



Angling Trust
Eastwood House
6 Rainbow Street
Leominster
Herefordshire HR6 8DQ

t: 0844 770 0616
e: admin@anglingtrust.net
w: www.anglingtrust.net

Reg Address: Angling Trust Ltd
Eastwood House
6 Rainbow Street Leominster
Herefordshire HR6 8DQ
Reg No: 05320350
VAT No: 948411215

Resetting the Relationship - But Where Are Recreational Anglers?

The Angling Trust response to the EFRA Select Committee's report on fishing communities | 24th April 2026

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee published its seventh report of this session on 24th April 2026, titled [Resetting the relationship with fishing communities](#). It examines the new Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund, the breakdown of trust between government and the fishing sector, and the growing "spatial squeeze" in UK waters.

There is much in this report that we welcome. The Committee has produced a serious, evidence-led piece of work that asks the right questions of government on transparency, engagement and coordination. Several of its recommendations, if adopted, would benefit the entire marine community - commercial and recreational alike. We are grateful for the Committee's willingness to hear from the Angling Trust during this inquiry and to reflect our enforcement concerns in its findings.

But we must be blunt: this report is overwhelmingly focused on the commercial catching sector. Recreational sea angling - an activity enjoyed by over 700,000 people each year, supporting thousands of jobs in coastal communities through charter boats, tackle shops, accommodation and tourism - is almost entirely absent. Shore anglers, small boat anglers, kayak fishers and charter skippers are all part of the fabric of coastal life, yet none of them feature meaningfully in this report. That is not a minor gap. It reflects the same blind spot that has plagued fisheries policy for years, and it is now squarely on the government to correct it in its response.

Communication and Trust

What We Support

- **MMO enforcement transparency (Recommendation, Paragraph 37).** The Angling Trust was cited in this report for raising the alarm over poor enforcement of fisheries rules covering sea bass, bluefin tuna and mackerel. We have long argued that the Marine Management Organisation's decision to stop routinely publishing inspection and enforcement data undermines public confidence. The Committee agrees. Its recommendation that the MMO must publish inspection rates and enforcement outcomes in its annual reports - and retrospectively release three years of historical data - is one we wholeheartedly endorse. Every sea angler who sticks to bag limits, respects minimum sizes or obtains a recreational bluefin tuna permit deserves to know that the rules are being enforced fairly across all sectors.
- **Regional Fisheries Management Forums (Recommendation, Paragraph 30).** We strongly support the Committee's call for Defra to establish UK-wide Regional Fisheries Management Forums that meet at least three times a year, publish minutes, and have a formal role in reviewing draft policies and technical measures. This is the kind of structured, transparent engagement the sector desperately needs. Decisions about fisheries management measures, MPA management, spatial planning and stock assessments affect every person involved in fishing, and the Forums must reflect that.

- **In-person engagement at ports (Recommendation, Paragraph 28).** The recommendation that Defra officials working on fisheries policy should undertake regular, in-person visits to ports - mirroring the department's farm placement scheme - is welcome and overdue. Policymakers who have never set foot on a working harbour, spoken to a charter skipper, or engaged with anglers fishing from a pier cannot fully understand the consequences of the rules they write.
- **Clear communication on regulatory changes (Recommendation, Paragraph 33).** The report documents the confusion that followed the December 2025 UK–EU fisheries written record, where even the MMO's own interim chief executive was unclear on implementation timelines. If delivery bodies themselves do not understand the rules, what hope do individual fishers - commercial or recreational - have? We support the call for Defra to publish a confirmed timeline and provide clear guidance.

Where the Government Must Go Further

- **Recreational anglers must be included in the Forums.** The Committee recommends that Regional Fisheries Management Forums should comprise "fishers, marine scientists and environmental organisations." That is a good start, but the report never specifies that recreational anglers, shore fishers and charter boat operators should be represented. Sea angling is not a niche hobby - it is a substantial part of the marine economy, and decisions about stock management, spatial planning and access directly affect everyone who fishes recreationally. Any forum that excludes them will produce incomplete advice. We call on the government to ensure recreational sea angling has formal, guaranteed representation in these bodies.
- **The trust deficit affects recreational fishers too.** The report frames the trust problem as one between the government and the commercial fleet. But recreational anglers have their own longstanding grievances: disproportionate regulations that penalise rod-and-line fishers while commercial bycatch continues; a lack of meaningful consultation on bag limits and seasonal closures; the feeling that shore anglers are an invisible constituency whose access to marks can be removed without notice or consultation; and the persistent sense that recreational sea angling is treated as an afterthought in fisheries policy. If the government is serious about resetting the relationship, it must acknowledge that this relationship extends well beyond the commercial fleet.
- **Defra officials should engage with the recreational sector, not just the commercial fleet.** The Committee's recommendation that officials should visit ports is welcome, but the framing assumes that fisheries policy engagement means speaking to commercial vessel operators. Defra officials should also be visiting popular shore marks, attending sea angling festivals, speaking to tackle shop owners, and meeting charter skippers. Understanding the fishing community means understanding all of it.

Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund

What We Support

- **Demand for transparency on funding rationale (Recommendation, Paragraph 8).** The Committee is right to press the government on how the £360 million figure was calculated, why 12 years was chosen as the duration, and what measurable outcomes will be used to track progress. Without this transparency, neither Parliament nor the communities the Fund is meant to serve can hold the government to account.
- **Front-loading the investment (Conclusion, Paragraph 14).** The observation that England's first-year allocation of £22.6 million is strikingly modest against the Fund's £304 million lifetime budget for England is well made. Coastal communities need investment

now, not a slow drip over a decade. We support the call for year-by-year budget allocations to be published and for meaningful front-loading.

- **Addressing gaps in stakeholder engagement (Recommendation, Paragraph 18).** There are serious oversights by Defra in stakeholder engagement, and we support the call for broader, more inclusive engagement going forward. That engagement must extend beyond the commercial sector to include recreational sea angling organisations - an omission that Defra, not the Committee, is responsible for correcting.

Where the Government Must Go Further

- **The Fund is not tailored to the recreational fishing sector and its needs.** The Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund is presented throughout the report as a vehicle for the commercial catching sector and associated coastal communities. Recreational sea angling - whether from the shore, a small boat, a kayak or a charter vessel - does not appear anywhere in the discussion of Fund priorities or eligibility. A £360 million fund for fishing communities that excludes the largest group of people who actually fish in this country cannot credibly claim to serve those communities. The government must fix this.
- **Shore-based fishing infrastructure has been ignored entirely.** The Fund talks about investing in port infrastructure and coastal communities, yet there is no recognition whatsoever of the infrastructure that shore anglers depend on. Piers, breakwaters and sea walls where people fish are deteriorating. Safe access to coastal paths and rock marks is being lost to development or neglect. Basic amenities at popular shore venues - railings, lighting, parking, public toilets - are disappearing. These are not luxuries; they are the things that make the difference between a fishable mark and one that gets quietly abandoned. A fund that claims to support fishing communities but ignores the infrastructure used by hundreds of thousands of shore anglers is not delivering for the whole community.
- **Small boat anglers and slipway access are overlooked.** Thousands of recreational anglers around the coast launch from public slipways. Many of these are in poor repair. Trailer parking is being reduced or priced out of reach. Launching fees continue to rise. Yet none of this features in the Fund's priorities or in the Committee's recommendations. Maintaining and improving slipway access is a direct investment in coastal economic activity - every angler who launches a boat spends money locally on fuel, bait, tackle, food and accommodation.
- **Charter boats are not recognised as coastal businesses.** Charter boat operators are commercial enterprises. They provide livelihoods for skippers and crew, bring visiting anglers into coastal towns, generate spending in local businesses, and introduce thousands of people to the marine environment each year. They need functioning pontoons, safe harbour access, customer parking, and well-maintained port infrastructure. They tick every box the Fund claims to support, yet it is not clear they are even eligible.
- **The government cannot keep ignoring the economic contribution of recreational sea angling.** The report notes that fishing and aquaculture account for 0.03% of UK GVA and that 2.9% of jobs in Cornwall depend on seafood. But there is no equivalent recognition of recreational sea angling's economic footprint. Sea angling generates significant direct and indirect spending in coastal areas - tackle, bait, boat trips, fuel, accommodation, food and drink. In many smaller coastal communities, charter boats, angling tourism and the spending of shore and boat anglers are as important to the local economy as the commercial fleet, if not more so. If the government is serious about supporting coastal economies, it cannot continue to base its analysis on half the picture. Any assessment of how fishing sustains coastal communities must include the recreational sector.

Spatial Squeeze

What We Support

- **A comprehensive Sea Use Framework (Recommendation, Paragraph 49).** This is the report's strongest and most important recommendation. The Committee is right that the current patchwork of outdated marine policy statements, opaque prioritisation programmes, and fragmented governance is failing. A single, comprehensive Sea Use Framework - developed collaboratively with all sea users and jointly with the devolved administrations - is essential. We strongly support this call.
- **Annual MSPri reporting (Recommendation, Paragraph 51).** The revelation that the Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme was not actually used in the development of the North Sea Future Plan - despite being cited within it - is damning. The Committee's detailed requirements for annual reporting on how MSPri is used, by whom, and where it was omitted, would bring much-needed accountability to a process that currently appears to exist largely on paper.
- **An addendum to the North Sea Future Plan (Recommendation, Paragraph 52).** The fact that the North Sea Future Plan contains no reference to fishing or marine environmental protection is extraordinary for a strategy that claims to support a "prosperous and sustainable future" for the region. An addendum addressing fishing interests and environmental protections is the minimum that should be expected.

Where the Government Must Go Further

- **Recreational fishing access is a spatial squeeze issue too - and the government cannot continue to treat it as though it isn't.** The report discusses the spatial squeeze almost exclusively in terms of commercial fishing grounds being lost to offshore wind and marine protected areas. But the recreational sector face the same pressures - and for many, the effects are deeply personal. A favourite rock mark closed off because of coastal development. A pier shut down with no plan to reopen it. An MPA designation that restricts fishing from the shore without clear evidence that rod-and-line angling was causing harm in the first place. Charter boats displaced by wind farm exclusion zones and cable routes. Small boat anglers finding their usual inshore grounds boxed in from all sides. The proposed Sea Use Framework must explicitly include recreational sea angling as a legitimate and valued use of marine space, with the same standing as commercial fishing, energy generation and conservation. That means recognising shore marks, inshore grounds, launch sites and charter boat operating areas - not just commercial trawling grounds. If it does not, the framework will simply replicate the existing bias.
- **The silence on Highly Protected Marine Areas and recreational access is a serious omission.** The report discusses MPAs in the context of commercial fishing displacement, but says nothing about the impact of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) and broader MPA management measures on recreational angling. Rod-and-line fishing is one of the lowest-impact forms of fishing. Blanket restrictions that treat it the same as industrial methods are neither fair nor evidence-based. This is a live and contentious issue that the Sea Use Framework must address directly.
- **Shore anglers, boat anglers and charter skippers all need to be at the table - and the government must guarantee it.** The Committee's recommendation that the Sea Use Framework should include "a formal mechanism enabling coastal communities to participate in decisions that affect them" is welcome - but only if coastal communities are understood to include the full breadth of recreational sea angling, not just the commercial fleet. Shore anglers whose access to marks is affected by development and conservation designations, small boat anglers whose launch sites are under pressure, and charter

operators whose livelihoods depend on access to productive grounds must all be part of these decisions. The government should not leave this to interpretation. It must be made explicit.

Our Asks

In summary, the Angling Trust calls on the government, when responding to this report, to:

1. **Guarantee recreational sea angling representation** in the proposed Regional Fisheries Management Forums and in the development of the Sea Use Framework, including shore anglers, boat anglers and charter boat operators.
2. **Open the Fishing and Coastal Growth Fund to include tailored funding for the recreational fishing sector** - shore fishing infrastructure such as piers, sea walls, coastal access and amenities; slipway maintenance and trailer parking for boat anglers; and charter boat eligibility must all be included in the Fund's priorities from year two.
3. **Recognise the economic contribution of recreational sea angling** in any assessment of how fishing sustains coastal communities. Over 700,000 people fish in the sea each year, and their spending supports thousands of jobs in coastal towns.
4. **Include recreational fishing as a named, legitimate use of marine space** within the proposed Sea Use Framework, with equal standing to commercial fishing. That includes shore marks, inshore grounds, launch sites and charter boat operating areas.
5. **Address the impact of MPAs and HPAs on recreational angling access** as part of the spatial squeeze discussion, recognising that rod-and-line fishing is one of the lowest-impact forms of fishing and should not be subject to blanket restrictions designed for industrial methods.
6. **Require Defra officials to engage with the recreational sector** as part of the recommended in-person engagement programme - not just the commercial fleet. That means visiting shore marks, attending angling events, and meeting charter skippers alongside port visits.
7. **Publish MMO enforcement data** as the Committee recommends - recreational anglers need confidence that the rules on bass, bluefin tuna, mackerel and other species are being applied fairly and consistently across all sectors.

This report is a welcome step towards resetting the government's relationship with fishing communities, and the Committee deserves credit for the rigour and seriousness of its work. But the government's response will be the real test. That relationship will not be truly reset until it includes the shore angler on the pier, the boat angler at the slipway, and the charter skipper in the harbour - not just the commercial fleet.