

40-metre illegal fishing net seized at Skinningrove

The Environment Agency has seized a 40-metre illegal fishing net in a cross-border enforcement operation on the north east coast.

The operation saw Environment Agency fisheries officers from Yorkshire and the North East working in partnership with North Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority to remove the fishing net at Skinningrove in Redcar and Cleveland.

Paul Slater, Fisheries Team Leader for the Environment Agency, said:

The prohibited fishing net had the potential to capture a large number of sea trout but luckily we found it in time before it had a chance to make a significant catch.

We received a tip-off about the net, which highlights the importance of people volunteering vital information to us that ultimately helps to protect the local fishing industry.

It is illegal for individuals to fish for sea trout by net without an official licence obtained from the Environment Agency. Even during the current unprecedented times created by Covid-19, we are still actively patrolling the coastline and responding quickly to any reports of illegal netting. Our officers are wearing the appropriate protective equipment and adhering to social distancing measures.

A licensed, strictly regulated and managed sea trout fishery operates in the coastal area around the waters of Skinningrove.

But the use of unlicensed nets which illegally take salmon and sea trout from the sea whilst the fish are returning to their spawning rivers is a major concern for the Environment Agency in the North East and Yorkshire. Such nets are indiscriminate by nature and are often left for long periods of time where they not only take significant numbers of fish of all kinds, but also capture mammals and sea birds.

Those who operate unlicensed nets leave themselves open to the full force of the law. There are unlimited fines and possible prison sentences available to the courts when initiating prosecution cases.

In recent years a number of significant prosecutions have taken place in the

region with one individual being fined nearly £7,000 for illegal netting in the Tyne & Wear area.

Whilst the number of illegal nets has fallen over the past decade significant numbers are still encountered by Environment Agency Fisheries Enforcement Officers, who can seize not only the netting equipment but also the captured fish. The officers also have the powers to arrest, search and seize vessels where necessary.

David McCandless, Chief Officer for North Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority, said:

It goes without saying that over the past 20-years we have enjoyed a close working relationship with Environment Agency officers, up and down the coast.

Given the current climate surrounding Covid-19. It's important that members of the public are aware we are out on the coast and on the ground – carrying out active and joint enforcement activities. Particularly relating to the detection of illegal fishing and unlicensed nets, which obviously causes impact on very sensitive migratory fish stocks, but can also create hazards for members of the public and potentially cause damage to other species that get caught up in the nets.

If you ever wish to report any incidents of illegal fishing or poaching then please contact the Environment Agency's 24-hour incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.