

Rod and line fishing rules

South West Region

July 2015

This is not a legal interpretation, but provides a layman's guide to the Environment Agency's rod fishing rules (byelaws) in the South West Region. These laws protect migratory and freshwater fish stocks, and the fisheries they support.

If you break the rules, you face prosecution and may receive a fine of up to £50,000.

Rod fishing rules tell you **when** you can fish (open and closed seasons); **where** you can fish; **how** you can fish; and **what** fish you can take.

Some fishing rules are local, covering specific waters; others apply to the whole of South West Region; and some national rules cover the whole of England and Wales.

Angling clubs and private fisheries often have their own rules which you must respect.

These rules apply to anyone fishing for salmon, trout, freshwater (coarse) fish, eels, smelt and lamprey in all freshwater fisheries and to a distance of 6 nautical miles at sea. They cover all rivers, streams, drains, canals, stillwaters and coastal waters within the Environment Agency's South West Region.

The Region stretches from the Hampshire Avon in the east up to Bristol and down to Land's End in Cornwall.

To find out more about fishing regulations, where to fish, codes of practice and information on how to stop the spread of invasive aquatic species which can harm our fisheries, please visit our website at

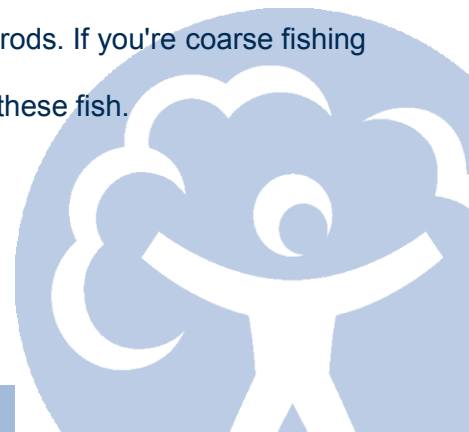
www.environment-agency.gov.uk/fish or www.gethooked.co.uk

Rod licences

You must have a valid Environment Agency rod licence if you are aged 12 or over and fish for salmon, trout, freshwater fish, smelt or eel in the south west.

A licence for coarse fish, non-migratory trout and eels allows you to fish with 2 rods. If you're coarse fishing with 3 or 4 rods (4 is the maximum) then you need to hold 2 licences.

A licence for salmon and migratory (sea) trout allows only 1 rod to be used for these fish.



An annual rod licence expires on 31 March each year. Short term (1& 8 day) licences can also be purchased. Seniors, juniors and the disabled can buy cheaper licences..

It is an offence to fish for freshwater fish and eels without a valid rod licence and if you are caught and prosecuted you may be fined up to £2,500.

There are 4 easy ways to buy your rod licence:

1. on-line at www.environment-agency.gov.uk/rodlicence;
2. by calling the Post Office on 0844 800 5386. (8.30am - 8pm daily from March to September, and 8.30am - 6pm daily from October to February, Monday to Saturday); Calls to the 0844 number can cost up to 5p per minute for BT users. Calls made using other service providers or mobiles may cost more. This telesales line is operated by Post Office Ltd on our behalf.
3. by Direct Debit (go to www.environment-agency.gov.uk/rodlicence);
4. at any Post Office branch in England and Wales (and some in Scotland).

Fishing rules

Do not sell rod-caught sea trout and salmon

No person shall sell, offer or expose for sale or have in possession for sale any salmon or migratory trout which has been taken by rod and line.

Artificial fly and artificial lure only for salmon before 16 June

Where not already limited by existing local byelaws, when fishing for salmon before 16 June in any year, you may only use artificial fly or artificial lure.

Catch and release of salmon before 16 June

You must not remove any salmon, alive or dead, from any waters before 16 June in any year. Any salmon caught before this date must be returned to the water with least possible injury.

Coarse fish removal

On rivers, you may take no more than:

- **one pike of less than 65 cm per day;**
- **two grayling of between 30 and 38 cm per day; 15 barbel, chub, common bream, common carp, crucian carp, dace, perch, pike, roach, rudd, silver bream, smelt or tench (including any hybrids of these species) of less than 20cm per day.**

All lengths are measured from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

There are no restrictions on the number of other coarse fish you may take (see later for eel and shad).

On stillwaters and canals, you may only take freshwater fish with the written permission of the fishery owner or occupier. NB. Canals are defined as those canals where the coarse fish close season has been removed.

You may keep fish in a keepnet or keepsack before returning them to the water.

Eels and shad

You may not take or kill any rod caught eel or shad from any waters, including tidal waters.

You may keep eel in a keepnet or keepsack before returning them to the water. Shad must be returned immediately.

Landing nets, keepnets and keepsacks

A national byelaw makes it illegal to use landing nets with knotted meshes or meshes of metallic material.

Similarly, keepnets should not be constructed of such materials or have holes in the mesh larger than 25mm internal circumference; or be less than 2.0 metres in length. Supporting rings or frames should not be greater than 40cm apart (excluding the distance from the top frame to the first supporting ring or frame) or less than 120cm in circumference.

Keepsacks should be constructed of a soft, dark coloured, non-abrasive, water-permeable fabric and should not have dimensions less than 120cm by 90cm if rectangular, or 150cm by 30cm by 40cm if used with a frame or designed with the intention that a frame be used. It is an offence to retain more than one fish in a single keepsack at any time.

It is illegal to retain in keepnets any salmonids (adults or juveniles) except when specially approved by the Environment Agency for collecting broodstock.

A number of other national fishing rules are in place - see below

1. In all reservoirs, lakes and ponds, with the owner's permission, you can fish all year for rainbow trout.
2. On fully enclosed stillwaters, with the owner's permission, you can fish all year for brown trout.
3. You are not allowed to use a gaff or tailer at any time when fishing for salmon, trout and freshwater fish or freshwater eels.
4. The number of rods that you can use at any one time is as follows:
 - One rod when fishing for salmonids in rivers, streams, drains and canals;
 - Two rods when fishing for salmonids in reservoirs, lakes and ponds (subject to local rules);
 - Up to four rods when fishing for coarse fish and eels (subject to local rules).

When fishing with multiple rods and lines, rods shall not be left unattended and shall be placed such that the distance between the butts of the end rods does not exceed 3 metres.

5. Annual catch returns for salmon and migratory trout should be submitted no later than 1 January in the following year. This is in addition to any returns that you have to make to in relation to a separate fishing permit.
6. Crayfish of any species, whether alive or dead, or parts thereof, may not be used as bait for salmon, trout, freshwater fish or eels.
7. Livebait may only be retained and used at the water where they were taken.
8. All salmon, migratory trout or trout, hooked other than inside the mouth or throat, shall be returned immediately to any river, stream, drain or canal.
9. A rod and line with its bait or hook in the water must not be left unattended or left so that the licence holder is unable at any time to take or exercise sufficient control over the rod and line.

Rod fishing open seasons

Salmon			
Fishery District	River	Starts	Ends
Avon (Devon)	Avon (Devon)	15 Apr	30 Nov
Avon (Devon)	Erme	15 Mar	31 Oct
Axe (Devon)	Axe Otter Sid	15 Mar	31 Oct
Axe (Devon)	Lim	1 Mar	30 Sept
Camel	Camel	1 Apr	15 Dec
Dart	Dart	1 Feb	30 Sept
Exe	Exe	14 Feb	30 Sept
Fowey	Fowey Looe Seaton	1 Apr	15 Dec
Tamar & Plym	Tamar Tavy Lynher	1 Mar	14 Oct
Tamar & Plym	Plym Yealm	1 Apr	15 Dec
Taw & Torridge	Taw Torridge	1 Mar	30 Sept
Taw & Torridge	Lyn	1 Feb	31 Oct
Teign	Teign	1 Feb	30 Sept
Frome (Dorset) & Piddle		1 Mar	31 Aug
All other rivers in Wessex		1 Feb	31 Aug
Sea trout			
Fishery District	River	Starts	Ends
Avon (Devon)	Avon (Devon)	15 Apr	30 Sept
Avon (Devon)	Erme	15 Mar	30 Sept
Axe (Devon)	Axe Otter Sid	15 Apr	31 Oct
Axe (Devon)	Lim	16 Apr	31 Oct
Camel	Camel Gannel Menalhyl Valency	1Apr	30 Sept
Dart	Dart	15 Mar	30 Sept
Exe	Exe	15 Mar	30 Sept
Fowey	Fowey Looe Seaton Tresillian	1 Apr	30 Sept

Tamar & Plym	Tamar Lynher Plym Tavy Yealm	3 Mar	30 Sept
Taw & Torridge	Taw Torridge Lyn	15 Mar	30 Sept
Teign	Teign	15 Mar	30 Sept
All rivers in Wessex		15 Apr	31 Oct

Brown trout

Fishery District	Starts	Ends
Camel & Fowey	1 Apr	30 Sept
Other rivers in Devon & Cornwall	15 Mar	30 Sept
All rivers in Wessex Area	1 Apr	15 Oct
Enclosed stillwaters	No statutory closed season	
All other waters in Devon & Cornwall	15 Mar	12 Oct
All other waters in Wessex Area	17 Mar	14 Oct

Rainbow trout

Fishery District	Starts	Ends
Camel & Fowey	1 Apr	30 Sept
Other rivers in Devon & Cornwall	15 Mar	30 Sept
All rivers in Wessex Area	1 Apr	15 Oct
All reservoirs, lakes & ponds	No statutory closed season	

Grayling, coarse fish and eels

Fishery District	Starts	Ends
Rivers, streams & drains (including the Glastonbury Canal) and some stillwater Sites of Special Scientific Interest	16 Jun	14 Mar
Ponds, lakes, reservoirs and all other canals	No statutory closed season	

There is no close season for coarse fish on canals within the region, with the exception of the Glastonbury Canal which is an open system with the South Drain.

How many fish can I keep?

See page 2 for coarse fish removal limits.

Private fisheries or clubs may have their own rules so do check.

Bag limits	River / Area	Species	Period		
			24 hours	7 days	Season
	Wessex (N)	Non-migratory trout	2	N/A	N/A
	Wessex (N)	Grayling	2	N/A	N/A
	Taw	Salmon	2	3	10
	Taw	Migratory trout	5	15	40
	Torridge	Salmon	2	2	7
	Torridge	Migratory trout	2	5	20

Prohibition of use of lead weights

No person shall use any instrument on which is attached directly or indirectly any lead weight (except a weight of 0.06 grams or less, or one of more than 28.35 grams) for the purpose of taking salmon, trout, freshwater fish or eels in any waters within the region, unless it is incorporated and fully enclosed in the core of the fishing line, or incorporated in the construction of a swim-feeder, self-cocking float or a fishing lure; "fishing lure" means any device, including a fishing fly, which is designed to attract fish and which incorporates a fishing hook.

River Dart - emergency byelaw

We have introduced an emergency byelaw on the River Dart as of 22 July 2015 for the protection of salmon. The main provisions of this are:

- no retention of salmon taken by instrument (rod and line or net) within the River Dart catchment or its estuary with immediate release at the point of capture
- closure of the River Dart net fishery at the end of July 2015 (shortening the season by 2 weeks)
- all rod and line fishing in the River Dart catchment to be undertaken by artificial fly only.

For full details of this byelaw please contact your local area office through the Customer Contact Centre 03708 506 506.

Devon rivers – no spinning for trout

No spinning for trout in waters included within the Dartmoor National Park, the Exe above Exebridge, Otter above Langford Bridge, Torridge above Woodford Bridge, Bray above Newton Bridge, Mole above Alswear Bridge, Little Dart above Afleton Bridge, and the whole of the Okement, Lyn and Barnstaple Yeo.

Kilbury Weir – Prohibited fishing

It is illegal to take or attempt to take by any means fish in any waters within 50 yards below the crest of Kilbury Weir on the River Dart.

Use of float

The use of a float when fishing for salmon or trout in any waters within the Avon (Devon), Axe (Devon), Dart, Exe, Taw and Torridge and Teign districts is prohibited.

Permitted baits

Crayfish of any species, whether alive or dead, or parts thereof, may not be used as bait for salmon, trout, freshwater fish or eels

The use of particular baits for fishing is regulated by byelaws and in some cases additional restrictions are imposed by the fishing association or riparian owner. The byelaw restrictions are shown in the table below:

Fishery district	Species	Baits (real or imitation)
SW Region	Salmon	Before 16 June, artificial fly and artificial lure only
Avon (Devon)	Salmon & trout	No worm or maggot
Axe (Devon)	Salmon & trout	No shrimp, prawn, worm or maggot. Fly only after 31 July below Axbridge, Colyford
Dart	Salmon	SEE BYELAW ABOVE. No worm or maggot. No shrimp or prawn except below Staverton Bridge. No spinning above Holne Bridge.
	Trout	Fly only.
Exe	Salmon & trout	No worm or maggot.
Barnstaple	All species (inc	No fishing

Yeo (tidal)	seafish)	
Taw & Torridge (except Lyn)	Salmon & trout	No shrimp, prawn, worm or maggot No spinning after 31 March
Lyn	Trout	No worm or maggot before 1 June
Teign	Salmon Trout	Artificial fly and artificial lure ONLY after 31 August No worm or maggot before 1 June
Camel & Fowey	Salmon Trout	No byelaw restrictions on bait after 16 June No byelaw restrictions on bait
Tamar	Salmon & migratory trout	No worm, maggot, shrimp or prawn after 31 August
Wessex Area	Salmon & migratory trout	Artificial fly only before 15 May.
Wessex Area	All species in rivers, drains and canals	No maggot (or pupae), processed product, cereal or other vegetable matter during the coarse fish close season.

Size limits

Length to be measured from tip of the snout to the fork or cleft of the tail.

The size limits, below which fish must be returned, imposed by byelaws are set out in the table below. Sizes in centimetres (cm).

Area, district or catchment	Migratory trout	Non-migratory trout	Grayling
Camel, Fowey, Tamar & Plym	18 cm	18 cm	N/A
Avon(Devon), Axe (Devon), Dart, Exe, Taw & Torridge, Teign	25 cm	20 cm	N/A
River Lim	N/A	22 cm	N/A
Wessex (N) except By Brook	35 cm	25 cm	25 cm
By Brook & tribs	35 cm	20 cm	25 cm
Wessex (South)	35 cm	25 cm	N/A

These size restrictions do not apply to non-migratory trout in any waters included within the Dartmoor National Park, the Exe above Exebridge, Otter above Langford Bridge, Torridge above Woodford Bridge, Mole above Alswear Bridge, Little Dart above Afleton Bridge, and the whole of the Okement, Lyn and Barnstaple Yeo.

Taw & Torridge salmon

From the 1 August to 30 September in any year no person shall take in the River Taw and River Torridge any salmon of a length greater than 70 centimetres.

END

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