

News story: Worm bait returns for trial period at Exmoor fishery

The Environment Agency is continuing conservation measures on its Watersmeet and Glenthorne Fishery for the coming season.

Restrictions have been in place on this popular Exmoor fishery since 2014 in response to disease problems affecting adult salmon and sea trout returning to the East Lyn to spawn. Recent monitoring also revealed reduced numbers of young salmon.

Anglers have been allowed to continue fishing for salmon and sea trout on a 'catch and release' basis throughout the season and have been limited to fishing with a fly or spinner only. The use of worms was traditionally allowed from 16 June. However, this method of fishing can be very effective and has been prohibited in recent years to limit the number of fish caught while stocks have been under pressure.

Following discussions with the Lyn Riparian Owners Association and local interest groups, worming is being allowed again on a trial basis this year from 16 June, subject to strict conditions.

Worms will only be allowed when fished on a single circle-patterned hook, no larger than Size 4. A circle hook increases the likelihood a fish is hooked in the jaw where it can be safely removed. This type of hook reduces the risk of 'deep hooking' which can sometimes occur when worming. It also reduces the chances of accidentally catching trout and salmon parr on this method.

All salmon and sea trout must still be released throughout the 2017 season, irrespective of the method used to catch them. As a further conservation measure, anglers will not be allowed to fish with worm at any time in Long Pool.

Mike Holland of the Environment Agency said:

We want fishermen to continue to enjoy their sport on the Watersmeet and Glenthorne Fishery, but at the same time ensure suitable measures are in place to safeguard migratory fish returning to the river to spawn.

By allowing only circle hooks to be used for worming we hope to maximise the survival chances of any salmon and sea trout caught and released by this method. We'll review the success of this trial at the end of the season.

The brown trout fishery regulations remain unchanged. The full list of

fishery regulations can be found printed on the reverse of the permits, purchasable from local agents.

[Kirsty Williams welcomes new OECD report on Welsh education reform](#)

In November 2016, after an invite from the Education Secretary, the highly-respected Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) visited Wales to examine the work underway on education reforms to make sure they are on track.

The [independent findings](#) (external link) published today state that

“the OECD has witnessed progress in several policy areas and a shift in the Welsh approach to school improvement away from a piece meal and short term policy orientation towards one that is guided by a long term vision.”

The report also found Wales’ reforms were characterised by close working between government and the education sector with a commitment to improvement “visible at all levels of the education system.”

Kirsty Williams said:

“I invited the OECD to come to Wales to challenge what we are doing to reform our education system and I welcome their findings. They have concluded that we are making progress and we have a long term vision in place to keep improving.

“We are already taking action on many of their recommendations, from creating a new national academy for leadership, transforming initial teacher education, launching new professional standards, and introducing a national approach to professional learning.

“Our job is to continue our national mission of education reform focused on driving up standards and helping every learner in Wales, whatever their background, fulfil their potential.

“As the OECD recommends, our focus must be on making sure we continue to properly implement our vision for reform. I am committed to raising standards, reducing the attainment gap and delivering an education system that is a source of national pride and confidence.”

Both the Education Secretary and Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills for the OECD, will today address representatives from all of Wales' 205 state secondary schools at a special event in Cardiff.

Chancellor must commit to 'triple lock' at Budget

In a speech today on intergenerational fairness Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary will demand that the Chancellor 'commit' in the Budget to 'guarantee the triple lock on state pensions beyond 2020'.

The Government hinted that they may cut the triple lock in order to "tackle the challenge of rising longevity." This led to accusations that the Tories were 'abandoning older people'.

Labour has made a commitment to maintaining the triple lock under the next Labour government, alongside other pensioner benefits.

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary commenting on concerns that the Government has refused to commit to the triple lock said:

"It was shocking to hear the Chancellor suggest that he would expose older people to the flawed austerity agenda – further proof that the Tories are abandoning older people.

"The last Labour government were responsible for a historic reduction in pensioner poverty levels. A record that we remain hugely proud of.

"The Chancellor must use this Budget to provide clarity on the issue of the triple lock, and follow Labour's lead by committing to the policy beyond 2020."

Our special relationship must boost trade and remove barriers – First

Minister's message ahead of United States visit

Ahead of the visit, the First Minister is calling on the special relationship to be a vehicle for removing barriers and boosting trade between Wales and the USA.

With more than 250 American owned companies based in Wales, the United States is one of Wales' most important trading partners and accounted for almost 40 percent of all our inward investment projects last year.

Over the next four days, the First Minister will meet with companies looking to invest and expand in Wales and will discuss trade and business links with political representatives.

As part of the response to Brexit, the Welsh Government will be strengthening its network of trade and investment offices across the US. The Welsh Government currently has offices in Washington, New York, San Francisco, Atlanta and Chicago.

The First Minister will also host a St David's Day reception on Capitol Hill for key political figures and investors, and a reception in New York geared towards promoting the Welsh tourist industry.

Speaking ahead of the visit, First Minister Carwyn Jones said:

“For Wales, the special relationship is about building on the strong cultural and trade links that already exist between our two countries.

“Wales has long been a destination of choice for many American businesses and we want to welcome even more in the future.

Equally, Welsh businesses have been successful in selling to the United States across a range of sectors and I believe we can do even better in the future.

“In my discussions with American businesses, politicians and diplomats, I will be raising the importance of further developing free trade between our countries and the removal of barriers to make trade between us easier and quicker.

“We will also be committing additional resources to North America. We need a permanent presence in Canada, and a strengthened network here in the US. That is a priority for me over the next twelve months, as we restructure our activities overseas to take advantage of new economic opportunities.”

[Press release: National Audit Office investigation into the Parole Board](#)

The Chair of the Parole Board, Professor Nick Hardwick, has welcomed the publication of the National Audit Office's findings following its investigation into the work of the Parole Board.

He said: "I am pleased the NAO has recognised the huge challenges the Parole Board faced as it dealt with more cases and more oral hearings with fewer Parole Board members. As a result, the backlog of outstanding cases grew, with unacceptable delays for victims and prisoners. Given the scale of the challenge it has taken time to put things right.

I am pleased the NAO recognises the progress we have made. We have a new strategy, have recruited over a 100 new members and our backlogs are down by over a third. There is more to do and the NAO report helpfully highlights a number of areas for us to focus on. I am confident we will continue to make progress whilst making sure that in each of the approximately 7,000 cases we decide every year we protect the public whilst treating prisoners fairly."

Martin Jones, Chief Executive said:

"I welcome this report, as a timely examination of the challenges facing the parole system. In recent years there has been a substantial increase in the number of cases needing to be heard by the Parole Board and this has led to excessive, often unacceptable delays. We are now making steady progress in reducing those delays and are committed to ensuring that we deal with all cases fairly and in a timely fashion, whilst ensuring the protection of the public; but there remains more to do.

The appointment of new members, who are now starting to sit on hearings, will enable us to sustain our good progress in bringing the backlog down. Also, our digital project which aims to have paperless hearings by October, is helping to make the Parole Board run more efficiently. The majority of our members have transitioned from paper to digital working, saving the Board time and money. The backlog at present is 2,030 cases, down over a third from its high point of 3,163 cases in 2015, and we are on track to eradicate the delays by the end of the year."

Notes to Editors

A full copy of the National Audit Office's investigation report (HC 19/2016-17) is available on the NAO website at www.nao.org.uk

The Parole Board Strategy 2016-2020 is available on the Parole Board web pages at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/parole-board>

The Parole Board is an independent body that works with its criminal justice partners to protect the public by risk assessing prisoners to decide whether they can safely be released into the community. The Board has responsibility for considering life sentence prisoners (mandatory life, discretionary life and automatic life sentence prisoners and Her Majesty's Pleasure detainees; and prisoners given indeterminate sentences for public protection); and determinate sentence cases (discretionary conditional release prisoners serving more than 4 years whose offence was committed before 4 April 2005; prisoners given extended sentences for public protection for offences committed on or after 4 April 2005; and prisoners given an Extended Determinate Sentence or Sentence of Particular Concern after 3 December 2012). The Board considers initial release into the community and re-release following a recall to prison.

For further information please call Glenn Gathercole, Business Development Directorate on 0203 334 4392 during office hours, or 07725-927954 out of hours, or e-mail glenn.gathercole@paroleboard.gsi.gov.uk