

# LABOUR'S CHARTER FOR ANGLING 2005



NATIONAL FISHING WEEK, August 2003 – TAPPERS LAKE, THEALE, BERKSHIRE

**Martin Salter MP**  
Parliamentary Spokesman for Angling & Shooting



**Foreword by Ben Bradshaw MP – Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries**

As the government minister responsible for fisheries I would like to offer my thanks and congratulations to everyone who has helped produce this marvellous document. It is a tribute to the close working relationship between Labour politicians and the world of angling.

In my time as a Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries I have been impressed with the passion and commitment that anglers have showed towards the environment. It was anglers' concerns to the threat to the biodiversity of freshwater fisheries posed by cormorant predation that led me to take action to protect fish stocks. It was anglers' concerns for the conservation status of sea bass that has persuaded me to agree to implement much of the excellent bass management plan put forward by the Bass Anglers Sport Fishing Society. I have learnt that anglers really are the "guardians of the waterside" which is why I listen carefully to the causes they take up on behalf of the sport and the wider environment.

Working with our angling spokesman Martin Salter, my ministerial colleagues in government and backbench Labour MPs, I am determined to do all I can to support angling and to see our fisheries improve.

Good luck and tight lines!

**Ben Bradshaw MP**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

This updated version of Labours Angling Charter has only been possible with the invaluable help and assistance of the major representative angling bodies in England and Wales. There are a number of different requirements for Scotland which may be beyond the scope of this document.

This Charter is the most comprehensive document on angling ever produced by a political party. It has been written by anglers, for anglers, with the active encouragement of government ministers. It does not claim to be a manifesto set in stone for the lifetime of a Parliament. What it does is to provide a guide as to how a future Labour government will work with angling to promote and develop this wonderful sport. We would welcome further views and contributions from those with an interest in both angling and the aquatic environment.

Labour was the first political party to formally recognise the unique contribution that angling makes to the "sporting economic and social life of our country" with the publication of our Angler's Charter in 1996. In government we have formed a strong and enduring relationship with angling resulting in a number of legislative changes to benefit the sport. We have appointed the first ever Parliamentary Spokesman for Angling and Shooting and have held four National Angling Summits where Labour ministers from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) enter direct dialogue with representatives of angling's national bodies.

We are pleased that other political parties have followed our lead and have produced policy documents in support of angling. Whilst we do not believe that angling should become a political football we are proud that under a Labour government the nations rivers have never been cleaner, more people are taking up angling, more funding is going into angling projects, angling representatives have direct access to government ministers and a voice in policy making. Labour has demonstrated by word and action that we are the most pro-angling political party in Britain. It is in this context that we are proud to present our second Charter for Angling.

**Martin Salter MP**

**Labour's Parliamentary Spokesman for Angling and Shooting**

**April 2005**

## 2. THE BENEFITS OF ANGLING

Angling is Britain's favourite participation sport. Estimates vary as to the number of anglers in Britain between 3 and 4 million. The numbers of people going fishing is rising and research by the Environment Agency (E.A.) indicates significant potential for further growth. For example a recent E.A. study showed that up to 4 million more people would consider taking up fishing if steps were taken to help them access the sport. Angling is especially popular amongst young people with some 20% of 12-16 year olds having fished. The nature of freshwater angling has changed considerably in recent years with a greater emphasis on carp fishing and commercial still water day-ticket fisheries. The membership of many angling clubs has fallen, particularly those who offer mainly river or canal fishing, but sales of rod licences have been increasing at 2% a year and junior licence sales have increased by over 25% since 2001. Successful angling participation projects have demonstrated an excellent retention rate of around 85% of youngsters and beginners staying fishing after two years and a tripling of junior membership of local angling clubs. This contrasts favourably with our national sport of football, which has been losing 100,000 players a year.

Both freshwater and sea-angling make a significant contribution to the economy, tourism and employment. Freshwater angling alone is worth around £3.5 billion a year and directly employs 20,000 people. The 200 largest commercial fisheries have a combined annual turnover of £30 million with another thousand plus smaller fisheries generating valuable income for farmers, tackle and bait shops and local guesthouses, pubs and hotels. Angling tourism is vital to many regions of the country. In Wales it is central to a £10 million investment package supported by the European Union. Similar projects are planned in Cornwall and in other regions.

A recent study of the sea fishing industry in England and Wales showed that recreational angling is worth £538 million a year (nearly as much as the commercial fleet at £600m). Further studies by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (P.M.S.U.) indicated that Britain's 1.1 million sea anglers contribute £1.3 billion to the economy every year. This prompted the government to state:-

*"fisheries management policy should recognise that sea angling may, in some circumstances, provide a better return on the use of some resources than commercial exploitation."*

Put simply, there is a better economic return in limiting the over exploitation of the sea by commercial fishing and allow sea angling to develop and prosper.

A similar comparison can be made for salmon fishing. Studies have shown that to capture a single Scottish salmon the average spent by an angler is £500 whereas the same salmon is worth a mere £20 to the commercial fisherman. Angling in Britain is responsible for over 30,000 jobs with many more benefiting from the angling related 'revenues'. It also generates nearly £5 billion annually for the economy and makes a major contribution to tourism in the UK. There are huge social benefits to be derived from angling. Any healthy, outdoor pursuit has its advantages in relieving stress and helping people relax and unwind. The old barriers in freshwater fishing between game angling for trout and salmon and coarse angling, where the fish are carefully returned, are fast disappearing. Many freshwater anglers now enjoy coarse, game and sea-fishing. Reasonably priced trout fishing is available in most regions and a shortage of fish stocks has resulted in catch and release becoming more widespread in salmon fishing. Angling is a sport, which can claim to be truly classless and meritocratic, and is especially popular with disabled people. The average angler can compete in angling competitions alongside national and world championship anglers whereas the average amateur footballer will never get the opportunity to play in the same match as David Beckham or Wayne Rooney.

In recent years huge strides have been made in recognising the contribution that angling can make to divert young people away from crime and in promoting social inclusion. Projects such as Mick Watson's "Get Hooked on Fishing" in Co. Durham have had remarkable success in working with young people at risk of spiralling into a life of crime and anti-social behaviour. The re-offending rates amongst young people who have participated in the project and have taken up angling have been minimal.

Finally, it is impossible to discuss angling without acknowledging its beneficial impact on the environment. Britain's best-known conservationist, Prof. David Bellamy had these words of praise for angling.

*"Good anglers are the eyes and ears of waterside wildlife. Without their lobby our rivers would still be used as sewers."*

What is good for angling is good for fish and good for the aquatic environment as a whole and the wildlife that depends upon it. Revenue from freshwater anglers' rod licences generates £18 million for the Environment Agency to help protect the waterside environment. Pressure from angling clubs and organisations such as the Angling Conservation Association (ACA) has led to the prosecution of those who pollute rivers, streams and other watercourses. Anglers have been major custodians of the aquatic

environment for the last two centuries. They were directly responsible for setting up the original Fishery Boards over 125 years ago and for taking subsequent action to improve water quality in Britain's rivers.

**Every person who walks, cycles, boats, and watches birds or simply admires Britain's rivers, streams and lakes owes a huge amount to the efforts of anglers to protect the waterside environment. Without anglers to guard against pollution the nation's watercourses would be in a poorer state.**

### **3. ANGLING AND THE LAW**

Angling is a well-regulated, lawful and responsible pastime, which delivers huge benefits to society as a whole. It enjoys according to recent E.A. surveys, the support of over 75% of the UK population with only 5% considering angling to be an unacceptable activity. However, it is important that anglers and angling receive proper legal protection from those who seek to disrupt or destroy their sport.

The greatest threat to angling is from the destruction of the aquatic environment through loss of habitat, pollution or excessive abstraction of water. However, there does exist a tiny minority of animal rights extremists who have on occasions sought to disrupt angling events and competitions. Their threat to angling has been grossly overstated by the supporters of hunting in particular, who clearly wish to enlist the help of anglers in seeking to overturn the ban on hunting passed by Parliament last year.

**Labour will take whatever legal steps are necessary to protect angling and anglers from those extremists who seek to disrupt the sport or intimidate people from going fishing.**

Labour has taken action through the Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill to give protection to "companies, universities and other organisations against the activities of animal rights extremists." Two new offences punishable by a period of up to 5 years in prison have been created.

Labour has through the Crime and Disorder Act introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders which can be used against known individuals who engage in disruptive behaviour. Whilst ASBOs have not been used as yet against anti-angling protestors the existing legislation has been designed to have a broad and flexible application.

## Labour's Charter for Angling (2005)

Labour has introduced the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) in such a way so as to ensure that there is a little or no impact on angling. The Act gives a right of access, in defined circumstances to walk over mountain, moor land or heath. Voluntary access agreements have been negotiated with landowners following a national mapping exercise. Activities such as cycling, fishing, and horse riding, camping or driving a vehicle are not permitted under the terms of the CROW Act. Private or club fisheries are therefore not at risk from unauthorised fishing nor is permitted angling likely to be disrupted by the operation of the CROW Act.

Labour has taken action to exempt "commercial fishing and angling" from the provisions of the Animal Welfare Bill. Farmed and ornamental fish have not been excluded. The government has always maintained that the Bill was not intended to interfere with fishing in any way but following representations from angling organisations, supported by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee, the specific exemption was introduced to avoid any doubt or misinterpretation.

The Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review by the Warren Committee reported in 2000 and made 196 recommendations for future fisheries legislation. The government accepted the majority of these recommendations. A new Fisheries Bill has been promised. Amongst the key outcomes sought from new fisheries legislation are: -

- Better Bailiff powers
- Accelerated procedures for Net Limitation Orders and By-Laws.
- Better fish movement controls.
- Powers to limit the amount of trapping of fish such as eels.
- Equal levels of protection for all fish species.

**Labour is committed to finding time to introduce a new Fisheries Bill in the next Parliament.**

Labour also recognises the need for marine legislation to protect sea fish stocks in coastal waters.

Following the publication of the P.M.S.U. report on how to ensure a sustainable future for sea fishing in all its forms. DEFRA has undertaken a wide-ranging consultation in which Recreational Sea Angling has been an active participant. The key outcomes sought from a new Marine Bill are: -

- Protection of fish stocks and spawning grounds.
- Creation of Marine Conservation Zones.

- Introduction of Minimum Landing Sizes for certain sea fishing species.
- Better managements of inshore waters.
- Proper representation of recreational sea angling and an overhaul of the current Sea Fisheries Committees.
- Better control of inshore netting.
- Management of fish stocks of species such as bass, wrasse and mullet specifically for angling.
- A commitment to a new Marine Bill is contained in the current DEFRA 5 year plan.

**Labour in government is the first political party to acknowledge and quantify the tremendous economic contribution of recreational sea angling. We are committed to taking action to halt the decline in fish stocks in coastal waters. We intend to introduce a new Marine Bill following the current consultation with stakeholders including sea-angling organisations.**

**Labour will seek to influence the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy to rebuild fish stocks in coastal waters for the benefit of recreational and commercial fishing.**

#### **4. ROD LICENCES, REGULATION AND THE CLOSE SEASON**

Currently all freshwater anglers, 12 years or older, in England and Wales are required to purchase a rod licence. The full charges levied are £23.50 for trout and coarse fishing and £63.50 for trout and salmon with concessions for age and disability. Sea anglers do not pay a rod licence. The situation is different in Scotland where revenue for the various river boards is created by a charge levied on the fishery proprietors and passed onto the individual anglers.

**Labour totally rejects the proposals originally put forward by the Conservative Party to abolish the rod licence thereby depriving the Environment Agency of £18 million of income to help finance its fishery work and to tackle pollution.**

In addition to creating an invaluable income stream for the benefit of freshwater angling the payment of a rod licence gives both coarse and game anglers added authority in their relationship with both government and the Environment Agency. There is a comprehensive network of Fisheries and Angling consultative Committees organised on a major river catchment basis across England and Wales. Anglers are well represented on all of these committees as well as on the various Fishery Action Plans (F.A.P.s) that are being implemented by the E.A. to improve fish stocks, habitat and water quality in



designated river catchments. However, no such arrangement exists for recreational sea angling save for some limited representation on the existing Sea Fisheries Committees, the operation of which has been often criticised by sea anglers. For a long time the sea anglers have felt disadvantaged by their lack of representation and it has been suggested that this is in part due to the absence of a sea rod licence. Following the publication of the P.M.S.U. report the government agreed to consult on the introduction of a sea rod licence.

**Labour agrees that whilst a sea angling rod licence could deliver valuable income the current organisational arrangements are not in place to create the improvement in sea fisheries, which might make a licence acceptable to recreational sea anglers.**

Labour acknowledges the arguments put forward by the National Federation of Sea Anglers (N.F.S.A.) that many of the following actions would need to take place alongside the introduction of a sea angling rod licence.

- The proper enforcement of regulations and minimum landing sizes.
- The replacement of the Sea Fishery Committees with an agency charged with marine ecology management – possibly by extending the responsibilities of the E.A.
- Or, vastly improved representation by sea anglers, charter boat interests and the tackle trade on reformed Sea Fisheries Committees.
- Restrictions on gill nets in inshore waters and around some wreck fishing grounds.
- The creation of recreational sea fisheries where commercial fishing is excluded.
- Increased protection for fish stocks from over exploitation.

However, there is a balance that needs to be struck since measures necessary to improve fish stocks for recreational sea angling would also require enforcement. Any enforcement action would require a revenue stream, some of which could come from income derived from a sea rod licence.

**Labour will continue to consult with recreational sea anglers on the measures that can be taken to improve fish stocks and protect their sport whilst developing better representation for sea anglers in general. Sea rod licences and the funding of enforcement action are part of this ongoing debate. We have not come to a view on this particular issue.**

Angling is by and large well regulated and a number of well thought out codes of conduct are in existence. We are particularly impressed by the work of the Specialist Angler's Alliance (S.A.A.) in the publication of their code to ensure safe angling practices with fish welfare uppermost in mind. We applaud the advances in knotless, fish friendly materials

for keep nets and landing nets to protect fish together with the increased use of unhooking mats to avoid damage on the bank side. The carp fishing world has been at the forefront of producing "safety rigs" to ensure that fish do not become tethered or are able to shed the hook in the event of an accidental line breakage. We believe that the vast majority of anglers are responsible individuals who care deeply about the welfare of fish and the environment in which they live. Anglers and angling clubs and associations together with fishery owners are the best people to decide on the rules and regulations of governing fishing on their waters.

**Labour rejects proposals originally put forward by the Conservative Party and more recently by the Green Party to ban barbed hooks or to interfere in angling practices. Labour believes that sufficient legislation exists to deal with problems of litter, trespass or anti-social behaviour and that a policy of self-regulation is the best way forward for most angling matters.**

The one recommendation of the Warren Committee review of fisheries legislation that the government did not accept was abolition of the close seasons on rivers and running water. The majority of anglers were hostile to this suggestion and it was felt that fish stocks in many rivers were already under huge pressure from low flows, avian and mammalian predation and other factors without the risk of anglers disrupting valuable spawning grounds. Obviously, this argument has more validity on smaller rivers and streams rather than on larger rivers especially those that are navigations. There was also a view that the bank side benefits from a spring break to allow the foliage to recover without pressure from anglers. Nevertheless lobbying has come from some quarters to open up coarse fishing on rivers all year round.

**Labour has no plans to revise the current close season for angling on running water but will keep the position under review.**

## **5. ANGLING GOVERNANCE**

We believe that as Britain's biggest participatory sport angling should have a far greater influence that has been the case in the past. There have been problems with the largely artificial distinctions between coarse, sea and game angling and the absence of a strong, unified body to speak for angling as a whole. The creation of the National Angling Alliance (N.A.A.) was a positive step forward, along with the Joint Angling Governing Bodies now the Joint Angling Development Board (JADB), to promote angling coaching and the development of the sport. Angling is still short of full-time professional advocates and needs an improved and strengthened national governing structure.

We have been encouraging these developments in angling in recent years. We welcome the Whole Sport Plan for Angling produced by the JADB which has attracted Sport England Lottery funding. However, angling in general has been slow to take advantage of the opportunities offered by lottery funding to create new fisheries or to provide angling education centres.

**Labour welcomes the recent establishment of the new unified governing body for angling – Fisheries Angling and Conservation Trust (F.A.C.T.). However, much more needs to be done to enable angling to have the influence that its numbers warrant in respect of policy and access to funding. Labour will continue to hold regular Angling Summits to give anglings' governing and representative bodies direct access to ministers. We will encourage angling clubs to access lottery funding.**

## **6. COMPETITIVE ANGLING**

Angling with rod and line has been in existence since at least 2000 BC. Fishing figures are depicted in ancient Egyptian paintings and there are references to angling in the works of Homer and the Old Testament prophets. Historically most angling was done for food although there would have been some sporting aspect to it as well. In recent years, with the ready availability of fish in supermarkets very few people need to fish with rod and line to eat. Some sea fish and trout, salmon and grayling are taken for the pot but this is more a by-product of angling rather than its main purpose. The coarse angler no longer exclusively practises catch and release; it is now a common feature of both game and sea angling. Anglers primarily fish for sport and pleasure and competitive angling is widely practised in Britain amongst all three disciplines.

Success on the international stage for English angling teams receives regrettably little publicity in the media. It is a shame that angling is not classed as a performance sport by Sport England given the record of individual and team gold medals won by England International teams. In 2003 England's Alan Scotthorne won the individual gold medal in the World Angling Championships and his wife Sandra led the England ladies team to victory in their World Championships. In total English anglers have notched up over 50 individual gold medals at international level and England teams have been World Champions no less than 15 times. There have also been 12 team and 6 individual gold medals in sea angling and 5 team and 4 individual gold medals in game angling for England.

**Labour applauds the success of our angling teams and recognises that the cost per medal makes angling one of the best value for money sports in terms of public investment. We welcome the publication of the Whole Sport Plan for Angling and the emphasis on developing and training talented young anglers to ensure continued success for competitive angling.**

## **7. PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES**

Labour is committed to encouraging more people to take up angling and to experience the social recreational and environmental benefits that the sport has to offer. We have gone far beyond our pledge "not to place restrictions on the sports of fishing and shooting". In 2003 the government issues statutory guidance clarifying the role of the Environment Agency in respect of angling:-

- *"Enhance the social contribution fishing makes as a widely available and health form of recreation."*
- *"Enhance the contribution salmon and freshwater fisheries make to the economy particularly in remote, rural areas with low levels of income."*

This is in addition to the duty required by the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act introduced in 1975 by a previous Labour government to:

- *"Maintain improve and develop freshwater fisheries."*

**Labour supports the EA's report 'Angling in 2015' which aims to get a 100,000 more people fishing by 2007 and 10% increase in rod licence sales. These are bold targets but the strategy fits well with the JADB's Whole Sport Plan for Angling.**

There have been a number of highly impressive schemes and projects to encourage young people to take up angling. Some of these such as Mick Watson's 'Get Hooked on Fishing' in County Durham have deliberately targeted socially excluded youngsters in areas of high crime and deprivation. Angling has proved to be remarkably successful in diverting young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour. We welcome National Fishing Week and other schemes, which introduce newcomers into angling. The National Federation of Anglers (NFA) has operated an impressive coaching scheme and now has a complete network of Senior and Regional angling coaches. The work of Alan Sandom with the Scouts has been highly successful and has seen over 3,500 young people introduced to angling.

**Labour will continue to support angling projects which seek to divert young people away from crime mindful that the cost to the taxpayer of keeping one young person in a secure unit is £150,000 a year. We believe that sport and outdoor activity programmes have a major role to play in tackling problems of poor health and anti-social behaviour.**

Other noteworthy schemes supported by the Environment Agency include Stoke Angling for Everyone (SAFE) and the Albrighton Moat Project. The forerunner of many of these schemes to get young people into angling was Les Webber's Angling Projects based in Wraysbury near Heathrow Airport. Les has worked with the police and local education authorities offering residential courses and angling tuition. As a result hundreds of young people have gone on to become anglers. More recently Les has set up Junior Coarse Angling UK and has been successful in getting angling onto the curriculum in a number of secondary schools. In a separate project the Thomas Adams School in Wem, Shropshire has included a certificated fly fishing course to improve pupils' knowledge of the countryside on its curriculum. The 15 hour programme is in partnership with the nearby Durnford Trout Fishery and has received funding from the Environment Agency. The classes earn pupils credits for a certificate of personal effectiveness, which has been accredited by the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). It is the equivalent of a GCSE and is thought to be the first time that angling has contributed formally to a national schools qualification.

**Labour supports schools wishing to include angling in their timetable as a way of promoting greater understanding of the environment and the countryside.**

## **8. MARINE RESOURCES AND FISHERIES**

There is increasing concern over the sustainability of global fishing practices, the need to protect vulnerable marine species and habitats, the plight of key fish stocks and of the industry, which depends on them. For example the North Sea cod fishery needs a spawning population of 70,000 to 150,000 tonnes to remain sustainable. The current estimate is around 40,000 tonnes. Addressing this, we agreed important commitments with our partners at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002. These include implementation of international fisheries agreements and action plans in order to tackle problems such as overcapacity and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and the commitment to establish a representative network of marine protected areas by 2012.

The EU's Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has demonstrated serious weaknesses and unsustainable fishing practices have resulted in the depletion of some key stocks crucial to the UK fishing industry and have left the whitefish sector of the fishing industry struggling economically. The UK fishing industry could have a sustainable and profitable future provided a number of major challenges are met. This will involve the development of a more responsive, sophisticated fisheries regime at the UK and EU levels to reduce adverse impacts on target and non-target species.

**We will improve the current framework for managing and protecting all our marine resources through a Marine Bill, which we hope to introduce some time in the next Parliament. This will provide the framework within which those who regulate marine activities can ensure the sustainable use and protection of our marine resources and will help us to apply the eco-system approach to the management of our marine resources. The framework will allow the different uses of the sea – including wildlife protection, offshore wind and other industries – to develop harmoniously.**

**We are also considering, amongst other alternatives, setting up a new marine agency, in line with the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee's recommendation for a coordinating marine agency following its recent marine inquiry. We will be discussing how marine and coastal management might work on an inter-departmental basis within the context of a pilot marine spatial planning exercise. This pilot project is already underway and will be completed in 2005 – the Year of the Sea. We will use this opportunity to review the Integrated Agency's role in the marine environment to ensure we deliver this.**

The UK needs to work within a reformed Common Fisheries Policy to achieve a higher standard of EU fisheries management based on greater regionalization and increased stakeholder participation, on reducing damage to marine biodiversity, on incorporating the ecosystem approach, and on integrating fisheries management more closely into management of the marine environment as a whole.

**We believe the right way forward on fisheries will combine short term actions with actions to be developed in the medium and long term and we are currently working with stakeholders to establish a permanent partnership for developing and implementing fisheries policy. As a first step £1 million per year is being provided for the Fisheries Science Partnership, to be renewed for a further 3 financial years. Under this scheme scientists work in co-operation with fishermen, to develop a joint understanding of what is happening to fish stocks and the impact of fishing on those stocks.**

## 9. ISSUES FOR ANGLING

### Angling and Fisheries Management

Although closely linked, these are two separate issues that require equal attention by government. The term *fisheries* covers the management, improvement and conservation of rivers, canals and still-waters - the resource, overseen by DEFRA and the EA- whilst *angling* is a sport which relies upon that resource for its existence, and requires promotion and development in conjunction with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Labour in government has promoted joint working between the two departments on angling issues and will continue to do so.

Angling has been a major custodian of the aquatic environment for at least two centuries. Fisheries management maintains and improves habitat on behalf of anglers, with the knock-on benefit that what is good for fish is invariably good for all other wildlife dependent on the aquatic environment, and those who have an interest in, or take enjoyment from, rivers, canals and stillwaters. Whilst angling is reliant upon fisheries, the part played by the sport in managing aquatic habitats should be recognised as bona fide conservation.

### Water

Labour is committed to protecting the aquatic environment from water abstraction, inadequately treated sewerage, point and diffuse pollution and urban run-off.

Water quality has improved considerably in recent years. Between 1990 and 2003, the number of rivers of good biological quality increased from 60% to 69% and the number assessed as being of good chemical quality increased from 43% to 62%, mainly as a result of water industry investment to achieve DEFRA's environmental objectives and controls on point sources of pollution. In recent years we have also had the cleanest bathing water on record – since 1997 compliance with the main Bathing Water Directive standard has increased by 10% to around 98%. But there is still more to be done if our rivers, estuaries, canals and still-waters are to achieve their full environmental and ecological potential, and contribute to an improved living environment.

The main mechanism for improving water quality for the future is the EU Water Framework Directive. Agreed in 2000, this sets demanding new ecological and chemical standards for rivers, estuaries, coastal waters, canals and still-waters and groundwater

across the EU. It requires eleven river basin management plans to be drawn up with active involvement of all interested parties by 2009. Programmes of measures must be operational by 2012 with the aim of achieving the environmental outcomes by 2015. Compared with previous directives, Member States have more flexibility over the choice of measures, and there is more scope for economic analysis in selecting the most appropriate measures. Implementing the Directive requires extensive linkages with other policy areas, including tourism and recreation, biodiversity and land use planning. There are challenges for many sectors, including agriculture. The continued pressure on water resources from additional housing and commercial development is another important issue.

**Planning Authorities should make water supply and sewerage treatment a high priority within future building programmes, with a presumption against planning permission if increased water or sewerage treatment provision is considered a serious danger to the aquatic environment.**

### **Diffuse Pollution**

Diffuse pollution, 70% of which emanates from agriculture, is acknowledged as the most serious source of freshwater contamination. Run-off brings silt into fragile ecosystems, introducing nitrates and phosphates to the water and cutting off oxygen supplies to incubating eggs and smothering juvenile habitat. However, the less-visual effects of agricultural chemicals are also a major concern for catchment managers. Pesticides, especially sheep dips, such as those containing cypermethrin, are known to kill invertebrates and destroy food chains, and there is now evidence that both organophosphate and synthetic pyrethroid dips have a direct impact on fish populations.

Fishery managers and rivers' trusts undertake much excellent in-river habitat improvement work each year, but their efforts will be negated if diffuse pollution renders the water passing through that habitat incapable of supporting life. There is a strong case for local maintenance, improvement and conservation work to be further supported at national level, agri-environment schemes and adequate resource provision.

**Labour is fully committed to the implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive. We recognise that it will be necessary to ensure appropriate funding of management on an individual catchment basis within the River Basin Plans demanded by WFD. Catchment management will enable the targeting of local problem areas, and also provide the most efficient use of resources in delivering our obligations.**



### **Water Conservation**

Rivers require all their water reserves to maintain aquatic environments, and sustain dependent species of invertebrates, fish, birds and mammals, particularly in times of drought. As well as finding alternative methods of water supply to alleviate over-abstracted catchments, Water companies should lessen demand by tackling leaks and promoting water meters. We are in favour of changes to building regulations so that future planning regulations compulsorily embrace modern water-saving technology.

### **Migratory Fish**

Salmon and sea trout are a natural resource within England and Wales providing important socio-economic benefits from anglers who target these species. These fish are demanding of a pristine environment, both in terms of habitat and water quality and quantity, and if a river catchment is capable of maximising its production of salmon and/or sea trout, it is arguably in a healthy aquatic condition and would meet our responsibilities under European legislation.

### **Exploitation and Drift Netting**

DEFRA recently entered into a partnership with wild fish interests to buy out 52 of the remaining 68 nets involved in the North East Coast Drift Net Fishery. This substantially reduced the amount of commercial exploitation of salmon and sea trout off the English and Welsh coasts, leaving predominantly estuarial netting as the major commercial interest.

However, the drift net fishery off the Irish Republic's coast remains an interceptor of salmon returning to rivers in England and Wales, as well as several other European countries. Many of these rivers are classified as Special Areas of Conservation within NATURA 2000 sites under the European Habitats Directive.

**We will encourage the Irish Government to act in a similar way to DEFRA, by facilitating a partnership with private fishery interests to bring about a voluntary cessation of drift net fishing off the coast of the Irish Republic, with compensation paid to licensees. This would be seen as persuading the Irish Government to abide by its responsibilities under both the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) and the European Union.**

### **Catch and Release inside Catchment Management**

For the past six years, under the Environment Agency's (EA) Spring Salmon Measures, there has been compulsory catch and release of all salmon caught on rod and line before June 16<sup>th</sup> each year. Many rivers also have local restrictions on rod caught salmon and sea trout in place for the rest of the season, while most game anglers now show restraint in the number of fish they retain. In practice, this has meant that more than 50% of all salmon caught in England and Wales are now returned alive to the water, and EA research on the River Eden has showed that, if handled properly, more than 90% of these fish survive to breed.

We have already shown how catchment management has a vital role to play in efficient and effective delivery of environmental improvements. We also believe that, at the next review of the Spring Salmon Measures in 2008, management of salmon and sea trout stocks should also be delivered at a catchment level, so that those rivers (such as the Tyne and Usk) considered capable of sustaining a limited retention of early running fish could do so by allowing anglers a quota before June 16<sup>th</sup>. This would enhance the socio economic benefits of salmon on these rivers, while still allowing local interests to manage their stocks within conservation strategies.

### **Fish Conservation Strategies**

The EA have several strategies for conserving wild fish stocks, and this principle is to be applauded. However, these strategies must only be delivered with the support of sound scientific research and evidence, and should at all times seek to achieve consensus agreement with local fishery interests. We believe this is the only way to deliver effective and efficient strategies capable of both conserving local fish stocks and maximising socio economic benefits for communities from visiting anglers.

### **Gyrodactylus Salaris**

*Gyrodactylus* has had a massive impact on salmonid fish populations in Scandinavia, and the parasite is known to be able survive transport on angling tackle, and almost certainly canoes and other water recreational equipment. There is a real threat, therefore, that *gyrodactylus* could be transported from an infected area to the UK by one of these means. We will take all necessary precautions to stop such an occurrence, which would be disastrous to local salmonid stocks. If necessary we will, in partnership with other stakeholders, publish advice concerning disinfection of all angling and water recreational equipment brought into England and Wales from infected areas.

## **Aquaculture**

Experience from other countries, including Norway, Ireland and Scotland, has shown that marine fish farms impact the environment and wild fish populations, principally through parasite and disease transfer, faecal and chemical contamination of production sites and the dilution of natural gene pools by escapees cross-breeding with wild fish. We would be concerned at any attempt to establish a marine aquaculture industry off the English and Welsh coasts, at least until research provides sufficient safeguards against environmental damage.

Research is currently being undertaken into the potential for freshwater fish farms to impact wild fish populations. Whilst acknowledging the importance of the freshwater aquaculture industry in England and Wales, we will use the results of sound scientific research to minimise any impact on wild fish or their environment.

## **Ofwat – Water Supply and Sewage Treatment**

With planned increases in housing in the south east of England we need to ensure that adequate water resources are available for those new houses if we are to avoid future water shortages in the region. Ofwat must ensure that water companies have the financial resources available to make the necessary investments in both water supply and sewage disposal in a timescale to suit the planned housing development, so that such development does not have an adverse affect on the aquatic environment.

The tidal River Thames suffers from raw sewage outflows on a regular basis and to ensure that the work already put in to make the river a cleaner habitat we will commit to enabling Thames Water to provide the sewage by pass system for which land has already been acquired.

We recognise that investment in water supply and sewage disposal must increase if we are to provide a water supply and sewage system, which is safe, adequate and non-polluting.

## **Waterside Access**

Waterside Access needs to be maintained and enhanced for the leisure and recreational opportunities and benefits it provides all citizens including anglers. Loss of waterside access on beaches, canals, rivers and lakes is a growing concern. Previously open waterside areas are now closed as a result of urban and rural land use changes and development.

Local authorities should take into account existing public areas and mark those areas appropriately. In new development plans, or changes to existing developments, a path to the waterside needs to be provided from the nearest road. New developments, or changes to existing developments should require additional designated waterside access areas.

These public access points should be signed and marked on development plans. To ensure residents adjacent to these areas do not encroach upon them, the access points need to be marked with a signpost and the public space boundaries fenced. Signs and fencing must be installed before development proceeds to ensure that purchasers are aware of the access points and those adjacent to public waterside areas are prevented from blocking access. The creation of waterside buffer strips wherever possible would be of considerable benefit in terms of both access and reducing damage from erosion and crop-spraying.

**We must ensure people retain the rights to use historical public waterside areas, as well as provide for public waterside areas in other areas.**

### **British Waterways**

British Waterways have a statutory duty to provide angling under the Transport Act 1968 and a duty to fisheries under the general environmental provisions of the British Waterways Act 1995.

In numerical terms anglers are BW's largest stakeholder group.

BW is the largest direct paying single owners of fishing rights in the UK owning these rights on an estimated 1400 miles of canals and close to 50 canal feeder reservoirs and other still waters.

Canals potentially offer local on the doorstep angling facilities for millions of people; 9 million people live within one mile and some 26 million live within 5 miles of a BW canal. Many of these are in urban socio-economically deprived areas.

**Labour will encourage BW to work with national angling bodies to prepare and deliver a fisheries and angling strategy and commit the resources necessary for its implementation. This should include a partnership with the EA, Local Authorities, Angling Clubs and other stakeholders to develop angling facilities on canals, particularly in urban areas.**

## **Canoeing**

There is strong pressure from canoeists to open up access to more river systems. However, the existing policy of the EA is only to support increased access where it will not adversely impact on existing uses and users, or the economic and conservation value of the site. Quite clearly, opening up access to the smaller rivers and streams would have an adverse impact on angling, bird-watching and other existing users. This is less of a problem on larger rivers such as the Severn, Trent or Thames.

**Labour supports the existing EA policy and believes that managed solutions need to be sought to canoe access issues which do not adversely impact on existing users.**

## **Planning Guidance**

Labour has introduced Planning Policy Guidance (PPG 25) to provide specific protection for water meadows and the functional floodplain. This is of benefit to anglers and will offer increased protection against the loss of fisheries located in the floodplain.

English Nature identified that some 250,000 ponds have been lost to development in recent decades. The Parliamentary Environmental Audit Committee Report on wildlife Crime (2004) recommended that remaining ponds should be afforded extra protection via Planning Guidance. We should not overlook the value of such ponds as local fisheries, especially in urban and deprived areas where angling opportunity is often low. We would support Planning Guidance or other initiative that:

- Stimulates creation of new ponds, with public access, within developments,
- Presses for restoration of existing ponds that have fallen into dereliction or disuse, for example those in Urban Parks – this would be consistent with ODPM's CABESPACE initiative and other neighbourhood regeneration initiatives.

## **The Removal of Fish**

The unauthorised taking of fish from freshwater fisheries has become an increasing problem and divides broadly into two categories – ignorance or criminal intent. With a noticeable increase in the number of anglers from non-English speaking EU countries and elsewhere it is important to ensure that information is made available on fishery laws and by-laws in a variety of languages. It would be helpful to also notify foreign embassies of the existence of the laws and regulations regarding the taking of fish. The

unauthorised removal of fish is an offence under the Theft Act and we support the EA in taking all necessary enforcement action.

### **Bass Management Plan**

Labour recognises that there are some species of sea fish which could return Best Value for the UK, and the overall marine environment, if designated and managed primarily as recreational species.

Bass are a prime example of this and consideration should be given to their designation as a Recreational Species, managed primarily for the development of Recreational Sea Angling, in accordance with proposals put forward in the Bass Management Plan prepared by the Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society.

The Bass Management plan has suggested:

1. Bass Commercial Licences - for the retention of bass.
2. Bass Carcass Tags – to cap effort, increase traceability and improve enforcement.
3. Bass Bag Limits – to limit the retention of bass by unlicensed fishermen and anglers and to aid detection and enforcement of illegal fishing.
4. Closed Season – to protect spawning bass when they are vulnerable.
5. Increases in Minimum Landing Size – to strengthen the brood stock.
6. Nursery Area additional measures and enforcement – to protect juveniles.
7. Near-Shore Netting Restrictions – to protect our fragile coastal zones.

As well as delivering an angling product that would provide anglers with more and bigger fish, these measures will also allow the development of a sustainable inshore fishery concentrated on producing a high quality, high value product.

**Labour welcomes the publication of the Bass Management Plan and following discussion with the authors has agreed to a programme of implementation. We have already banned Bass Pair Trawling in inshore waters to help preserve bass stocks and prevent by-catches of dolphins and porpoises.**

## **10. PREDATION**

### **Cormorants and Goosanders**

Many freshwater fisheries have suffered severe predation from cormorants, goosanders, otters and mink. Cormorant predation has been a matter of great concern to anglers, conservationists and fishery owners in recent years. In September 2004 we took action to open up the existing licensing system to allow more cormorants to be shot if they posed a clear threat to fisheries without endangering the conservation status of the bird. This decision followed several years of research by DEFRA into the damage to freshwater fisheries caused by the vastly increased numbers of cormorants coming in from the sea and over wintering on inland waters. The research also included the effectiveness of specially constructed fish refuges and bird scaring devices to deter cormorants. It became clear that simply moving the problem of excessive cormorant predation from one fishery to another provided no real solution and that action was needed to protect the bio-diversity of fisheries.

The new arrangements have been successful and show an increase in the number of licences issued from July 2004 – January 2005 compared to the same period the previous year of 259 to 123. Some valuable fish stocks upon which anglers as well as other birds such as herons, kingfishers and grebes depend, have been saved as a result.

**Labour will continue to work with anglers and fishery owners to protect fish stocks from excessive predation from cormorants and goosanders. We also recognise the need to re-establish inshore fish populations, including sand eels, in coastal waters and to find an acceptable and sustainable pan-European solution that protects the survival status of both fish and birds.**

### **Otters**

The Environment Agency support the Specialist Angler's Alliance in their view that fishery protection from excessive otter predation should be funded, but not exclusively from rod licence income. This reflects the site-specific nature of otter predation issues – large carp in commercially run, limited access fisheries. The EA has funded research into the most effective designs of otter-proof fencing as a contribution to general fisheries management practice. The report on this research has just been released and will be available on their web site. The re-introduction of otters into designated areas

should take into account the impact on fisheries and fish stocks. The decline in the freshwater eel population has removed a major food source for otters and cormorants.

### **Mink**

The EA has supported the Game Conservancy Trust in developing specially designed rafts to help trap mink. As part of their responsibilities towards helping conserve aquatic wildlife they encourage mink control by riparian landowners. The irresponsible release of mink into the wild has a damaging effect on the environment and is to be deplored.

### **Invasive Species and Fish Movements**

Labour strongly supports the Import of Live Fish Act, to control the movement of fish such as carp and other species. Where introduction of proscribed species to the wild is concerned, the risk-based policy is not to consent introduction of alien species into waters connected to rivers or in a flood plain.

Where containment has failed the EA are increasingly taking more active steps to remove or destroy ILFA listed species in waters where consent would normally be refused. Here, the judgement is based upon the cost and probability of complete removal of the target species, weighed against the acceptability of the management action.

**Labour condemns the illegal movement of live fish for commercial gain or any other purpose. There are huge risks in transferring disease between the waters and infecting existing fish stocks. We will continue to support strong enforcement action to tackle this problem.**



## **11. SUMMARY**

The recent Environment Agency report 'Our Nations Fisheries' presented an upbeat picture of most freshwater fish stocks with the exception of migratory species such as Salmon and Sea-trout. Even here there are positive signs with salmon returning to previously polluted rivers such as the Tyne, which in 2002 had the highest reported rod catch in Britain. Native brown trout were found in 50% of river catchments and there was an increase in the numbers of grayling – a fish extremely sensitive to water quality.

A survey of 350 sites showed fish present in 97% of sites with 50% containing eight or more species.

However, the ability of water to sustain fish species is only one factor and issues such as predation, abstraction, pollution and habitat destruction remain central to maintaining health fisheries.

**Labour in government has demonstrated its commitment to the waterside environment, to cleaner rivers and streams and to taking effective action to promote angling and protect our fisheries and fish stocks. This new Charter for Angling is the most comprehensive document ever produced by a political party on angling and we are pledged to do all we can to help angling grow and prosper in Britain.**