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Angling Trust's response to the Sussex Inshore and Fisheries and Conservation Authority Hand Gathering Byelaw Formal Consultation

The Angling Trust is the representative body for all angling disciplines in England and Wales, with thousands of individual members and hundreds of thousands of members of affiliated clubs. It is united in a collaborative relationship with Fish Legal. This separate membership association uses the law to protect fish stocks and the rights of its members throughout the UK. Angling is one of the UK's most popular pastimes. It contributes considerably to the English economy, generating £1.4 billion annually and supporting 27,000 jobs. We represent more than 1,800 of the many angling clubs, fisheries and riparian owners throughout the UK, whose fishing rights are worth at least £1 billion. The value of those rights largely depends on the health of the freshwater and coastal marine environment.

Hand gathering is a commonly practised part of the recreational angling pastime. Ragworm, lugworm, crab, shellfish, and other marine organisms are dug or foraged, mainly within the intertidal zone between high and low water. Anglers collect bait for personal use on behalf of friends and family, and commercial operations gather bait on behalf of the local tackle trade.

Although we recognise the requirements for a bylaw to restrict illegal commercial hand gathering activities, which can have adverse effects on populations and the wider ecosystems, we wish to object to the Hand Gathering Byelaw proposed by the Sussex IFCA (Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities), as it is currently drafted. We consider it will be ineffective in achieving its desired outcomes and that it is disproportionately disadvantaging members of the recreational angling community.

More specifically, we believe this byelaw (as currently drafted):

- Lacks sufficient evidence to support the implementation of the proposed limits of hand gathering per day for the recreational angling community, which does not adequately reflect the needs of the angling community
- Marginalises the recreational angling community through the requirement of an expensive permitting system, especially within the context of the current cost of living crisis

We highlight these specific areas of concern:

- **Proposed limits:** Within the proposed bylaw, the limits on daily restrictions for the following species do not acknowledge that some within the angling community collect bait on behalf of

others, such as family and friends, or for their usage for a significant length of time, e.g., between spring tides. We also believe there is a lack of sufficient evidence to arrive at some of the proposed quantities. Although the precautionary principle should be applied in the absence of data, the below proposals are inadequate for meeting the needs of stakeholders.

The current bylaw proposes:

- *20 crabs in total of any species other than *Cancer pagurus**
- *5kg of mollusc shellfish except for piddocks (*Pholadidae*), blue mussels (*Mytilus edulis*) or native oyster (*Ostrrea edulis*)*
- *1kg of prawns or shrimps*
- *1kg or 1 litre or 100 individual marine worms (*Annelida*)*

We want to propose the following amounts:

- *100 black lug*
- *2kg blow lug*
- *2kg maddies (harbour ragworm)*
- *5kg of mollusc*
- *1kg of shrimp*
- *40 crabs in total of any species other than *Cancer pagurus**

We want to highlight that a more appropriate figure may have been reached sooner if there had been adequate engagement with the local recreational angling community before the drafting of the associated bylaw.

- **Permitting system:** Whilst we accept the potential requirement for a £100 permit to monitor, regulate, and enforce commercial bait collection, we believe this permit is unnecessary for individual anglers collecting for personal usage. We are supportive of the bylaw not necessitating amateur diggers to require a permit. Should it become a requirement, a permit of this cost may have possible implications for anglers participating in the sport, especially within the context of wider pressures due to the rising cost of living. Angling is often associated with lower socio-economic groups within vulnerable and marginalised coastal communities. Yet, the sport delivers numerous benefits such as mental health and wellbeing, nature connectedness, and supporting local economies that can benefit the national economy. It is paramount that proportionate solutions are identified to ensure that individuals who wish to participate in the sport can continue. At the same time, we are supportive of managing the environment upon which the sport depends to ensure its conservation and restoration where evidence demonstrates a need.
- **Enforcement:** The IFCA needs to clarify how the proposed bylaw will be enforced. Hand gathering by all stakeholders takes place over a wide area within the Sussex district, and given that it is publicly recognised that the IFCAs are under-resourced and underfunded to carry out their existing bylaws effectively, we question the usefulness of implementing a bylaw that cannot be effectively enforced. Instead, we advocate for a voluntary code of

conduct among the recreational angling community to encourage best practices and for the sector to self-regulate.

- **Disturbance:** We recognise the requirement to protect sensitive and vulnerable species from the threats posed by disturbance, particularly during essential lifecycle stages for species like overwintering birds; however, should protection be necessary, we believe all stakeholder activities must be managed equally. [For example, dog walking has been shown to pose a higher threat to disturbing birds.](#) We also recognise and support the need for managing sensitive habitats, such as seagrass and biogenic reefs; however, we believe that a voluntary code of conduct and improved education on best-practice are better tools to achieve shared objectives over the implementation of a bylaw.
- **Crab traps:** The River Adur SSSI is a popular location for crab tiling within the Sussex district. Our understanding is that there is a lack of sufficient evidence to support the implementation of restrictions for the hand gathering of crabs within this area – an activity that has taken place here for generations. Research has indicated that the practice of crab tiling may be advantageous in encouraging improved diversity at the site. We appreciate concerns regarding materials utilised to produce crab traps, such as asbestos, and we object to the utilisation of such materials. We put forward to the Sussex IFCA the possibility of exploring the development, manufacture, and distribution of inert materials for environmentally friendly clay crab traps to mitigate these concerns. The Angling Trust would be open to discussing this with the Sussex IFCA.
- **Bait pumping:** We recognise the need to reduce the number of pollutants entering marine ecosystems, particularly within sensitive habitats such as those given SSSI, SAC/SPA and MCZ designations; however, we believe that the inclusion of bait pumping within the bylaw is not enforceable nor a proportionate solution. This is especially considering their relative insignificance compared to background pollutants from other sources such as sewage pollution. Instead, we believe that the IFCA should implement and advocate a voluntary code of conduct on sustainable bait pumping and invest in outreach and education within the angling community on best-practice. This may be carried out in conjunction with the Angling Trust as the national governing body for recreational angling.

The byelaw, as currently drafted, is not fit for purpose. The Angling Trust's view is that it would be better to bring into force proportionate management measures, such as commercial operators having to carry ID to improve traceability. This would strike a balance between limiting any damaging commercial exploitation whilst facilitating recreational sea angling by the public. We also object to the inclusion of Beachy Head East MCZ within the bylaws prohibited areas as this is a significant area for recreational sea anglers to gather their bait.

We propose that a voluntary code of conduct on hand gathering and sustainable bait pumping is a more logical and practical way forward rather than the employment of a bylaw and permit system. We stress to the Sussex IFCA the need to revise the proposed daily restrictions for hand gathering and the utilisation of the best available evidence.

Moving forward in the interests of co-design and co-management, we also urge the Sussex IFCA to engage with the local recreational sea angling community effectively. As the national governing body for angling, we welcome opportunities to facilitate and communicate this engagement.

We request, therefore, that the proposed bylaw be rejected and returned to the IFCA for revision and resubmission.

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