

**Ivel action plan article**  
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There is little doubt that fishing on the Ivel has deteriorated significantly in recent years. The decline reached a point this year when we felt it necessary to cancel the Ivel Open Championship. There has been much discussion of this problem at Ivel Protection Association delegate meetings over the last few years with invited experts from the EA in attendance to try to address the issues facing our river. Lots of opinions have been expressed on both sides but no action has resulted.

This is a request to all delegate clubs to consider the state of the River Ivel and come forward with suggestions for an action plan. Please discuss this at club level, it will appear on the IPA website. If possible add a link to this article on your website such that our combined general membership get to see it and have an opportunity to comment. The aim is to collate suggestions beginning at the June IPA meeting and look for a consensus to take forward.

There has been a long and gradual decline in the level of catches on many sections of the river, although this season does seem to have witnessed an especially bad deterioration. As to the causes, naturally there are many opinions....but little in the way of fact. Water quality seems to be good and food supplies adequate. Barbel caught in recent years have been amongst the fastest growing in the country and the roach, dace, bream and chub appear healthy and well fed. And long lived, the same bream shoals and the same mature carp have inhabited various sections of the river for a very long time. However, not all species found in the river actually spawn successfully. In particular bream, tench and carp are never caught as immature fish, indicating they must have been introduced as adults. Barbel recruitment in our river is said by the EA to be extremely poor. All these species have been stocked into the river at regular intervals by various means, otherwise they would not be there. In recent years regular additions of roach, dace, chub and especially barbel have boosted angling success and made the Ivel as popular as it is.

Unfortunately, changes in EA policy now prevent most re-stocking. No longer are we allowed to crop still waters and introduce these fish into the river, and with very good reason. The EA will now only permit the addition of farm bred fish from secure certified sites. This combined with a planned reduction in EA stockings will mean the river is very soon left to its own devices. Even the frequent barbel introductions over the last twenty five years are under threat. Combined with the massive increase in predation from crayfish (eggs and fry), cormorants (small and medium size fish) and otters (many of the prime specimens) a rapid decline in fish stocks is inevitable. Without action some species will soon cease to exist in the River Ivel.

Obviously the ideal scenario is that the river is a natural, self supporting environment. Clearly this hasn't been the case for decades, but it is probably what we should be striving for even though none of us operate our lakes on this basis. The Ivel Project is working towards returning the river to its natural state but will take many, many years to reach fruition. In the meantime we could be doing something to help maintain the fishing amenity of the Ivel. The EA too are charged with this responsibility. We as clubs take action to boost the attraction of virtually all our still waters, we could be doing something for the river. Please help with suggestions.

For information, these are some of the key points raised by the EA at the January meeting:-

- Stocking isn't sustainable – as shown by previous attempts
- Stocking is a high risk activity and should be considered as the last resort
- Skimmers do a brilliant disappearing act in lakes let alone rivers – I suspect they will never be seen again
- The IPA should be looking at investing in improvements to the waterbody as a whole so that the fishery can support itself

These are some of the responses from the IPA:-

**Re-stocking isn't sustainable.....**The Ivel has always been stocked – the EA have done it for many years with chub, dace and barbel. The IPA have stocked roach, rudd and some perch. Member clubs have introduced roach and bream. And other fish may well have entered from lakes during floods. These additions have kept the river worthy of angling effort for many years, even in the face of increasing predation.

**Stocking is high risk and a last resort** – this hasn't stopped the EA from introducing fish when it suits them. It is difficult to understand this attitude, it seems two faced in the extreme. And by the way, we are at a last resort position.

**Skimmers will disappear.....**they certainly haven't in the past when they have been introduced.

**The IPA should invest in improving the water body....**the EA are spending hundreds of thousands on the Ivel project, to date mostly in studies. Our couple of thousand pounds wouldn't keep their staff in coffee and biscuits.

Lets remind ourselves of what is happening – the EA are charged with improving the Ivel under the Water Framework Directive. Their approach so far is to remove barriers and embankments. No investment in STW's, little action with farmers to reduce nitrates and phosphates, no action on pollution, no action on alien species. And the other hidden agenda behind all of this – to reduce costs. To this end the EA have stopped virtually all regular fish surveys. They have

now removed the water quality monitoring station at Tempsford. Weed cutting is decreasing. And they are likely to stop stocking fish – which is now limited to just barbel anyway.

However, there is a glimmer of good news. The EA have suddenly found some cash available and proposed walkover surveys of the lvel by the Wild Trout Trust. This will require some effort from delegate clubs who are asked to provide maps and details of their sections of the lvel and accompany experts on the walk overs. We have questioned if the WTT are the best people to help our river and await news back.

Please discuss this paper in detail and come back to the IPA meetings throughout this year with your ideas, starting in June. There may be club members out there willing to assist with habit improvement as suggested by the EA – or to help the IPA committee, we need a fisheries officer and now we also have vacancies for match secretary's. There might be a desire for the IPA to fund some re-stocking. Or there might be a consensus to do nothing and let the river take its own course?