

Annual Fisheries Report 2016 to 17: Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk



We are the Environment Agency. We protect and improve the environment.

We help people and wildlife adapt to climate change and reduce its impacts, including flooding, drought, sea level rise and coastal erosion.

We improve the quality of our water, land and air by tackling pollution. We work with businesses to help them comply with environmental regulations. A healthy and diverse environment enhances people's lives and contributes to economic growth.

We can't do this alone. We work as part of the Defra group (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs), with the rest of government, local councils, businesses, civil society groups and local communities to create a better place for people and wildlife.

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Foreword

In each of our 16 areas we carry out a wide range of work in order to protect and improve fisheries. Below are some examples of what has been happening in the Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk (ESNFSF) Area, much of which benefits fisheries from funding from both rod licence fees and other sources. For a wider view of the work we do across the country for fisheries please see the national [Annual Fisheries Report](#).

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Rod licence checks and prosecutions

During the 2016 to 2017 financial year a total of 63,039 (the last complete year of data) rod licence checks were carried out by our fisheries enforcement staff across the country. Our checks show us that evasion was relatively low with a national average of 5.5%. Below are details from ESNFSF:



93,904 rod licences sold



£1,582,873 income generated from rod licence sales



3,165 rod licences checked



118 successful prosecutions



£25,749 fines collected from prosecutions

Illegal fishing

Illegal fishing remains a threat to game and coarse fish stocks in England and the fisheries they support. The Environment Agency uses a combination of covert and overt patrols to deter and detect poachers, as well as responding to reports of illegal fishing where there is a credible threat to fish stocks and where we have a realistic chance of apprehending the alleged offenders. We cannot respond to every report of illegal fishing so we must prioritise where we focus our efforts. For ESNFSF:

279 illegal fishing incidents were reported to our incident hotline (0800 80 70 60)



Catfish on the move

Using the new Keeping and Introduction of Fish Regulations, we have highlighted stillwater sites where Wels Catfish are not permitted. Keeping conditions within some site permits require non-native invasive species to be removed, due to the potential impact on the wider environment. These invasive non-native fish are highly detrimental to our rivers: working with angling clubs in Essex, we have removed 10 catfish and set in place procedures for further removals.

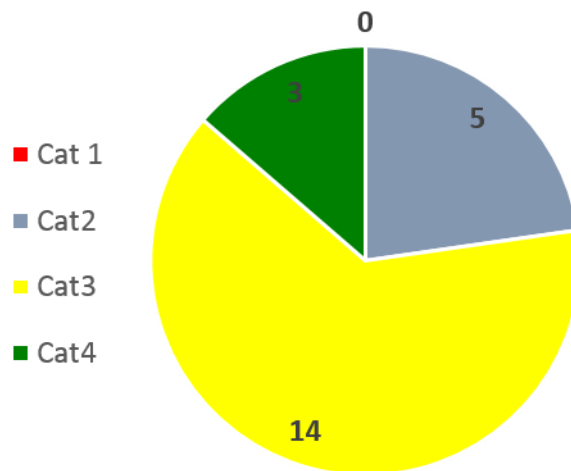
The fish have been relocated to a fully enclosed stillwater, where they pose no threat to the environment.

Incident management

Responding to fish kills and other environmental incidents is a vitally important part of what we do. We respond to thousands of substantiated incidents annually. Members of the public report incidents through our Incident Hotline (0800 80 70 60) and we are able to respond 365 days a year and on any day, at any time, providing an effective and proportionate response. For ESNFSF:



All incidents are categorised according to potential and actual impact on the environment and the impact on our resources. We can then break this figure down into categories of incident as shown below. Category 1 is the most serious and Category 4 is a reported incident with no impact.



Fish rescue at Cornard lock



Following a blockage in the Environment Agency tilting gate at Cornard lock on the river Stour, our fisheries officers spent two days removing fish stranded by the lowering water levels. A backwater used by the Sudbury Rowing Club supports a huge number of over wintering fish species and as water levels dropped these fish were faced with lowering dissolved oxygen levels and deep silt which could

have led to a large fish kill. Wading in deep silt the team managed to electrofish and relocate upstream to deeper water approximately 10,000 fish of mixed species, including roach, perch, pike and tench.

Environment Agency and Becmain Angling work together to save fish at Bonnetts Wood



Following reports of fish in distress at Bonnetts Wood near Upminster, the our Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology team worked with the local angling club (Becmain Angling Society) and the Forestry commission to remove 22 large common and mirror carp from a shallow pond. The fish had been washed out from Harwood Hall fishery following a high flow event and were left vulnerable to falling water levels within in a silty pond. The fish were netted and electrofished and repatriated with the fishing lake, much to the delight of the angling club and 'paw print', a 20lb mirror carp.

The size and number of the fish represented a potentially large financial loss to the fishery and the small pond was a concern to the Forestry Commission that illegal fishing was taking place.

The fishing club was given management advice and suggestions on how to reduce the likelihood of any future escapes.

Geared up to respond to environmental incidents

Our Fisheries, Biodiversity and Geomorphology (FBG) team recently purchased additional aerators and associated generators for use during environmental incidents. Units were purchased from incident response budgets and passed onto Operations Delivery teams, who are the lead for deploying in rivers during incidents. This will enable us to react faster to events as the units are now distributed over a wider area. This increase in units will also aid biosecurity measures and help reduce the risk of transferring non-native invasive species, as the units need to be pressure washed, dried and in some case sprayed with Virkon to ensure no transfer of unwanted viruses, plant material, invertebrates or fish. Additional units give the resilience for us to continue environmental support.

Units were also purchased by FBG to be used for stillwater fishery support. The Environment Agency is the first responder to fish in distress within stillwaters and a combination of initial aeration support and advice on fishery management help to reduce the impact on fish stocks and fish health.

Fisheries Improvements

The boxes below highlight some projects we have delivered followed by the table below listing many of our environmental improvement projects that have helped to deliver benefits to fisheries; many in conjunction with our partners. We have included the time of our fisheries officers in the funding considerations for the projects as their posts are funded by rod licence income. Considerable amounts of their time and expertise has been provided for the projects. Many projects have also received funding from government or from other parts of the Environment Agency e.g. flooding, the Environment Programme or Water Framework Directive budgets however where contribution has included rod licence income, this has been noted.

$$\begin{array}{rcccl} \mathbf{\pounds 98,000} & + & \mathbf{\pounds 40,000} & = & \mathbf{\pounds 138,000} \\ \text{EA Funding} & & \text{Match Funding} & & \text{Fisheries Improvements} \end{array}$$

In 2016 to 2017 ESNFSF installed 1 fish pass and opened up 9.7 km of habitat or spawning ground for fish.

Creating fish refuges on the River Stour

Fish stocks in the River Stour on the Essex/Suffolk border have shown a decreasing trend through our routine fisheries surveys over recent years. Part of the overriding problem is due to poor natural recruitment of local species which has been compounded by a shortfall of suitable habitat.

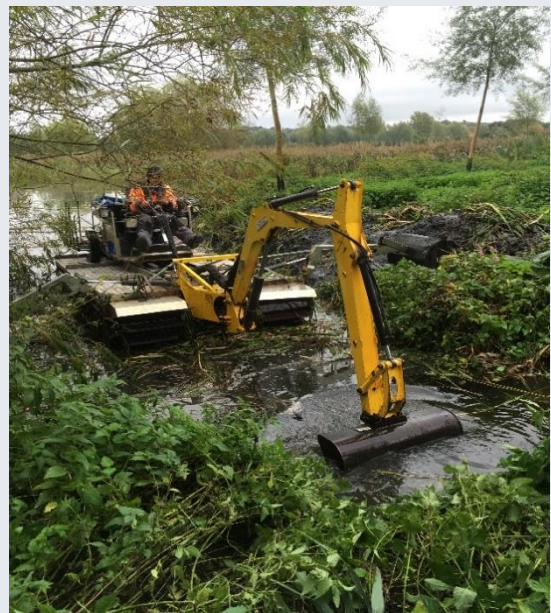
Through the Fisheries Improvement Programme fund partnership money was spent over the summer and autumn on river habitat improvement, clearing and refuge creation.

Reconnection or creation of refuge areas will improve the off-river habitat greatly. Once connected the areas will have great potential to hold a number of local species and provide off-river refuge and habitat to various life stages including spawning habitat and juvenile nursery areas.

The new refuges will also provide good habitat for migratory eels which have decreased by over 95% in the Stour catchment over recent years.

Partnership funding and land owner authorisations are key in developing the scrapes further.

The benefit to landowners for flood elevation and drainage is also important. The near channel scrapes will benefit a range of biodiversity and act as refuge in a very short time frame.



Project Title	Outcome or benefit	Partners	EA Funding (£)	Match funding (£, in kind benefit)	Total Cost
Glemsford Lakes Fish Refuge	Creation of Fish Refuge to improve fish stocks on the River Stour	Sudbury and Long Melford Angling Association, Dedham vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Essex and Suffolk Rivers Trust, Colchester Piscatorial Society	£5,000	£5,000 in contribution in kind	£10,000
Higham Lake Fish Refuge	Creation of Fish Refuge to improve natural recruitment on the River Stour	Landowner and Dedham Vale AONB	£8,000	£5,000 in contribution in kind	£13,000
Prymnesium Research	Equipment for Broads fish tracking project	John Innes Centre	£5,000	£5,000 direct match funding from John Innes Centre for field trial work.	£10,000
Norfolk Broads Fish Tracking	Equipment for Broads fish tracking project	Bournemouth University, Natural England and Fish Track	£45,000	£25,000	£70,000
New Mills Eel Pass	Permanent, robust, effective and safe trap for eels at a key site has now been installed replacing previous temporary version. This ensures passage is possible past the tidal limit of the Wensum and opens up some 4.5km to Hellesdon, which is already passable. Funded fully by FCRM		£35,000	£0	£35,000
Total			£98,000	£40,000	£138,000

Monitoring

Monitoring of all fish species is vital to our assessment of the condition of the environment. Surveys of fish populations, including coarse fish, are used to assess the status of stocks and contribute to the overall assessment of ecological status of a water body. In ESNFSF:

103 Waterbodies
assessed for
fish 2016/17

32% of waterbodies
assessed were at
good status or above
for fish

You can look at our [Catchment Data Explorer](#) for more information.

Our fish count data is now available online: <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/freshwater-fish-counts-for-all-species-all-areas-and-all-years>

Better understanding sea trout and eel migration

We have worked on a partnership project in North Norfolk focusing on sea trout and eel migration. Over 800 eels and 500 sea trout have been tagged to assist us in decision making on tidal sluices and barriers to migration. The information is also important in understanding the population dynamics of both species.

For information on what we are doing across the rest of the country read our other [Area reports](#)

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