

[Press release: Three men fined for illegal fishing](#)

Three men have been ordered to pay fines and costs totalling more than £1,300 for poaching with illegal fishing nets in the River Derwent in Gateshead.

Scott McGuire, 30, of Beach Road, South Shields, appeared at South Tyneside Magistrates' Court on Thursday 24 May, where he pleaded guilty to using gill nets to catch fish at Durham Bank, Rowlands Gill. He was fined £120, ordered to pay £300 costs and a victim surcharge of £30.

Stuart Ashall, 45, also of Beach Road, appeared previously on 4 January for the same offence where he pleaded guilty and was fined £180, ordered to pay £400 in costs and a victim surcharge of £30.

A third man, John Britten, 34, of Belgrave Road in South Shields, had also previously pleaded guilty to the same offence and was fined £45, ordered to pay costs of £200 and a victim surcharge of £30 at a court hearing on 8 November last year.

Gill nets are designed to catch fish by their gills and are rarely licensed in rivers due to their indiscriminate nature and the fact that fish caught in the nets will usually suffocate and die.

Illegal gill net

Representing the Environment Agency, solicitor Chris Bunting told the court that Environment Agency enforcement officers were patrolling the River Derwent on 22 July 2016, looking for people fishing illegally.

At 12.40pm they came across a tent with the three men asleep, two inside and one outside. In the river next to them was a gill net set across the river. There was also a salmon head on the ground.

The men said the net had been there when they arrived and they had got the salmon from a supermarket.

However, investigations from a fisheries expert concluded the remains were of an adult wild migratory salmon which had been subject to physical trauma before death and exposed to the natural environment post death. A fish bought from a supermarket would be farmed.

Two of the men attended for voluntary interviews on 8 August, 2016, where they said they did not know there was a net in the river until the enforcement officers had pointed it out, adding they had met some strangers on the riverbank the night before, who spoke to them before leaving. They reiterated the salmon was from a supermarket.

Net is extremely damaging

Following the case David Shears, Senior Fisheries Enforcement Officer for the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

The River Derwent is a recovering river that had been previously affected by industry but which has been slowly improving.

Water quality has improved drastically and a fish pass has been installed in Blaydon which has resulted in fish returning and repopulating the river system.

Gill nets such as the one used in this case are designed to catch fish by their gills and can be extremely damaging to fish stocks. Illegal fishing like this can have a devastating impact, especially on recovering rivers such as the Derwent.

We're committed to tackling illegal fishing of all kinds and we'll continue to work closely with police and angling clubs, supported by the Angling Trust, to target those flouting the law and take enforcement action.

All income from rod licence sales is used to fund Environment Agency work to protect and improve fish stocks and fisheries, including improving habitats for fish and facilities for anglers, tackling illegal fishing and working with partners to encourage people to give fishing a go.

Buying a rod licence is quick and easy – [you can buy them online](#)

The Environment Agency urges anyone to report illegal fishing by calling 0800 80 70 60.