

Swiss government to ban catch-and-release fishing

***Bundesrat* to require all anglers to take course on humane fish handling methods**

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Courtesy of EFTTA (European Fishing Tackle Trade Association Limited)

It was revealed this week that catch-and-release fishing will be banned in Switzerland, starting next year.

And anglers in the country will have to demonstrate their expertise by taking a course on humane methods of catching fish, under new legislation outlined by the *Bundesrat* (the Swiss Federal Parliament).

The new legislation states that fish caught should be killed immediately following their capture, with a sharp blow to the head from a blunt instrument. Under the new regulations, the use of live bait and barbed hooks is also prohibited, except in certain situations.

The laws come into effect in 2009, but while the Swiss government does not mention catch-and-release specifically, it states "it is not permitted to go fishing with the 'intention' to release the fish."

EFTTA lobbyist Jan Kappel has been in contact with Martin Peter, Vice President of the Swiss Angling Federation, to see whether a joint approach to the Swiss government could persuade them to amend the legislation — which forms part of a much wider animal welfare programme.

The law on the protection of animals was passed by the Swiss parliament in 2005 and officials have spent three years refining the details, taking into account comments of interested parties.

Said Jan: "Catch-and-release is one of the most difficult issues we have to deal with, and one of the most important, in my opinion.

"The new Swiss law doesn't make use of the term 'catch-and-release', which is the same as in Germany — but I don't see how governments can enforce legislation which makes 'intent' illegal.

"And demanding that people kill the fish they catch gives no thought to the conservation benefits from releasing them."

Angling Codes of Conduct with regard to proper handling and release can be found for practically any fish species caught by anglers in Switzerland and the rest of the world. The new Swiss law makes it obligatory for anglers to take lessons before being granted a fishing license. So there is absolutely no need for an outright ban on the release of fish in Switzerland."

It's believed the legislation could affect as many as 275,000 anglers in Switzerland, who generate around €30 million in annual tackle sales.

EFTTA acting president, Pierangelo Zanetta, said: "EFTTA does not believe that forcing anglers to kill their catches is either good for nature or for recreational sport fishing — which makes a significant financial contribution to the EU economy.

"Making the killing of fish obligatory will simply reduce fish population and, at the same time, run the risk of having a negative impact on sport fishing.

"Anglers and the sport of angling invest time and money to improve water quality and create larger and healthier fish populations. We believe is it far better for the fish if the fisherman decides, according to the situation, whether to keep and eat the fish or to release it."