

# National Angling Strategy Annual Report 2020/21



Image source: Angling Trust



## Foreword

2020/21 has been a year like no other! The Coronavirus pandemic has effected every corner of society with fishing being no exception. As we entered 'lockdown' in March 2020 the 'Stay at Home' messaging and policy effectively put an end to the majority of outdoor sporting activities, including fishing. However following a highly successful campaign led by the Angling Trust, 'When We Fish Again', fishing was one of the first activities to be allowed when lockdown restrictions were eased on May 13th and since then angling has seen a resurgence!

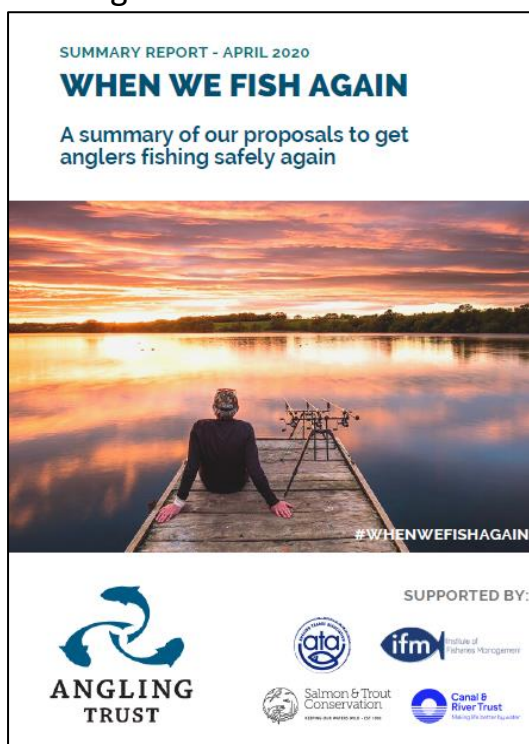


Image source: Angling Trust

Prior to Covid-19, rod licence sales had been declining year on year for almost a decade with 33% fewer anglers (buying a licence) than in 2010. However, by the end of 2020/21 rod licence sales were 17% higher than 2019/20 figures which resulted in an additional £5m in rod licence sales income. With more people fishing this has resulted in more people accessing the environment, improved health and wellbeing, increased fishing tackle sales and increased rod licence income to deliver the fisheries service.

Many of the case studies in this report detail the amazing work the fisheries community have undertaken despite of

and also as a response to the pandemic. In a year when many normal angling support activities have been curtailed or seriously affected it is testament to the spirit, passion and work ethic of those involved in angling that the sport has been able to flourish.

The work highlighted here is only a snapshot of the huge amount that is taking place on the ground working towards the aims and objectives of the [National Angling Strategy](#). For more information about this Annual Report or the Strategy in general please contact Tom Sherwood ([tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk))

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## Introduction

Welcome to the National Angling Strategy Annual Report for 2020/21. In this report we aim to showcase some of the exciting work that has been carried out by the angling community in contributing to the aims and objectives of the National Angling Strategy.

The National Angling Strategy 'Angling for Good' was launched in June 2019. It is a partnership-led strategy that was developed by consultation with the angling community key partners, angling charities and other interested organisations and using feedback from the National Angling Survey in which over 35,000 people took part.

The aims of the National Angling Strategy are to:

1. Increase participation in angling to:
  - a. Increase the numbers of people getting active outdoors through angling.
  - b. Improve the health and well-being of those that take part.
  - c. Help people and communities develop with skills, education, volunteering and facilities.
2. Connect more people to nature through angling for their well-being and to improve the environment.
3. Increase the economic impact of angling and in particular deliver economic benefits in rural and coastal communities and revenue to clubs, fisheries and businesses.

These aims are being delivered through the following six objectives:

- Objective 1 - Develop awareness and knowledge of angling
- Objective 2 - Increase participation in angling
- Objective 3 - Develop social benefits through angling
- Objective 4 - Develop Sustainable Places to Fish
- Objective 5 - Increase angling's economic impact
- Objective 6 - Understand angling data and evidence

Through this report we will be taking a look at individual case studies from each of these objective areas

## Objective One: Develop awareness and knowledge of angling

### Case Study 1: Environment Agency's fisheries marketing campaign – reacting in a global pandemic



Image source: Environment Agency

Following a six-week lockdown in spring 2020, the Environment Agency (EA) was 50% down on rod licence sales compared to the previous year. For a sport that was already in decline, the figures didn't look good. However, thanks to the Angling Trust's 'When we fish again' campaign, fishing was one of the first activities allowed when restrictions began to ease. The EA's marketing team responded swiftly to the changing situation, flexing the campaign to target emerging audiences and encourage more people than ever before to give fishing a go and buy a licence. By the end of September 2020, we were over 16% up on sales compared to 2019.

While many of those buying a licence were customers who'd simply delayed the purchase of a rod licence due to lockdown, analysis of the EA's

sales data suggested that around 30% of sales in the few weeks following lockdown came from new or returning anglers. Pausing some of the activity the team had originally planned for spring and summer, the campaign looked at ways to engage with new audiences and build upon the momentum being seen out on the banks.



Image source: Environment Agency

Working with National Angling Strategy partners, the EA's fishing licence campaign saw some great successes in the summer of 2020:

- A press release focussing on the increased interest in fishing talked about the mental health benefits of the activity and gained broad coverage across consumer, specialist, national and trade media.
- The EA emailed 880,000 current and lapsed licence-holders as lockdown eased and saw a 59% open rate (compared to an average open rate of 40% across emails sent in 2019). 4.8% went on to click on a link within the email.
- Over £1.6million additional income was directly attributed to the EA's direct marketing retention activity.
- Over 8million page views were seen on the GOV.UK Buy a Licence page between June and August.
- We reached new audiences through partnering with JOEMedia and NetMums.

For more information please contact Hannah Millbank, Deputy Head of Campaigns and Marketing, Defra Group Communications. [hannah.millbank@defra.gov.uk](mailto:hannah.millbank@defra.gov.uk)

## Case study 2: 'Fishing Buzz' – The Angling Trust's new website pages

On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020 the first Covid-19 Lockdown came into effect in the UK and fishing ceased to be a lawful activity for the first time in living memory. The question that immediately came to many anglers minds was, "What am I going to do now?" For so many of us, angling is an integral part of our lives, it provides a connection with nature, a way of spending time with friends and family and a wonderful way to relax and restore our mental health away from the pressures of modern life.



Image source: Angling Trust

Fishing gives us a "buzz" and without it, life was going to feel pretty flat. To try to keep anglers connection with the sport and provide a virtual form of that "fishing buzz" the website was officially launched on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2020 funded by fishing licence income and built by Angling Trust staff. In just two weeks an online resource was created that engaged with anglers in a new and original way. Since that launch day the site has grown from an

idea of a way to keep anglers engaged with their "fishing habit" during lockdown, to a key way of delivering high quality angling content to all UK anglers.

In essence, Fishing Buzz is a place where all the best fishing content is collated and available online. From videos and blogs, to archive footage and how-to articles, Fishing Buzz provides instruction, inspiration and entertainment. All the content has been checked by Angling Trust staff or volunteers to ensure that it passes key criteria such as making sure the videos demonstrate good fish handling and all the articles offer sound advice.

In the first 365 days of Fishing Buzz, nearly 1000 pieces of content were added and in that time the site has been accessed around a quarter of a million times. That has led to 697,000 page views showing that, on average, visitors read about 3 items of content each time they visit. Anglers love the site and they love the content.

So next time you're looking for some angling inspiration take a look at Fishing Buzz, it doesn't matter whether you want to know the best way to tackle gravel pit tench, fish for wrasse with lures or just want to watch some great fishing videos, it's all there for you free of charge with new content being added almost every day.

For more information please visit [www.fishingbuzz.co.uk](http://www.fishingbuzz.co.uk) or contact John Cheyne, National Regions Manager, Angling Trust ([john.cheyne@anglingtrust.net](mailto:john.cheyne@anglingtrust.net))

## Objective Two: Increase participation in angling

### Case study 3: Take a Friend Fishing



Image source: Angling Trust

Following collaboration between the Angling Trades Association (ATA), Angling Trust and the Environment Agency the Take a Friend Fishing (TAFF) was successfully relaunched in 2020. The campaign allows fishing licence holders the opportunity to apply for a free one-day fishing licence to take someone they know fishing.

The campaign was held over several separate periods and involved over 4,000 participants

- TAFF 1: 4th Jul to 19th Jul – 1,264
- TAFF 2: 14th Aug to 4th Oct – 2,934

The campaign saw widespread coverage through a number of media channels and resulted in high-profile coverage over the important summer months and lockdown in publications such as Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Telegraph and The Independent.

While there was an excellent uptake in the scheme, it was really encouraging to see the uptake by female anglers. In July's Take a Friend Fishing, 26% of anglers applied for a female friend to get a free one-day fishing licence and 25% of licences issued were for female friends of anglers

The success of the campaign was not only centred around the large number of participants that took part but also some of the positive collaborations between the fishing trade. Partners who supported TAFF included, Korum, Korda, Orvis, Angling Times, Anglers Mail, Nash Tackle, Fox International, Matrix Tackle and Angling Direct. There was also significant support from numerous fisheries, mostly in the form of 2 for 1 offers for anglers fishing as part of the TAFF scheme.



Image source: Angling Trust

For more information on TAFF please contact Clive Copeland at the Angling Trust ([clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net](mailto:clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net))

## Case study 4: Canal & River Trust's – National Celebration of Young People and Angling

Each year, predominantly between March and October, the Canal & River Trust (C&RT) run their Let's Fish campaign. Supported by local angling clubs, the campaign runs 100's of learn to fish introductory events and ongoing development sessions up and down the country. Priding itself as being a charity that helps local people to take advantage of the wellbeing benefits of being by water, they host most events in places where everyone, regardless of background or ability, can get the opportunity to enjoy a happier, healthier life.

One of the highlights of the campaign is the National Celebration of Young People and Fishing. The event aims to make sure participants have a fun day, land a few fish, learn something new, meet new friends and end up being inspired to go fishing time and time again. The event caters for a number of age ranges seeing participants split into cadet, junior and youth sections



The winning junior team, the Gudgeon Gatherers (Daniel Chalk, Billy Pitman and Jake Checketts) Image source: CRT

John Ellis, CRT's National Fisheries & Angling Manager takes up the story, "Time has flown by since we held our annual national celebration of young people and fishing in September on the Shropshire Union Canal. Despite the pandemic, with more than 20 people who planned to take part regrettably unable to attend, we still broke the 2019 attendance record with 107 participants, up from 91 in 2019. 26 attendees were female.

The weekend's objectives combined an element of friendly competition with learning opportunities for those who have recently joined the Let's Fish! family. It was also a chance for coaches and families to have a socially distanced meet up. We've always prided ourselves on the event being open for everyone, from elite young fishermen right through to those new to the sport."

Planning is already underway for next year's event so if you would like more information you can find it [here](#). Also if you would like more information on Let's Fish please visit the [website](#) or contact John Ellis ([John.Ellis@canalrivertrust.org.uk](mailto:John.Ellis@canalrivertrust.org.uk))



## Objective Three: Develop social benefits through angling

### Case study 5: Adam's story. Sarah Collins, CEO of Get Hooked on Fishing (GHoF) highlights the positive social benefits of angling

**"I find it easier to concentrate outdoors – I don't like being inside."**

**"I love fishing – when I catch a fish, I feel proud and happy!"**

These comments from two young people really do summarise the beneficial effects on mental health and well-being of fishing. It's obviously not just the act of fishing and catching a fish that's the main outcome of course – it's so much more than that!

Typically, GHoF's beneficiaries are referred to the charity as they have been identified as being potentially at risk of social exclusion or isolation or have exhibited risk-taking behaviour. Despite the obvious challenges of the last year, one particular success story is 'Adam'. He was 15 when he first took part in our angling programmes. He was diagnosed as being on the Autistic Spectrum with social relationships with family and friends being particularly challenging for him.

When Adam first started to work with GHoF he was very quiet and found it difficult to engage with anyone. He came for three hours once a week with a group of 6 other students from an alternative education provider and was accompanied by 3 members of staff. After a few sessions, Adam started to show more confidence and staff and volunteers noted he was enjoying his sessions and engaging more with other people – even making humorous comments!



GHoF's Northhala Fields fishery at Northholt. Image source GHoF

A significant development was when Adam started to visit with his parents at weekends and during school holidays to volunteer. This involved working with the general public, advising them regarding the fishing, taking care of the areas around the ponds and looking for any hazards or problems.

Amongst other things, Adam learnt how to: Mentor other students; be calm and patient if problems arose; Stay safe around water; Talk to the public in a polite manner; How to work well in a group.

Adam is now attending college and training to become a plumber.

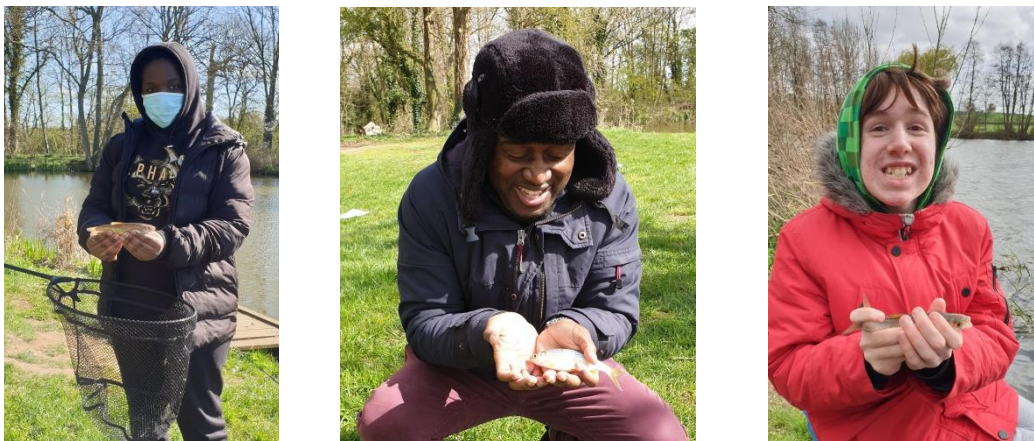
For more information on the work that GHoF undertake please contact Sarah Collins ([sarah.collins@ghof.org.uk](mailto:sarah.collins@ghof.org.uk))

## Case Study 6: The Tackling Inequalities Fund

During the first lockdown period insight from Sport England indicated that some priority audiences were suffering more from the impact of COVID-19 than the wider population. These sectors were people from lower socio economic groups, ethnically diverse communities, disabled people, and people with long term health conditions. To help reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 and to prevent the widening of the inequalities in sport and physical activity in these groups Sport England launched the Tackling Inequalities Fund.

Following a successful Tackling Inequalities Fund bid to Sport England, the Angling Trust managed the distribution of £120,382 to support 22 qualifying community angling clubs and organisations whose ability to deliver angling to the priority groups had been negatively affected by COVID-19.

One of these projects was the Northampton Nene Angling Club's (NNAC) Fish-ability Project. Over Easter 2021 NNAC delivered taster angling sessions for people from black & ethnic and minority communities, children and young people with disabilities, those in isolation and people experiencing mental health issues, over a period of 6 days.



Youngsters enjoying Nene Angling Club's Fish-ability project. Image source: Angling Trust

The project was initially supposed to be delivered in 2020 but was rescheduled for March/April 2021 due to the COVID-19 lockdown. A total of 67 participants attended the activities, 19 adults and 48 children/young people. Of these participants 25 had disabilities and additional needs, 14 of whom were registered as disabled. Participants came from diverse ethnic groups and ages. Some had fished before and 38 were trying fishing for the first time.

NNAC'S lead coach C.S. Galloway said, "We achieved our objective of providing a service to those who may not have had the opportunity to access the sport of angling. I saw smiles on all the faces as fish were caught. Words could not express the excitement and joy that was heard and felt as participants caught their first fish."

For more information on the 'Tackling Inequalities Fund' please contact Clive Copeland at the Angling Trust ([clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net](mailto:clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net))

## Objective Four: Develop sustainable places to fish

### Case Study 7: The Environment Agency's Fisheries Improvement Programme invests in 170 projects over 12 months to boost fish stocks, improve facilities and accessibility for anglers.

Due to the resurgence in angling last year, extra fishing licence sales meant there was additional income to spend on projects to improve fishing and fisheries. In 2020/21, The Environment Agency's (EA) Fisheries Improvement Programme (FIP) invested £1.3 million of fishing licence income into 170 projects across England to benefit anglers, deliver improvements to vital habitats, increase fish stocks and improve accessibility to ensure the sport is as inclusive as possible. This was approximately £450,000 more than the previous year.

The FIP funding is matched by local partners including angling clubs and fisheries. The EA worked closely with landowners, local rivers trusts and the Wild Trout Trust. The total match funding, made up of additional cash and in-kind contributions, is estimated to be more than £3.2 million which continues to have a positive impact on local communities, angling and ecology.



A new platform at the iCARP fishery. Image source: Environment Agency

Examples include: In Essex, a new fishery has been developed for military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, working in partnership with iCarp ([www.icarp.org.uk](http://www.icarp.org.uk)) to establish and revamp Lifted Lakes near Harwich. The venue is intended to be used as a base for treatment and future mental health research. A £10,000 FIP grant was used to enhance the environment for fish and refurbish angling platforms and facilities.

On the Great Ouse in Bedfordshire £8,000 was used to deliver improvements in partnership with Luton Angling Club. The stretch of the Ouse had previously been difficult for members of Luton Angling Club with mobility impairments to access.

At Walton Hall Park Lake in Liverpool a project was undertaken on an urban fishery to improve historically poor water quality. Habitat improvements were implemented to preserve and enhance this angling resource and to return the lake to its former glory. These included floating islands, duck platforms and fish refuges to provide shade and refuge for fish from predators and help to regulate water temperatures. Vegetation bays were also used to provide cover, food for fish and fry and contribute positively to water quality.

For more information and a full list of projects please contact Roger Handford ([Roger.handford@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Roger.handford@environment-agency.gov.uk))

## Objective Five: Increase angling's economic impact

### Case study 8: Angling Trust continue to bolster links with the angling trade

Throughout 2020 the Angling Trust maintained their focus on engaging with the angling trade and continued to make significant progress in developing collaborative relationships which previously, had not existed.

The retailer Angling Direct agreed to become the official retail sponsor of the Get Fishing campaign which involved sponsorship investment for coach training and event delivery and promotion. Supported by a 50% bursary from the Environment Agency with the remaining



Andy Torrance, Angling Direct CEO. Image source: Angling Direct via Google

50% paid by the company, 80 Angling Direct staff were trained and licenced by the end of March 2020. These newly trained coaches will now support delivery of Get Fishing participation events centred around the nationwide network of Angling Direct stores.

Andy Torrance, Angling Direct CEO said, "The core purpose of Angling Direct is to inspire everyone to get outdoors and enjoy an exceptional fishing experience. Key to this is working with our partners to

protect waterways and the health of our environment. As trade members of the Angling Trust, we look forward to working closely with them for the benefit of the whole angling community."

In addition, The Angling Trust has secured a partnership with Shakespeare to become the exclusive fishing tackle sponsor of the Get Fishing programme of events. This agreement will see Shakespeare working with the Get Fishing team to help promote angling to encourage more people to take up fishing or go fishing more often. Shakespeare has been providing quality, affordable fishing tackle for over 120 years with one simple objective: To make fishing easy and enjoyable. This makes Shakespeare the perfect partner for the Get Fishing campaign which runs hundreds of events throughout the year for all ages and abilities. The Angling Trust will also be working with Shakespeare on tackle offers for beginners as well as a new Get Fishing initiative to encourage children to take up fishing.

For more information please contact Clive Copeland at the Angling Trust ([clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net](mailto:clive.copeland@anglingtrust.net))

## Objective Six: Understand angling data and evidence

### Case study 9: Understanding rod licence sales during the Coronavirus pandemic

When angling was allowed after the Government eased restrictions during the first national lockdown (from 13th May 2020), there was a surge in angling participation which has resulted in rod licence sales increase by 17% on the previous year.

To gain an understanding of the increase in angling participation the Environment Agency invited 20,000 'new anglers' (those whose contact details have not appeared before on the current rod licence database) to take part in an online survey. There were 1,749 responses which is an 8.5% response rate. This compares favourably to recent surveys, the National Angling Survey (2018) and the Lapsed Angler Research (2019) which both had a response rate of approximately 4%.

Findings from the survey revealed;

- 91% were male, 8% female
- 21% were new anglers buying a licence for the first time
- 62% were lapsed anglers buying a licence for the first time in several years
- 22% of new anglers buying a licence for the first time were female
- 86% bought an annual (12 month) licence
- 17% bought a short term licence (1 or 8 day)
- 96% bought via the Gov.uk website
- 44% had been 10 times or more since buying their licence
- 86% plan to renew their licence in the next 12 months
- 12% are undecided whether they will renew
- There was a fairly equal distribution of age ranges

Some of the findings from this survey demonstrate that in a time where people are looking for a hobby / pastime that can be practised in a socially distanced manner, which allows access to nature and provides overall benefits to participant's health and well-being, angling ticks all these boxes.

Although more detailed research would be needed to highlight impacts of the pandemic on peoples' choices in relation to angling, it is apparent that after years of falling licence sales and participation rates, angling by its nature and allure still has the ability to appeal to a broad range of people.

The report recommends there is still a need for further research and data analysis to place these survey findings into context with previous years' licence sales and also to understand the wider demographics of the angling audience through a population level study.

For more information and a copy of the report, contact Tom Sherwood ([tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:tom.sherwood@environment-agency.gov.uk))

## Case study 10: Making Your Catch Count! The Sea Angling Diary Project

Getting information about who is fishing, what they are catching and what the social and economic impacts are is vital to the delivery of the National Angling Strategy. In sea angling – where there are no data from fishing licences – this is even more important.

The **Sea Angling Diary Project** is the longest continuous study of sea angling ever undertaken in the UK. It allows sea anglers to contribute vital information so that the UK governments and angling federations are better informed in helping develop sea angling and improve marine fisheries.

We all know sea angling is an important activity for the UK. The latest evidence from the Sea Angling Diary showed that in 2018/19 around 758,000 (2018) and 551,000 (2019) UK adults went sea angling at least once each year, fishing for over 6 million days each year.



Image source: Substance

But knowing what anglers do and what they catch is also vital in informing how our marine environments are managed. In 2020 100 fish species were recorded as caught. But, crucially, Diary data also showed that about 77% of catches were released, providing a more accurate picture of sea angling's *actual* impact on marine stocks.

These data are vital to better inform UK governments and angling federations about the development of sea angling and marine fisheries. With sea angling now recognised in the Fisheries Act, and funding for its development a real possibility, such data has never been more important.

**Since 2016, about 5,000 sea anglers have joined the project, contributing data on over 48,000 sessions and 362,000 catch records from 216,000 hours of angling activity.**

There are over 2,300 sea anglers currently on the project, contributing data about 2021. However, by having a 'panel' of citizen scientists, the diary project also allows collection of other important survey data. In 2020 Substance conducted a survey about the impact of COVID on sea anglers' participation; and in 2021 it is collecting vital new data on sea angling's economic impact, and health and well-being impact.

In return for their data, anglers receive free access to a state-of-the-art mobile app, to record all their catches and photos anywhere, as well as a Fish ID guide and catch recording kit.

Adam Brown from Substance said: *'There is a lot in this for sea anglers – their own app and record of their fishing. But most importantly it allows anglers to contribute to a vital, national citizen science project that will help inform the ongoing management of our fisheries at a critical time.'*

Funded by Defra, the Scottish and Welsh Governments and Northern Ireland Administration, the project is run by Cefas and Substance. It is supported by the Irish Federation of Sea Anglers, Welsh Federation of Sea Angling, Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers, and Angling Trades Association.

### **How do you sign up?**

Visit [www.seaangling.org](http://www.seaangling.org)

### **What will you get?**

- Free mobile app with a free waterproof phone case - and online tool!
- Fish ID Guide and waterproof notebook.
- Prize draws for Fishing Megastore vouchers and RNLI Goody bags

### **What do you need to do?**

Record when and where you fish, and what you catch. Upload a photo if you wish! It is as important to record when you have *not* fished and *not* caught as when you have. (Don't worry – detailed information about your marks and catches will not be divulged unless you choose to share them!)

To find out more, and read the reports, visit [www.seaangling.org](http://www.seaangling.org) or contact [seaanglingdiary@substance.net](mailto:seaanglingdiary@substance.net).