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The Social and Community Benefits of Angling

Research Task 1

Angling Participation

Interim Report

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substance.

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Executive Summary

Recent research, including work commissioned by the Environment Agency and the Scottish Executive, has presented angling in the UK as a significant recreational activity – both in terms of participant numbers and economic impact. These studies have been effective in raising awareness of the scale of angling activity, but have directed little attention toward the nature of participation itself. There is a need for more robust investigation of what represents angling participation, the motivations that underpin angling participation, and the benefits accrued by individual anglers and host communities as a result of angling activity. The Angling Participation (Research Task 1) of the *Social and Community Benefits of Angling* research project has been designed to address this shortfall.

This component of the research project has been designed to inform public policy makers, agencies with legal responsibility for angling, the national governing bodies for angling in England and Scotland (and their local organisations), and the wider research community about two key areas of investigation, namely:

- i. What constitutes angling participation in England and Scotland?
- ii. How does angling participation deliver social and community development?

To address these questions in a meaningful way, a mix of qualitative and quantitative data is being collected at a national level. This document is the first Interim Report for this component of the research project, and draws largely on quantitative (numerical) data. The report contains results and analysis derived from data collected through a questionnaire survey of anglers in England and Scotland.

The Angler Questionnaire

The main features of the questionnaire used to survey anglers can be summarised as follows:

- The questionnaire contained 11 sections that measured general participation behaviours, participation details specific to coarse, game and sea angling, membership of clubs and organisations, motivations, future issues and demographic details;
- It was an ‘open’ questionnaire made available to any angler with access to the internet. Paper copies of the questionnaire were made available on request;
- A publicity campaign about the questionnaire, drawing on a number of promotional channels and methods was employed in order to ‘reach’ as many English and Scottish anglers as possible; and
- 2,417 responses were collected between July 10, 2009 and October 31, 2009.

Principal Findings

The Nature of Participation

- Respondents were predominantly male (97.5%), with a mean age of 48.9 years. Game angling respondents were the oldest sub-group in the sample, with approximately 30% over 59 years of age;

- Mean household income of the sample was £51,137 per annum. The majority of the sample was represented in the £20,000-£29,999 and £30,000-£39,999 categories; however, there were some quite high income levels and nearly 20% of game angling households earned more £70,000 per annum;
- More than 75% of the sample bought/read angling books and magazines, prepared and maintained tackle and rigs or watched angling content on television or films. More than 50% the sample read or contributed to angling blogs, websites or discussion boards. Attendance at club meetings or undertaking club business was an activity of approximately 44% of the sample;
- A majority proportion of respondents (59%, n=1,411) made overnight trips at least 25 miles away from home for the main purpose of angling. Game angling respondents recorded the highest proportion of angling-related travel (68%) and coarse angling respondents the lowest (55%).

The Social Organisation of Participation

- Respondents preferred to go fishing with friends (73%, n=1,737), alone (55%, n=1,324), with immediate family (41%) and with angling club members (39%);
- Almost three-quarters of all respondents were club members (73.2%, n=1,704). The most popular reason for joining a club (or to consider joining a club) was “to gain access to fishing” (86%, n=1,994). Sea angling respondents recorded somewhat different results than coarse or game angling respondents - the proportion of club members amongst sea angling respondents was only 49% (n=175) and the most popular reason for joining a club “was to be around like-minded individuals” (67%, n=229);
- The sample of questionnaire respondents included 1,050 Angling Trust members, largely due to the efforts made by the Trust to promote the research and questionnaire to its membership;
- Respondent membership of angling-related organisations encompassed 138 unique (non-club) organisations.

Personal Benefits from Participation

- Escaping crowds and noise, and experiencing natural settings, were very significant motivations for many respondents. On a 6-point importance scale, they were rated 4.9 by coarse and game angling respondents, and 4.6 by sea angling respondents. The many comments made by respondents about the importance of being close to nature and away from other people emphasised the benefits that such experiences provide, particularly rest and relaxation suggesting that angling might make contributions to health and wellbeing.
- In terms of physical activity benefits, the majority (higher than 60%) of coarse and sea angling respondents classified their participation as moderate intensity physical activity. Although self-rated, this aligns with the classification put forward by the Angling Development Board, but is higher than Sport England’s assessment of angling as low intensity physical activity;
- Over a third (34%) of game angling respondents viewed their participation as high intensity physical activity – a much greater proportion than coarse or sea angling

respondents. More detailed research into the physical activity involved in angling participation is needed to help understand these inconsistencies;

- Importance ratings of motivations relating to shared experience reinforced earlier results about the social organisation of participation and suggest the potential of angling to act as a conduit for community interaction. Spending time with friends and being alone/independent attracted higher ratings than motivations that involved spending time with family or meeting new people. Sea angling respondents recorded marginally higher ratings for all shared experience motivations, and a lower motivation for being alone;
- Benefits related to catching fish – measured using the importance ratings assigned to catch motivations – were lower than expected. Motivations such as catching big fish and lots of fish received more neutral responses (neither important nor unimportant) than any other rating. Respondents rated catching a specific type of fish higher in importance (average rating of 3.9 on a 6-point importance scale), while – with the exception of sea angling respondents – catching fish for food was rated lower in importance (average ratings of 1.3 for coarse angling respondents and 2.5 for game angling respondents).

Community Benefits from Participation

- As noted earlier, angling has a strong club and organisation element to participation, particularly compared to other activities. Angling clubs and related organisations benefit communities by helping to connect people, by building relational networks, by enabling intergenerational socialisation and by providing routes to volunteering;
- Angling offers physical and health benefits to all members of the community, as it is one of few activities that can be continued right through life. As some respondents commented, angling is also a good therapeutic activity for people suffering or recovering from health problems or to combat stress;
- Nearly 25% of the sample – 593 respondents – indicated that they contributed to environmental or aquatic habitat conservation projects. Aside from the ecological benefits these projects deliver to host communities, some angling-lead conservation projects actively engage with community members and raise awareness and appreciation of local waterways;
- Angling participation requires a series of expenditures on equipment, travel, licenses and permits, literature, memberships and other items – all purchases that contribute to local economies. From the questionnaire data the most frequently-occurring expenditure categories in the last 12 months were £501 to £1,000 (n=623), followed by £251 to £500 (n=587) then £1,001 to £3,000 (n=511).

The Future of Angling Participation

- Lack of knowledge about where to go angling is often cited as barrier to participation. Unsurprisingly, improving the quality of information about angling was rated as a very important future issue by all questionnaire respondents. Substance is looking to facilitate easier access to high quality angling information through electronic signposting and mapping initiatives;
- Both game and sea angling respondents were stronger than game angling respondents in their support of a relaxation of the restrictiveness of rights to fish

waters. Opening up waters to new users embraces a more egalitarian approach to participation, nevertheless there are legitimate questions around the capacity of natural and social environments to cope with an increase in angling demand;

- Increasing opportunities for young people to participate in angling was widely viewed by respondents as issue worth supporting (average rating approximately 4 – Very Important). However, the same cannot be said for other social groups. Increasing angling participation opportunities for minority ethnic groups was clearly rated the lowest in importance – over 40% of respondents rated the issue as either unimportant or neither unimportant nor important;
- There was little compelling evidence that respondents supported either a fee increase or decrease for rod licences (applicable to England and Wales), suggesting the current fee is about right in terms of price. Some respondents commented on what they perceive to be a lack of transparency and accountability around licence fee revenue.

Research Priorities for 2010

In addition to the further analysis and dissemination of findings from the angler questionnaire, the next phase of angling participation research will adopt a more qualitative, site-based focus. Twelve angling sites and initiatives in England and Scotland have been identified as being as representative as possible of the varieties of angling participation that exist. Over the next year, a number of visits will be made to each of the sites in order to conduct personal interviews with anglers and key stakeholders, to observe events and angler practices, and to share knowledge.

The criteria and questions that directed the first phase of investigation will remain central to the research agenda of the project - namely the personal and social benefits that angling activity generates. However, a number of key issues/questions have emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire data that will also be explored over the next 12 months. They include (but are not exclusive to):

- *How does angling contribute to key national agendas around health and well being, community cohesion and interaction, promoting volunteering and environmental improvement?*
- *Beyond the act of 'going angling', what sort of personal investments/commitments do anglers make in order to contribute to angling activities? Why do they make these investments/commitments and what benefits do they and others get from them?*
- *How does angling participation facilitate both relaxing **and** physically/mentally challenging moments, and restful **as well as** exciting moments, within the confines of a single experience? Does this characteristic explain why angling appeals to such a broad spectrum of ages and does it generate benefits for people in terms of health and well being?*
- *What is the future of the angling club as a conduit for participation?*
- *What role can angling stakeholders play in the development of a sense of community attachment to a waterway or aquatic resource?*

Angling Participation Interim Report

The fact that angling is a chancy business is one of its greatest appeals – especially in today’s regulated world. Even without the workings of the chaos principle, the angler has to work with changeable weather, the moodiness of fish, the state of the water, the proximity of anglers, the arrogance of swans, the blindness of dogs and their owners, the obstinacy of cattle. Unlike other watery activities, like boating or swimming, a whole day can pass without anything seeming to happen. Unlike non-watery activities, like tennis, cricket or football, fishing does not conform to straight lines or strict rules: its only essential rules are moral ones and, anyway, it’s not a game or a sport but a generic imperative that makes us whole again each time we give it expression.¹

1. Introduction

This report forms part of the feedback from the first year of *The Social and Community Benefits of Angling* research project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund and undertaken by Substance. It addresses the first of the research tasks – the nature and benefits of angling participation. It should be noted that this is an *interim* report only and contains results from our Angling Participation survey and initial qualitative work. Whilst this report presents some preliminary findings, it also serves to highlight emerging issues and outline the foci of the project in the coming year.

Angling for sport and recreation in England and Scotland has a long and rich participation history, and is described as one of the more popular activities in contemporary UK society. In the Environment Agency report *Our Nations Fisheries*² (2004) it was argued that more people in England and Wales go fishing than take part in any other ‘sport’. This claim referenced 2001 survey data that indicated 3.9 million people – some 9% of the population aged 12 years and above – had been fishing in the previous two years. The *Our Nations Fisheries* report also outlined the economic importance of angling participation, with freshwater angler expenditure in England and Wales estimated at more than £3 billion per year.

With regard to sea angling, the most influential research publication in recent times has been the *Research into the Economic Contribution of Sea Angling*, conducted by Drew Associates in 2004³. This report estimated that total expenditure by anglers residing in England and Wales was £538 million per year, and stated that boat anglers were responsible for a little over half of the expenditure (52%) – reflecting the importance of capital expenditures on boats and equipment.

Likewise, two angling research reports in 2004⁴ and 2009⁵ demonstrated the extent of angling participation and its associated economic impact in Scotland. Expenditure by game

¹ Yates, C. (2007) *How To Fish*. Penguin Books: London, p.53.

² Environment Agency (2004) *Our Nations Fisheries: The migratory and freshwater fisheries of England and Wales – a snapshot*. Bristol: EA, p.15.

³ Drew Associates (2004) *Research into the Economic Contribution of Sea Angling*.

⁴ Radford, A. and Riddington, G. (2004) *The Economic Impact of Game and Coarse Fishing in Scotland*. For SEERAD, November 2004.

and coarse anglers in Scotland in 2004 was calculated to be £131 million per year. In 2009 it was estimated there were 125,188 resident sea anglers in Scotland (and an additional 23,445 juvenile anglers), with total expenditure on sea angling estimated to be approximately £140 million per year.

Reports such as these are useful in apportioning a sense of *scale* to angling participation in the UK; however, they provide scant detail of the *nature* of angling participation itself – an aspect of angling which is not well understood by the public or by policymakers. Irrespective of this large gap in knowledge, claims to continue to be made about the positive impacts attributable to angling participation, particularly in regard to how angling can contribute to personal health and wellbeing, to the rehabilitation and conservation of freshwater and saltwater ecosystems, to the economic and social development of rural communities, and to the reduction in social problems such as youth offending, anti-social behaviour and truancy.

There is a need for more robust investigation into what comprises angling participation, the motivations that underpin angling participation, and the benefits accrued by individual anglers and host communities as a result of angling activity. This component of the *Social and Community Benefits of Angling* project aims to address this shortfall by collecting data and evidence, processing information, and reporting to stakeholders using a detailed, structured approach that is as representative as possible of contemporary angling policy, structures, cultures and practices.

2. Research Approach

This research has been designed to inform public policy makers, agencies with legal responsibility for angling, the national governing bodies for angling in England and Scotland (and their local organisations), and the wider research community about:

- iii. What constitutes angling participation in the UK; and
- iv. How this participation delivers social and community development.

A number of knowledge-investigation criteria were identified as part of the research approach, including:

- Definitions of angling; historical background, policy and legal contexts;
- Different angling disciplines, cultural practices and lived experiences, and how these phenomena influence personal and community development;
- The range of angling organisations and structures, and their influence upon angling-related community benefits;
- Different forms of participation and the perceived benefits of these forms of participation;
- The range of perceptions about ethical issues associated with angling; and
- Identifiable community benefits from angling developments.

So these criteria were addressed in a meaningful way, it was decided that a mix of qualitative and quantitative data would be collected at a national level. Suitable attention was

⁵ Radford, A. Riddington, G. and Gibson, H. (2009) *Economic Impact of Recreational Sea Angling in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

given to ensuring the data was as representative as possible of the diverse forms of angling participation and the geographic regions of England and Scotland. Most of the quantitative data would be collected through a questionnaire-based survey of anglers. Alternatively, qualitative data would be largely obtained through in-depth interviews with key national stakeholders and through participant interviews at a wide range of local angling sites.

3. Angler Questionnaire Survey

As stated in the introduction to this report, large-scale studies of angling participation (in England and Wales) have, in recent years, been conducted by the Environment Agency and incorporated surveys of anglers. Likewise, several pieces of angling research recently commissioned by the Scottish Executive have involved angler surveys of considerable size and scope.

To avoid replicating these pieces of research, the questionnaire survey element of this research contained at least three key design differences, namely:

- i. Targeting both fresh water (coarse and game) and salt water (sea) anglers;
- ii. Making the survey available to both English and Scottish anglers; and
- iii. Using an 'open' survey approach to recruit participants as opposed to having a list or database to draw a sample from.

3.1. Survey Method

The questionnaire itself was divided into 11 sections. The first two sections contained general queries about angling participation, such as experience level, personal preferences, behaviours and lifestyle of respondents. The ensuing three sections featured questions specific to either coarse, game or sea angling participation. Respondents were asked to select which of these three types of angling they had the most interest in, and were then directed to the appropriate section. The content of questions in these sections was similar, with respondents asked to rank their favourite fish species, identify the type of water and method of angling they most regularly used, and assess how physically active their participation tended to be.

The next section focused on angling motivations. Respondents were required to rate fifteen different motivations using a scale of importance. The section that followed posed questions about club and organisational membership and rod licence ownership of respondents. After that, respondents were asked to rate the importance of fifteen issues relating to the future of angling in the next section, while the final section was designed to collect socio-demographic data.

As noted earlier, instead of drawing a random sample of respondents from a known population of interest, this survey operated as an 'open', non-random method of data collection. This approach was adopted because a population list of all anglers in England and Scotland does not exist. The questionnaire was made publicly available in an electronic format, using the online survey platform SurveyMonkey.com⁶. An attractive feature of

⁶ Go to www.surveymonkey.com for more information.

SurveyMonkey.com was its ability to support bespoke design of an online questionnaire. SurveyMonkey.com also hosted the data collection and analysis processes.

The use of a website-based questionnaire was considered to be the most cost- and time-effective method of making the questionnaire accessible to as wide an audience as possible. Paper copies of the questionnaire were made available on request (only 1 request was received) and were also used to collect data from 6 anglers surveyed by the research team at Scottish Game Fair, Scone, 3rd July 2009.

Given the non-targeted, open status of the survey, a strategic publicity campaign was employed to:

- i. Raise awareness of the research within the angling community; and
- ii. Directly recruit respondents to the questionnaire.

A variety of promotional channels were drawn on as part of the campaign; including electronic mail-outs to membership databases of angling organisations, articles in print media (newspapers and magazines), articles in angling club and association newsletters, website referrals, homepages on social networking websites, postings on angling-related discussion boards and forums, in-person distribution of promotional cards at the aforementioned 2009 Scottish Game Fair and the 2009 Country and Land Association Game Fair, and word-of-mouth endorsement. Examples of how the research and questionnaire were promoted in these ways appear in Appendix A.

The online version of the questionnaire opened for data collection on the 10th of July 2009 and closed on the 31st of October 2009. A total of 2,417 completed questionnaires were received. In terms of response, the most successful periods of data collection were linked to actions taken by the Angling Trust. The Trust issued a media release announcing the launch of the questionnaire on the 10th of July, and followed this soon after with an electronic mail-out to its membership base on the 13th of July. In the week from the 10th to the 16th of July the questionnaire collected 862 responses (or 36% of the sample total). A reminder notice sent by the Angling Trust on the 20th of October also generated a significant increase in responses.

The sampling approach was effective in attaining a large volume of responses; however, it should be noted that the approach influenced the characteristics of the sample. Essentially, there was an over-representation of experienced anglers in the sample (see ensuing sections for more detail). Some effort will be directed to amelioration of this bias; largely through interviews of less-experienced and more 'casual' anglers during the qualitative component of the participation research (see Section 4).