

## 4. Angling Sites & Angling Initiatives

The second major element of the participation research, in the coming year, focuses on qualitative work at a total of twelve angling sites, initiatives and organisations in England and Scotland (hereafter referred to as 'site-based research'). The rationale for this element of the research is the collection of rich qualitative data using interviews with anglers and angling stakeholders, in conjunction with data collected via on-site observation of angling cultures and practices. Given the range of sites the amount of research at each will inevitably be limited. The qualitative data will act as a measure of triangulation to the quantitative data and quantitative methodology, which have to date accounted for the bulk of the participation research. Most notably, the inclusion of an angling site and initiative-focused element is an opportunity to:

- Shift in scale from a nation-wide survey to a series of local cases;
- Capture individual narratives, community contexts and finer detail; and
- Engage with less experienced anglers who were not adequately represented in the survey data, i.e. the casual or 'holidaymaker' anglers.

### 4.1. Research Methods

In terms of sequencing, the site-based research commenced after the angler questionnaire survey closed and will continue at least until the end of 2010. Findings from the questionnaire survey have informed the site-based research, insofar as issues from the questionnaire data identified as needing further investigation will be explored in interviews with anglers and stakeholders.

A list of selected focus sites, initiatives and organisations appear in Table 17. The process of selection was designed, as far as possible, to be representative of geographic regions in England and Scotland and to be representative of different modes of participation. Attention was also given to including initiatives that facilitate participation for particular social groups or specialist angling methods, for example physically disabled people, females, competition angling, angling for specimen fish, angling for people suffering from mental health problems. Some of the sites, initiatives and organisations were selected as examples of best practice, i.e. where angling is central to community and/or individual benefit. It is acknowledged that the list does not cover all regions or participation modes, as time and resource limitations constrain the scope of work that can be done.

Where circumstances allow, additional data will be collected from other angling sites, initiatives and organisations – particularly if new entities emerge that address gaps in the current schedule, e.g. an angling project designed to encourage participation amongst black and minority ethnic groups. Some opportunities to collect additional data have already been identified, and include interviewing canal anglers in Manchester and engaging with stakeholders and participants from Casting for Recovery, a non-profit education and support programme for breast cancer survivors (as an example of a health related intervention)

**Table 17: Focus Sites, Initiatives and Organisations for Qualitative Research**

Site, Initiative or Organisation	Region	Type of Angling	Comments
Fishing for Everyone	Northumberland	Mixed	Club specifically for female participation
Whitby	North Yorkshire	Sea	Sea angling tourism, charter boats
Wakefield Angling Club	West Yorkshire	Coarse	Competition, veterans, young people
Disley New Mills Angling Club	Lancashire	Mixed	River Goyt, involvement in Trout in the Town, environmental intervention
Telford Disabled Anglers	Shropshire	Coarse	Albrighton Trust Moat & Gardens
Mallory Park Fishery	Midlands	Coarse	Commercial coarse fishery
West Country Rivers Trust	Devon/Cornwall	Game	Angling Passport, fly fishing guides
Chesil Beach	Dorset	Sea	Beach fishing for bass, Weymouth Pier
Wandle Piscators & The Wandle Trust	London	Mixed	Trout in the Town project, intervention for environmental + social benefit
Environment Agency/Mind	East Sussex	Mixed	Intervention for people with mental health problems, therapy
North Third Trout Fishery	Central Scotland	Game	Commercial game fishery
*TBA	Tayside, Scotland	Game	Salmon fishing.

#### 4.2. Progress to Date

A range of site visits, meetings and interviews with the targeted sites and initiatives had already taken place at the time of this report. More specifically, they have included:

- **Wandle Piscators and The Wandle Trust:** Completed interviews with the Development Officer The Wandle Trust, South London County Sports Partnership, two Trustees of The Wandle Trust and four committee members of the Wandle Piscators;
- **Environment Agency & Mind organisation:** Conducted one field visit to a fishery event and six interviews with event participants;
- **West Country Rivers Trust:** Attended one meeting to plan ongoing scope of work in region;
- **Wakefield Angling Club:** Met with club officials and members to announce details of research at club AGM;
- **Whitby (Sea Angling):** Conducted one field visit, met with Secretary of the Whitby Charter Skippers Association and interviewed two anglers on a charter boat;
- **Fishing for Everyone:** Completed a focus group interview with four committee members;
- **Disley New Mills Angling Club:** Held an initial meeting with club contact to plan research in 2010;
- **Telford Disabled Anglers:** Met and interviewed club representative;
- **North Third Trout Fishery:** Owner has agreed to assist with research; and
- **Mallory Park Fishery, Chesil Beach:** Have received contact details but yet to commence dialogue with either site.

#### 4.3. Trout in the Town (TinTT)

TinTT is a community-focused initiative of the Wild Trout Trust funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation which aims to “improve the quality of river habitat in urban areas for the benefit of trout and wider biodiversity, and to raise awareness of wild trout as a totem species for clean water and living rivers”<sup>19</sup>. The TinTT initiative requires new or existing community groups to adopt their local urban stream and work towards the restoration or conservation of wild trout populations in that stream. TinTT seeks to build stronger connections between communities and the rivers and streams that flow through them. Although not specific to angling, to date all TinTT projects have been led by angling groups or clubs.

Substance has identified the TinTT initiative as an example of best practice angling participation, insofar as anglers who have committed to TinTT projects have achieved much in terms of wider community benefit, including environmental rehabilitation, monitoring of invertebrate and fish populations, information sharing with community members and education of young people. Two of the angling sites and initiatives selected for the qualitative component of participation research incorporate TinTT projects – the Wandle Piscators and Wandle Trust on the River Wandle, and the Disley New Mills Angling Club on the River Goyt.

In addition to these two projects, Substance has agreed to assist TinTT with the monitoring and reporting of community impacts across all projects. The assistance will involve some combination of:

- A questionnaire survey of TinTT to be run by TinTT participants to explore their views on the community and ecological impact of tasks that TinTT projects are involved in, such as habitat restoration and the removal of fly-tipping waste;
- The in-person observation and analysis of a small selection of TinTT events including visits by a researcher to TinTT project events, such as river festivals or angling coaching days. The researcher will use a combination of observation-based field notes, photographs and media reports (where available) to analyse the nature and extent of the social impacts of these events; and
- Assistance in providing an online means by which TinTT projects can themselves collate project activity.

In addition to supplying TinTT with information about how projects deliver social and community value, the data will be used in this research to further illustrate the relationship between angling participation and individual and collective benefit, as well as the utility of structured monitoring and evaluation systems.

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.wildtrout.org/>, accessed 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009.

## 5. Summary and Future Research Directions

This interim report has been prepared following less than one year of a three year project being completed and forms one of three constituent interim reports for the project as a whole. As such it represents both a **summary of achievements to date and the first substantial interrogation of the project's research criteria relating to participation**. Drawing largely on data collected from a questionnaire of anglers in England and Scotland, the report has analysed what constitutes angling participation and explored how participation can be linked to range of individual and collective benefits.

Data from the questionnaire confirmed that angling participation is **a far more complex phenomenon than public perception would have us believe**. Angling comprises different activity types (coarse, game and sea angling), relies on vastly different habitats (ponds, rivers, lakes, estuaries, canals, beaches and deep sea waters) and encapsulates a broad sweep of interests and industries (from river fly monitoring to boat-building). Angling offers an array of positive experiences to the individual, including opportunities to escape the 'everyday', to reconnect with nature, to socialise, to acquire skills, to gain employment, to catch fish for the table, to share knowledge with others, to be challenged, to feel a rush of adrenaline as a fish takes your line, and – most importantly- to rest and relax.

At a community level angling is also **a valuable contributor to social, economic and environmental sustainability**. Anglers have a vested interest in the health of aquatic and marine ecosystems that play host to fish populations. Consequently anglers invest a considerable amount of resources into the conservation, rehabilitation, monitoring and protection of habitat and wildlife – as the data from the questionnaire reinforced. **Anglers share their knowledge and skills with others using formal and informal channels**, such as coaching sessions, taster days, education programmes and training courses, websites, internet forums, print media, digital media and, of course, interpersonal communication. For many individuals, angling participation entails travel away from home to a preferred fishing location. Even small amounts of expenditure by these visiting anglers can bring significant economic and employment benefits to host communities.

The content of this report provides the *Social and Community Benefits of Angling* project with a solid foundation of understanding about angling participation; however, more analysis and presentation of data will inevitably follow. Overall, the research on participation will contribute further knowledge about how angling contributes to key national agendas around health and well being, community cohesion and interaction, promoting volunteering and environmental improvement.

In addition to the research criteria that directed the first phase of investigation, a number of key issues/questions emerged from the discussion that add further direction to the research over the next 12 months. They include (but are not exclusive to):

- **What sort of personal investments/commitments are made by anglers to contribute to angling activities beyond the act of 'going angling'?** Capturing the 'lived experience' of participation in angling-related activities would help obtain a deeper understanding of the role these play in the lives of individuals. Such investigation would enhance knowledge of the type of personal benefits that are associated with particular activities;

- **How can angling participation be relaxing yet challenging, restful as well as exciting?** There is a need for more precise, detailed understanding of the angling experience which could involve exploring if different experiential 'modes' exist within an overall angling experience, identifying the nature of these modes and testing if such modes are somehow associated with particular temporal or spatial contexts. Such analysis would help develop an appreciation of how angling delivers certain benefits to participants, and would be of use when angling is delivered as part of an educational, developmental or therapeutic agenda;
- **What is the future of the angling club as a conduit for participation?** The responses from the questionnaire infer a healthy club system, but draw from a biased sample of the angling population. More detailed investigation of angler opinions about club membership (in addition to impartial perspectives) will improve understandings of how clubs are currently perceived, both as a means for gaining the right to fish waters and as a social institution;
- **What role can angling stakeholders play in the development of a sense of community attachment to a waterway or aquatic resource?** Engaging communities with features of the local landscape can help to cultivate a sense of stewardship, civic pride and social unity. Identifying the ways that angling and related activities contribute to developing a sense of attachment to place, at both a personal and community-wide level, will help evaluate the contributions that angling makes to community development.

Lastly, the findings in this report have particular implications for those who fund angling or develop policy that affects angling. Clearly the most ubiquitous issues raised by respondents involved **water quality** and **fish stocks**. This is entirely understandable given their fundamental relationship to angling – if either water quality or fish stocks deteriorate then angling ceases to be a viable activity. Although (indirectly) related to personal and community benefit, as essentially scientific issues they fall outside the remit of this research.

**One significant social finding involves the classification of physical activity associated with angling participation as well as how well being improvements from angling might be assessed.** It is evident from the questionnaire data that anglers discern the physicality of angling as a variable, not a constant. This variability is substantial in some instances, and is contingent on factors such as the health of the participant, the type of angling involved and the techniques used, the environment in which the angling takes place etc. The feedback of respondents from the questionnaire suggests further attention to this issue is required.

Another finding with political ramifications **involves the accountability of rod licence revenues, and the fairness of rod licence fee structures for disadvantaged individuals.** While not particularly concerned about the cost of an adult rod licence, respondents instead indicated that they would like to see more transparency about how revenue from rod licences are spent and the benefits angling gets from it. This concern speculated that revenue from rod licences might be being used in other areas of the Agency's portfolio, or used to benefit the claims of one type of angling over the claims of another. Others wondered if rod licence tenures and costs should be altered for disabled persons or disadvantaged people.