



A Guide to Stocking Fish

One of the biggest risks any fishery manager will take is when they purchase new stock for their fishery. The accidental introduction of disease, unsuitable fish or non-native species can have long-term impacts on any fishery, so getting it right at the stocking stage is absolutely vital. This guide is intended as a beginners guide to the process of purchasing and stocking fish. It is not exhaustive and cannot cover every situation so we would encourage any fishery owner to contact their local Environment Agency Fisheries Officer or IFM Branch if they have any questions or are in any doubt.

Before Stocking

There are a number of questions that you should ask before even considering the purchase of new stock.

Firstly, you will need to be really clear about the reasons for stocking new fish;

- Is there a clear plan about what sort of fishery you are trying to create? A clear vision will guide the steps that follow, particularly in terms of stocking.
- Is there actually any need to stock or will other measures improve the fishery?
- Can natural recruitment be encouraged?
- Can the fishery sustain a higher biomass than it already has?
- Are the existing fish growing? If so, at what rate? Is there recruitment?

A survey of the venue may be a much better way of spending the available money so you really know what is going on beneath the water. Knowledge of the existing stock levels is a key component of fisheries management. Further surveys of water quality and invertebrate life will provide further evidence to ensure that measures taken to improve the fishery will be both cost-effective and environmentally sustainable.

If you have answered these questions in a considered manner and stocking remains the only viable option then there should be a series of follow up questions;

- What are the suitable / desired species of fish?
- How many fish to stock now, to create the fishery that is planned? And should it be a single or multiple stocking
- The size of fish
- Are there potential predators on a particular size or species of fish?
- What time of year is best to stock and why?
- What impact upon angling will the stocking have?
- What impact will increased fish numbers have on water quality?
- What impact will increased numbers have on the invertebrate population and ecological processes within the water? For example, increased turbidity, associated with an increased fish population, may have an impact on plant growth.

Sources of fish

There are two main routes available for a fishery manager when it comes to sourcing fish for the lake: either farmed fish or those sourced from a fish dealer, which have been netted from other fisheries or natural waters. Obviously, both of these routes have their pros and cons, and the following questions should be asked. It is always a good idea to talk to other clubs or fisheries for their experiences with, and recommendations for, potential fish suppliers. Shop around and contact various suppliers but be aware that very cheap fish can end up being very costly as they are often cheap because they are of lesser quality or may not be what they seem.

Note - some operations calling themselves fish farms do not actually farm the fish but catch them from the wild and supply through a holding farm. Make sure you know the exact source of the fish.

Once you have decided on a potential supplier ask them;

- for the farm's CEFAS registration number. This registration means that the site is a registered Aquaculture Production Business (APB) and has to conform to certain regulations.
- for details of their supplier permit – see below.
- for the current health check on the fish. A health check is **not always** required for stocking fish into certain waters, but is always a good idea. These types of health check require some fish from the source to be examined for a variety of parasites and pathogens. It is important you see and understand the health check report.
- for details of previous customers you may contact to seek views of the supplier and the fish

Some other questions are worth asking;

- What is the history of these particular fish? Are they farm grown or wild caught and do they come from a single source?
- What age are they?
- What is the maximum and minimum size range of the fish you will receive?
- Are the fish the right/pure species and not hybrids or colour variants?
- How will the fish be transported?

Some of the answers to these questions may raise other concerns that should be followed up before progressing. For example, if the fish are imported, where have they originated from? You should be able to view any “licence to import” that farmer has.

Some farmers have claimed that the fish they have for sale have been genetically modified or immunised against certain diseases. If this is the case then it is recommended that you contact the Fish Health Inspectorate (FHI) for further information.

Have the fish undergone any other additional health investigations?

Once you have decided to go ahead with the purchase then you need to confirm the full cost of the fish, any delivery charges and payment requirements. It is best to have all the details in writing with written confirmation of your order from the supplier, listing all the important details above.

Once you have settled on a supplier for your fish it is a good idea to stick with only obtaining fish from that one, trusted supplier.

Legal requirements

To receive new fish your fishery must be registered with the Fish Health Inspectorate and have a Site Permit from the Environment Agency. The Site Permit is issued under the Keeping and Introduction of Fish Regulations 2015 and will list the species and, sometimes amounts, you can stock and will

include any further conditions and steps you must take, for example, it may be mandatory for there to be a health check for the stocked fish.

The fish supplier must have a permit, there are two types of Supplier Permits:

- Tier 1 Permits are issued to an individual, a business or an organisation that is a legal entity that holds Authorisations under the Aquatic Animal Health Regulations 2009. Examples of Tier 1 suppliers would be commercial coarse or trout fish farm suppliers
- Tier 2 Permits are issued to an individual, a business or an organisation that is a legal entity that do not hold Authorisations under the Aquatic Animal Health Regulations 2009. This permit gives the permit holder freedom to operate as a fish supplier. Examples of Tier 2 suppliers would be angling clubs, fishery managers, or commercial cropping suppliers.

Receiving the fish

Always remember that you are the customer and you must be there to oversee the stocking. You must only accept what you are happy with and have ordered. The purchase of fish should be treated in the same way as any other significant purchase. The species you are buying must be listed on your Site Permit. Do not accept fish that you feel do not match what was ordered or described to you. If in doubt, turn them away!

Consider the following when receiving fish from a supplier:

- YOU are the customer.
- Always ensure the fish are delivered during daylight hours and in plenty of time to allow the unloading and visual examination of the fish to be carried out at your leisure.
- Always be present in person when the fish are introduced
- Ensure all paperwork is checked and covers all the fish to be introduced before unloading any fish. You can contact your local EA Fisheries Officer to confirm if consents, applied for by the supplier, have been approved.
- Encourage the EA to audit the introduction - you have nothing to hide and neither will a good supplier.
- Ensure all prices / costs are agreed before any fish are unloaded.
- Check the temperature difference between the transport tank and receiving water. Large temperature shocks may cause undue stress or even kill the fish.
- Check the fish are exactly what you ordered (e.g. species, size, weight, quality, number, health status / condition etc) and if in any doubt do not proceed with the introduction.
- Insist that the fish are weighed or counted off the vehicle in front of you and that you understand the method and units of weighing. Never accept a weight or number count that has not been carried out in front of you.
- Assign a scribe to record weights / numbers, agree these with the supplier and ensure they are recorded by both parties. Take photographs or video footage of the fish and the introductions for your records as you see fit.

Note - If you are buying small cropped silver fish then take a small (20L) plastic aquarium to look at a few random small nets of fish from the delivery tanks. Looking at the fish side on, swimming in a tank, makes it easier to spot imperfections and the wrong species compared to when there is a load of fish bouncing around in a handnet.

Make sure you are fully prepared for the delivery to ensure all this is done with the minimum amount of delay or stress to the fish.

Once all the fish are unloaded, agree the final invoice amount with the supplier.

It is a good idea to observe the fish closely over following days/weeks and allow them to settle into the new environment. Ideally, we would recommend having a short period after stocking where the fishery is closed, or has reduced activities (e.g. matches). For example, you could plan the stocking early on in the week rather than on a Friday prior to a full weekend of match bookings. Stocking can be stressful for fish, so giving time for them to acclimatise can help reduce stress and further complications.

Useful contacts

Environment Agency: 03708 506506 or 0800 807060

Natural Resources Wales: 0300 065 3000

Fish Health Inspectorate: 01305 206700

Institute of Fisheries Management: 0845 388 7012

Note – Non-native species are a significant risk to fisheries, particularly Invasive non-native species. It is very important that you ensure that you know exactly what species of fish you are purchasing. Some small bodied fish such as the highly invasive topmouth gudgeon or the sunbleak, are small and inconspicuous when mixed with a group of other fish. These species can have a devastating impact on a fishery.



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