



Institute of Fisheries Management

IFM Advice for Fisheries Closed During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In response to the many concerns expressed by fisheries managers about the viability of their businesses and the welfare of their fish stocks as a result of restrictions caused by the Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak, the Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) is offering some important advice for fisheries that have closed their doors during the pandemic

Many freshwater fisheries had, quite rightly, already decided to close their doors to anglers to reduce the spread of the virus before the tighter restrictions were put in place. This could lead to some difficulties for the fish in those fisheries, some of which rely on bait from anglers as their main source of nutrition, and also as spring is the time of year most associated with mortalities in still waters. In order to manage this, fisheries managers also perform important tasks, for example weed management and water quality checks.

The Government advises that you should work from home unless it is impossible to do so. If the work is essential and cannot be carried out at home, social distancing rules must be applied. You should also stay at home if you are showing any symptoms of COVID-19. Currently our interpretation of the rules set by government is that they would apply to fishery owners and their employees.

IFM's advice is therefore:

Firstly, where essential fisheries management work needs to be undertaken to ensure the welfare of fish, it should only be done alone or, if this is not possible for safety reasons, the 2m distancing rule must apply.

From an essential animal welfare perspective and to prevent mortalities, it is important that fishery managers take steps to safeguard the health of their stocks. In the majority of fisheries the fish will be fine, as there will be plenty of natural food for the fish, however there are circumstances where this might not be the case.

- Where new fish have recently been introduced.
- Where the stock density is higher than would naturally occur.
- Where angling activity and baiting is particularly high in normal circumstances.

As waters warm up following the winter, fish will become more active which in turn increases their demand for food. As waters are closed, it is important that fishery managers consider the implications of the loss of anglers' baits in waters where

there is limited natural food or high stock densities and consider providing supplementary feed to make up the shortfall.

If your fishery has the circumstances listed above, The Institute recommends that you should;

- Begin feeding your fish sparingly once the water temperature is consistently 8°C and above.
- Only feed a diet designed specifically for fish and from a reputable company. For example, Aller Aqua, Skrettings, Coppens and Le Gouessant all produce excellent dedicated coarse fish diets.
- Feed at around 25-30kg per acre per week initially, dependent on stock levels and water temperatures.
- Use a pellet of 4mm or larger in size.
- Feed fish in the morning and in a dedicated area each day (try to make sure the area is free of weed). This allows you to assess how active the fish are and the demand for food. If the food isn't being eaten, stop feeding.
- Monitor water quality regularly, particularly dissolved oxygen, so that you can react to adverse conditions or a decline in available DO quickly. Also monitor ammonia and nitrite. Cease feeding at the first sign that either of these parameters is increasing.

There is a greater risk from over-feeding than under-feeding so we would recommend that fisheries managers are very cautious with any feeding regime.

Spring is always a difficult time for fish and feeding first thing in the morning will also allow you to keep an eye out for abnormal behaviour, lethargic fish and fish that are gathered on the surface, in the margins or gasping at the surface. Fisheries should check the dissolved oxygen concentration of their waters daily, and ideally first thing in a morning because DO can fall drastically overnight. Only provide supplementary feed where conditions are optimal and fish are behaving normally. Fisheries should have aeration equipment on hand, or know where to source it, should they need it at short notice.

During the coming weeks the incident response from the Environment Agency, Natural Resources Wales and the Fish Health Inspectorate is likely to be reduced, and as such it is important that fisheries are prepared to react to any incidents themselves.

Even though attendance may be reduced, it is still important that fisheries report any and all fish health concerns to the appropriate authorities immediately;

Environment Agency incident line: **0800 807060**

Natural Resources Wales Incident hotline: **0300 065 3000**

Fish Health Inspectorate contact Telephone: **01305 206700**

IMPORTANT REMINDER - if essential fisheries management work needs to be undertaken to ensure the welfare of fish, it should only be done alone or, if this is not possible for safety reasons, the 2m distancing rule must apply.