



Virtual Fisheries Forum 17/03/21 - The Angling Improvement Fund

Q&A Session with Mark Wilton

Q. Does the building of islands with fish refuges qualify?

A. It certainly does, since fish refuges are very important for protecting your stocks from predators. There is a [video available from the Environment Agency which shows you how to build these kinds of structures](#), which are very easy to do. We can provide funding for the materials and you can perhaps provide labour to install these facilities. Alternatively, they can be purchased pre-assembled from various companies.

Q. Does it matter how much funds an organisation has in the bank?

A. No, this isn't something we take into account. Every application is judged by its own individual merits.

Q. Is there a standard risk assessment available from the Angling Trust?

A. We don't have a standard template at the moment. Usually, due to the diverse nature of projects, it isn't possible for us to provide a one-size-fits-all template given how different waters and works vary. I take on board your question however and we'll look at how we can best give guidance on risk assessments in future. In the meantime, it may be worth looking at the [Sport England 'Club Matters' site which includes a host of documents for sports clubs, including blank risk assessments](#).

Q. Could you please re-summarise the secondary funding option available?

A. This is called the Fisheries Improvement Programme (FIP). It's operated by the Environment Agency themselves. What this fund is about are things like pathways, car parks, habitat improvement, new pegs etc. [The application form is found in the same place on our website](#). We pass on applications to the EA every month, who then circulate those to the relevant fisheries officers who will then reach out to discuss your application. We would strongly recommend making contact with your local EA officers to discuss the project at the same time as applying via our portal.

Q. What is a rough idea to cost an otter proof fence per meter?

A. The costs can change dramatically depending on what is needed at a specific water. If you're still at the stage of working this out, I'd recommend getting in touch with one of our [Fisheries Management Advisers](#) who will come out to visit your fishery and discuss options. There is also a website called [Otterstop](#) who do quick quotes online.

Q. Can an application for funding made be made prior to officially obtaining permission from the landowner for fencing?

A. Absolutely. These things take time, so if you can get your application in as soon as possible, that would be best. There is a section asking about landowner permissions, but this isn't essential to make the application. We will come back to you after the application has been reviewed however, and you must demonstrate written permission before we pay any funds.

Q. Is it realistic to expect one of your FMA's to visit in the next month? We are in urgent need of advice for deterring cormorants.

A. Yes – confirmed by Richard Bamforth.

Q. What proportion of applications either get accepted or rejected?

A. In the last round we had 65 applications and we funded 49 of them. 2 were rejected immediately because they didn't fit the criteria. Even if your application is rejected however, we are available to give you feedback and work with you the next time round to give you the best chance possible.

Q. Our Club has benefitted from Grant monies to purchase otter proof fencing which has been 100% successful. However, cormorants are now picking off silvers and skimmers. I have submitted an application for prevention measures and was wondering if, in the future, funds may be available for re-stocking?

A. No unfortunately. Neither AIF or FIP can be used to fund stocking directly. We do however consider applications for fish refuges to protect against predation, in parallel with the clubs own stocking efforts to replace lost fish - which counts as matched funding. It's also worth having the conversation with your local EA fisheries officer to see if they can be of help.

Q. Does the purchase of 'Hedgehog' fish refuges qualify as part of a predation project? Also, the purchase of additional trees to impair the flight path of Cormorants. And the purchase of mannequins etc?

A. Yes, they would all qualify apart from maybe trees which is a new one for me. Certainly, mannequins and hedgehog fish refuges are part of our criteria. It doesn't necessarily need to be something which has been funded before however, if you can demonstrate why it's necessary.

Q. We have a number of waters including a river, all in close proximity all visited by otters. We only own one, the others are on short leases, which would be the logical water to protect, as it's possibly the only venue which could be fenced. However an otter fence would save this venue and probably the club, but this would only push the otters onto the other waters, do we just let these water get decimated and give up on them?

A. No you shouldn't. We can't fence every fishery in the country – there are places where it's just logistically impossible. Often in these situations it's best to look at availability of refuge, and what stocks you have. Clearly a water with a small head of big carp makes it particularly prone to otter predation, since an otter will only need to take a handful of fish to make a noticeable impact. A much more balanced fishery however, with a mix of coarse fish and broad range of year classes/ sizes etc, will see a much less noticeable impact from otters. So I think the answer would be to look at the stocking policy, and the quality of habitat in the waters for fish as a whole.

Q. Could you please tell me if you would consider funding for CCTV at a lake? We already have one at one of our waters. We use it for monitoring for poaching, cormorants, mink etc.

A. Great question. I think both our FMA's have cameras they can install at your fishery to monitor otters, but I'm not sure if/ where CCTV could be funded. If you'd like to give me a call I'm happy to chat about this.

Q. Is funding 50/50 split with match funding from club funds? - If so do I assume £5k is a maximum - therefore a £10k project spend?

A. No, not quite. Ideally we want a 50/50 split. Otter fencing isn't cheap and we have seen applications come in totalling as much as £40k/ £50k in past, so £5k is really only a small contribution. Ideally if you have a project and put in 5k minimum from cash, voluntary time or a mixture of both, we'll contribute to it. Most awards are for £5k simply because of the amount of material and time involved.

Q. Can a club apply for funding if it has a limited membership?

A. Yes. The AIF is open to everyone who is providing an angling opportunity. The money comes from fishing license sales though, so the EA provide it on the basis that it will help grow angling participation and fishing license sales in the future. So unlimited membership will score more points from the panel than a very private syndicate, though everyone can still apply and win applications.

Q. Can a club apply for both AIF and FIP at the same time?

A. Yes, by all means. Both funds are open and do different things.

Q. Can a club apply for multiple projects within AIF at the same time?

A. Yes, but you will need to make it clear that both can be successfully delivered and you won't be overstretching.

Q. We have applied for a fund in the first round and completed an expression of interest form. Do we actually need to complete another form as we have not heard anything yet.

A. Call your local Environment Agency office and ask for the fisheries officer – if you can't get through to anybody, send me an email and I will chase it up through EA head office. You should have someone contacting you from the EA about your FIP application within 2 months of applying.

Q. Is there anywhere with an approved spec for otter fencing, so I can use this to get quotes?

A. Otterstop would be a good place to start. There are lots of other fencing contractors around too – it's worth getting in touch with our [Fisheries Management Advisers for help](#).

Q. How do people work out what volunteer time is worth?

A. We have some formulas available in the [guidance notes](#) which you can use to work this out.

Q. Could donated materials count as match funding?

A. Yes – for example if you have a member with a digger who says his rate is £200 per day, we will take this into account.

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