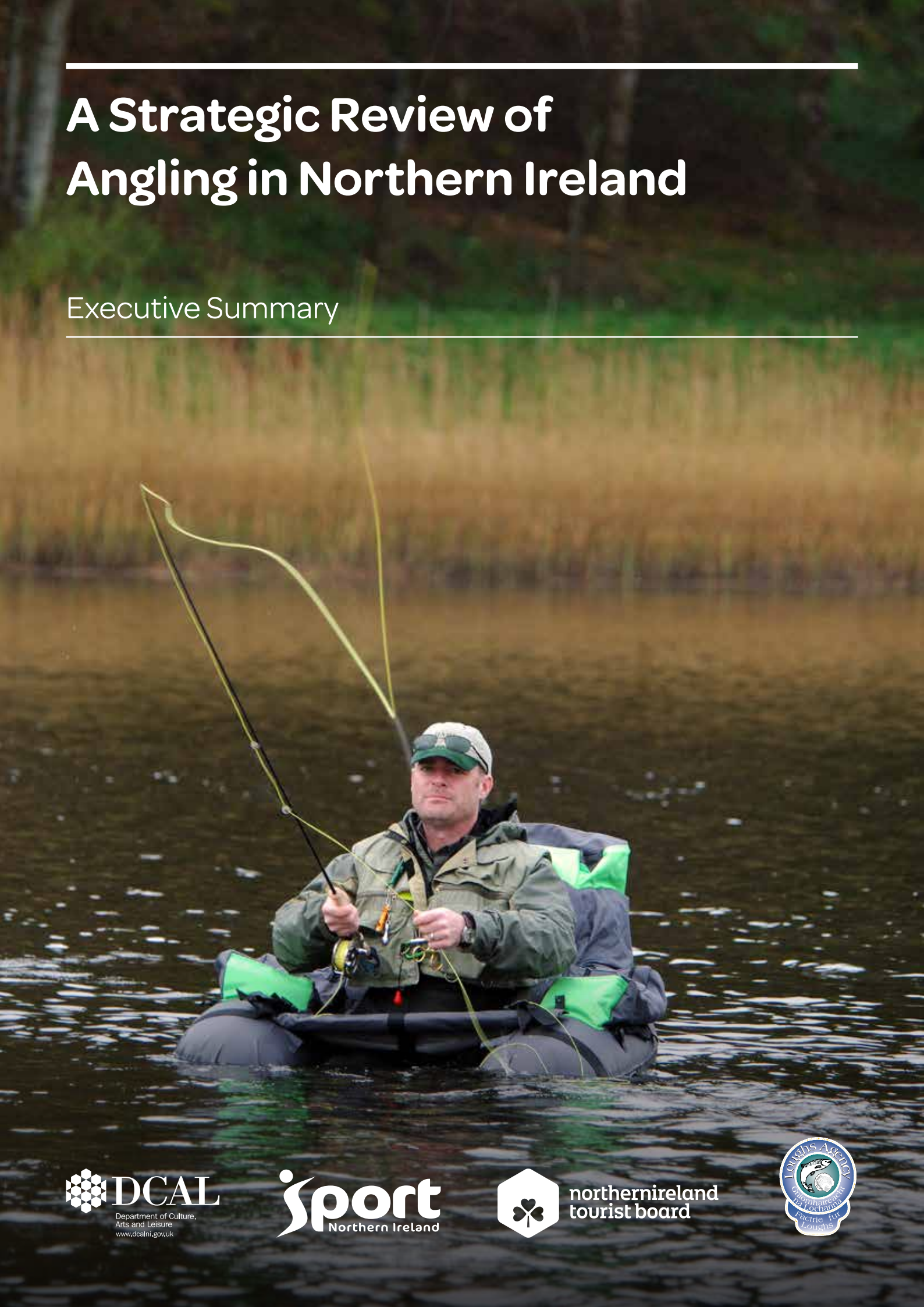

A Strategic Review of Angling in Northern Ireland

Executive Summary



“The review provides up to date information on the scale and characteristics of participation in angling in Northern Ireland.”

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In partnership with



All photos (except page 7) are courtesy of the Loughs Agency and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.



Introduction

This is a summary of 'A Strategic Review of Angling in Northern Ireland, 2013', a report that has been prepared by contractors to help inform the development of an angling strategy for Northern Ireland. The review has been commissioned and advised by a Steering Group comprised of the following organisations:

- Sport Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB);
- Department of Culture Arts and Leisure Inland Fisheries (DCAL);
- Loughs Agency;
- The Ulster Angling Federation;
- The Irish Federation of Sea Anglers – Ulster Provincial Council; and
- The National Coarse Fishing Federation of Ireland – Ulster Provincial Council.

The full report (available to download from www.sportni.net) provides the evidence base to support the conclusions and recommendations made in this summary document.

These recommendations were developed with stakeholders to address key issues for the development of angling through a two-stage consultation process and are seen to be instrumental in the development of a **Strategic Action Plan for Angling in Northern Ireland**. This Plan should be prepared by the Steering Group and have cross-agency support.

The review provides up to date information on the scale and characteristics of participation in angling in Northern Ireland and identifies the opportunities and constraints to further development. It provides detailed information on the issues and challenges that need to be overcome to realise the potential of Northern Ireland to be a place where angling can be enjoyed by all, deliver healthy lifestyles and be a key economic driver through tourism visits.

In this study, angling refers to game, coarse and sea fish species but does not include commercial inland or sea fisheries.

“Angling is one of over 90 ‘recognised’ sports by the Sports Councils in the UK, and is therefore eligible for support and grant aid but it has not historically been seen as a high priority for Sport Northern Ireland.”



Context for the Review

Angling is one of over 90 “recognised” sports by the Sports Councils in the UK, and is therefore eligible for support and grant aid but it has not historically been seen as a high priority for Sport Northern Ireland whose focus has been on Olympic and Commonwealth sports for National Governing Body support. Nor has angling been seen, thus far, as a key product for tourism growth by the NITB.

Following discussions between the partners involved in this review it was agreed that the time was right to re-examine the evidence from previous studies (particularly the information from a study undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2007, examining the economic impact of angling). This will enable information to be established as to how angling can contribute to Northern Ireland’s Programme for Government which sets out the strategic priorities for all Government Departments and Agencies including:

- Growing a sustainable economy and investing in the future;
- Creating opportunities, tackling disadvantage and improving health and wellbeing;
- Building a strong and shared community; and
- Delivering high quality and efficient public services.

Desktop research has highlighted a number of projects in Great Britain and Ireland which have demonstrated how angling can effectively contribute towards:

- Helping to divert young people away from anti-social behaviour;
- Enhancing social cohesion;
- Improving physical and mental health and wellbeing; and
- Enabling learning particularly about wildlife and the environment.

The review examines the evidence of the benefits that can accrue from participation in angling.

In addition to the benefits to people and communities, the NITB was interested to explore the opportunity for angling to contribute to the creation of a dynamic, competitive economy. Activity tourism is one of the key themes for unlocking the potential of Northern Ireland as a tourist destination and the opportunities for visitors to take part in angling have been examined to establish whether it has the potential to be a key product.



“The review examines the evidence of the benefits that can accrue from participation in angling.”

The Review Process

In accordance with the brief, the study followed a number of key stages leading to the identification of issues and recommendations.

Document Reviews: Evidence was gathered from a range of sources, including revisiting data sources from previous studies to assess what had changed and looking at reports from other countries, particularly examining what happens in other parts of the UK and Ireland. At an early stage it was agreed that the focus of the study should be on establishing the strategic issues which influence development of angling rather than seeking to fill gaps in participation data or prepare registers of facilities. The aim was to identify participation rates across the community, examine trends and factors influencing further development including identifying and sharing examples of good practice from within Northern Ireland, other parts of the UK and Ireland as well as further afield.

First Stage Consultation: A series of meetings and telephone conversations took place with both key providers and managers of access to angling facilities and a wide range of user groups. A workshop was held with local authority representatives.

Questionnaire Surveys: Quantitative and qualitative data was collated to build an up to date picture of opportunities for angling in Northern Ireland, identifying infrastructure and facilities provision. A survey of clubs, local authorities and a range of angling businesses provided their views on the constraints and opportunities influencing participation and the jobs and growth agenda.

A total of 184 questionnaires were circulated:

- 66 to angling clubs (which elicited an 84% response rate);
- 65 to angling business (13% response rate); and
- 26 to Northern Ireland Local Authorities (77% response rate).

Second Stage Consultation: This was designed to help the contractors establish the views of stakeholders, to confirm that the issues identified from initial research and discussions were the right ones, and to decide what actions and activities might be recommended to overcome the constraints and challenges that had emerged. The consultation period was held in May and June 2013 and in addition to a web-based opportunity to respond, public consultation events were held at seven locations across Northern Ireland.



The Findings

Angling is the 6th biggest sport in the UK but it does not have the visibility of many other activities, such as walking and cycling. Through the evidence gathered it is clear that to date angling has had a relatively low profile in Northern Ireland. There were consistent concerns that it is under-developed and needs fresh resources to build capacity among the clubs and to develop opportunities for tourism based angling.

There is evidence that angling has the potential to generate economic benefits, particularly in rural areas where job opportunities are limited. There has been little consideration into how angling can be developed to create new and long-lasting economic benefit.

There are a range of Government Departments and Agencies with an interest or overlapping responsibility for some facet of angling that impact on its development. Respondents highlighted that stronger political interest and profile is required along with greater cohesion and holistic working to realise the potential of angling.

The Social and Community Impact of Angling

There is persuasive evidence about the positive roles that angling can play in improving people's lives. However, if it is to fulfil its potential much more needs to be done to develop and share good practice. Whilst the main report identifies a number of case studies and successful schemes already happening, much more could be done to disseminate such information and build capacity within clubs and community organisations to facilitate such developments.

1. Health Benefits

One of the most important social impacts identified is the benefit to personal health that can be delivered. There is clear evidence that a wide range of physical and mental health benefits can be accrued from participation. Angling appeals to individuals who are not necessarily attracted to more formal sport and can offer opportunities for lifelong participation.

2. Social Cohesion Benefits

With high levels of participation and involvement across a range of age and income groups, angling can contribute towards building social cohesion and rebuilding communities. It can bring together people of different ages and income groups and facilitates interaction and relationships. Angling is also regarded as a popular and relatively accessible sport among people with disabilities. The sport is unique in offering opportunities for competition alongside able bodied participants. It can help people with disabilities socialise, build a sense of independence and integrate into the wider community.

3. Crime Reduction Benefits

Evidence suggests that angling can be used as a tool to reduce crime and engage people at risk of offending; it can help to divert young people away from anti-social behaviour. A number of charitable organisations as well as the Loughs Agency have been involved in encouraging socially excluded young people in areas of high crime and deprivation to take up angling.

4. Educational Benefits

Angling can provide educational benefits across the curriculum. As an outdoor recreation activity, angling offers the potential to learn more about wildlife, ecology and the natural environment as well as facilitating social and personal development.



Photo courtesy of Angling First Ltd.

CASE STUDY

Angling First

Angling First Ltd is a charity that aims to introduce the sport of angling to young people as a positive alternative to engaging in anti-social activity. Angling is also introduced to vulnerable adults with the aim of improving their mental health. Services of Angling First Ltd are accessed through organised groups and delivered at their own purposely developed pond located just outside Dromore, Co. Down.

Funded almost entirely by donations from the general public, Angling First Ltd delivers its services to an average of 1000 young people and 300 vulnerable adults a year.

In 2005, the charity worked with a total of 596 young people over a one and/or four day period from a range of deprived areas in Northern Ireland including, Ardoyne, Tigers Bay, Twinbook, Old Warren and the Garvaghy Road area of Portadown.

Following the programme, the charity can point to a wide number of individuals who have taken up the sport on a regular basis; one child having gone on to represent Ireland at angling competitions at junior international level. Evaluations of the scheme have found that of the 596 young people introduced to angling in 2005, 75% went fishing after the charity fishing trip and 17% have taken up angling on a regular basis.



Trends and Levels of Participation in Angling in Northern Ireland

The number of anglers in Northern Ireland fell to about half its previous levels during the period of political unrest, but appears to be now rising. While there were 19,697 resident licences purchased from DCAL in 2012, in reality it is not easy to provide an accurate assessment of the number of people taking part in angling because of the difficulties in assessing the numbers of unregistered anglers, and because it is not necessary to have a licence to participate in sea angling. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest that 3% of the population of Northern Ireland went fishing at some time during 2012. The Continuous Household Survey shows that of the 36 sports included in the survey, angling is the 7th most popular in Northern Ireland.

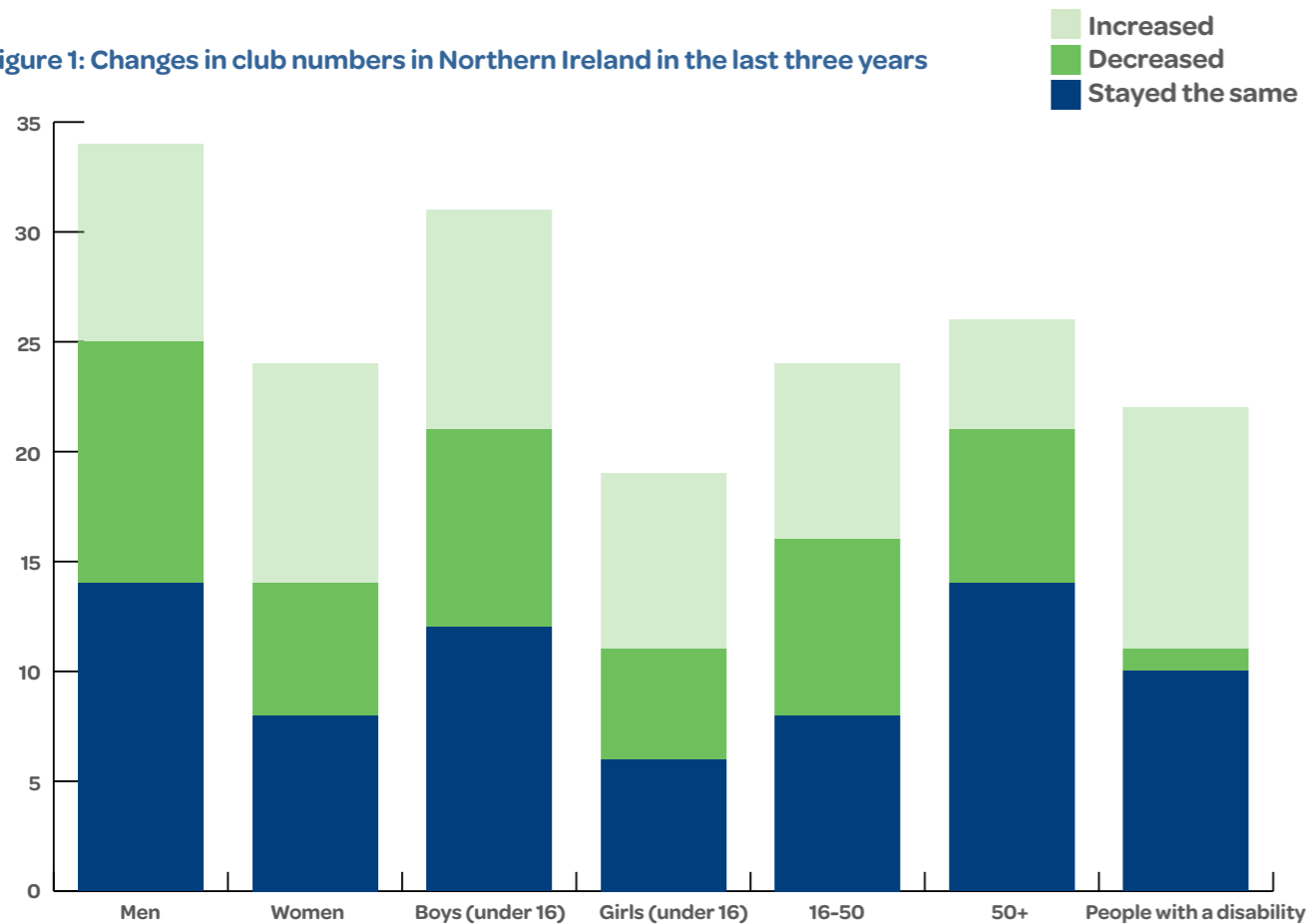
During the consultation there was some anecdotal evidence of a decline in club membership, combined with an increase in the average age of club anglers in all three categories of sea, coarse and game angling. However, the results of the survey of angling clubs in Northern Ireland indicated that overall club membership is not declining, with membership across all age groups showing an overall increase or staying the same.

Socio Economic Characteristics of Anglers

An analysis of the socio-economic characteristics of anglers is vital to understanding more about the profile of anglers and influencing how angling participation is developed in the future. Although there is no data that is specific to Northern Ireland, information from England shows that angling is enjoyed by a range of different social classes. Most participants are employed although nearly a quarter are retired. Whilst angling is popular amongst all age groups the club survey undertaken in this review shows that 51% of members are over 50 years of age and only 10% are juveniles.

The Irish Angling Development Alliance Annual Report in 2012 indicates a fall in the number of young people taking up angling is a result of a range of factors, including the popularity of home computers and computer based games and the raised profile of other sports such as soccer, rugby and GAA, along with longer working hours and less parental participation.

Figure 1: Changes in club numbers in Northern Ireland in the last three years



Barriers to Participation

There are no specific studies that have explored the barriers to participation in angling but research for this study indicates that there is a lack of interest amongst some groups of people and there are factors which prevent people from taking part more often.

Some of the key issues include:

- 1. Safeguarding Children:** The introduction of measures to safeguard children participating in sporting activities has impacted across many sports. The survey of angling clubs indicated that a lack of capacity in angling clubs has made it onerous to go through the procedures.
- 2. Facilities:** Many clubs, although very willing, have been unable to provide facilities that meet the needs of women and people with disabilities because of a lack of funding.
- 3. Landowners' Liability:** There remains a perception that landowners are unwilling to allow people across their land unless they (the landowners) are indemnified against any claims arising from accident or injury. The extent to which litigation issues present a barrier is not entirely clear but the need for insurance was a strong and recurring theme.
- 4. Fish Stocks:** The issue of fish stocks was given high priority by the governing bodies and was mentioned by participants at all of the workshops. The consensus seems to be that numbers and size of fish have declined.

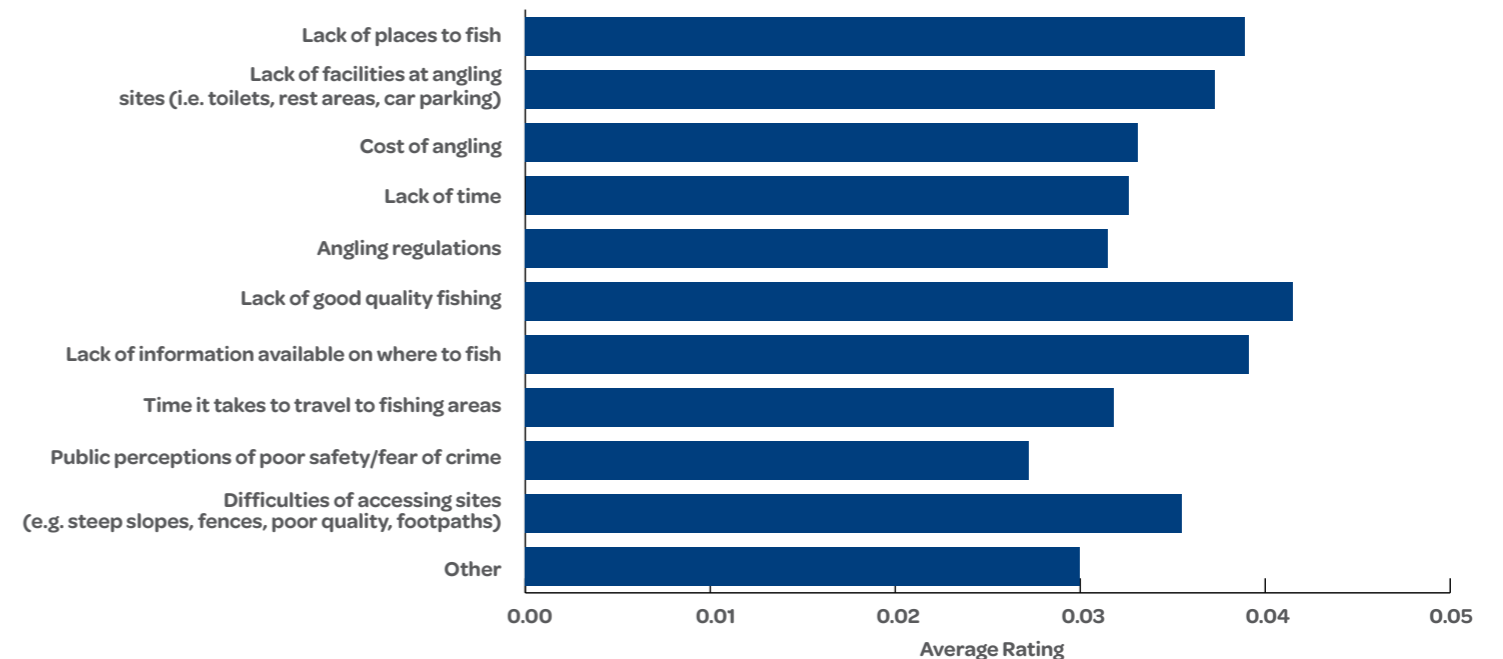
It is accepted that the enforcement of angling regulations will not resolve this issue but that it is associated with the wider concerns about commercial fishing and in some cases pollution or changes to habitats which are beyond the scope of this study. There is however a need for more research and the development of angling in Northern Ireland is currently hindered by a lack of scientific evidence on which the agencies can base their decisions.

5. Derelict Waters: One of the issues highlighted was the development of Derelict Waters for angling under the 1966 Fisheries Act. Derelict Waters may offer the potential to increase opportunities for angling where there is a shortage of opportunities to meet the needs of local communities, which, it was suggested, is particularly acute around Belfast.

6. Licences and Permits: There was evidence that the licensing regimes are acting as a barrier to participation in angling. There are three licensing regimes in Ireland. DCAL has a suite of licences and the Loughs Agency has a slightly less complicated range. A key priority must be to explore the opportunity to simplify the system.

7. Coaching: There was evidence of a shortage of coaches able to work with young people and a lack of a coordinated coaching programme. Acquiring recognised coaching qualifications for angling in Northern Ireland is complicated depending on whether the awarding body is affiliated to a UK or all-Ireland body.

Figure 2: Scores out of 5 indicated by angling clubs when asked to rate the importance of various barriers to participation in angling



“Evidence shows that the visiting angler is as valuable to the Northern Ireland economy as a visiting golfer, walker, cyclist or horse-rider.”

Angling Tourism in Northern Ireland

The contribution that domestic and visiting anglers can make to the economy was an important part of the review. Evidence shows that the visiting angler is as valuable to the Northern Ireland economy as a visiting golfer, walker, cyclist or horse-rider and all these groups spend more than the average ‘non sporting’ visitor.

Based on the number of licences issued, the number of visiting anglers from outside Northern Ireland appears to be slowly increasing. Currently, by far the biggest market for angling in Northern Ireland is Great Britain. Only a small proportion of visitors are from Europe and this was highlighted as a concern. Previous research (PwC study) found that anglers from the Republic of Ireland behave more like domestic anglers and they spend only 6% as much as anglers from Britain and Europe.

A recurring theme was that the information available, both to domestic and visiting anglers, is difficult to access and is scattered across a wide range of sources. This is an impediment to the development of angling tourism.

The main beneficiaries of increased angling tourism would be service providers including pubs; restaurants; hotels; holiday lets; and B&BS. With some notable exceptions there is a lack of awareness among these providers of the potential opportunities to service visiting anglers which would attract new summer business and also extend their season. There is currently limited information available to make them aware of the nature and scope of the opportunity and the strategies they need to adopt to develop the market for angling visitors.

The consultation and surveys indicated that angling in Northern Ireland varies in quality according to factors such as local weather and also with the season. The underlying issue seems to be with information:

- Do people know what to expect before they come?
- Do they know in advance how to access local knowledge?
- Can they go online and see in real-time how the fishing is going?

The advice from both the freshwater governing bodies was that the quality of angling is inconsistent. For sea angling there were strong messages from consultees that at present the quality of the fishing is poor and could not provide the basis for a sustained promotional campaign. However, in reality the picture is quite uneven and there clearly are ‘hot-spots’ of excellent sea angling particularly in the Loughs Agency coastal areas. Further scientific and/or statistical evidence is needed relating to the number, species, size and location of angling quarry so that a sustainable tourism offer can be developed. The research undertaken by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) on sea angling is likely to shed more light on this information.

Access to Facilities, Information and Advice

In the survey of clubs, questions were included about the facilities that clubs have to offer and the means by which they promote them. Questions were concerned with the facilities available to anglers in Northern Ireland, how information is currently communicated and how current practice in Northern Ireland compares with recent innovations elsewhere, particularly in Wales and Scotland. Whilst there are examples of some good quality information being available, action is necessary to bring this all together to provide a more coherent picture of what exists that is easily accessible to all.

It was highlighted that there is confusion among the public about where to turn to for information and advice, the rules and regulations controlling angling in Northern Ireland, and information on how new users can get in to angling.

Online information available on fishing opportunities in Northern Ireland tends to display a bias towards game angling, with a lack of information about sea angling and opportunities for coarse fishing. Local authority information is uncoordinated. Many angling clubs do not have their own websites although some use social networking websites and other social media through which to advertise their services.

There is a strong case for a more centralised approach to the provision of information via an interactive website, which would act as a 'one stop shop' for information on angling and associated products/activities in Northern Ireland.



The Governance of Angling in Northern Ireland

The governance of angling in Northern Ireland is complex and the management of the aquatic environment and resources is highly regulated. There is a large group of stakeholders involved in angling making it difficult to delineate responsibilities and allocate resources.

Angling would benefit greatly from closer co-ordination between Departments and Agencies in Northern Ireland. It was highlighted that Government Departments and Agencies may not always fully appreciate the impact of their role in respect of angling. For the agencies involved in supporting angling the aim should be to facilitate access to angling organisations and programmes by bodies charged with delivering social policy.

The National Governing Bodies (NGBs) currently recognised by Sport Northern Ireland appear to be meeting the day to day needs of their members but from the perspective of sport development are not proactive. They lack the capacity to take their sport forward. The representation of women and young people in the sport is a key failing and this is partly

because there are few effective outreach programmes in place. The NGBs do seem willing to take on these challenges but cannot do so without help. There is strong case for investment in capacity-building in game, sea and coarse fishing clubs in Northern Ireland.

Common to all of the consultation meetings was a strong sense that the anglers welcomed the opportunity to meet each other to discuss common issues and to have their concerns and issues listened to.



Next Steps

Angling is a popular sport in Northern Ireland but it is largely invisible. There is a feeling that angling has been somewhat off the radar as many of the Government Departments and Agencies have focused on their responsibilities for conservation and protection and administering their own affairs – there appears to be a lack of a joined up approach.

The Steering Group will need to consider the review and accept or reject its findings and the recommendations. This should then become the basis for developing a Strategic Action Plan owned by the partners providing the focus for the way forward. The Plan needs to be time limited and identify clear targets and responsibilities for determining key developments through which all of those who have committed considerable time and knowledge to the process will benefit.

The recommendations included in the report for development identify three main areas of action:

1. Better Governance

The current arrangements for the governance of the sport and the respective roles of the public and voluntary sector need to be restructured to build links between the many agencies and organisations involved. Public sector partnerships need to be

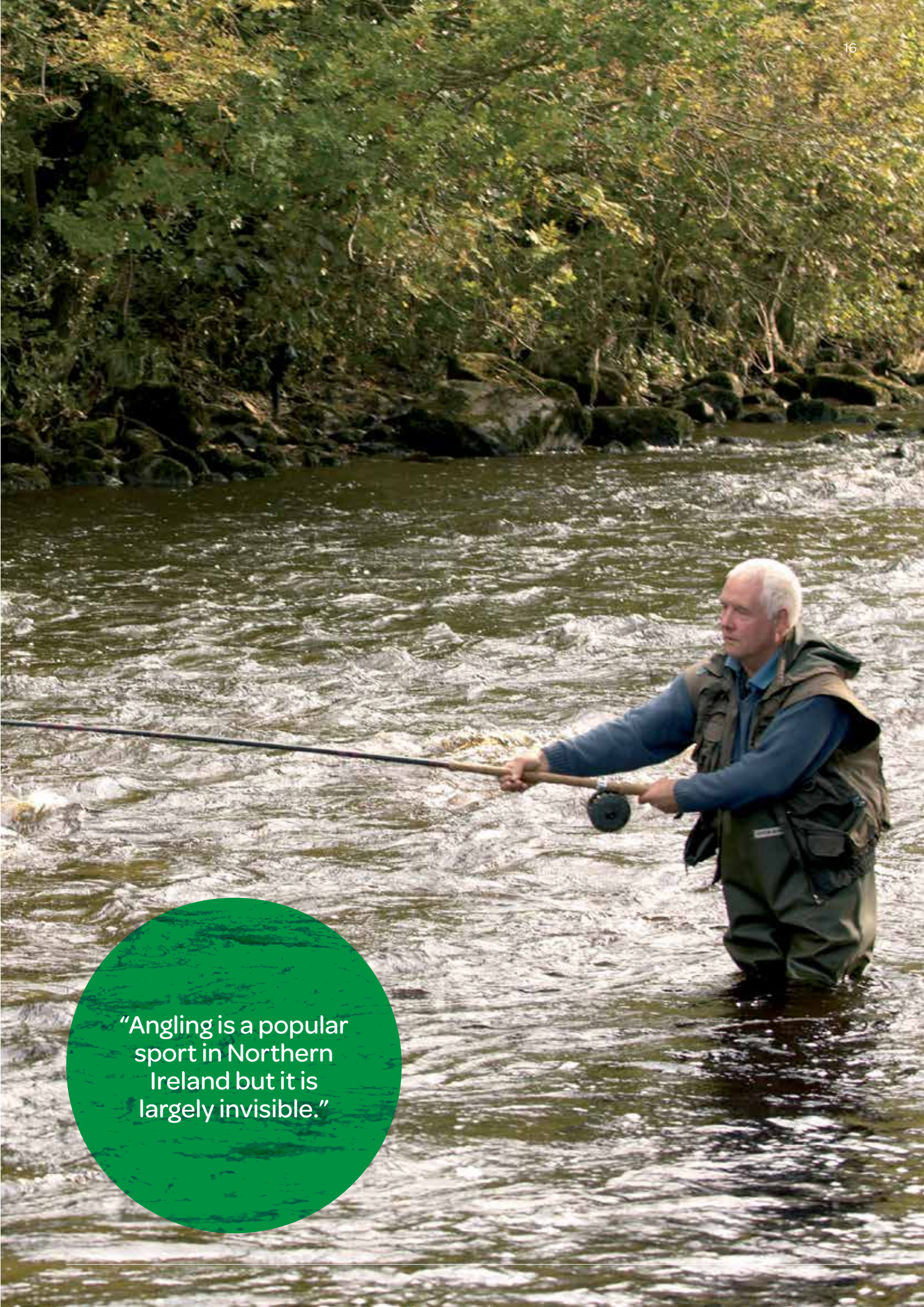
developed between the Government Departments responsible for regulation of aquatic environments with those which have responsibility for angling development. Partnerships with other Government Departments and agendas are required to explore joint interests, e.g. health, justice and education. A Forum should be established to enable the governing bodies to work together to build capacity for which public sector support will be required.

2. Improved Facilities

There is a need for infrastructure to support the development and growth of angling, a need to build capacity of clubs, with selected centres focusing on coaching and the need for financial assistance to support initiatives to address the issues.

3. Increased Awareness

There is a need for a coordinated programme to promote angling, to raise awareness of the opportunities and to maximise the potential that could bring wide benefits to Northern Ireland.



“Angling is a popular sport in Northern Ireland but it is largely invisible.”

Recommendations for the Development of Angling and Angling Tourism in Northern Ireland

RECOMMENDATION 1: Consideration should be given to holding a regular angling conference and networking events at which clubs, governing bodies, statutory agencies and community organisations can discuss the constraints and opportunities in developing angling and share good practice about what works.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The Steering Group should consider promoting a conference to which representatives of angling organisations and the health sector are invited to explore how closer links might be established.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Evidence from successful projects should be drawn together by the bodies responsible for angling and used as the basis for an early meeting with the Department for Social Development, Youth Justice Agency and the Department for Justice to explore how joint initiatives might be pursued.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Loughs Agency and DCAL should collaborate to develop a programme of educational outreach initiatives through partnership with stakeholder interests aimed at stimulating greater interest and involvement in angling amongst young people.

RECOMMENDATION 5: An early meeting should be held between this review steering group and representatives of the AFBI Steering Group for the sea angling review to develop dialogue, share information from the two reviews and explore joint initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 6: DCAL should continue to monitor participation to develop a longitudinal dataset, purchasing space in commercial omnibus or household surveys.

RECOMMENDATION 7: The partners supporting this review should co-operate to recruit sports development staff. It is advised that they should be independent of existing agencies or governing bodies and their role should be to focus on the recruitment of young people and to enhance the capacity of the governing bodies and clubs. Sport development skills rather than knowledge of angling are the key requirement.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The sports development resource should be located within an organisation that is seen as independent of existing structures and organisations and should be managed by a small management group of the organisations involved.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The partners should collaborate to provide grant aid to clubs to support the provision of facilities for anglers with disabilities.

RECOMMENDATION 10: Design guidance should be commissioned to provide advice to public and private sector bodies and clubs on provision of facilities for anglers with disabilities. All applicants for grant aid should then be required to comply with this guidance and it should be used by public sector agencies in enhancing access provision.

RECOMMENDATION 11: Sports development initiatives need to incorporate opportunities for women and girls focusing on increasing the capacity of clubs to be able to accommodate the needs of women members.

RECOMMENDATION 12: Grant aid schemes should afford a high priority to provision of toilet facilities.

RECOMMENDATION 13: The development of codes of practice for clubs should be incorporated as part of the work of the development officers to encourage responsible angling and to increase the capacity of clubs.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Access Officers should be considered as a post within club structures, or available to clubs, to address the issues of access to land and to act as the liaison between the club and the landowner.

RECOMMENDATION 15: Sport Northern Ireland should continue to promote the findings of its research into current occupier's liability in conjunction with the other parties to the review.

RECOMMENDATION 16: The position of visitors and children relative to third-party insurance needs to be clarified and a leaflet specific to public liability in angling should be published by the partners to the review.

RECOMMENDATION 17: A strategic network of accessible fisheries should be developed that are designed to specific standards to cater for the needs of young people and people with disabilities, such centres to offer quality coaching as an introduction to the sport and to develop standards of performance. An early priority is given as part of this initiative to developing a centre in proximity to Belfast.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The sponsors should develop a programme of small grants to support masters' dissertations on angling and also small commissioned studies to assist the clubs and governing bodies. The programme should be publicised to the HE sector in Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Grant aid schemes should afford a priority to providing infrastructure for clubs.

RECOMMENDATION 20: An audit should be undertaken of potential Derelict Waters in areas where there is an identified need for more water particularly in the area around Belfast. Subject to the outcome of an audit the Department should advertise the Derelict Water application process which is outlined in the Fisheries Act 1966.

RECOMMENDATION 21: Any future survey of visiting anglers should explore their attitudes to the licensing system in Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION 22: Further discussions should be initiated between DCAL and the Loughs Agency to explore ways of simplifying the licensing system.

RECOMMENDATION 23: The Steering Group should hold discussions with Coaching Ireland about their role in angling coaching in Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION 24: The Angling Forum for Northern Ireland (see recommendation 33) should include a sub-group to focus on coaching opportunities and recognitions.

RECOMMENDATION 25: There should be greater collaboration between the two tourist bodies responsible for promoting Northern Ireland in relation to angling. There is a need to agree to a programme of promotion for angling in Northern Ireland, identify named staff to have oversight and arrange for regular officer-level meetings to monitor and evaluate progress. Progress should be reported to the Angling Forum.

RECOMMENDATION 26: Those organisations with a specific mandate to promote water-based recreation and/or tourism – NITB, DCAL, Sport Northern Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Tourism Ireland, and the Loughs Agency should form an officers group with responsibility for overseeing and enabling the development of angling tourism in Northern Ireland.

RECOMMENDATION 27: A grant scheme should be developed by the agencies with responsibility for water related recreation, to provide support to angling clubs and other organisations to develop information on where to fish in their area, and how to access local opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 28: NITB and Tourism Ireland should develop a programme to bring angling journalists to Northern Ireland to demonstrate what is on offer. The key people are those who write for the British market in each of the three fishing disciplines.



RECOMMENDATION 29: The sponsors of the review should develop a mechanism to encourage clubs and other organisations to develop and maintain an online presence both through websites and social media. This mechanism should have two elements:

1. Access to expertise; and
2. Development grants.

RECOMMENDATION 30: An Officers Group should be established within Government to bring together officials from each of the agencies and departments, including cross-border bodies that co-report to the Assembly, that have responsibilities that impact upon angling. It is suggested that this should be chaired by an officer of sufficient seniority to endow the group with the status necessary to keep the participants engaged over time and should be independent of the organisations with a statutory responsibility for angling.

RECOMMENDATION 31: Formal membership of the officers group should be restricted to representatives of statutory bodies so that policy matters and political concerns can be discussed openly.

RECOMMENDATION 32: There should be a person appointed to lead the development of angling as a sport in Northern Ireland. An Officer should be jointly funded by the partners to the review and hosted by Sport Northern Ireland in order to have access to departmental and agency officials as a fellow public servant and to be answerable as a public servant. This person should have expertise in sport development and knowledge of angling should not be a pre-requisite.

RECOMMENDATION 33: An Angling Forum should be established in Northern Ireland that provides an interface between the governing bodies and the Government and also an opportunity for dialogue and collaboration between the three governing bodies. This should be led by Sport Northern Ireland and it is suggested that such a Forum should have a senior status and be seen as a representative voice for anglers in Northern Ireland.



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