

[Press release: Man fined after pleading guilty to fishing offences](#)

Christopher Myers, 27, of Surrey Place, Willington, Crook, appeared before Newton Aycliffe Magistrates Court on Wednesday 4 July where he pleaded guilty to fishing using illegal equipment, killing and being in possession of trout about to spawn.

He was ordered to pay a total of £1,180, which includes a fine of £800, costs of £300 and a victim surcharge of £80.

The offence happened at 2100 on 21 November last year when Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers were carrying out patrols at Waskerley Beck, Wolsingham.

They observed three men on the beck. Myers was at the water's edge shining a torch into the water and carrying a large gaff – a one meter long metal hook – with a number of fish impaled upon it. A second man was wearing a headlamp torch and the other was carrying a landing net that contained a number of fish.

After officers made themselves known to the poachers, all three ran, dropping the fish and equipment. Myers was caught and arrested while his accomplices escaped. Four dead trout were found in Myers nearby vehicle.



Seized equipment and eggs web

During a voluntary interview at the scene, Myers denied taking any fish, stating that he didn't know who the other men were, that he did not know how the fish got into his pick up and that he was not the driver that night.

Officers found a total of 13 dead sea trout, 11 of which were females ready to spawn. Between them, they were carrying around 35,000 eggs. Their loss could have a major impact on future sea trout stocks in the River Wear.

In mitigation, Myers stated he didn't know how serious these offences were and said he was very sorry.

The Environment Agency's Kevin Summerson said: "This level of illegal activity could have a serious impact on the sustainability of future stocks of sea trout in the River Wear. That's why we take reports of suspected poaching seriously and work closely with the police to take action where appropriate. We're pleased the court has also recognised seriousness of the crime in sentencing.

"At this time of year salmon and sea trout are returning to rivers to spawn and protecting returning fish is vital to maintaining a healthy fish population.

"We'll continue to target all aspects of illegal fishing activity, particularly where serious illegal and potentially damaging methods are used."

The court also ordered the forfeiture of all seized items: gaff, net, torches and fish.

Under the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, lights are prohibited, as are gaffs, and landing nets if used without an authorised rod and line. It is also illegal to fish during the close season for migratory fish.

Anyone discovered committing offences could face a substantial fine and imprisonment. The Environment Agency urges anyone to report illegal fishing by calling 0800 80 70 60.

You can buy a licence at <https://www.gov.uk/fishing-licences> and don't forget that all fishing licence income is used to fund work to protect, improve and develop fisheries, fish habitats and angling. If you want to fish a new river this season, why not visit the fishinginfo website to find details of different venues, river levels and angling clubs.