

[Press release: Close season offenders risk court appearance and £50,000 fine](#)

The Environment Agency reported 122 offences of fishing during the close season, following 670 patrols carried out in the restricted period. The targeted patrols also detected 179 other offences, mainly unlicensed fishing.

Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers were supported by 232 Angling Trust Voluntary Bailiff Service members, carrying out over 5,000 hours of patrols under Operation CLAMPDOWN. Now in its 5th year, Operation CLAMPDOWN is a joint initiative between the Environment Agency, Angling Trust's Fisheries Enforcement Support Service, UK National Wildlife Crime Unit and police forces, aimed at gathering intelligence about illegal fishing and responding through targeted patrols. The volunteers reported 111 suspicious incidents to the Environment Agency and police.

The coarse fish close season restrictions are imposed in order to protect vulnerable spawning fish, helping to safeguard fish stocks for the future. Patrols took place across rivers, streams, drains and specific canals and stillwaters covered by the coarse fish close season byelaw, which runs from 15th March – 15th June inclusive.

Judy Proctor, Acting Deputy Director for Fisheries at the Environment Agency, said:

The vast majority of anglers fish legally; sadly there is a small number of anglers who cheat others by fishing during the close season. The coarse fishing close season helps protect vulnerable spawning fish – this is why it's in place. It is still possible for anglers to fish during this time on many stillwaters and canals, which are open all year round.

We respond to the intelligence we receive about illegal fishing by ensuring our patrols are targeted at the right places – and the right people.

Dilip Sarkar MBE, Angling Trust National Enforcement Manager, said:

These figures show that during Operation CLAMPDOWN 5, Phase 1 Volunteer Bailiffs throughout England demonstrated their massive commitment to protecting fish and fisheries and cracking down on illegal fishing. All anglers can help this process, in fact – at any time of year – by reporting information and offences in progress to the Environment Agency on 0800 80 70 60, or the police on 101/999 as appropriate.

The enforcement work was supported through a network of 474 Angling Trust volunteer bailiffs covering all counties in England. Patrolling under operation CLAMPDOWN for a 5th year, they assisted by reporting illegal fishing incidents and information to the Environment Agency and police.

Anyone who suspects illegal fishing to be taking place should report the matter to the Environment Agency's incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Notes to editors

- Enjoy fishing and make sure you fish legally
- Annual fishing licences from only £30
- It's easy to buy online. [Get a Fishing Licence](#)
- All fishing licence income is used to fund work to protect, improve and develop fisheries, fish habitats and angling.
- Go fishing – Find out about angling events, fisheries and venues so you can [go fishing](#)
- The Environment Agency is cracking down on illegal fishing
- The reason why it is illegal to fish on rivers, streams and some specific canals and stillwaters. Due to many waters being under multiple ownership we apply legislation in a precautionary approach. This helps to protect vulnerable fish during spawning time. In addition fishery managers are free to impose close season rules at any time should they consider it necessary to protect their fish stock

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Press release: Sutton Coldfield angler fined for fishing illegally

On 4 July 2017 at Nuneaton Magistrates' Court, Matthew Hitches of Harvest Fields Way, Sutton Coldfield was fined £220 for fishing without a licence. Hitches was also ordered to pay costs of £580.17 and a victim surcharge of £30 following a prosecution by the Environment Agency.

The offence took place on 17 September 2016 at Kingsbury Water Park.

At his initial hearing on 25 April, Hitches, aged 40, entered a plea of not guilty which forced the case to go to trial. This accounted for the high costs awarded in this case. Hitches failed to attend the court for his trial and the case against him was proved in his absence.

Andrew Eardley from the Environment Agency said:

The majority of anglers fish legally. The minority of anglers that fail to buy a fishing licence are cheating their fellow anglers and the future of the sport.

An annual licence costs just £30. It seems ridiculous that anglers risk significant fines and costs, a criminal conviction and the loss of their fishing equipment for such a small fee.

Money from fishing licence sales is invested in England's fisheries and is used to fund a wide range of projects to improve facilities for anglers, including protecting stocks from illegal fishing, pollution and disease; restoring fish stocks through re-stocking; eradicating invasive species; and fish habitat improvements. Licence money is also used to fund the Angling Trust to provide information about fishing and to encourage participation in the sport.

You need a valid Environment Agency rod licence to fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel in England. Buying a rod licence is easy, simply visit [buy a rod licence](#) on GOV.UK.

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing incidents in progress can report it directly to the Environment Agency hotline on 0800 80 70 60. Information on illegal fishing and environmental crime can also be reported anonymously to Crime stoppers on 0800 555 111.