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For Publication

Sir,

Nick Weston in the Observer Food Monthly advocates eating wild freshwater coarse fish as a potential solution to the tragic decline of our marine fish stocks in his article "Freshwater Fish Fight", posted on your web site Monday October 17th.

This suggestion is not only ludicrous, but following it would also, generally, be illegal. Buried in the article, the author does point out that the Environment Agency has recently introduced bylaws to limit strictly the number and type of fish that can be taken from freshwaters for the table because of pressure on stocks. Readers should beware that they must comply with these rules, buy a rod licence, and have the permission of the owner of the fishing rights if they want to go fishing in freshwater. In places fish theft is big business and the Angling Trust helps fund a Crimestoppers helpline on which anyone can report fish theft and illegal fish movements: 0800 555 111.

Freshwater fish stocks are under threat from: pollution from industry, sewage and agriculture; over-abstraction; barriers to fish migration; a rash of new fish-mincing hydropower turbines; predation from cormorants driven inland due to declining fish stocks at sea; habitat destruction from flood defence works; invasive non-native species like American crayfish and a host of other impacts. The last thing wild freshwater fish need at this time is to become a fashionable new source of food for the 60 million people crammed onto this little island.

We have no problem with sustainably-farmed freshwater fish being used for food; carp can be sustainably produced from ponds enriched with farm waste. By providing these farmed fish we could also meet the needs of Eastern European communities who view carp as a delicacy – so much so that it is served instead of turkey at Christmas. Not all farmed fish is sustainable of course; farmed salmon in particular is fed on huge quantities of wild fish and causes terrible pollution of Scottish lochs from faeces, uneaten food and clouds of parasitic sea lice which decimate wild fish stocks.

Wild freshwater fish provide a resource for the delight of millions of recreational anglers, generating billions for the economy, providing a healthy and educational activity for young people and a small army of anglers who help to maintain and improve rivers, lakes and canals. All that would be lost if we start a fashion for serving them with chips.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive