

Close season retained following public consultation

The decision follows a detailed review of the evidence and responses provided to a public consultation which indicate that removing the close season would pose a risk to coarse fish in some locations.

The close season for coarse fishing on rivers was introduced in 1878 and is in force from 15 March to 15 June. It aims to reduce risks to spawning fish caused by angling.

The review also showed that amending the start and end dates of the close season would increase protection for some fish that spawn later but would increase risks for those that spawn early.

Support among anglers for retaining a close season and removing it is finely balanced. The 8 week public consultation received 13,680 responses with 38.8% of anglers supporting retaining the current close season; 9.2% support retaining a close season, but changing the dates to 15 April to 30 June; and 49.8% support removing the close season altogether. 2.2% were undecided or didn't respond.

The responders were invited to provide evidence to support their view and the Environment Agency has assessed that evidence, alongside other considerations, and determined that there is not a case for changing the current close season.

In addition to the evidence supplied through the consultation, the experience of the Environment Agency's own fish farm at Calverton has shown that some species, notably Chub and Barbel, form large spawning aggregations that can be very sensitive to disturbance. Where disturbed, spawning females may reabsorb their eggs and defer spawning to the following season rather than spawning elsewhere or later.

Kevin Austin, Deputy Director of Fisheries at the Environment Agency said:

"We are really grateful to the people who took the time to respond to the consultation. We have analysed the many comments from the 13,680 responses to understand the evidence and opinions around the close season. Given the limited further evidence on risks to coarse and other fish stocks, we have decided to retain the close season."

"We would also like to thank the joint Angling Trust/Institute of Fisheries Management study group for its work to collate, analyse and interpret the available evidence on the close season. This enabled an informed public debate. While the group concluded a more risk-based approach may be possible, our priority is to find the right balance between angling and protecting fish stocks. The current close season is risk-based and maintains protection for the majority of coarse fish."

"We recognise that some anglers will be disappointed in this outcome, while others will welcome it. This reflects a shared passion for fishing.

"We will continue, working with partners, to consider any new information on the close season as and when it becomes available."