

Stocking your fishery

Fish health and management series

Stocking fish is important in managing a fishery. It can bring many benefits to a fishery, including adding new species and increasing angler's catches. The UK now has many successful fish supply businesses, supported by high quality fish farms. But stocking is one of the highest risks to a fishery. It is important that you fully understand these risks, before you stock fish and do everything you can to reduce them.

You may want to stock fish if you:

- are developing a new fishery;
- want to increase angler's catches;
- want to add a new fish species or change the mix of species in the water;
- want to change the type of fishery, for example from a match water to a specimen fishery.

The risks of stocking fish

Understanding the risks of stocking new fish will help you reduce the likelihood of them affecting your fishery. The main risks from stocking new fish are:

- introducing new disease and parasites;
- these fish failing to establish in your water;
- the sudden increase in the number of fish, which can damage the ecology of the water.



Stocking fish into a fishery.

Protecting your fishery

You can reduce the risk of stocking causing problems in your fishery by following the simple steps laid out below. Stocking can add great value to a fishery, but bad stocking can cause long term harm. It is important not to take short-cuts and to ensure you protect your fishery:

Do you really need to stock?

Stocking new fish can often increase angler's catches, but it may not always be the best way to do this. If in doubt, get

expert advice on improving catches and always take the long term view. For example, developing better spawning habitat may improve catches in the long term.

Make sure that there is room for your new fish. Checking how well your original fish are growing, will tell you if your fishery has space for the new fish to feed and grow. If the water is already overstocked, then removing some fish may provide more food and habitat for those that remain and improve angler's catches. This is very important if angler's catches have shown a decline. The fish are probably still there, but they will not feed as much if they are stressed.

What will a successful stocking do?

Make sure you know what results you want from the stocking of more fish, and make sure you can show when you've done it. If your aim is to increase angler's catches, use match records or collect angler's catch information to see if it has worked. If you wanted to introduce a new species, keep an eye on how they are growing.

Adding a new species

Stocking is often used to add new species to a fishery. Increasing the mix of fish species is often a good idea, but make sure the species you are going to stock will not damage the fish already there. For example, tench and crucian carp do not compete well with common carp.

Make sure that the water you have is suitable for the fish species you want to add. All fish species have different needs. Making sure the fish can thrive in your water will ensure the stocking is successful.

It is also worth checking why a species is not present already. It may be that no-one has ever stocked them. But, if they have been in the water and not done well, you may save some money by not trying to introduce them again.



Careful consideration is needed before stocking pike for the first time in a water.

Stocking consent

Always make sure you get a consent to stock the fish from the Environment Agency. This consent will reduce the risk of introducing fish with diseases that are harmful to your fish. The Environment Agency will also assess the introduction, to ensure that it will not damage your fishery.

Please note that Environment Agency consent is a legal requirement. For more information contact our Fisheries Permitting Team on 01480 483968 or log on to www.efishbusiness.com for more information about consents for stocking fish. Please also note that if you wish to stock non-native fish (like grass carp or wels catfish) an additional licence will be required from Defra.

Finding a source of fish

Make sure you find a reputable fish supplier. We cannot recommend a supplier, but other fisheries near you will be able to tell you who they have brought fish from and if they were happy with the

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service and the quality of the fish. If you choose a supplier listed in the angling press or in other adverts, make sure they supply references, and check them.

Once you have found a good supplier stick with them. Buying fish from only one source greatly decreases the risk of introducing disease. It also means that if a problem occurs, you can speak to your supplier, knowing that they are the only fish that have been introduced.

Fish grown on fish farms have a lower disease risk than those cropped from other fisheries. Ensuring that you are buying farmed fish will help protect your fishery.

Health checks

We will insist that stocking consents are supported by a valid health check if your fishery is on-line (this is one where water can flow from one body of water to another, or is in the floodplain). We do not usually ask to see a health check for fully enclosed stillwaters. But, you can ask to see one, and we recommend that you do. We, or fisheries consultants, can advise you on what you should expect to see on a health check.

Fish farms have additional checks carried out to look for the most serious fish diseases.

No health check can completely guarantee that stocked fish are totally free of diseases or harmful parasites. But it is the best protection that you can have when stocking fish.



A health check on a sample of fish.

Ornamental fish

Ornamental fish, such as koi carp, ghost carp or goldfish, can add novelty value to a fishery. However, the disease controls placed on fish meant for the ornamental trade are lower than those for fish grown just for stocking. Some parts of the ornamental trade have also suffered badly from diseases, such as Koi Herpesvirus. We strongly recommend that you should never stock ornamental fish and very strongly advise against getting unwanted fish from garden ponds for your fishery.

Be a smart fish buyer

The vast majority of fish suppliers in England and Wales will provide you will healthy fish, good advice and good service. But, like other trades, there are some suppliers who may not give you the quality of fish you would expect. We, and the trade representatives, work hard to ensure that everyone works within the law and provides healthy fish. However, there are steps you can take to protect yourself from rogue traders:

- Never buy fish from people who approach you first. Beware of cheap deals and suppliers who want to avoid paperwork. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
- If you are offered cheap fish, ask yourself why they are so cheap.

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- Only buy fish when they are part of your long term plans. Do not be tempted by offers or deals.
- Always be present when the fish are stocked. If you are not happy with the quality of the fish, send them away. Always put the value of your fishery first. If the fish arrive in a bad condition that is the suppliers problem, not yours.
- Never accept fish that were not on the original order. They may not be covered by the consent and they may not be part of your plans.
- Never pay for fish with cash. Buying with cash may be cheaper, but you lose all the consumer protection that can help you if something goes wrong.
- If you want us to be present at a stocking because you have concerns then contact us.

Good stocking

If you are buying fish from a good supplier they should give you all the correct advice about when to stock fish. Often they will only offer coarse fish for sale in the cooler months of the year. If you are moving fish, we recommend only stocking coarse fish between October and March.

Stocking can be very stressful for the fish. This stress can lead to disease problems. Stocking in late autumn and winter will reduce this stress, as the amount of oxygen in the water is high and the fish are not so active.

If you are developing a new fishery, or looking to increase the numbers of fish in an established water, you should add the fish gradually, over a period of time. Adding a large number of fish all in one go can upset the balance of the ecology in the water, causing water quality and habitat problems.

Successful stocking

Following this guide will help your fishery and stocking to be successful. Stocking is a very important fisheries management tool, and when it's done well, it can be a great success. Disease problems after stocking are not common, but do affect a number of fisheries each year. Following this guide will ensure that your fishery is not one of them.

If you are in any doubt, make sure you get expert advice, either from us or a fishery consultant. It is much better to stock with caution than rush into stocking for quick returns. Once the fish are in the water it can be very difficult to put right any problems.

This fact sheet has been produced by:

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