

# Code of Practice for Freshwater Recreational Angling in the Western Cape

Dean Impson, Scientific Services, CapeNature

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Happy art-lure angler with indigenous Clanwilliam yellowfish before release.

Happy bass angler with trophy alien smallmouth bass.



## **Background**

Recreational fishing is an extremely popular pastime in the Western Cape, both in inland waters and the sea. It is a major economic activity in the province, and the fishes caught provide a vital source of protein to its citizens, especially to subsistence fishers. CapeNature has an important role in recreational angling in inland public waters through its Nature Conservation Ordinance. This requires that an angling licence is needed to fish in such waters, and in the Ordinance there are additional regulations to guide how angling can be practiced including rules governing the capture and take of various species.

However, the enormous popularity that recreational fishing enjoys also contributes to the decline of fish stocks and can contribute to the destruction of vital fish habitat. Recreational fishing is often created and sustained by fish stockings, which already have had a serious ecological effect on our rivers and dams. These effects include stocking of alien fish species which can cause ecological damage e.g. smallmouth bass *Micropterus dolomieu* or economic damage to valuable fisheries (e.g. carp *Cyprinus carpio* causing damage to water quality), and that stocked fish may carry harmful diseases such as Encephelative Ulcerative Syndrome (EUS) and parasites.



**Sharptooth catfish that died  
because of EUS disease**

In the Western Cape, freshwater anglers are fortunate to fish in a particularly beautiful but sensitive environment. This province has South Africa's highest concentrations of threatened fish species, mostly small fish species such as redfin minnows *Pseudobarbus*, Cape Galaxias *Galaxias zebratus* and Cape kurper *Sandelia capensis*. These fish generally inhabit rivers of great clarity and purity. River and dams are often in areas that are very susceptible to fires, especially in the dry summers. It is thus essential that local and visiting anglers behave in an environmentally responsible manner when fishing in this province.

**The Olifants gorge is a near pristine  
landscape with clear unpolluted  
waters that are home to several  
species of threatened freshwater  
fishes**



How should an angler behave – what are his or her responsibilities when pursuing this popular pastime and sport? Excellent Codes of Practice for recreational anglers have been developed elsewhere in the world and this proposed Code of Practice has benefitted greatly from guidelines from the Specialist Anglers Conservation Group of Great Britain and Ireland (SACG 1997) and the National Code of Practice for recreational and sport fishing of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF 2001). There is currently not an environmental Code of Practice for recreational freshwater angling in South Africa (Morne Viljoen, Bernard Venter; pers. comm.).

The following principles are regarded as important in promoting environmentally responsible angling in the province.

#### *CARE OF THE ENVIRONMENT*

##### **Litter**

- Litter is anti-social and unsightly and spoils our experience of the outdoors. Never discard litter, including fishing line, dead fish or parts of dead fish and unwanted bait.

- Fishing line is especially hazardous to wildlife such as birds.
- Place litter in waste bins if available or take the litter home in a plastic bag or bucket.

### **Respecting wildlife and property next to rivers**

- Recognise the diversity and sensitivity of vegetation next to rivers and dams; these areas provide food and shelter and breeding and nursery areas for many fish species.
- Keep a safe distance from aquatic wildlife, especially spawning fish, and avoid undue noise and disturbing roosting and nesting birds.
- Do not light braai fires without permission, and avoid damage to fences and crops when accessing fishing spots.
- Use existing or open fishing areas to avoid damaging bankside vegetation through trampling.
- Use established roads and pathways to access fishing spots and avoid off-road driving which can be a major cause of erosion and vegetation loss.

### **Supporting fish conservation projects**

- Anglers can participate as volunteers in fish rehabilitation (e.g. Rondegat project) and monitoring programs (e.g. SAIAB baseline fish surveys on large dams e.g. Brandvlei)
- Anglers can participate in CapeNature fish re-introduction projects (e.g. Berg-Breede whitefish *Barbus andrewi* into Berg River Dam)
- Anglers can contribute photos of fish caught with locality information to the ISpot website, part of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) awareness initiative with the public. Anglers can greatly increase our knowledge of fish distribution by getting involved with ISpot.

### **Priority rivers for conservation**

- The Western Cape has a high concentration of rivers that have been declared National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas (FEPA's). These rivers are priorities for conservation and often contain threatened fish species.
- Rivers in national parks and nature reserves are also priorities for conservation.
- Special care must be taken of such rivers by visiting anglers.
- Anglers can visit the SANBI website (>information sources> BGIS) to see location of FEPA's.

### **Boat fishing**

- Boating gives anglers greater access to fishing waters but unskilled and thoughtless use of boats can lead to environmental damage. Watch boat speed, especially close to river and dam banks.
- Taking care when boating includes showing care when anchoring, avoiding disturbance to wildlife by excessive noise or harassment and ensuring that the hull of your boat is clean before entering a dam or river.
- Movement of boats with dirty hulls between waterways can be a major source of pest plants and animals species as well as diseases. Clean boats properly after use.
- Ensure that the boat and skipper meets legal specifications when boating on public waters.

### **Reporting Environmental Damage and fish kills**

- Reporting environmental damage means reporting any fuel and oil spills, fish kills, fish poaching, netting in public waters, bulldozing of rivers, and sightings of suspected aquatic pest organisms such as sharptooth catfish *Clarias gariepinus* and category one aquatic weeds (e.g. water lettuce *Salvinia*)
- Report these incidents to the Department of Water Affairs and CapeNature and send photos of potential problem species to SANBI's ISpot for identification.

## **GENERAL BEHAVIOUR**

### **Conduct at the waterside**

- Dams, lakes, rivers and streams are used for a variety of purposes. By recognising the rights of others to use the waters for their recreation and livelihood, recreational fishers help ensure that all are equally able to enjoy their activities.

- Park your vehicle considerately and safely.
- Minimise bankside noise and maintain an acceptable distance from other anglers as appropriate.
- Do not cast your line across that of another angler.
- Respecting the rights of others means gaining permission before entering land and clearly indicating where you are going, obtaining permission before lighting fires and leaving all gates as they were found.
- Be aware of any rule related to a fishery and observe them.

### **Angling licences**

- Government departments and angling organisations develop regulations or controls to manage recreational fisheries for now and the future.
- Anglers over 6 years of age fishing public waters (rivers and public dams) must be in possession of a freshwater angling licence from CapeNature.
- The Ordinance requires that an angler can use a maximum of two rods / lines, each equipped with a maximum of two hooks.
- Anglers must abide by bag, size and possession limits for the different species and the waters they are fishing. Indigenous fishes must be released if caught in rivers and public dams.
- It is illegal to catch freshwater fish in public waters by netting, spearing and using poisons. It is also illegal to deliberately attempt to foul hook fish.

### **General safety**

- Always use an adequate breaking strain when using heavy weights.
- Maintain a safe distance from other anglers when casting.
- Be aware of the dangers of wading, especially in fast flowing rivers and in deep rivers and dams. Use a wading staff to judge the depth.
- Always wear a life jacket when fishing from a boat.
- Be aware of the dangers posed by dangerous snakes such as cobras and puffadders, as well as dangerous livestock.
- A number of our rivers and dams are polluted - don't swim in them, use waders, clean yourself after direct contact and don't drink water from them.

## *FISHING TACKLE AND BAITS*

### **Tackle**

- While fishing, rods must be under the immediate control of the angler.
- Use only tackle that is appropriate for the size and type of fish. This should allow fish to be landed without excessive fighting time and associated stress.
- Keep tackle in good working order.

### **General**

- Use barbless hooks and single hooks, in preference to treble hooks (unless art-lure fishing).
- Do not use excessive amounts of groundbait - adhere to club guidelines in this respect.
- Observe any fishery rules on bait restrictions and types of fishing allowed (e.g. flyfishing only).

## *HANDLING OF FISHES*

### **Recommended equipment**

- Use a knotless landing net big enough for the species targeted.
- Carry a forceps to remove hooks from the fishes mouth.
- Carry a quality unhooking mat for handling large fish.
- Avoid using keepnets, either immediately kill your catch and store in a coolbox or release the fish. If using a keepnet, use modern "fish friendly" large keepnets and submerge the maximum amount of keepnet which is correctly pegged out to prevent collapse.

### **Handling**

- Use the unhooking mat on a flat surface and make sure it is wetted before use.

- Minimise the time a fish is out of the water.
- Only handle fish with wet hands.
- When photographing fishes, have the camera ready for use, keep the fish as close to the ground as possible, either over the water or unhooking mat and minimise the time taken to photograph it.
- Deep-hooked fish should survive if the hook cannot be removed. Here cut the line as close to the hook as possible.
- When releasing fishes, support them in open water until they are ready to swim off.
- Respect your catch - never drop or throw fish back into the water.

### *FISH MOVEMENTS AND DISEASE*

- Unauthorised movements of live fish caught in inland waters are illegal.
- Never remove fish or introduce fish into any inland water without a permit from Cape Nature and approval from the owner of the water body.
- The stocking of fishes can cause tremendous ecological harm (e.g. introduction of smallmouth bass into Cape rivers) and upset the ecological balance of an existing fishery (e.g. the illegal introduction of catfish into the Voelvlei Dam).
- The movement of fishes between waters can introduce diseases such as the highly destructive EUS as well as parasites such as anchor worm.
- To avoid the accidental transfer of fish diseases and parasites, thoroughly dry or disinfect all landing and keepnets and handling mats between angling sessions

### **References**

DAFF 2001. National Code of Practice for recreational and sport fishing 2001. Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries website.

SACG. 1997. Code of Conduct for specialist coarse anglers. Specialist Anglers Conservation Group. AE Simmons Limited (01245 352480)