PETERBOROUGH & DISTRICT ANGLING ASSOCIATION

Press release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE · 12 NOVEMBER 2026

P&DAA calls for removal of law allowing fifteen fish a day to be taken from English rivers

> ### “But .gov says I can take…”
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> This is the line we hear time and time again when challenging anglers about the removal of fish from our waters. It’s about time the law was updated to match the time we’re living in.

Peterborough & District Angling Association is calling on the Environment Agency to delete the daily allowance that permits any angler to remove fifteen coarse fish, one pike and two grayling from an English river every day of the season, and to widen the byelaw’s existing retention exemption so that bait is retained rather than taken. The Association has put the request to the Agency formally, and is asking the Angling Trust, Fish Legal and other clubs and fisheries to support it.

What the law currently allows

The Fish Removal (Rod and Line) Byelaws came into force on 1 June 2010 under the Water Resources Act 1991. Byelaw 3(i) allows any angler to take from a river, stream or drain, each day, fifteen fish up to 20cm, one pike up to 65cm, and two grayling between 30cm and 38cm.

Byelaw 3(ii) covers stillwaters and canals. There, no fish may be removed at all without the written permission of the owner or occupier.

The same instrument requires the owner’s permission on a canal and requires nobody’s permission on the river running alongside it.

Every water in England is owned or controlled. The fishing rights on a river belong to someone, in almost every case a club, a syndicate or a riparian owner. The byelaw recognises that on stillwaters and canals and sets it aside on rivers, and the waters it leaves open are the ones under the most pressure.

The Association has not identified a single coarse fishery in England that permits anglers to remove coarse fish. The same GOV.UK page that publishes the daily limits warns that taking fish from privately owned water without written permission is an offence. Both appear on the same screen, and that screen is reproduced at the end of this release.

The byelaws publish an allowance that almost nowhere in England can lawfully be acted on. They state no purpose, and they contain no provision relating to bait.

Why it matters on the bank

The purpose of the ask is to remove a conflict.

Almost every club and fishery in England forbids the removal of coarse fish in its own rules. Those rules are contractual, and the only sanction a club holds is expulsion. Beyond that the sole route is paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 to the Theft Act 1968, which is rarely pursued. The Agency will not act either, because nothing in its own byelaw has been broken. The byelaw permits the take.

A bailiff on the bank holds a club rule with no criminal backing and a theft provision nobody runs, facing an angler holding up a government page that says he may take fifteen fish. That is the position P&DAA's bailiffs are put in every season.

Deleting the allowance resolves it. The fishery's own rules and the national byelaw would say the same thing, and the Agency would have something to enforce.

What the Association asked, and what the Agency confirmed

On 16 October the Association asked the Environment Agency, under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, for the consolidated text of the byelaws as in force, for any instrument amending or revoking any part of them since 2010, and for the date and reference of their confirmation by the Secretary of State. The Agency replied on 12 November under reference EIR2026/49836.

It confirmed that the byelaws have never been amended:

> "We can confirm that no further amendments have been made to these byelaws since they came into force on 1 June 2010."

It also confirmed that no consolidated text exists. The byelaws were modified by the Secretary of State and the Welsh Ministers at the point of confirmation in May 2010, and of those modifications the Agency states:

> "These amendments have not been incorporated into a separate consolidated version of the byelaw text."

The law an angler is expected to obey is two documents that have to be read side by side, and sixteen years on they have never been published as one. What anglers read instead is a GOV.UK summary, and that summary does not match the instrument. Schedule 1 of the byelaw is a closed list of fourteen species and expressly includes hybrids between them. The GOV.UK page names twelve, says "including", and does not mention hybrids at all.

That request established what the law says. The challenge itself is the submission reproduced in full at the end of this release, which the Association is putting to the Agency now.

Rob Harris, Chairman of Peterborough & District Angling Association, said:

> "Our bailiffs are met with the GOV.UK figures quoted back at them as an entitlement. The byelaws set a maximum. They confer no right to take fish from any water, and almost every club rule in the country forbids it outright. We are asking the Agency to remove a conflict it created."

> "We asked what the law actually says and who confirmed it. The answer is that it has not been touched in sixteen years and has never been published as a single document. That isn't an administrative detail when it's the law every angler on every river is told to follow."

What the Association is asking for

P&DAA is asking the Environment Agency to amend the byelaws in three respects.

1. **Delete byelaw 3(i)(a), (b) and (c).** That removes the daily take allowance. Byelaw 3(i) then reads as a prohibition on removing coarse fish from rivers, streams and drains, which is what almost every fishery in the country already requires of its members.
2. **Widen the final paragraph of byelaw 3 to cover the retention of fish for use as bait on the water they came from.** That paragraph already exempts anyone who returns a fish immediately, or who retains it in a keepnet or keepsack and returns it alive on or before the end of fishing. The mechanism is already in the byelaw. It needs a few words, not a new regime.
3. **Keep the dispensation route in byelaw 3(i)**, under which the Agency may give an owner or occupier written permission to set the requirements aside. Where a genuine case exists, including commercial deadbait supply, it should be made to the Agency by the fishery the fish come off, rather than held as a standing permission by every angler on every river.

What this is not

This is not an attack on livebaiting. P&DAA is not asking for livebaiting to be restricted, licensed or banned, and nothing in the ask makes a live or dead bait harder to come by. A pike angler who nets a few roach and fishes them on the same water is unaffected, and is already exempt under the byelaw's final paragraph. The Association is asking for bait to be retained rather than taken, which puts it outside this byelaw instead of inside it.

This is not a change to where a bait may be used. Moving a live fish from one water to another, or holding one with that intention, has been an offence since 19 January 2015 under the Keeping and Introduction of Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2015, and carries a fine of up to £50,000 on summary conviction. The same-water rule is the law now. The Association is not proposing it and nobody should read it as new.

This is not a judgement on anglers who bait with fish. P&DAA does not permit livebaiting on its own fisheries and never has. That is a rule for its own waters, not the national ask, and it is not being put forward as one.

This is not a challenge to game fishing. Trout and salmon are not in Schedule 1 of this byelaw and the daily allowance has never applied to them. Deleting it changes nothing for the game angler.

Grayling

Grayling sits in Schedule 1 of a coarse fish byelaw under a slot limit that reads like a game fish rule: two fish, between 30cm and 38cm.

It should be one or the other. If grayling stays on the coarse fish list, removal goes with the rest of that list. If it is a game fish, it should come out of Schedule 1 and be dealt with where game fish are dealt with. Either way the two-fish allowance goes, because it exists only because nobody has decided which category grayling belongs in.

Grayling are in the vast majority returned. The Grayling Society's own angling code advocates catch and release, and the byelaw tells anglers they may take two. P&DAA is asking for the law to stop contradicting both the sport's own body and what nearly every grayling angler already does.

Why the bait case does not save the allowance

Bait is the only argument anyone has advanced for keeping the take allowance, and bait does not require it. Retention on the same water delivers the bait and carries none of the damage. No fish leaves the fishery and nothing moves between catchments.

The allowance does more than supply bait. It permits the permanent removal of fish from rivers already under pressure from abstraction, pollution and habitat loss, it cuts across the rules of almost every fishery in the country, and it sits against both national fisheries strategy and the welfare standards anglers now hold themselves to. A retention provision supplies the bait without any of that.

Angling should not be anchored to a take mechanism it has no need of.

The argument the Association rejects

The rules were last examined publicly in 2022, when it was argued that small permitted takes let angling be defended as a source of food and not only as recreation. P&DAA refuses that argument outright.

> "If the case for angling is that we are less cruel because we kill things, we have gone wrong somewhere. Angling is a day outdoors and a fish briefly in the hand, admired and slipped safely back. We are not defending the sport on the grounds that some of us eat the catch."

Section 6(6) of the Environment Act 1995 places the Environment Agency under a duty to maintain, improve and develop freshwater fisheries. The work on these rivers is done by volunteers who plant the margins, clean the gravels and walk the banks. A byelaw that permits what those fisheries' own rules forbid does not serve that duty.

A call for support

P&DAA is asking the Angling Trust and Fish Legal to support this submission publicly.

The Trust speaks for the sector with Defra and the Agency in a way a single club cannot. Fish Legal exists to act for clubs and fisheries whose rights over their own water are not holding. That is what the allowance produces.

The Association is also asking other clubs and fisheries to get in touch at **support@fishinginpeterborough.co.uk**, whether they agree with its position or not. How the allowance works

on other waters, and what it costs those who have to police it, is the evidence this case will be argued on.

In particular, if any club, fishery or landowner does permit removal under these limits, P&DAA would like to hear from them. It has not yet found one.

E N D S

Press enquiries, and comment from other clubs and fisheries whether they agree with the Association or not:
support@fishinginpeterborough.co.uk

Notes to editors

1. The Fish Removal (Rod and Line) Byelaws were made by the Environment Agency on 16 December 2009 under section 210 of, and paragraph 6(1)(b) of Schedule 25 to, the Water Resources Act 1991. They were confirmed with modifications by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and by the Welsh Ministers in May 2010, and came into force on 1 June 2010. The daily limits are published at gov.uk/freshwater-rod-fishing-rules/fish-size-and-catch-limits.
2. The Association's request is dated 16 October 2026, reference EIR2026/49836, made under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 with a Freedom of Information Act 2000 fallback. The Agency responded on 12 November 2026, within the statutory period, supplying the byelaws and the confirmation instrument under the Open Government Licence.
3. The confirmation instrument modified the byelaws in four respects, none of them the daily limits. Two were drafting corrections in Schedule 4, to a confirmation date and a byelaw number. The other two made byelaw 3(iii) and the final paragraph of byelaw 3 subject to sections 9 and 28P of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which concern protected species and sites of special scientific interest. Separately, Schedule 5 of the byelaws revoked one existing byelaw: Anglian Region byelaw 5, "Maximum number of fish which can be taken", confirmed 21 April 1988, so the Association's own region previously set its own limit and the 2010 instrument replaced it with the national one.
4. Byelaw 3(i) allows the Agency to give written permission to the owner or occupier of a fishery to dispense with the requirements for people fishing their waters. A mechanism to vary the allowance fishery by fishery therefore already exists, but only in the direction of permitting more removal.
5. Schedule 4 of the 2010 instrument separately amended a number of existing regional byelaws relating to trout, including daily limits and size limits in the former Yorkshire, North West, Thames, Wessex and Midlands areas. Byelaw 3, which contains the daily allowance the Association is asking to delete, applies only to the Schedule 1 species and covers neither trout nor salmon. The Association is not asking for any change to Schedule 4.
6. Introducing fish to inland waters in England, or possessing them for that purpose, without an Environment Agency permit is an offence under the Keeping and Introduction of Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/10), in force since 19 January 2015. Section 30 of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975, still widely cited, was amended by those Regulations to apply in Wales only.
7. The argument that limited allowances help defend angling as a source of food, and the view that the pike clause is a throwback that probably needs throwing out, were both reported by Angling Times in April 2022 in a piece examining whether the rules need a rethink.
8. Peterborough & District Angling Association has held the fishing rights on the River Nene and the River Welland since 1875, and was named Angling Times Club of the Year in 2023 and 2025.

Annex A: the submission in full

Request for amendment of the Fish Removal (Rod and Line) Byelaws, submitted to the Environment Agency by Peterborough & District Angling Association, 12 November 2026, related to EIR2026/49836.

1. The request

1.1 Peterborough & District Angling Association ("the Association") asks the Environment Agency to make byelaws amending the Fish Removal (Rod and Line) Byelaws, confirmed in May 2010 and in force from 1 June 2010, in the three respects set out at section 5, and to submit them to the Secretary of State for confirmation under Schedule 25 to the Water Resources Act 1991.

1.2 The Association makes this request as the holder of fishing rights on the River Nene and the River Welland, which it has controlled since 1875. Its own rules require all coarse fish to be returned alive.

2. The byelaw as it stands

2.1 Byelaw 3(i) prohibits the removal by rod and line of any freshwater fish listed in Schedule 1 from any river, stream or drain, or from the waters listed in Schedules 2 or 3, except:

a. 15 fish, other than grayling, of not more than 20cm per day;

b. 1 pike of not more than 65cm per day;

c. 2 grayling of not less than 30cm and not more than 38cm per day.

2.2 Byelaw 3(i) does not apply where written permission has been given by the Agency to the owner or occupier of the fishery to dispense with any of those requirements.

2.3 Byelaw 3(ii) prohibits the removal by rod and line of any freshwater fish from stillwaters or canals other than those listed in Schedules 2 or 3, except with the written permission of the owner or occupier of the fishery.

2.4 The final paragraph of byelaw 3 disapplies byelaw 3 in respect of any person who, with as little injury as possible, either returns fish immediately to the same water alive, or retains fish in a keepnet or keepsack and returns them to the same water alive on or before completion of fishing.

2.5 Schedule 1 is a closed list of fourteen species, expressly including hybrids between them and excluding ornamental varieties and colour variants. It does not include trout or salmon.

2.6 By its response of 12 November 2026 under reference EIR2026/49836, the Agency confirmed that no amendments have been made to the byelaws since they came into force, and that the amendments made at the point of confirmation "have not been incorporated into a separate consolidated version of the byelaw text".

3. The grounds

3.1 **The byelaw applies ownership inconsistently.** Byelaw 3(ii) requires the written permission of the owner or occupier before any fish is removed from a stillwater or a canal. Byelaw 3(i) requires the permission of nobody before fish are removed from a river. Every water in England is owned or controlled, and the fishing rights on a river belong to a club, a syndicate or a riparian owner in all but exceptional cases. The byelaw recognises that interest on one class of water and disregards it on another, and the class it disregards is the one under the greatest environmental pressure.

3.2 **The byelaw makes fishery rules unenforceable.** The rules of the Association, and of almost every club and fishery in England, require all coarse fish to be returned. Those rules are contractual, and the only sanction available to a club is the expulsion of a member. Beyond that the sole route is paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 to the Theft Act 1968, which is rarely pursued. The Agency will not act, because nothing in its own byelaw has been breached. A bailiff therefore confronts an angler holding up a page on GOV.UK which states that he may take the fish. The Association's bailiffs meet this every season. Deleting the allowance would bring the national byelaw into line with the rules of the fishery and would give the Agency something to enforce.

3.3 **The byelaw does not serve the section 6(6) duty.** Section 6(6) of the Environment Act 1995 places the Agency under a duty to maintain, improve and develop fisheries. A byelaw which permits the permanent removal of fish from rivers under pressure from abstraction, pollution and habitat loss, and which permits what those fisheries' own rules forbid, does not advance that duty.

3.4 **The byelaw states no purpose, and the only purpose advanced for it does not require it.** The byelaws contain no recital of purpose and no provision relating to bait. The sole justification advanced publicly for the allowance is the supply of bait. That supply does not require a take mechanism, for the reasons given at 5.2.

4. What this request does not seek

4.1 This request does not seek any restriction on livebaiting or on the use of dead baits. Its effect on bait is set out at 5.2, and is to place bait outside the byelaw rather than within it.

4.2 This request does not seek any change to the law governing the movement of live fish between waters, which is already regulated by the Keeping and Introduction of Fish (England and River Esk Catchment Area) Regulations 2015.

4.3 This request does not seek any change to Schedule 4 of the byelaws, or to any byelaw governing salmon or trout. Neither species appears in Schedule 1 and neither is affected by the allowance.

4.4 The request does extend to grayling. Grayling appears in Schedule 1 under a limit expressed as a size slot, which is a form used for game fish. The Association's position is that grayling should be treated consistently. If it remains on the Schedule 1 list, the prohibition on removal should apply to it as to every other species on that list. If it is to be treated as a game fish, it should be removed from Schedule 1 and dealt with under the provisions applying to game fish. In either case byelaw 3(i)(c) should not survive.

5. The amendments sought

5.1 **Delete byelaw 3(i)(a), (b) and (c).** Byelaw 3(i) would then read as a prohibition on the removal by rod and line of Schedule 1 species from any river, stream or drain and from the waters listed in Schedules 2 and 3, subject to the existing dispensation described at 2.2.

5.2 **Amend the final paragraph of byelaw 3** so that the existing exemption also covers the retention of fish for use as bait on the water from which they were taken. The Association suggests the insertion, after the words "on or before completion of fishing", of:

> "or who retains fish for use as bait on the water from which they were taken"

The effect is that a bait fish is retained rather than removed and so falls outside the byelaw. No fish leaves the fishery and nothing is moved between waters. The retention mechanism already exists in the byelaw and this adds to it rather than replacing it.

5.3 **Retain the dispensation in byelaw 3(i)** in its present form. Where a case exists for removal from a particular fishery, including the supply of a commercial deadbait trade, it should be made to the Agency by the owner or occupier of that fishery under the existing mechanism, rather than held as a standing permission by every angler on every river.

6. What the Association asks the Agency to do

6.1 Confirm receipt of this request and the route by which it will be considered.

6.2 State whether any review of these byelaws is in progress or planned, and whether any representation seeking their amendment or revocation has previously been received.

6.3 State the process and indicative timetable by which a request of this kind is considered, and whether the Association will be consulted.

6.4 Publish a consolidated text of the byelaws as in force, incorporating the amendments made at confirmation, and review the summary published at gov.uk/freshwater-rod-fishing-rules/fish-size-and-catch-limits against the

instrument. That summary names twelve species where Schedule 1 lists fourteen, describes the list as "including" those species where Schedule 1 is closed, and does not mention the hybrids that Schedule 1 expressly covers.

7. Publication and support

7.1 This request is published in full. The Association has asked the Angling Trust and Fish Legal to support it, and has invited other clubs, fisheries and riparian owners to submit their own evidence of how the allowance operates on their waters.

EXHIBIT: THE PAGE ANGLERS ARE TOLD TO RELY ON

Catch limits

There's a daily limit on the number of fish you can take.

Coarse (freshwater) fish

Each day you can only take from rivers:

- 1 pike (up to 65cm)
- 2 grayling (30cm to 38cm)
- 15 small fish (up to 20cm) including barbel, chub, common bream, common carp, crucian carp, dace, perch, rudd, silver bream, roach, smelt and tench

> Any eels you catch (except conger eels) must be released alive.

You can also take:

- minor or 'tiddler' species, such as gudgeon
- non-native species
- ornamental varieties of native species like ghost or koi carp

You can be fined if you remove fish from privately-owned waters without written permission from the owner.

The daily limits and the written permission requirement, as GOV.UK sets them out on the same screen. Source: gov.uk/freshwater-rod-fishing-rules/fish-size-and-catch-limits, retrieved 4 November 2026.