

VOLUNTARY BAIT COLLECTORS' CODE

It is hoped that adopting this voluntary code of practice will help to protect the environment, reduce the risk of conflict with other maritime activities and ensure that there is enough bait for everyone now and in the future.

It is thus in the interests of all who collect bait to respect the code since lack of due consideration could result in the introduction of restrictions on bait collecting in a particular area or at particular times.

LEGAL POSITION

The legal right to collect bait for personal or recreational use is ancillary to the right to fish and is governed by a combination of common law, ownership of the foreshore, case law, acts of parliament and local bye laws.

However, it should be noted that there is no legal right to gather bait commercially for sale or reward although recreational anglers may gather bait to share with family or friends but not for sale or reward.

Commercial bait diggers therefore need to obtain permission from landowners, etc before starting work. They should also check to see if they need to obtain consent from environmental agencies such as English Nature. In general terms, anyone who damages or destroys a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) may be fined up to £20,000. In some areas there may be bye laws to prohibit activities that are deemed to be a danger or to threaten wildlife and English Nature will assess allegations of damage by bait collectors on a site-by-site basis.

It should also be noted that in some cases access to the foreshore can only be gained by crossing private land in which case prior permission should always be sought.

THE CODE

General

- Be aware of hazards and conditions such as soft mud, tide times, adverse weather conditions, etc
- Observe local bye laws and regulations that may be in force in an area or govern access to that area either permanently or seasonally. Ignorance of any restrictions is no excuse;.
- Only gather sufficient bait for your own need and leave plenty of mature worms, crabs or prawns to enable them to reproduce
- Do not retain green spawning ragworms, King Rag less than 100 mm long, crabs in berry (egg bearing) or prawns that are egg bearing;
- Do not collect crabs from traps that “belong” to other people;
- Lay crab traps at a low angle to reduce their visual impact;
- Do not retain crabs that are too small (the shell the size of a £2.00 coin)
- Be aware that edible crabs are subject to a legal minimum size (male - 140 mm; female - 160 mm).

When digging for worms

- Back fill all holes for safety reasons and to maintain the inter-tidal habitat. This will enable the foreshore to recover more quickly, the appearance of the area will be better, it will be safer for others who may walk over the same ground, will help protect marine life from birds and will help reduce pollution from heavy metals that may be trapped in the sediment;
- Replace all rocks and stones and help preserve the food chain by not digging in eel grass beds
- Do not dig around boat moorings, slipways, or sea walls since harbour bye laws often prohibit digging for reasons of health and safety. Digging in such areas reflects badly on the reputation of anglers and can be a source of complaint by other shore and sea users as well as property owners and harbour and local authorities;
- Take all litter home.