

## Recreational angling as a vector of freshwater invasions in Central Italy: perceptions and prevalence of illegal fish restocking



Italian freshwater ecosystems were strongly affected by biological invasions during the last few decades. Recreational angling contributed to this, through the widespread use of invasive alien species for fish restocking. To date, no research is available about the psychological and structural determinants of deliberate fish restocking in Italy. This work aims to fill this research gap, through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of recreational anglers (n = 276) in the Arno river basin (Central Italy). A predictive model for fish restocking, based on a quasi-binomial logistic regression, was fit and multi-model inference was drawn, to highlight the most significant predictors. Respondents, who expected that most anglers practiced restocking and who believed restocking could create closer fishing spots, were more prone to illegally restock fish. Our findings indicate that expectations about illegal fish restocking might exist among specialized segments of anglers. Targeted communication campaigns must be enforced as soon as possible to change them. Furthermore, fish restocking is supposed to reduce the travel costs for angling: future research about

this is needed to model invasion hotspots.

**Auteurs du document :** Jacopo Cerri, Alessandro Ciappelli, Andrea Lenuzza, Marco Zaccaroni, Annamaria Nocita

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