



Zander: finding a way forward

Angling Trust Specialist Anglers Advisory Group & Canal & River Trust joint workshop | 10th May 2019

Summary of conclusions and outcomes

The meeting was convened by the Angling Trust Specialist Anglers Advisory Group (SAAG) and was hosted by the Canal & River Trust at their offices at Hatton. Speakers for the day were selected and invited by Eric Edwards, SAAG chairman and delegates were chosen jointly by John Ellis (Canal & River Trust) and Eric Edwards to provide a range of views on the subject. Mark Owen, Head of Freshwater for the Angling Trust, was asked to chair the meeting as an unbiased individual. Those parties involved all agree that the day was balanced, and all invited stakeholders had an opportunity to outline their views.

There was considerable involvement from all persons present with frequent lively debate and high-quality input from invited guests. There was clearly considerable interest in the topic under discussion.

Key Conclusions & Outcomes

- The risk assessment for zander will be published imminently and will be open for stakeholders to provide comments on the scientific evidence that underpins it. A management measures paper would then be produced.
- Everyone present condemned all illegal fish introductions and the illegal transfer of zander to other locations. This was explicitly stated during the meeting and all those present bought into this.
- The Canal & River Trust stated that they supported the principle of preventing further spread of zander and the do-nothing option will not prevent ongoing spread. Several member clubs present expressed a strong desire to keep their fisheries zander free. The vast majority of Canal & River Trust licensee clubs support and endorse their current work around zander management, but the Canal & River Trust respect the view and welcome the custom of the two predominantly lure-based clubs with specific interest in zander.
- Natural England representatives emphasised that fishing for zander is fundamentally exploiting a non-native species for recreational purposes, and for any changes in legislation to take place the regulators would need to demonstrate no risk to the environment and convince the minister that the evidence was reliable.

- The Angling Trust agreed to continue promoting the message that the illegal movement of zander must be condemned.
- Natural Resources Wales confirmed that they do not wish to see zander spread to Wales and that the canal network represented a high-risk transfer route.

Legislation

A primary aim of the workshop was to provide clarity on the legal position with regard to zander in order to inform anglers of their legal obligations. This was provided by the regulators: Natural England (NE) and the Environment Agency (EA). The position is set out under the following legislation:

- *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*. Section 14 of the W&CA prohibits introduction into the wild of any animal which is not ordinarily resident in, and is not a regular visitor to, Great Britain in a wild state, or any species of animal or plant listed in Schedule 9 to the Act.
- Schedule 9 lists non-native species already established in the wild, which continue to pose a conservation threat to native biodiversity and habitats.

Zander is arrested as Schedule 9 species and it was clear that NE would not support a change from this current position. However, when questioned NE also made it clear that no prosecutions had yet taken place for the returning of zander by anglers to the canal network, or any other water in England. They pointed out that in the event of an arrest being made by the police the matter would be referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, who would have to decide if it was in the public interest to bring such a prosecution based on the evidence.

The research presented by Emma Nolan, PhD student at Bournemouth University, illustrated the fact that the vast majority of zander anglers return their catch in the UK, in keeping with traditional UK angling practice. Many migrant anglers to the UK favour lure fishing as a recreational sport and one that can be used as a route for integration into mainstream UK angling and therefore UK society. Zander are a favourite species for them. The presentation by the Lure Anglers Canal Club (LACC) made it clear that interest in zander as a species and in lure fishing in general is growing; however, the growth in lure angling is not directly dependent on the expansion of zander.

The regulators were clear that they recognise the concerns of anglers, as part of a wider freshwater recreational user group, around the existing legislation.

Risk Assessment

The EA described the process around non-native species risk assessments and explained that the one for zander (covering the whole of Great Britain) was complete in draft form and would shortly be submitted to Defra's Programme Board for approval. There would subsequently be a period when interested parties will have the opportunity to provide comments on the scientific evidence that underpins it. All present were encouraged to refer to [this page](#) for further information and to register for updates through the Great Britain Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS).

The risk assessment is only part of the process. It will not prescribe how or indeed whether a species should be managed and does not consider any socio-economic benefits or impacts of zander or

angling for zander. Therefore, it is only one consideration for policy makers. The risk assessment will be followed by a risk management assessment that is of equal, if not greater importance, as that will assess what can and should be done (eradicate, contain, control etc.).

Zander and the Canal & River Trust

The EA explained the Keeping and Introduction of Fish Regulations (KIFR) and confirmed the following:

- That zander cannot be introduced into rivers and canals but may be kept in certain still waters that meet specific conditions. These still waters will have a permit from the EA;
- Currently the Canal & River Trust's KIFR permit states that zander cannot be returned to the canal network;
- Under KIFR, the EA regulate the fishery owner and not the individual angler directly;
- KIFR permits nationally are being reviewed during 2019; this will include the Canal & River Trust's KIFR permits.

The Canal & River Trust believe there is currently a potential risk of them being prosecuted for permitting the spread of zander into new catchments and impacting on the property of other fishery owners. The EA agreed that they would take the following questions submitted in the Canal & River Trust presentation and come back with clarification:

- The options for a Midlands Canal Zone within the Warwickshire Avon catchment within which zander can be returned by anglers and/or rehomed there by the Canal & River Trust without fear of prosecution.
- Establishing whether there are potentially options around relocation of zander into totally enclosed (non-Canal & River Trust owned) still waters in the Midlands. The Trust supports this proposal and prefer to rehome zander where it is legal to do so, rather than to euthanise. This initiative, if it were developed would be led by zander angling community with support from the Canal & River Trust.

A change to the Trust's KIFR permit would be required for this to happen, in addition to clarity from the regulator on the Wildlife & Countryside Act offence of re-releasing zander caught on rod and line. The Environment Agency and Natural England are seeking clarity from Defra on this issue.

Available Research

The presentation by the Zander Angler's Club – referring primarily to water courses in the Fens – suggested strongly that if a zander population is left alone it will balance out over time, allowing the species to live in harmony with native (mainly cyprinid) species. However, the native fish assemblage will have still been fundamentally changed and it is also noted that full analysis of fish population data would be required to tease out any species-specific effects. It was stated though that highly turbid narrow canal ecosystems are inherently different to Fenland ecosystems and cannot be directly compared. In these environments, the research undertaken by Dr Phil Smith during his doctorate, based on his research on narrow, shallow turbid canal ecosystems provides the best available scientific evidence at present.

There has never been a longer-term study undertaken on a zander population in a shallow, turbid canal environment and members of the audience suggested that we simply do not know how long it would take for a system like this to equilibrate. There was a suggestion from the floor that such a study, with no culling taking place, would provide valuable information on the development of zander populations and the predator/prey relationships in this ecosystems. There was even an offer from the floor to do the work but the question of who should commission this work and who would pay for it to be done still remains. The obvious location for this would be LACC waters on the Grand Union Canal where no zander management work has taken place for many years. The Canal & River Trust could not fund the research, but they would support it and make the fishery available.

Angling Trust | June 2019