



River Deben Association

Introduction

The River Deben Association was recently contacted because of concerns about fishing at Wilford Bridge. After some research, the below summarizes the association's best understanding of the current regulations for recreational fishing in the Deben.

The regulations are quite complex and are different for **freshwater** fishing, which is regulated by the Environment Agency and **saltwater** fishing, which is regulated by Eastern Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA).

The demarcation between **freshwater** and **saltwater** on the Deben is defined as Wilford Bridge and so the question that has been raised is interesting as there are different rules depending on whether fishing is done upstream from the bridge or downstream.

Freshwater Fishing

Rod Licence: If you are **over 13** you must have a rod licence in order to fish above Wilford Bridge. A licence is required whether you are fishing from the bank, wading or from a boat. The rod licence allows fishing with 2 rods, that must be attended. The rod licence is available from the Environment Agency:

<https://get-fishing-licence.service.gov.uk/buy/licence-for#>

Consent of the landowner: Most of the freshwater Deben runs through private land. The rod licence alone does not give you permission to fish you must also have the consent of the landowner. On the Deben, it is recommended that all fishing in the freshwater section is catch and release.

Fishing on the freshwater river is **prohibited between
15th March - 15th June**



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Saltwater fishing

The Deben provides ample opportunities for the saltwater fisherman. There are legal **minimum sizes** and also some guidance on size where there is not a defined size:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-conservation-reference-sizes-mcrs>

Below are the current rules (last updated Summer 2016) for some of the species found in the saltwater stretch of the Deben

Sea Bass



Sea Bass are one of the most common species of fish in the Deben. *During February and March*, they are catch and release only. The rest of the year it is lawful to catch on a rod and line but must be released back to the river if they are smaller than 42 cm from the front of the head to tip of tail. No more than 3 may be taken per rod per day.



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Eels



Eel Numbers have declined alarmingly in the last decade although there are some indications that they are returning to the Deben. Currently, they are strictly catch and release only.

Thornback Ray



Thornbacks are a relative newcomer to the Deben but are now caught quite often. There are currently no UK-wide laws regarding their catch or size but anglers are encouraged to catch and release. If they are to be kept, best practice is to only take those above **minimum size** of 41 cm from wing tip to wing tip.



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Grey Mullet



Grey Mullet are common in the Deben but are a particular challenge for the angler as they have very sensitive mouths and are reluctant to take bait. Currently there are no restrictions in place for recreational fishing.

Flounder



Flounder used to be common in the Deben but numbers have declined in recent years. They are catch and release unless they are over **minimum size** of 27cm.



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In the winter

- **Cod** can be fished in the Deben but can only be kept if **minimum size** over 35cm
- **Whiting** are also found in the winter months but can only be kept if **minimum size** over 27 cm
- **Herring**, once abundant in the Deben, have been caught again recently, from time to time. Their **minimum size** is 20 cm

Fish stocks in the UK are closely monitored and catch recommendations are in place to help conserve fish populations.

It is hoped that this guidance will help to conserve the stocks we have in the River Deben.

Summer 2026

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