

Evidence

A survey of freshwater angling in England

Phase 1: angling activity, expenditure and economic impact

Project summary

This report presents results on the economic valuation of freshwater angling in England. It shows that freshwater angling contributed £1.46 billion to the economy and supported 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs in 2015.

The project provides a wide range of information on angling activity and the contribution it makes to the economy - essential for future management of fisheries and for the recognition of freshwater fisheries as part of our Natural Capital (the ecosystem services that land, water and air provide and which keep our society healthy and prosperous).

Survey approach

The Environment Agency commissioned environmental economists to conduct a questionnaire-based survey of holders of angling rod licences to find out:

- how often and where anglers fished in freshwaters in England in 2015
- what species and water types they preferred
- how much they spent on angling-related goods and services

Over 10,000 online responses and 500 computer-assisted telephone interviews were collated and analysed. The project found that anglers are fishing less frequently, but spending more on each trip and significantly more each year on items not related to specific fishing trips, such as tackle, club memberships and specialist clothing. Angling therefore had a similar economic impact in 2015 to that in 2005. The trends in interest in fish species and water types identified in earlier surveys are continuing, with even greater dominance of the angling scene by lake fisheries in contrast to rivers and canals.

The wide range of responses from anglers indicated that angling is a very fragmented market. Providing facilities and services that suit all, or even most, anglers will therefore always be a challenge. The results of this study will help policymakers, external groups and commercial companies with an interest in angling and fisheries to ensure the sport continues to make a valuable contribution to local economies in England.

Key findings from the 2015 survey

- A total of 22.5 million days were spent freshwater angling in England in 2015.
- Freshwater angling in England in 2015 contributed £1.46 billion to the economy (expressed as gross value added) and supported 27,000 full-time equivalent jobs.
- Angling for coarse fish (as opposed to salmonids such as salmon and trout) was the most popular (19.4 million days spent in 2015).
- Carp were the most popular individual species, accounting for 7.4 million angling days in 2015.
- Across all types of angling, almost 70% of all angling days in 2015 were on lakes, ponds, reservoirs.
- Anglers each spent an average of over £400 on tackle and around £110 on club or syndicate fees in 2015.
- Fuel and bait accounted for the bulk of expenditure on specific trips.
- Salmon anglers tended to spend more on annual memberships and accommodation than other types of anglers.
- Most coarse angling trips took place between 5 and 25 miles from the angler's home.
- Anglers travelled significantly further for game fishing, with most salmon anglers travelling at least 50 miles from home to fish.
- Geographical patterns of angling activity tended to reflect the numbers of anglers living in the respective river basin districts. Visiting anglers, however, made significant economic contributions in the Northumbria, the English part of the Severn and South West river basin districts (RBDs).

Comparison with the 2005 survey

Despite similar sales of rod licences, there was a significant fall in angling activity between 2005 and 2015. However, total trip-related expenditure by anglers in 2015 (£1.06 billion) was very similar to that in 2005 when adjusted for inflation. Total non-trip related spend increased from £469 million in 2005 to £680 million in 2015. Key changes include the following.

The total number of freshwater angling days spent in England in 2015 was 22.3 million, a fall of 22% from the 2005 estimate of 28.5 million.

- Fishing on all water types is less frequent. The greatest decline has been in fishing on rivers and canals (43% and 39% fall since 2005 respectively).
- The greatest fall in angling activity has been in the North East and North West RBDs, with a small increase in the Anglian, Thames and South East RBDs.
- The popularity of river trout and grayling angling has increased slightly.
- The number of days spent fishing for salmon has fallen by over half since 2005, particularly in the North West RBD.

The reasons for the general decline in angling activity are complex and not yet fully understood.

Further work

Phase 2 of the project investigated the values that anglers hold for different fishery characteristics such as size and type of fish, aesthetic quality and facilities. Its results are reported in a separate report.

This summary relates to information from the Value of Freshwater Angling in England project reported in detail in the following output(s):

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