



Virtual Fisheries Forum 05/04/2023 (Achieving A Progressive & Inclusive Rod Licence Service).

Q&A session

Q. Does somebody need a Rod Licence if they are supervising/helping a child aged under 13 years old who is fishing as the child would not legally need a Licence, but I am unsure if the supervisor/helping person (such as a parent) would still need to have one?

A. (Tom) So long as the child is the one actually doing the fishing either by holding the rod whilst it is in the water fishing or being within appropriate distance of the rod then no licence would be required by the supervising person however if the child was to for example get bored and walk off leaving the rod to be attended by the supervising adult then they would need a rod licence as they would then be the person technically fishing.

Q. Rod licence sales are obviously really important. If that money supports so many good projects, why have the EA stopped advertising the need for them and reduced the number of EA licence enforcement staff?

A. (Tom) 2010 was when the agency had to cut down on advertising rod licences due to the then coalition government putting what effectively was a limit on the amount of marketing that the EA could do. We do still market our rod licences within the allowed means, but the reach is obviously less. With the now increased Rod licence prices we will be putting some of that money into improving our marketing, but you still will not be seeing it on mainstream TV for example as used to happen due to the huge costs involved with this. We will be using other different formats such as social media, press releases and also working with our partners to push out marketing messages.

Q. What is the latest with regard to self-regulation of licensing?

A. (Jenny) We are actively developing means to broaden out the ability of checking rod licences to third parties such as the police, angling trust VBS and NRW etc. We are also looking at how we can provide a service for fishery owners to check rod licences without any implications for data protection. Official agency Enforcement officers will have access to more data than we can pass on third parties due to GDPR but we will be able to find a compromise for fishery owners etc within what is legal.

Q. Does the EA carry out predation surveys, in particular the numbers and distribution of cormorants and otters in our rivers?

A. (Tom) Natural England administer these areas as opposed to the Environment Agency. The agency is joint funding the 6th national Otter survey currently to gather data on Otter populations and distribution around the country, but this is still not carried out by the agency itself.

Statement. Our club has received a great deal of support from EA Officers by way of advice, seminars etc. Also, financial grant aid has helped us improve our facilities. It is much appreciated!

Q. Is there an analysis of the age profile of rod licence sales?

A. (Tom) Yes, we have all those analytics. The pattern is unsurprisingly still showing an ageing trend likely because of reasons we are all aware of with how the sport is perceived and we have been/are working on changing this.

Q. More a comment than a question. I guess that everything has to go up, but when people say they haven't had a licence checked for 10 plus years then it's only their morals that cause them to renew. Most people without those morals would fancy taking the chance of getting caught for a possible £300 fine instead of getting a licence. You only have to look at the amount of uninsured cars on the road, people can't afford it. As things stand if you fish in wild and remote areas you are unlikely to ever get checked; so why buy the licence?

A. (Tom) I appreciate when people say they have never had their licence checked and ideally, we would have a bigger enforcement presence. We are aware the agency is missing out on over 1 million pounds of rod licence income from our estimated evasion rate of approximately 5%

and there is a lot we could do with that money frustratingly. We are already trying to recruit more enforcement staff to mitigate this as well as the voluntary bailiff initiative with the Angling Trust sharing intelligence of areas patrolled etc. It will never be a 0% evasion rate sadly.

A. (Jenny) Making sure that anglers are aware there is enforcement activity going on checking validity of licences etc is important to instil confidence in the service as well as incentivise anglers to purchase a licence. Something we are working on is online rod licence validation checks linking up different services electronically to ensure clubs & fisheries have a way to know if anglers on their waters are legal and take a stance of not allowing access to un-licensed anglers.

Q. Surely the answer going forward is to use an App for online licence purchase & licence monitoring and for the issuing of the monthly fisheries newsletter. Government digital services would no doubt design an App fit for purpose. Young people are the lifeblood of the sport & they are not being served by continuing to use old fashioned services?

A. (Jenny) There is Government digital service guidelines we have to operate within and these limit the technology we can use. There is a sensible thought process behind the guidelines such as Governmental organisation App's are only permitted if there is a need to download data to a mobile device or if data is needed to be stored on a phone so that users/customers are not overloaded with information on their mobile devices. We might look at this in future if needs dictate but for now web based platforms are the best option.

Q. Does digital licencing make checking any easier as we have a club rule in our printed book that members need to produce a valid rod licence to bailiffs?

A. (Jenny) There is work the agency needs to do to help anglers understand the easiest way to produce their digital licence. Potentially a system along the lines of how vehicle insurance is checkable by registration plate number on a government website platform for example.

Q. Anglers want to see more enforcement and more improvement of water quality and reduction in pollution. I know there's a national enforcement team, but this screams VBS phase 2 to help out with enforcement?

A. (Tom) So for those who do not know the difference between VBS 'phase 1' and DBS 'phase 2' is that phase 1 VBS act as eyes & ears on our waterways which report intelligence back to the Environment Agency on issues, they come across but do not have any powers under the Salmon & freshwater fisheries act to check licences. VBS 2 is where we hope to get VBS a warrant to enable them to check licences legally under the Salmon & freshwater fisheries act and thus increase overall fisheries enforcement presence.

Q. Do you think licences going digital will mean more evasion especially at club bailiff level for example when they say I can't find the email etc?

A. (Jenny) There are already processes in place to make this not an issue as our enforcement officers can use a remote database or ring a helpline to check details provided by an angler and verify if they are legal should the angler not have a licence either digital or paper immediately to hand.

Q. I wonder how many clubs are put off running get fishing days due to the strict safeguarding requirements?

A. The Angling Trust have a participation team that specialise in helping run beginners & children's fishing events as well as helping clubs or fisheries run their own events successfully according to the rules. Find your areas regional angling development officer [HERE](#) and get in touch.

Statement. The public HAD to use digital services for Tax so why not the EA licences? Digital is easier to check on the bank and let's face it who doesn't take their phone fishing for Facebook updates, photos videos etc. Also, in-app purchases would surely make it easier for contacting the agency regarding problems like unlicensed anglers, Invasive species reports, fish kills and pollution etc

Q. You don't need to carry your driving licence with you at all times as the police can still check. The same goes for the EA checking fishing licences, I still have a paper licence and it can't now be read due to damp damage! Most fisheries are now digital and don't give the angler the choice of a paper or electronic day ticket etc, that's just called progress. If people want a paper licence, then they should pay the extra for it if it is still to remain an option.

A. (Jenny) Anglers can still get the illustrated paper card licence currently, but it will be from June 2024 that the paper licence with the printed artwork will not be an option anymore. Instead, we will issue paper licences without an illustration that will be printed through central government facilities to save cost. We would not want to completely stop selling paper licences altogether because we acknowledge some people will always have difficulty with technology access.

Q. I pay by direct debit to ensure I renew. if this service isn't available there will be persons who forget to renew?

A. (Jenny) The direct debit system works well for both anglers and the agency. We have unfortunately not been able to welcome more anglers into using this function for a number of years but hopefully when we have an alternative option even more anglers will make use of it. Having anglers on a direct debit system is good for the Agency as we can more accurately predict our income annually to plan how rod licence money will be invested back into the sport of angling.

Q. Is it legal for clubs to ask to see members fishing licence?

A. (Tom) If it is stipulated within the club's rules that members must have a valid Environment Agency rod licence then the club's officials and bailiffs etc can ask to see a valid EA rod licence.

Statement. To achieve maximum positivity towards EA Fisheries, it is very important to promote more keenly, and publicise the good work that has already been achieved with Clubs and Fisheries

A. (Alex) Communicating the activities of the Environment Agency fisheries teams is certainly a big part of my team's role at the Angling Trust to ensure as many anglers as possible are aware of how rod licence money is invested within the sport of angling. The EA fisheries teams themselves are also getting much better at this with many of

the teams running social media pages such as the '[Great Ouse & Fenland Fisheries Team](#)' and [Calverton Fish farm team](#) accounts. This will no doubt expand further over time.

Statement. At present this 'good news' is more than offset by Pollution incidents, Sewage etc. Although a Government issue it is EA that are seen as responsible, and EA fisheries will suffer as a consequence.

A. (Tom) It is an emotive subject and I understand the point you are making. For most anglers the fishing licence is their main touchpoint with the EA so it can be a source of frustration paying it when they see/hear about water pollution issues on waterways but do not understand how the EA is departmentalised or how rod licence income is used. Sewage pollution especially has become such a contentious issue the government are taking note and bringing out additional means of holding to account/fining water companies. The EA want to do more but would also benefit from more investment.

Key contacts from this forum meeting:

- Alex Clegg (Angling Trust National Angler Engagement Manager)
alex.clegg@anglingtrust.net
- Sam Hubbard (Angling Trust National Angler Engagement Officer)
sam.hubbard@anglingtrust.net
- Tom Sherwood (Environment Agency Fisheries Team)
Tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk
- Jenny Yates (Environment Agency Fisheries Team)
Jenny.yates@environment-agency.gov.uk



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