

Coarse fishing close season in English rivers

May 2018

European coarse fish close seasons

Background

Coarse angling in England on rivers (and some stillwaters and canals) is subject to a coarse fish close season between 15 March and 15 June, inclusive. It is maintained to protect coarse fish stocks from additional angling pressure in the period around their typical spawning period. However, prohibiting angling on rivers also has other effects, including the reduction of the social and economic benefits from angling.

The close season has been maintained on a precautionary basis – revoking or changing it would entail running a number of risks, most importantly that to maintenance of fish stocks. England Fisheries Group established a study group, comprising representatives from the Angling Trust, Institute of Fisheries Management and the Environment Agency, to examine the available evidence on the effects of the coarse fish close season in England, particularly on rivers, and whether collecting additional evidence to increase our understanding of likely effects of changes to the close season on rivers was possible.

European coarse fish close seasons

Different European countries have different close season arrangements. We've collated details from some of them.

Most countries have a coarse fish close season, albeit dates and species covered are different from those in England. Notable exceptions include Belgium, which only has a close season on protected waters; and Ireland where there is no close season but restrictions on coarse fish removal.

We are not aware of any studies or evidence of potential impacts on coarse fish stocks or fisheries in countries with no close season or lesser close season regulation than England.

Country	Close season?	Species	Dates	Other restrictions	Angling culture
England and Wales	On all rivers, streams and drains, and on some canals and stillwaters	All coarse fish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 March to 15 June 	(Year-round) size and bag limit restrictions. 100% catch & release for eel. Some local tackle and bait restrictions between 15 March and 15 June to avoid accidental coarse fish capture.	Some coarse fish can be taken for personal consumption or for bait, otherwise catch and release.
Germany	Yes	Eel, lamprey, barbel, nase, bitterling, minnow, whitefish, bullhead, gudgeon, pike, sunbleak, loaches, smelt, zander	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During spawning periods or total ban on fishing for Natura 2000 species Different rules in different lander (states) Stricter rules can be applied by owners Some lander have total fishing bans, even on some non-Natura 2000 species, such as barbell and dace 	Forbidden to interfere with spawning grounds (reeds and macrophytes)	Target species are retained for the table, not allowed to target inedible species
Netherlands	Yes	Pike, barbel, chub, dace, beaked carp, ide, grayling, pike-perch, perch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pike: 1 March to last Sat in May Pike-perch and perch: 1 April to last Sat in May Barbel, chub, dace, beaked carp, ide and grayling: 1 April to 31 May 	Bait bans 1st April - May 31st - no worms, lures offal, fish or fish-based baits. Longer closed seasons on some waters, local rules	Species such as pike, perch, Zander, eel and game fish are retained for the table, other species mostly released
France	Yes	Pike, grayling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pike – February, March and April Grayling: end Sept to end May (in non-trout waters – end December to end May) 	Other local rules	Species such as pike, perch, Zander, eel and game fish are retained for the table, other species often retained but some catch and release
Poland	Yes	Most species	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different dates for different species 	Vary across river basins	Most species retained for the table but some catch and release
Belgium	No – except protected sites (since 2013)	Pike and zander only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On protected waters: 16 April to 31 May Zander and pike: 1 March to 31 May on protected waters only. <p>Prior to 2013, there was a general close season – dates as above on all waters.</p>	5 fish bag limit; no-kill for pike all year round	72% catch and release; 21% retain small fish for use as predator bait, 7% retain fish for the table sometimes

Country	Close season?	Species	Dates	Other restrictions	Angling culture
Czech Republic	Yes	Nase, barbell, vimba, sturgeon, ide, chub, catfish, zander, pike, grayling, eel, burbot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nase, barbell, vimba, sturgeon, ide, chub: 16 March to 15 June Catfish, zander, pike – 1 January to 15 June Grayling: 1 December to 15 June Burbot: 1 January to 15 March 	Overall national rules but local stricter rules by clubs. Strict bag and size limits and method restrictions.	Most species retained for the table but some catch and release. Closed seasons apply to killing and retention of fish, fish caught during their closed season must be released
Republic of Ireland	No				All coarse fish catch and release
Northern Ireland	No				
Denmark	Yes	Pike, zander, grayling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pike: 1st April to 30th April; Zander: 1st May to 31st May Grayling: 15th March to 15th May 	Size limits for retention	Species such as pike, perch, zander, eel and game fish are retained for the table, other species mostly released, rarely targeted.