

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR METAL DETECTING



MEMBER OF: SPORTS AND RECREATION ALLIANCE

Caroline Dinenage MP
Minister of State DCMS
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ
2021

7th January

Dear Ms Dinenage,

I am writing to you on behalf of the National Council for Metal Detecting (NCMD) to seek further advice in the light of the latest covid 19 lockdown restrictions, and in particular whether metal detecting can be officially recognised as a form of exercise which can be legitimately undertaken at this difficult time.

The NCMD fully appreciates the seriousness of the current situation and is fully supportive of the latest general lockdown measures that have been introduced. We were pleased that during the last lockdown, the Government agreed to permit individual outdoor recreation to continue so that those who were initially restricted in the first lockdown could once again participate in individual, socially distanced outdoor recreational activities such as metal detecting.

Currently, the Government's regulations stipulate that under the restrictions on 'leisure and recreation' no metal detecting is allowed outside the boundaries of one's own garden. The NCMD has over 20,000 members across the UK and there is understandably considerable frustration that there is currently a blanket ban on metal detecting outwith one's own garden ground whilst a leisure activity such as angling has recently been officially recognised by the Government as a permitted form of exercise, viz:

"fishing is allowed as exercise so long as participants adhere to the rules on staying local, gathering limits, social distancing and limiting the time spent outdoors"

This has also been confirmed by DEFRA:

"Cabinet Office have now officially confirmed that angling / fishing (incl. sea fishing off private boats, water sports) can be considered exercise and are hence permitted."

(Source: The Angling Trust 7th January 2021)

Whilst the NCMD has no issues with angling being classified as an approved form of exercise, we would submit that by its nature, it is a sedentary pursuit compared with metal detecting which involves almost continuous walking for a period of several hours on fields or beaches.

I would therefore be grateful if you could consider metal detecting in exact same fashion to angling, as my Executive Officers colleagues and I are unanimous in our view that metal detecting contributes not only to physical health but also, importantly, to mental wellbeing. We have a number of examples of the latter within our current membership e.g., ex military personnel who suffer from PTSD and who find that metal detecting is highly beneficial in coping with their condition.

The NCMD sees metal detecting as part of the solution to physical and mental wellbeing during the covid crisis, not contributing to it. The NCMD also strongly believes that 'exercise' should not simply be limited to the previous definition of 'exercise' involving high impact, aerobic activities such as walking, running and cycling, a definition which frustrated many people during the first lockdown as they felt that they were being left without the means to maintain an active lifestyle.

In order for metal detecting to be permitted at this time, the Government would need to relax its current ban on metal detecting on private land. In your letter to me of 23rd December 2020 (attached) you stated:

I understand that the new regulations do permit metal detecting on private land, although you must follow the limits on gathering with other people for the tier they are in. It is for individuals to ensure that their activities are allowed under the legislation, and if they are in any doubt they should take legal advice.

Metal detecting is almost without exception, an activity that takes place on private land and the NCMD would therefore wish to see the current blanket restriction lifted as a matter of priority.

It goes without saying that if metal detecting was to be confirmed as permitted exercise, it is accepted that it would be subject to the same strict regulations that applied previously regarding numbers, social distancing and hygiene. We are not looking for permission to be granted for large numbers of detectorists to congregate – quite the opposite.

Metal detecting is a largely solitary pursuit and by its nature, it automatically provides social distancing as everyone detects solo, keeping well away from anyone else. It is carried out on farm fields, well away from the public and there is no risk interaction with anyone outwith the detecting group.

Finally, you will no doubt be aware that metal detecting is currently permitted within the three devolved administrations of the UK, subject of course to their own government regulations/restrictions. If you could agree to permit a continuation of metal detecting on private land as in 2020, this would therefore bring the Westminster Government's position on metal detecting into line with the other three nations.

I hope that you will consider this request sympathetically and I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Alastair Hackett, President, National Council for Metal Detecting (NCMD)