

The Danish Animal Ethics Council
Statement on angling

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The Danish Animal Ethics Council
The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries
Slotsholmsgade 12
1216 København K
detdyreetiskeraad@fvm.dk
www.detdyreetiskeraad.dk

Only the summary has been translated.
[The full statement is available \(in Danish\) here.](#)

Summary

Angling is a popular hobby. It is estimated that around one in five Danes have either tried angling to some extent, or angle regularly. Excitement, relaxation and nature experiences are the most frequent reasons mentioned for pursuing this hobby.

In recent years, focus on fish welfare has increased, both in terms of research and legislation. Research focuses particularly on the capacity of fish to register and experience pain and to have some form of consciousness. Currently, the research community is divided into two camps: some researchers believe that, although fish have bodily structures enabling them to respond to a pain stimulus, they do not have the brain structures required to experience the pain; while other researchers believe that fish do have sufficient brain structures to experience to some extent, that something is painful.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has followed the development in the view of fish with interest, including the research and regulation. The Council welcomes that also this category of animal species has become the subject of animal welfare considerations. At the same time, the Council is aware of the current scientific uncertainty about the capacity of fish to register and experience pain. However, the Council believes that, with this scientific uncertainty, fish should be given the benefit of the doubt. The Council therefore assumes in this statement that fish can be seen biologically in the same way as other vertebrates and that fish can at least to some extent both register and experience pain.

With this statement, the Council hopes to generally increase the awareness of relevant ethical considerations, including welfare considerations, regarding fish. The Council has decided to focus on angling in this statement but would like to stress that the decision to focus on this topic does not mean that the Council does not find it relevant to discuss other human uses of fish as well.

The overall opinion of the Council is that, in principle, angling should be regarded in the same way as other human uses of animals. Among other things, this means that if people are willing to accept eating animals, they also have to accept that, to a limited extent, animals may be exposed to discomfort, pain and stress, and that they will ultimately have to die. This also means that certain conditions must be imposed on angling. Here, the Council emphasizes conditions such as ensuring sustainable use of nature's resources, and that angling is practised in the most gentle way possible and with the intention to eat the fish caught.

The Council believes that this hobby also offers opportunities for nature experiences, understanding of nature and promotes respect for the origin of food, which should be protected. Overall, the Council believes that angling should still be permitted, but that in light of current knowledge about fish and norms for acceptable treatment of animals there is a need to evaluate the balance between considerations for anglers and considerations for the fish, and to reconsider the practices involved in angling.

In this statement, the Council has focused on discussions regarding the following areas of concern: fish welfare, Put & Take fishing, Catch & Release fishing, precision and shoal fishing and the use of live bait.

Fish welfare

Recommendations have been presented from several sources, both in relation to the killing of fish and to the reduction of stress and lesions when catching, handling and releasing fish. The Danish Animal Ethics Council believes there is a need for certain regulatory initiatives regarding angling. Moreover, existing knowledge and recommendations need to be disseminated to anglers in general. The Council supports these recommendations and believes that angling organisations have a major task in communicating these recommendations to anglers. The Council highlights in particular the recommendations regarding gentle fishing methods as well as release and active killing of fish to be taken home. With reference to the current recommendations, the Council believes that killing should be carried out by a stunning or fatal blow to the head, followed by bleeding out. The Council finds, that when children are fishing, the adults accompanying the children are responsible for ensuring that the fish are killed correctly, or, if children fish on their own, the parents are responsible for ensuring that their children can kill fish correctly.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council has discussed the possibility of introducing courses where participants must pass a test as a prerequisite for obtaining a fishing licence. The Council believes that the knowledge acquired through such a course could contribute significantly to ensuring that angling is carried out as gently as possible. One member of the Council finds it reasonable to require a mandatory course with a test, whereas the other members are hesitant about introducing this as a first step. Instead, they recommend starting with voluntary courses organised by the angling associations. However, these members are also concerned that campaigns and voluntary courses alone may not have sufficient effect. Therefore, they recommend that acquisition of national fishing licences and local fishing permits should be accompanied by more information on rules and recommendations concerning angling. Moreover, they recommend establishing some sort of interactive online barrier with relevant questions to which a person wanting to acquire a national fishing licence must respond before the fishing licence can be obtained. If the aim cannot be achieved this way, these members of the Council find that mandatory courses and tests organised by a public authority should be considered after all. Further to this, the Council believes that the requirement for a fishing licence should apply to everyone who wants to engage in angling, and that the age limits should be evaluated.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council calls for more focus on fish, both in welfare research and in relation to the development of gentle fishing gear, tackle and methods. To the extent that more gentle conditions, gear, tackle and methods can already be identified, the Council believes that anglers have an obligation to use these. Following this, the Council believes that there should be a general ban against using barbed hooks.

Put & Take

Put & Take fishing is practised in lakes in which fish are released for anglers to catch. The fish released into the lakes usually come from fish farms, i.e. industrial production of fish for human consumption. Thus, the fish are bred as farm animals, but instead of being slaughtered for consumption, they are released into a lake so that anglers can catch them. The lake is

separated from the surrounding waters, and the release of fish is not aimed at allowing the fish to establish themselves as wild populations in a larger water system.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds it ethically problematic to breed and release fish for the sole purpose of supporting a hobby, where the release is not part of nature conservation, and where the fish, in order to cater for this hobby, are subjected to additional strain when they are transported, released and caught, before, finally, being killed anyway. Furthermore, the Council believes that living in the new surroundings may give rise to certain welfare concerns. Even though Put & Take fishing may support other aspects that the Council finds to be positive, the ethical problem of breeding and releasing fish for the sole purpose of hobby fishing is so significant for the majority of the Council members that these members recommend, all things considered, that Put & Take fishing should no longer be permitted. One Council member weighs the considerations discussed differently and does not support this recommendation.

If Put & Take fishing continues, against the majority's recommendation, all Council members agree that welfare-relevant requirements should be established by law for the approval and operation of Put & Take lakes, and that efforts should be invested in improving certain conditions in the lakes in order to best accommodate the fish. Finally, the Council stresses the need to ensure adequate, easily accessible and clear information to anglers on how to handle and kill fish correctly.

Catch & Release

Catch & Release means that the fish is caught and released. Being caught is stressful and triggers a stress response in the fish. However, there are big differences in the stress caused to the individual fish that is caught and released, and thus for its survival. Thus, in Catch & Release fishing the catch does not result in the fish being killed and taken home. For the Danish Animal Ethics Council, the decisive thing from an ethical point of view is what purpose the catch then serves and whether the catch could have been avoided. The Council believes that there is a need to distinguish here between the release of fish that have been caught with the intention of being released, and fish that have been caught unintentionally.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council generally finds that Catch & Release fishing, where catch and re-catch are the main elements, is unacceptable, whether it be as part of fishing events, competitions or individual fishing trips. The Council believes that there must be a reasonable reason for fishing. Catching a fish and thereby causing it distress purely for pleasure, excitement and the experience itself, and with no intention or desire to take the fish home, but simply to release it again, is not a reasonable reason in the Council's opinion. The Council therefore recommends a ban against Catch & Release fishing where this alone is the key element in angling.

When Catch & Release fishing takes place in connection with fishing for other fish and as part of nature management, the Council finds that release of bycatches to a certain extent must be accepted as an unavoidable side effect. In this context, the Council defines bycatch as fish that have been caught unintentionally, for example protected fish or fish that are too small, even though the angler was fishing for other fish with the aim of taking them home. To the extent that the choice of fishing gear and tackle, methods, fishing waters etc. can reduce the

number of bycatches, the Council believes that anglers should target their fishing as far as possible towards the desired fish. Following this, the Council believes that there should be a ban on releasing a fish that could have been taken home. To the extent that there is a need to release fish, the Danish Animal Ethics Council supports the recommendations made by others to do this as gently as possible.

Precision and shoal fishing

Precision and shoal fishing are types of deep-sea fishing in which a large group of fish, typically cod or herring, is located using sonar from a boat. This type of fishing involves a high density of hooks, and when the lines are pulled at regular intervals with this relatively high density of both hooks and fish, there is a risk of foul-hooking the fish, i.e. the hooks become lodged in places other than the mouth of the fish; i.e. the body, fins or gills. If the fish is too small and must be released, foul-hooking may be undesirable, as the chances of survival are reduced if vital parts of the fish have been injured. The choice of fishing gear, tackle and fishing methods can have an impact on the occurrence of foul-hooking.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council sees a significant problem in relation to foul-hooked fish that escape or have to be released, as foul-hooking can result in damage to vital parts of the fish's body, and thereby reduce its chances of survival. The Council finds that foul-hooking of around half of the fish caught, as indicated by a study, is unacceptably high, and finds that the number of foul-hookings must be reduced significantly if precision fishing is to be allowed in the future.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council believes that the responsibility lies with the anglers themselves to develop more gentle gear, tackle and methods and to apply the current experience regarding reducing foul-hookings. According to the Council, considerations on the development of gear, tackle and methods should cover all relevant aspects, and anglers should be prepared to accept that a reduction of foul-hookings may result in less efficient precision and shoal fishing.

Live bait

Live animals are used as bait to get the fish to take the hook. Worms, maggots and small fish are typically used as bait. The animal welfare considerations in connection with the use of live fish as bait are complicated by the uncertainty about the extent to which fish can register and experience pain. The difficulties are even greater in relation to worms and maggots, but the fact that worms and maggots wriggle when put on the hook make it likely that they do register some sort of impact.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council does not find it acceptable to use live fish as bait. The fish is thereby exposed to unnecessary stress and presumably also pain. The Council finds it hard to see how this is compatible with the provision of the Animal Protection Act to protect animals as far as possible against pain and suffering, etc. The Council believes that this consideration of animal protection outweighs the consideration of the angler's desire to use the most effective

bait. Therefore, the Danish Animal Ethics Council recommends that the current ban on using live vertebrates as bait should also include fish. If anglers want to use fish as bait, the fish should therefore first be killed in accordance with the current recommendations.

The Danish Animal Ethics Council finds that there is currently not sufficient knowledge about invertebrates such as worms and maggots for the Council to be able to take a position from a welfare perspective on the use of these animals as live bait. However, the Council fundamentally believes that live animals must be shown respect, and therefore, the Council recommends that alternatives be used whenever possible.

