



1. Introduction

Fisheries Management Scotland have been in regular discussion with Scottish Government officials throughout April and May to make the case that angling should be considered by Government to be a low-risk activity that could be undertaken in a manner consistent with current and future physical distancing regulations. The purpose of this paper is to support fishery owners and anglers to understand their public health responsibilities and take appropriate measures to maintain public safety.

The Scottish Government have now published [Scotland's route map through and out of the crisis](#) which sets out a phased approach to relaxing the current restrictions. It is important to recognise that at Phase 1 the route map emphasises that there remains a high risk that the virus is not yet contained and a continued risk of overwhelming NHS capacity without many restrictions still in place.

Angling in Scotland is diverse in nature and therefore this guidance does not cover all forms of fishing. Our focus is on fishing on rivers and lochs, but we do not consider sea angling, coarse angling, commercial still water fisheries or competition angling. Angling Scotland Ltd has published [guidance](#) which covers a wide range of fishing.

As we have stated in previous guidance, the approach adopted by the UK and Scottish Governments is designed to prevent the spread of the virus, supporting and sustaining the NHS, and ultimately saving lives. It remains our view that the fisheries management and angling communities should play a full part in this greater societal commitment and therefore it is important to recognise that this guidance is supplementary to, and in no way replaces, the latest Government regulations relating to Covid-19. It is the responsibility of fishery owners, individual anglers and angling associations to ensure that their activities are compatible with any such regulations.

2. Angling and the phased approach to varying restrictions

The First Minister has now confirmed that angling is included amongst the outdoor activities allowable under phase 1 with effect from Friday 29 May. A key factor in the resumption of angling remains the Scottish Government regulations on travel for the purposes of leisure or exercise. The route map sets out a phased approach to relaxing the current restrictions. It also indicates that relaxation of restrictions on accommodation providers will not be eased until Phase 3 – the exact timescales for the various phases are not yet confirmed.

During phase 1, limitations on travel will have a bearing on angling activity. People are only permitted to travel short distances for outdoor leisure and exercise and are advised to stay within a short distance of their local community (broadly within 5 miles) and travel by walk, wheel and cycle where possible. The First Minister has indicated that the reference to 'broadly 5 miles' is an indicative guide. What is 'local' in an urban environment, as opposed to a more rural environment, could be quite different. It is important that anglers and fishery owners use their judgement about an appropriate distance of travel within a short distance of their local community.

Underpinning this guidance is the fundamental rule that no one should be present on the river bank (or indeed outside their own house) if they are showing any symptoms associated with

Covid-19, or if contact has been made with a confirmed or possible case of coronavirus within the last 14 days.

As is always the case, no fishing should take place without the appropriate legal right or written permission, or during the weekly close time in the case of salmon and sea trout fishing. Fisheries enforcement activity, including checking permits, will continue throughout all phases set out in the route map in order to protect and preserve Scotland's salmon and sea trout. Some proprietors may wish anglers to notify them when they arrive at the beat they are fishing and also when they leave.

The principal issue is the ability for fishery proprietors and angling associations to ensure that participation in their fishery can be permitted in a manner fully consistent with current physical distancing regulations and hand washing/sanitisation requirements and that anglers take responsibility to comply with these. It is likely that all fisheries will require to make changes to the way anglers' access and conduct themselves in the fishery, and we provide some examples of the types of practice that will require consideration below.

A critical component of the advice below is the absolute need to maintain hand washing and sanitization, as this is one of the most effective ways to suppress the spread of the virus.

Angler responsibilities

- **Travel to and from fisheries by private vehicle.** Any passengers must be from the same household and Scottish Government physical distancing regulations must be observed.
- **Parking and social interaction** on arrival at the fishery must be responsible and consistent with Scottish Government physical distancing regulations.
- **Fishery access and use.** Anglers must not share fishing tackle or equipment, except with members of the same household.
- **Gates and stiles** are common on fisheries, and where they need to be used, appropriate sanitation measures should be taken by anglers, including use of gloves and disinfectant hand gels as appropriate.

Fishery owner responsibilities

- **Permissions for fishing** should not be physical transactions, and online or contactless facilities should be used for any purchases.
- **Fishing huts and clubhouses** present the highest risk of social interaction. Group gatherings in fishing huts should not be permitted, but individual access to toilets and handwashing facilities may be allowed if strict hygiene rules are followed. Otherwise these facilities should remain closed until such time as Covid-19 restrictions are consistent with their use. Food and drink should be consumed in a manner consistent with physical distancing regulations.
- **Boats** should only be used where use is consistent with the physical distancing regulations in force at the time. Where boats are to be used, the key points of contact (i.e. oar handles, seats, outboard handles etc.) should be sanitised at the end of the angling session.
- **Ghillies and angling guides** - Many of the accepted activities of ghillies and angling guides in supporting angling clients will have to be undertaken in a modified manner under physical distancing regulations. When setting up to fish, while fishing, and when landing and unhooking fish, ghillies and guides should observe minimum physical distancing regulations in force at the time. Gillies must not touch the angler's fishing tackle at any

point, including supplying and tying on casts and flies. It is possible that assistance with landing fish may be undertaken, however nets or any fishing tackle should not be passed between people. Ghillies and guides should regularly wash/sanitize their hands throughout the day and ensure that hand washing/sanitising facilities are available for anglers.