

Pike in Ireland

The pike is the largest of our freshwater predatory fish and they are found in most of our watercourses. Pike are opportunistic feeders, preying on smaller fish and Ireland provides the perfect habitat with numerous lakes and rivers containing good stocks of fodder fish. These factors ensure that Irish pike are fast growing, particularly in our rich limestone waters where they have been recorded growing up to 40lbs (18kg) in eight years. This growth rate is limited only by the availability of fodder fish. In Ireland the maximum lifespan of a pike is probably some 14 or 15 years. A 6-year-old female pike in Ireland can weigh as much as 20lb (9kg).

Because of its size and fighting qualities, the pike has become one of our most sought after sport fish and pike angling is increasing in popularity every year. With more people fishing for pike, it is important that we all take measures to ensure that our stocks of pike remain strong. Due to their size and reputation as a predator, pike have traditionally been regarded as a tough fish, able to endure rough handling. In fact the opposite is true, as pike are quite vulnerable and poor handling, particularly of the larger specimens can often lead to death. The most common causes of pike mortality while angling occur due to:

- **Snap offs** – Leaving treble hooks/lures in a pike due to line breakage.
- **Deep hooking** – Pike hooked deep in the gullet due to inadequate bite detection or delayed strike.
- **Over playing** – Exhausting the fish through inability to land it quickly.
- **Gassing up** – Bringing a pike to the surface too quickly from deep water.
- **Poor handling** – Rough treatment of fish once landed and/or excessive time out of water.

This brochure will provide the necessary information and guidance to anglers to ensure that pike are fished for with care, handled correctly and that best practices are employed to aid the recovery of the fish prior to its release back to the water. By preparing properly and by following the recommendations and guidelines set out in this brochure, we can ensure that pike remain plentiful and that pike angling will be available for all to enjoy into the future.

Preparation & Tackle

The first step an angler can take to help conserve our pike stocks involves proper & thorough preparation prior to angling. Pike angling can be quite technical, involving various different methods (deadbait, wobbling, fly-fishing), each of which requires different tackle/rigs etc. There are many books & magazine articles that describe in detail the different methods and approaches to pike angling and they should be required reading for anybody taking up the sport. Joining an angling club and/or fishing with an experienced angler is also recommended. Through gaining knowledge and understanding of pike, the angler will learn to respect them and to choose the appropriate tackle and methods to ensure their survival.

While choice of tackle depends on the angling method, venue etc., a general rule of thumb is that tackle should be sturdy enough to enable the pike to be landed quickly whilst also minimising the risk of breakages while playing the fish. Rods should be strong enough and sufficiently long to play and land the fish quickly. A 12 foot rod with a 2.5 - 3.5lb test curve will suffice for most deadbaiting situations. A wire trace of at least 30 lbs. (13.60 kg.) test should be coupled with a reel line of at least 15 lbs. (6.8 kg.) monofilament test or 30 lbs. (13.6 kg.) braid. When fishing in weedy swims, braid is preferable as it can cut through the weed where mono would tangle & snap.

For terminal tackle, size 6 to 8 strong wired treble hooks are advised for deadbait rigs while size 2 to 6 strong wired treble hooks are suitable for wobbling or trolling deadbait rigs. For fly fishing, size 1 to 6/0 can be used. To make unhooking easier, it is preferable to pinch some of the barbs on the hooks or to use barbless altogether. Items such as swivels, links & split rings should be strong enough (+30lbs/13.6kg) to handle the fight of a large pike.

Other tackle, including electronic bite alarms and drop off bite indicators combined on rod stands or a rod pod are excellent for early detection of a ‘take’. For landing and unhooking fish there is a minimum requirement of a good knotless mesh landing net, an unhooking mat, long nosed forceps/pliers, wire cutters and pike sack.

It is essential to check your fishing tackle regularly throughout the season. Line (particularly mono) will weaken with time and should be replaced regularly. Rod rings and reel fittings should be checked for wear and tear that could lead to line

fraying. Spare batteries should be purchased for bite alarms. In short, the angler should be prepared and organised both prior to and during each angling session.

Basic tackle requirements
Strong rods coupled with a minimum of 15lbs monofilament.
Wire traces – at least 20cm of 30lb wire.
Suitable bite indication.
Knotless mesh landing nets with a minimum arm width of 90cm.
Unhooking mat, weigh sling & pike sack.
Forceps, pliers & wire cutters.



Large net, unhooking mat, forceps, pliers and wire cutters are all essential tools for handling/release of pike.

Angling

There are a number of basic precautions the angler can take during an angling session, which will help minimise damage/stress to pike. Firstly, a proper form of bite indication should be used which enables the angler to detect bites early. While deadbaiting, floats & bite indicators are an aid, but it is imperative that the angler pays attention to them and does not wander too far from the rods. Secondly, a suitable landing area should be chosen and landing & unhooking equipment should be placed close by. Always avoid having to run to find e.g. forceps after the fish has been landed. Possible snags should be identified and avoided once a fish is hooked. Tackle & rigs should be checked during fishing to make sure there is no weakness (e.g. kinked trace or frayed line). Finally, when deadbaiting, it is extremely important to strike the fish early to avoid deep hooking.

Playing & Landing

Pike are built for short sharp bursts of energy and so from the moment they are hooked they expend their energy quite rapidly. As pike are not used to prolonged periods of exertion, playing puts them through great strain and so every effort should be made to land the fish quickly. This is particularly relevant during the summer months when oxygen levels in the water are low. One exception is when a pike is hooked from a deep lie (25ft/7.5m). In this case the fish should be brought slowly up to the surface to allow it to adjust to the change in water pressure and thus avoid gassing. A strong rod coupled with strong line will help to bring the fish in quickly. A longer rod will give better control when seeking to avoid snags such as weed. Once tired, the pike may be unhooked in the water (lure or fly fishing), or else it should be drawn in over a large landing net. Choose a knotless mesh landing net that is resistant to tangling with treble hooks.



With deeply hooked pike, an artery forceps should be used.

Unhooking & Release

Once landed, it is important for the angler to work quickly and efficiently to return the pike to the water as soon as possible. Hands should be wetted prior to touching the fish to avoid damage to its protective slime coating. The fish should then be laid flat, preferably on a protective mat and the hooks removed with a suitable tool such as long handled artery forceps or long nosed pliers. Sitting astride the fish will help to stop it thrashing around. To open the pike's mouth, a finger can be inserted in the gill opening on the underside of the pike's chin forcing the jaws apart. Anglers may find it useful to wear protective gloves. Sometimes it can be easier to release the hooks by working very carefully through the