

## **Guidance on Environment Agency funding for fencing to prevent or reduce predation by otters on fish stocks.**

### **Background**

Otter numbers and distribution have increased in parts of England and Wales in recent years. Otters are a native predator and predation on fish by them is a natural consequence of their presence.

Our long term aim is that the numbers of fish and otters should be in balance. We recognise that in the short term we have a situation where otters becoming established within new locations are impacting on fish stocks and affecting the viability of certain fisheries. As a protected species we can only consider measures that protect fish stocks and therefore we will consider applications for funding otter fencing to reduce predation in stillwaters, providing that certain criteria are met - see below.

Not all sites will be suitable for fencing. Some may be prohibitively expensive, others may be in the floodplain where it may not be appropriate for fencing to be installed. (Land Drainage consent would be required in these cases).

We have developed a set of criteria below to guide us on how we handle any applications for otter fencing. This is to achieve cost effective use of rod licence income and wide benefit for anglers as a whole as well as fulfilling our biodiversity duties.

### **Policy**

We will consider applications for funding for otter fencing under the following circumstances:

- the fishery concerned is open membership or day ticket and not a syndicate
- we will fund up to a maximum of 50% of the fencing costs but typically less than this
- we expect the owner &/or operator to contribute to the costs to reflect the fact the assets belong to them and they should have the major interest in looking after them
- we are not able to contribute to funding for work that has already been undertaken
- Ongoing maintenance should be the responsibility of the fishery owner/operator and this should be made clear in any partnership agreement etc.

The information below provides details of the application process and how the project will be considered against other priorities.

## **Procedure for Applying**

### ***Pre-application***

We strongly recommended that operators of affected fisheries obtain a copy of the document 'Otters & Stillwater Fisheries'<sup>1</sup>. This provides information to help them to decide how to deal with the predation of fish by otters. Carrying out the actions identified in the document, will confirm whether or not otters are the cause of the fish losses and will direction to possible management options to help deal with the problem.

Before considering applications, we expect that discussions should have taken place with the local Environment Agency Fisheries or Fisheries, Recreation & Biodiversity Team Leader ( F or FRB Team leader), **and** the local Water for Wildlife Trust officer or equivalent officer based at the County Wildlife Trust (if they have one). This discussion should confirm whether otters are the cause of the losses at the fishery and that fencing is the only viable solution.

### ***Application***

If the only option is fencing then it will be necessary to provide the following information to the Fisheries or Fisheries, Recreation & Biodiversity Team Leader to enable a thorough assessment of the project to be undertaken:

- confirmation that otters are the cause of the fish losses, and fencing is the solution
- what the total cost of the project will be
- what the financial contribution from the owner/operator will be
- what the maintenance arrangements/agreements are
- confirmation that any necessary permissions are in place – land drainage consent, planning permission and land owner consent

### **Timetable for Applications and Financial Position of the Environment Agency**

Applications for funding need to be made to the FRB Team Leader in each area office. The FRB Team Leader will consult with colleagues locally as to the relative priority of the project.

The budget for otter fencing is held nationally. and the FRB Team leader will make a bid to this budget for works that are agreed locally. The budget available is limited each year and is allocated on a first come, first served basis. In the event of the all the budget being spent, consideration will be given to making more budget available if resources allow at that time. This will be at the discretion of the Head of Business.

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<sup>1</sup> Available from Environment Agency offices or from The Wildlife Trusts, The Kiln, Waterside, Mather Road, Newark,NG24 1WT