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Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

4th January 2021

By Email

Dear Mr Dowden,

It seems clear that with rising COVID infection rates the government will soon have to consider increasing the severity of the restrictions that are in place to slow the spread of the virus.

We were pleased that during the second lockdown the Government agreed to permit individual outdoor recreation to continue so that those who were initially restricted in the first lockdown could once again participate in individual, socially distanced outdoor recreational activity. This delivered huge benefits to those whose recreation is not narrowly confined to running, walking or cycling. We know that promoting socially distanced outdoor recreation is a safe and responsible response to the COVID crisis and that its continuation will not contribute to the problem.

In fact, the multiple benefits are apparent not only in terms of individual health and mental wellbeing during these difficult times but in reducing pressure on parks, footpaths and other open spaces where people would otherwise gather if prohibited from pursuing their chosen pastimes.

Our purpose in writing to you today is to urge you to remain consistent in any further measures implemented and not to place wholly unnecessary restrictions on angling and the £4bn angling trade which supports up to 40,000 jobs in the UK. Recreational fishing has been practised safely and responsibly in England since May 13th in accordance with the approved COVID compliant guidelines produced by the Angling Trust and this included the second lockdown period.

We have approved guidelines in place covering all aspects on angling. These COVID compliant guidelines have been widely accepted across angling and to the best of our knowledge there have been no known examples where angling activity has contributed to the spread of the virus. We feel it's important to encourage people to take their essential recreation in a safe, socially distanced outdoor environment as opposed to a crowded indoor situation.

Whilst angling is not alone as an individual form of outdoor recreation it has a number of key benefits which ensure it can remain part of the solution during this challenging period:

- being a largely solitary sport where social distancing occurs naturally
- proven benefits for mental health and physical well-being
- angling appeals to people of all ages and backgrounds and engages able-bodied and disabled participants alike
- the majority of the population live within 5 miles of a waterway minimising the need for significant travel.
- evidence that non-contact outdoor activities will not increase infection rates
- a reduction in pressure on other public open spaces

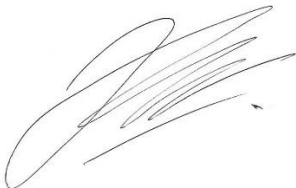
The Angling Trust do not believe it is the intention of ministers to unnecessarily restrict healthy activities like angling which are demonstrably beneficial for our health and well-being at this critical time. We ask you to be vigilant, as you were in drafting the second lockdown regulations to ensure that any new regulation does not accidentally do so. We contend that largely solitary, socially distanced, activities like angling should not be further restricted under any new lockdown provisions – as a Government you supported this position during the second national lockdown and I hope that you will maintain that ability for individuals to participate alone or with members of their families in safe, outdoor recreational activities such as angling.

In these difficult and demoralising times we believe it is important to public confidence in your measures, and ultimately vital to the wellbeing of the nation, that where they can safely do so, people should be free to pursue their passions with the joy and comfort of continuing some part of their normal lives.

The approved Angling Trust guidelines have sufficient safeguards and levels of compliance and ought to satisfy any concerns as we enter this new phase – we believe angling can continue to play it's part. We are of course happy to discuss these matters in more detail if it would be helpful.

We look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie Cook', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jamie Cook
CEO - Angling Trust and Fish Legal

Cc: The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Sir Charles Walker MP