

Make time to go fishing



Lincs and Northants Fisheries Team Activity Report June 2020

Introduction

Welcome to our fisheries report for June 2020. The period from March to June 2020 has been a very strange kettle of fish indeed. The fisheries team quickly adapted to lock down, the restrictions and to working from home. The business has supported all staff in this transition and we have all felt very supported. The team have been working well and have been continuing to provide the best service we can within the constraints. During the early stages of lock down our service was very much restricted to advice and guidance over the phone, site visits and all outdoor work activities were stopped. As folks might remember the lock down coincided with warm dry weather. The inability for us to get out to support fisheries during the hot weather did cause the team some concern, not least for developing Category 1 incidents.

All Environment Agency Offices have been closed since March with all staff working from home. All field based fisheries work including rod licence patrols, enforcement of the coarse fish closed season, fisheries incident response and fisheries monitoring were put on stop. We were able to respond to Category 1 incidents where there was a significant risk of harm to the natural environment but the decision making was controlled centrally by our Incident Room and Base Controllers.

During the Covid 19 incident the Environment Agency have been working to three key strategic priorities;

- Protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff
- Protecting lives
- Preventing serious harm to the environment.

Fortunately the routine business of the Environment Agency is slowly re-starting and we are pleased to report that the Fisheries Services have been one of the first functions of the Environment Agency to re-start field activities. Of course the new ways of working under the COVID 19 incident has resulted in many challenges but also many opportunities and innovations. Our daily use of networking apps and video conferencing has improved team communications and we will continue to adopt these tools as we gradually move out of lock down. It has been really excellent to hear Ministers and the press talking about the health benefits of angling. We feel this has helped to put angling back on the map as a healthy recreational activity for all age groups. It has been fantastic to see so many anglers getting out and about following the slow lifting of lock down restrictions. Rod license sales have increased and there are many anglers getting out and about. This has resulted in a 10% rise in income compared to figures from this time last year. Our National Colleagues will be considering how these additional funds can be distributed and we hope funding will become available for the Fisheries Improvement Programme, Fisheries Improvement Fund and support for fisheries during Prolonged Dry Weather. We hope that it won't be long before angling participation events and junior coaching events can re-start.

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Fisheries Incident Summary

Environmental incidents impacting our fisheries have continued to be reported during lock down; with very few people out and about these have been low in number. Providing a physical response to incidents during the early weeks and months of lock down was restricted and strictly controlled by our Incident Room and Base Controllers. This has been challenging for the team but staff safety must come first at all times.

During the first weeks of lock down we received a call from a local fishery in the Northampton area, reporting that fish were dying at his fishery. Given the low number of fatalities we were not permitted to visit the site, so we provided advice and guidance for aeration over the phone. As expected the incident escalated with a slow but steady increase in fish losses. Given the potential for a further escalation we obtained special permission to visit the site where basic water quality parameters were checked. We advised the owner that a change in environmental conditions at the fishery had resulted in a sudden shift in the ecological condition of the lake, as a result the water had become dominated by bacteria, typical of very poor water quality. Our response options were limited but we were able to advise and provide a number of peroxide barrels for an external contractor to use. Sadly this did not prevent further fish losses and the fishery suffered a near total loss of fish. As lock down restriction ease we will be offering additional advice and support for the restoration of this fishery. The following text and images give a flavour of the type of incidents reported to us during the early lock down period.



Another incident reported in the Wellingborough area involved the breach of a foul sewer pipe which discharged untreated effluent into two lakes within the Wellingborough & District Nene AC fisheries complex. This was a significant incident with the potential to destroy two fishing lakes and important units of the Upper Nene Gravel Pits Special Protection Area. Again, our response options were limited. Anglian Water Services who were responsible for the breach promptly called us for advice on the incident response. We were able to provide detailed advice over the phone and Anglian Water employed an external contractor to dose both lakes with peroxide. This work saved both lakes from catastrophic fish losses.

Another incident that we were unable to attend occurred on the Sencil Dyke water course in Lincoln centre. Members of the public reported a small number of dead fish. At the time we were unable to carry out an assessment. Sadly this incident escalated over a period of a few weeks, eventually resulting in the loss of several hundred fish. Although not a formal fishery it is always very frustrating when we are unable to deploy. This again is a good example of how often minor reports of fish dying or in distress can escalate to a significant fish mortality.

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Fisheries Enforcement Summary

Following our March 2020 edition we can now confirm that Jake Reeds and Hugh Bunker are fully operational SAFFA Enforcement Officers bringing our full time staff resource up to 4.5 full time officers for the Area. In addition to their regular duties Jake and Hugh will support all aspects of fisheries regulation and enforcement throughout the area.

Unfortunately Darren Randall's training programme has been interrupted by the COVID 19 incident. We are planning that Darren will complete all training modules later this year bringing our total enforcement resource up to 5.5 full time officers by 2021. This is subject to the continuing COVID incident restrictions. The Team have been out and about working with local clubs, undertaking joint patrols and targeting known hot spots. Our patrols have been overt and pre-planned based on intelligence reports. Wherever possible we have been in partnership with local club bailiffs.

Reports of illegal fishing instruments – Category 1 Incidents during lock down

Where it has been safe to do so our Enforcement Staff were able to respond to several Category 1 incidents, removing illegal nets and traps during lock down. These are events that pose a significant risk of harm to our environment. Our fisheries enforcement officers have been successful in removing a range of trap and net, some of which were elaborate rigs designed to remove large numbers of fish in a short period of time, typical of organised poaching crime. Our officers also removed some authorised traps, these were not compliant with the conditions of the authorisation and as such unsafe for wildlife. Officers responded to 5 category 1 reports during the early stages of lock down period. Our officer removed a very elaborate fish rig on the Coronation Channel in Spalding. This attracted media interest and was widely reported in local media outlets.



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Fisheries Enforcement, Rod License Patrols & Lock Down

Environment Agency staff have been required to follow all the governmental instructions for Lock Down. All routine fishery enforcement activities were put on stop across the Country; including regulation of the Coarse Fish Closed Season. We received a significant number of calls to our incident line relating to anglers not complying with the lock down rules, both on still waters and river fisheries. In our area alone our officers handled over 50 calls where folks were reporting anglers breaking the lock down rules and going fishing on local rivers. Angling during the lock down is not our area of jurisdiction, where possible we passed these reports to our local Police forces. We were unable to respond to any closed season fishing reports.

Enforcement Restart – Targeted Joint Patrols

We have now re-started our enforcement patrols checking our river systems for illegal activities. During day 1 of the open season our staff have been patrolling and checking fenland drains and river systems including; The River Welland, The River Glen, The South Holland Main Drain, the North Level Drain and the River Nene including, the North Bank Water Newton and Castor Backchannel. Our officers have been working closely with Angling Clubs and making good use of social media pages. Our patrols are on-going during this month and into July and include the use of boats and sonar equipment which is being used to identify illegal instruments.

Our officers have strict instructions in the use of PPE and safe ways of working. This is taking some time to get used to but so far we have received very positive feedback from our local clubs, associations and anglers on the banks who are pleased to see us back out on patrol.



LNA Fisheries Enforcement Patrols – River Nene Peterborough June 2020



LNA Fisheries Enforcement Patrol – River Welland Spalding Centre June 2020

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We have been keen to get back to Boston to build on the successful enforcement work carried out earlier this year. On the 25th June, a late evening joint patrol was organised with Boston & District Angling Association. We also teamed up with our local Police Wildlife Officer who is keen to work with us more in the future. This will be a team to watch in the future months and years.

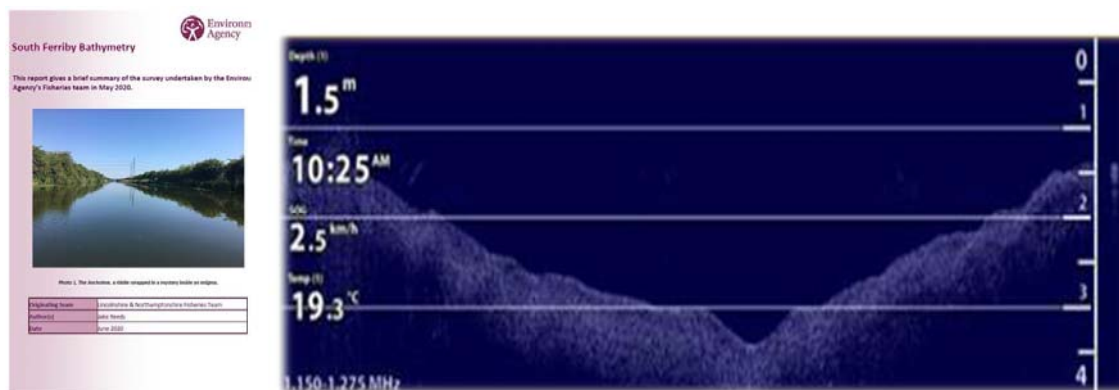


Evening patrol with BDAA, Police and EA Fisheries Enforcement Officers

In summary; following Fisheries Re-start we have undertaken 5 targeted and planned patrols with the Police and local angling clubs this month. With other fisheries activities still on stop we plan to make the best use of our time and continue with our high impact fisheries enforcement strategy (HIFE).

Jake and Darren Finnie continue with innovative sonar work

Jake Reeds and Darren Finnie have been using fisheries monitoring equipment to produce detailed bathymetry maps of our river systems. These techniques have multiple benefits across the Environment Agency business. The scan image below shows a typical cross sectional view produced by the equipment. This can provide valuable data for Fisheries, our Waterways Team and Flood Defence Teams. This work will also be useful for local angling clubs and not least for future habitat improvement planning. The equipment and staff time is in big demand so any work undertaken is carried out on a strict priority basis.

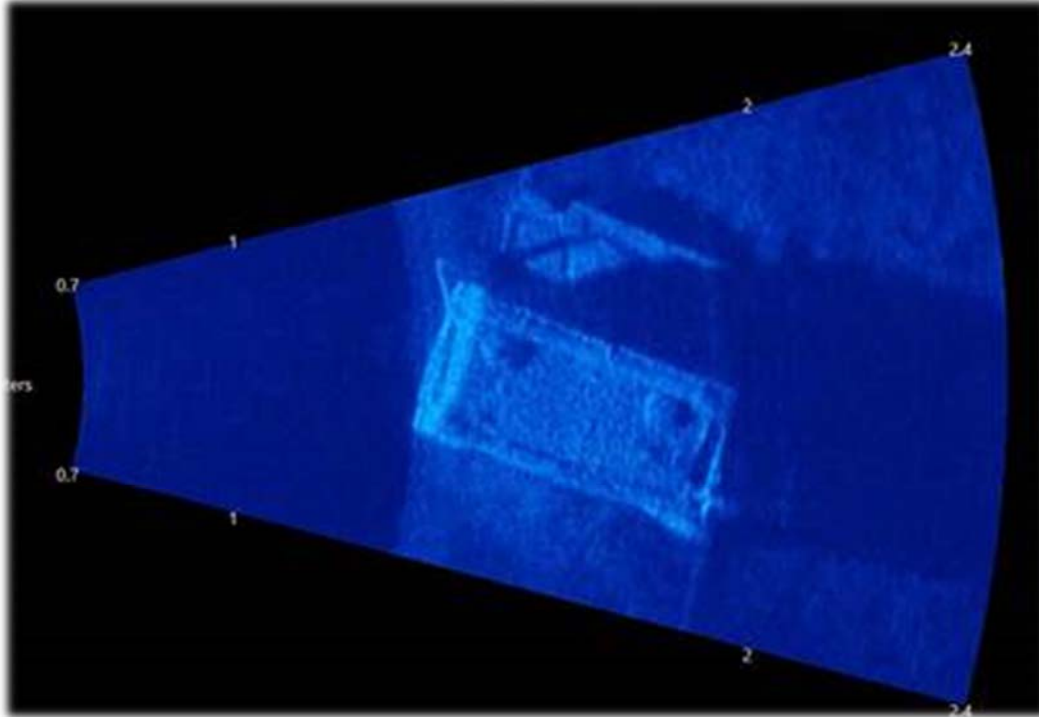


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Additional Fisheries News.

Fisheries monitoring officer Jake Reeds has been commended for the innovative use of Fisheries Sonar equipment during the recent mustard gas incident at Woodhall Spa in Lincolnshire. The Environment Agency were fully involved in the incident which involved 27 separate agencies. Jake was able to demonstrate that the sonar equipment could locate and identify objects on the lake bed. This enabled specialist military divers to dive directly unto the site and retrieve the dangerous gas containers. The sonar image below shows the initial image produced by Jake and the clear outline of the mustard gas canister box.



Welland & Nene Weed Cutting Operations 2020

Our Field Operations Teams are commencing weed cutting for Navigation. Cutting on the River Glen began in May. The River Welland starting in Spalding will commence in June and upstream towards Market Deeping within July. Cutting the River Nene in Northampton will start in June. These programmes are all subject to strict controls with regular checks for water temperature and dissolved oxygen levels.



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And finally we thought you would find the following text written by Tom Sherwood from our National Fisheries Team interesting and thought provoking.

The ‘new normal’ – everyone’s going fishing!

Well, perhaps not everyone is going fishing! However since the Government eased the lockdown restrictions on fishing on May 13th we have seen an absolutely amazing recovery in fishing licence sales. More people fishing means more people accessing the environment, improved health and wellbeing and increased income for us and our partners to deliver the fisheries service.

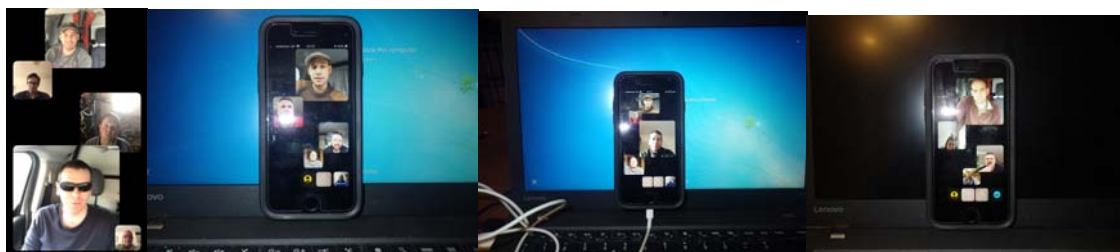
Before restrictions were lifted we had only recorded around 50% of the previous year’s sales, however as of the 17th June we have now achieved approximately 107% of last year’s figure. If this trend continues we are destined to see the first increase in rod licence sales since 2010! So why has this happened? Time is undoubtedly a factor here. Our research has constantly shown that time is the biggest barrier to angling participation, however for many people who are furloughed from work due to Covid-19, time is now somewhat a plentiful commodity!

We are currently looking into licence sales patterns trying to work out if these are ‘lapsed’ anglers or new people coming to the sport for the first time. This will help inform us and our partners when it comes to our marketing messages so hopefully we can take encourage as many of those new and lapsed anglers to carry on fishing beyond this year.

Dr Graeme Storey, Acting Deputy Director for AFNE said: “Over the last few weeks, it has been heartening to see more and more people take up the sport of angling. Responsible fishing is an excellent way to enjoy the outdoors, has great health and welfare benefits and interacting with nature teaches us a lot about our environment. It is also important to our economy and through rod licence sales, anglers are at the heart of protecting and improving the very things they care about.

*“Fishing really is an activity that everyone, of any age, can get involved in and I would encourage those who think it could be a sport for them to give it a go. However, it is important to remember that if you decide to return to fishing or take it up for the first time, you must have a valid fishing licence and adhere to current government guidelines on social distancing.”
(Sherwood, T, June 2020)*

We leave you with some images of our FT meetings held during lock down.



----- Report Ends -----

Stay Safe – Stay Alert – Go Fishing – Tight Lines

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