



Bass FMP Authorisations review: Inshore fishing industry workshop summary

Kent & Essex



Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority

Workshops held
12 March 2026 -
Colchester, Essex
26 March 2026 -
Whitstable, Kent

Workshop aims

KEIFCA led two workshops in Spring 2026 to support constructive engagement of local commercial fishing fleet on the future management of bass. The specific aims were to:

- Increase understanding among commercial fishers of the Bass FMP process, including the outcomes of the Bass Authorisation Review Report

Bass Authorisation Review- an overview

A new report has been published on an MMO led review of the system used to authorise UK commercial fishing vessels to land bass.

- Guided by goal 2 of the Bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).
- The review was supported by engagement with nearly 300 stakeholders across 20 events around the English coast.
- Discussion topics: track records, vessel transfers, gear and discards.

Recommendations

Here are a few examples from the 24 recommendations in the report:

- Opportunities**
Create opportunities for new entrants and young fishers to join the industry.
- Fishing methods**
Allow fishers to switch from fixed gill nets to hook and line fishing.
- Discards**
Improve the recording and administration process.
- Gear trials**
Carefully consider the implications of gear trials on the ecosystem.
- Vessel size**
Make changes to the vessel size and power restrictions for fishing.

Important information and next steps

Recommendations in the report are proposals and will now enter a formal decision-making process. They do not represent the official position of Defra or MMO at this stage.

This process, led by Defra and the Bass Management Group, may include further consultation, evidence gathering, and assessment of wider impacts before any decisions are made.

For more information email regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemangement.org.uk

Watch on YouTube

202512 ...ambitious for our seas and coasts

- **Collate industry views** on the report's recommendations, to feed back to DEFRA and the Bass Management Group

- **Build on Recommendation 5** from bass authorisation review report, by working with members of the local fishing fleet to **scope out, and assess support for, a possible inshore drift netting trial**

[Bass Authorisation Review Report](#)

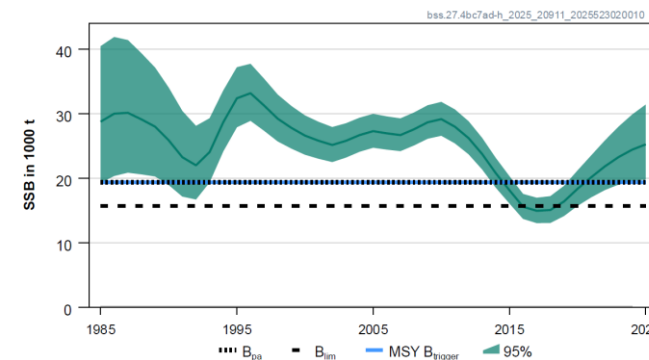
Background

At the outset of the workshop, KEIFCA provided attendees with an overview of the way bass is currently being managed in the UK.

It was explained that decisions on bass management are made and negotiated at national and international level, led by Defra and the Minister, rather than regionally by IFCAs.

ICES provides the main scientific advice on bass stocks to inform UK and EU decision making for fisheries management.

However...



Recent ICES advice marks a shift from the position taken over the last decade. Advice for 2025 indicates a recovery in the spawning stock biomass and an increase in removals from 2,620 tonnes to 5,180 tonnes for 2026. This shows the stock is in recovery, which has been reflected by increased catch limits negotiated between UK and EU for 2026.

Bass FMP and BMG

The Bass Management Group (BMG) was established as a core element of the Bass FMP, providing multi-stakeholder oversight of FMP workstreams (including task and finish groups) and a new forum for fishers to have their views on bass management heard at national level.

Running the workshops

In total 24 commercial fishers or industry representatives attended the workshops, with 13 attending the Essex event and 11 attending the Kent event.

Both workshops followed the same agenda and used an interactive voting system (SurveyMonkey) to capture attendee views. Results from each set of questions were discussed collectively, with additional feedback recorded during group discussion.

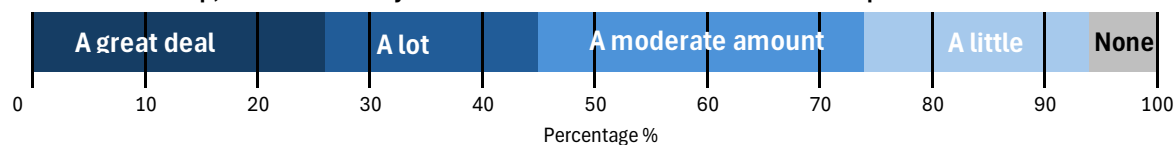
Whilst most of the attendees were netters that had either dual bass authorisation (fixed gillnet and hook & line) or a fixed gill net authorisation only, fishers that used other gear types (such as trawlers) were present and contributed to the meeting.

Feedback showed that most attendees were already familiar with the Bass FMP process and were aware of the recommendations from the Bass Authorisation Review Report to some extent.

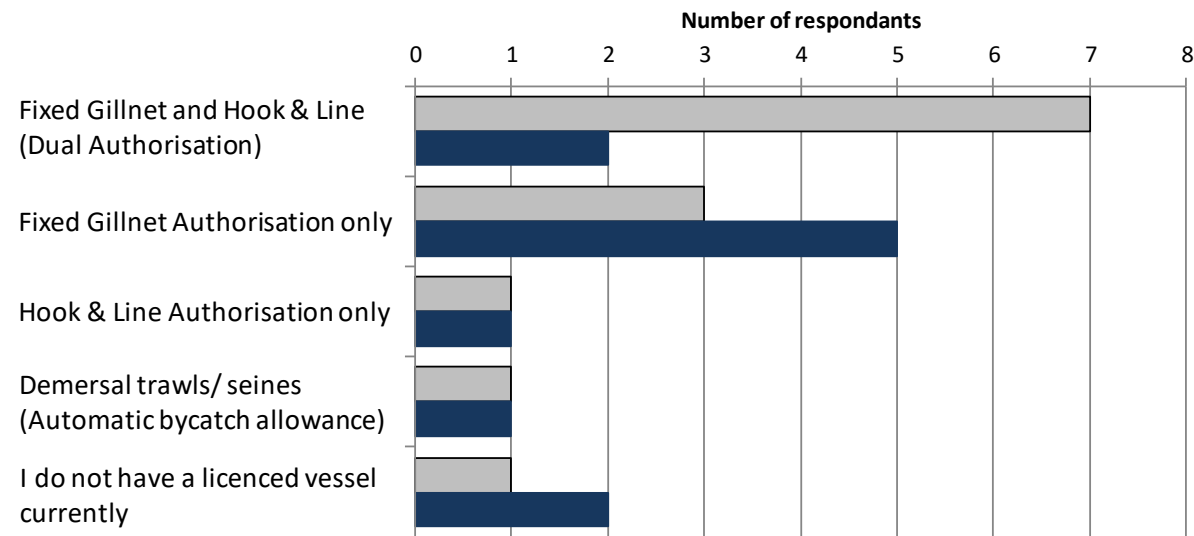
Have you already engaged with the Bass FMP process?



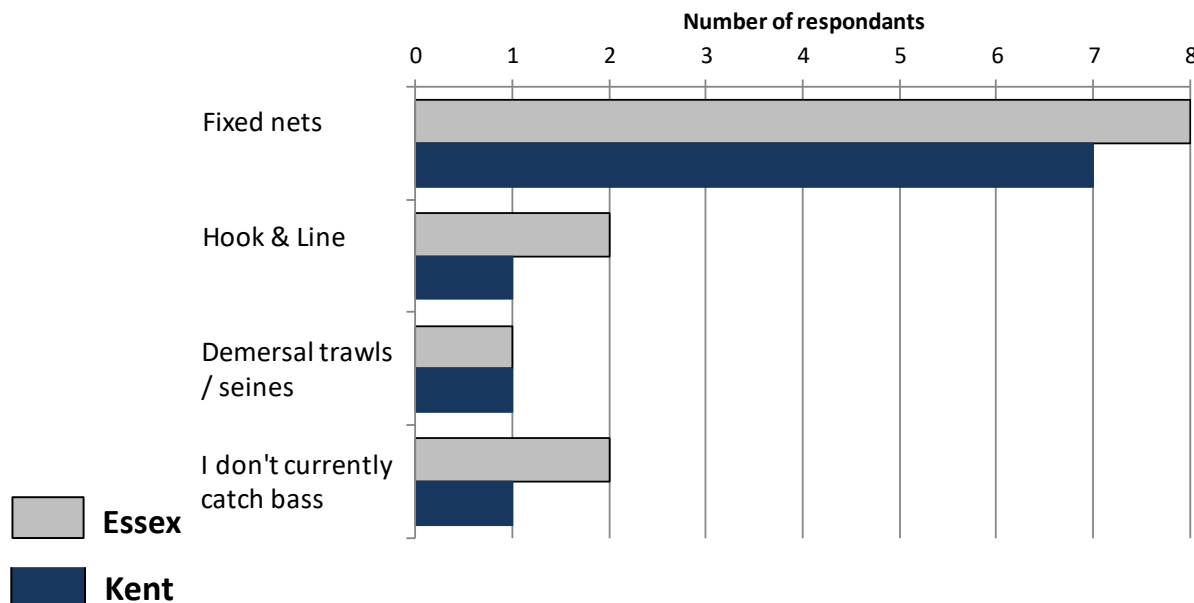
Before this workshop, how much were you aware of the Bass Authorisation Review report and its recommendations?



What type of bass authorisation does your vessel currently hold?



What authorised gear type do you mainly use to catch bass?



Common ‘bass’ issues raised by local industry

At the outset of the workshops, participants were asked to confirm key issues relating to the local bass fishery. The aim was to consolidate industry concerns for clear communication in future discussions on bass management.

● **Observed high abundance of bass locally**

Fishers consistently reported observing high numbers of bass locally and felt that their own observations do not align with current scientific / ICES advice.

● **Lack of other species available on the East coast**

Industry highlighted the decline of other finfish species on the East coast, making bass an essential species for the inshore fleet.

● **Drift netting is a low bycatch and selective method**

Industry maintain that drift nets were the traditional method prior to the 2015 ban, that they offer better selectivity and efficiency than hook & line or fixed nets and are still legally used to target other species. Unlike other areas, they maintain that small-scale bass drift netting in the East does not result in the same bycatch of sensitive species seen in other regions.

● **No mechanism for new entrants**

Bass authorisations are only issued if the vessel has a track record from 2015, with no way for new fishers to gain access to the bass fishery.

● **Seal predation**

Seal predation was repeatedly raised as a major issue, impacting income and increasing discards. Fishers feel this source of bass mortality is not accounted for in current management. Shorter soak times with drift nets could reduce the impact of seal predation and possibly reduce sensitive species by-catch.

● **Catch limits considered more important than gear type for bass sustainability**

Industry perceive that catch limits are the key control on bass sustainability, rather than restrictions on gear type. “If we have a catch limit [for bass], why does it matter how it is caught?” Renaissance in East Anglian Fishing (REAF) industry letter to Defra

● **Lack of Hook & Line viability in the East**

Fishers argued that hook-and-line bass fishing is less commercially viable in the East, due to local conditions, and that netting is often the only economically viable method. Fishers question some of the accuracy of the data and worried it can mislead management.

Main points from meeting

Fishers at both workshops expressed frustration that these issues are repeatedly raised at engagement meetings without tangible outcomes.

Participants were asked to rank the importance of the issues identified; however, results were inconclusive, with a general view that all issues were of similar importance to the local fleet.

Bass FMP Authorisation Review report - Recommendation 5: inshore drift netting scientific trial

Recommendation 5 identified the following requirements of any future trial:



- **Scientific trial** - to gather evidence, **not a commercial fishery**

- **Collaboration with all stakeholders** - regulatory, recreational, commercial, and non-government organisations

- **Monitoring** - Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) / observers

- **Comparison** to other gear types – fixed gillnets and/or hook & line

- Address industry concerns e.g. **seal predation**

- Regionally targeted - where fishers have **no viable alternative to netting**

- Include robust **technical conservation measures**:

- Gear construction/method, including mesh size and soak time
- Temporal restrictions
- Vessel size limitations
- Bycatch mitigation

Challenges to establishing a trial

- DEFRA have power to authorise trial, not IFCA
- Recreational sector and RSPB oppose trial
- Concerns over illegal targeting of bass by net fishers
- Efficiency of targeting spawning aggregations
- Risk to sensitive species – salmonids, mammals and birds
- Resource – trial could be complicated and expensive
- Hook & Line declarations for bass in East region

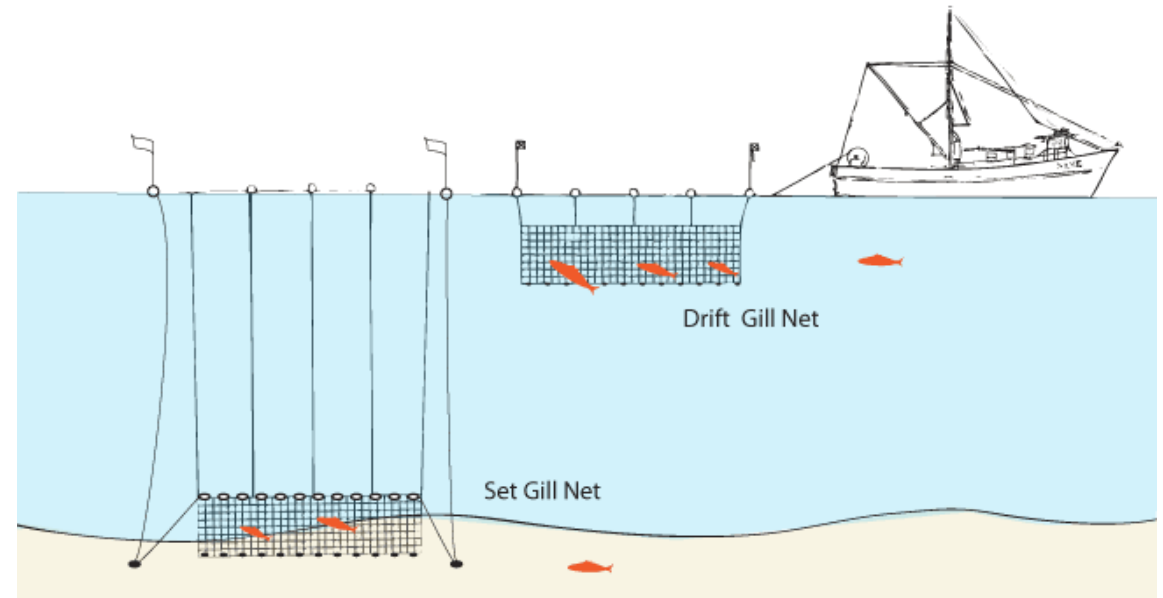
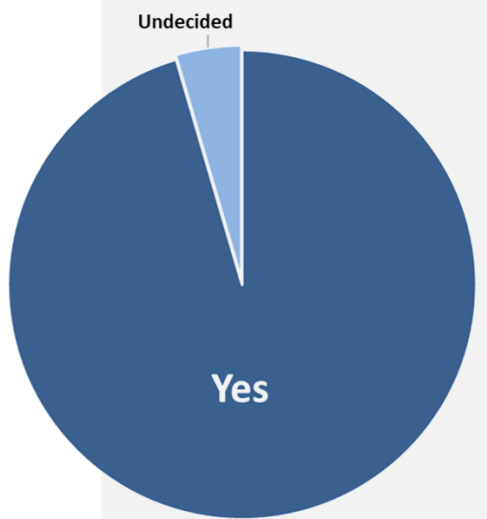


Image credit: [KEIFCA](#)

Industry feedback on a drift net trial

With overwhelming support for a prioritising a drift net trial, fishers set out what they saw as the **benefits of drift netting for bass**.

Do you support having a drift net trial?

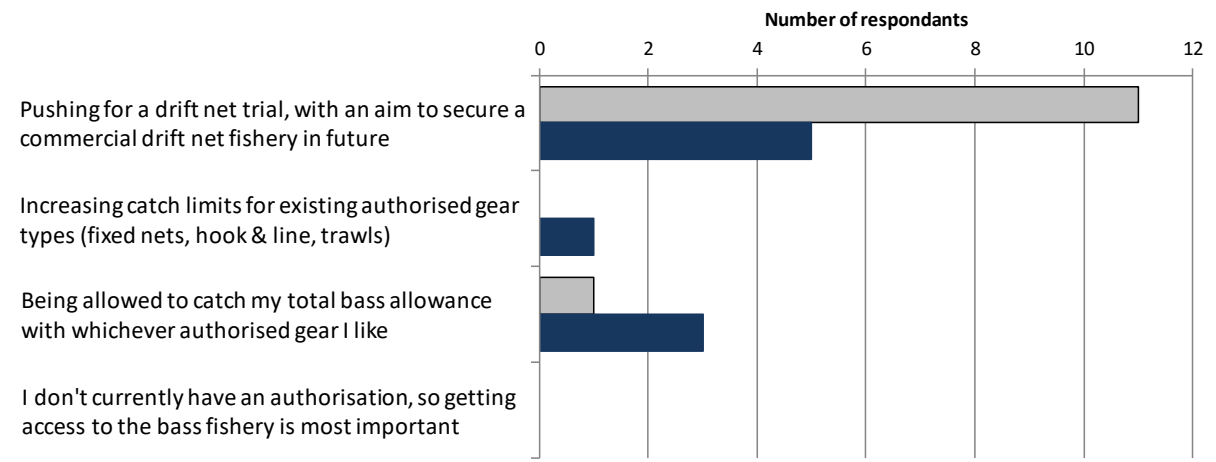


Main points from meeting

- Strong **industry support** during Bass FMP engagement
- Highly **efficient and selective** (with appropriate mesh size)
- **Low fuel cost** / emissions (passive gear)
- Reduced **seal predation** (short soak time)
- Lower **bycatch mortality** compared to fixed nets (short soak time)
- **Very limited** seabed interaction (midwater/surface drifting)

- Local **traditional method** for inshore fleet
- Drift nets are **legal for other species**, reduces bass discards
- **Low sensitive species bycatch** in East
- Reduced risk of **ghost fishing** from lost gear (net attendance)
- Less **weed fouling** than in fixed nets
- **Safer** than fixed nets, especially in shallow water
- **Higher quality** product / better prices

As a member of the inshore industry, what matters most for a future bass fishery?



Additional benefits from running a drift net trial

- ✓ Collect high quality data to inform evidence led fisheries management decisions
- ✓ Gather useful data on mammal, bird and salmonid bycatch
- ✓ Bass bycatch data collected as part of the trial could help inform ICES bass stock models
- ✓ Could help test REM use on inshore vessels in the bass fleet and encourage early adoption of this tool by the industry
- ✓ Would help quantify the impact of poorly quantified seal predation on bass stocks
- ✓ Information could be recorded as to the quality and impact on price of drift net caught bass

Scoping - initial ideas for a trial

The workshops covered the scope and parameters of a potential drift net trial for fishers to feedback on.

Who would be involved?



CEFAS – scientific / study design advice



KEIFCA & EIFCA – project partners



Local fishers from KE and E IFCA districts – active participants
(Participating vessels would need a fixed net bass authorisation)



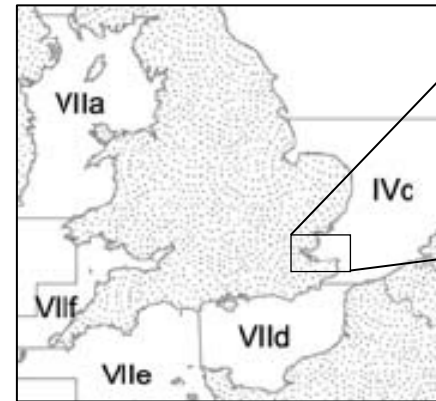
DEFRA / Bass Management Group – approval / consultation

Scale?

- ▶ Small number of vessels initially
- ▶ KEIFCA would advocate for participants to be **paid a daily rate** for taking part in the trial.
- ▶ Bass catches deducted from existing Fixed Net Authorisation catch allowance.
- ▶ An **iterative trial** could increase scale over time if results are promising, while also providing reassurance to critics.

Where?

Joint project between KEIFCA and EIFCA focusing on inshore areas in North Essex and South Suffolk.



Main points from meeting

There was a feeling expressed by a few fishers that drift netting was a long-established, well understood fishing technique and a frustration that a trial was required at all.

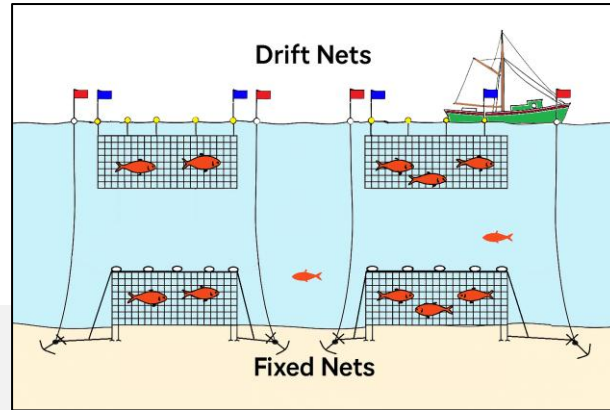
Given the recommendation from the Bass Authorisation Review, as to the need for a drift net trial, across both Essex and Kent meetings, there was support from fishers as to the suggested initial outline of trial. Expanding future iterations of the trial to vessels south of Dover would allow the trial to compare shallower and deeper water fishing areas.

Fishers from both meetings wanted to get the trial up and running as quickly as possible and in general supported the idea of running an iterative trial.

Several fishers said they would be happy to take part in the trial.

Scoping - what would be recorded?

The workshops set out potential data to be collected through a trial, with discussion focused on ensuring the design was ground-truthed by fishers' practical experience.



Main points from meeting

Fishers were supportive of a trial design that directly **compared fixed and drift nets**, but emphasised that location, timing, and tidal conditions strongly influence how and when different gear types can be used.

There was strong support across both workshops for recording **the quality and value of bass** landed, as fishers expected drift nets to result in higher-quality fish compared with fixed nets. Participants felt this information would be critical in understanding the economic benefits of different gears.

Quantifying the impact of seal predation on bass catches was also identified as a priority. Fishers reported frequent interactions with seals and shared photographic evidence showing the extent of damage to bass caught in fixed nets. Attendees supported the inclusion of clear methods for recording seal damage and associated losses within the trial.

Fishers also highlighted the impact of **weed fouling** in fixed gillnets as a significant operational, safety and economic issue due to extra weight of hauling weed aboard, and the challenges of clearing it afterwards. Attendees felt this factor should be recognised and, where possible, recorded as part of trial observations.

There was general support for collecting standard metrics like number, weight, length of bass caught in the nets. Recording this information would also provide useful bass bycatch information.



A trial would seek to address industry concerns, such as the impact of seal predation on net-caught bass (above) and weed fouling in nets (below). Both issues are reported to have considerable economic impact on inshore vessels in the East.



Scoping – technical measures

Attendees voted on technical conservation measures that would be adopted to standardise fishing practises during a trial.

Main points from meeting

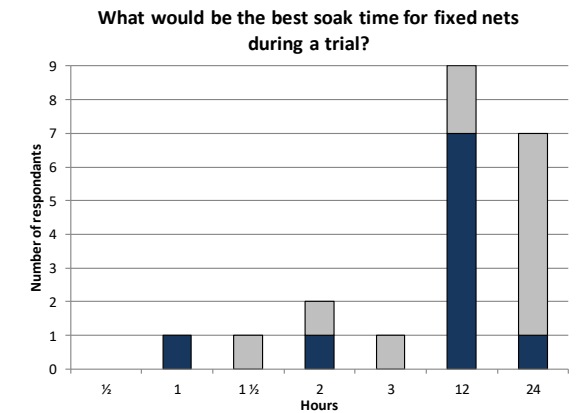
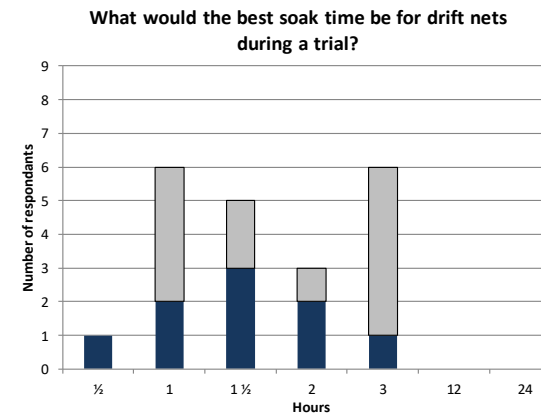
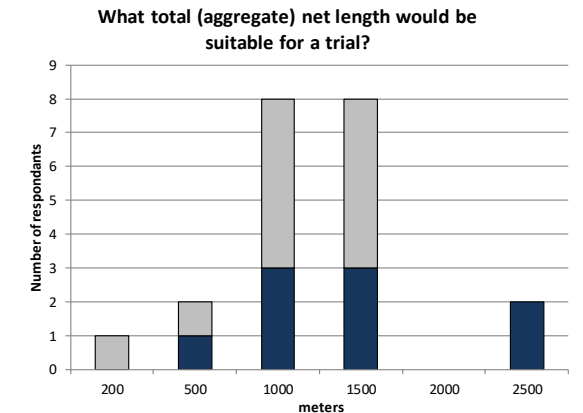
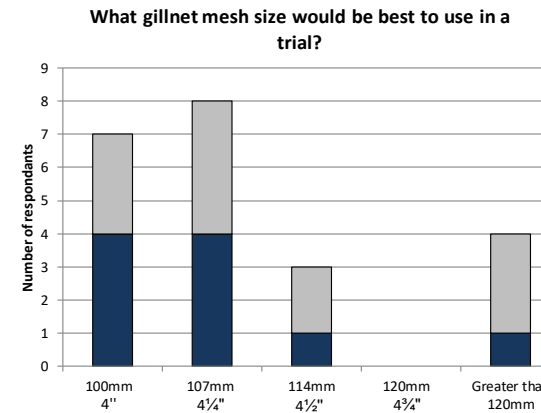
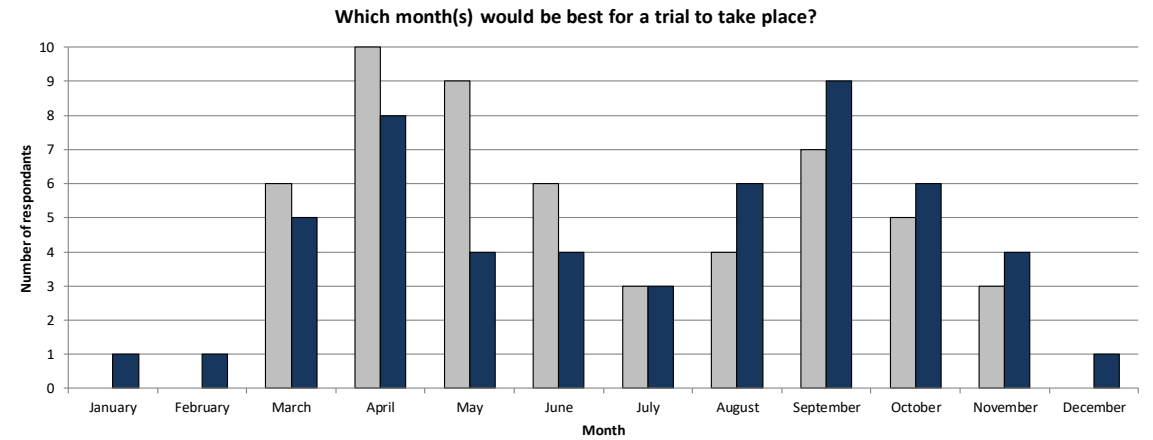
As the results from the voting show, there are **two peaks in the bass abundance** in the KEIFCA district. Fishers identified April–May and September–October as key periods. Running a trial across both seasons would allow data from these two important periods to be captured and compared.

There was considerable discussion around **mesh size** selection. While a 100 mm mesh meets minimum legal requirements, many participants felt that 107 mm mesh represented a more conservation-focused option, targeting bass well above minimum landing size. Some fishers suggested testing mesh size during the trial, however, others noted that considerable research on mesh selectivity already exists and that practical considerations (particularly the size of participants existing gear) would likely dictate mesh size used in the trial.

The envelope for the **length of gear** to be trialled was between 1000m and 1500m, with fishers suggesting this would be made up of 2 x 500m nets or 2 x 750m nets. Again, the exact length might be down to the trialists' available gear.

The **soak times** for drift nets did vary between fishers and fishers commented that it depended to some extent on how the gear was being used, however a range of 1-3 hours covered nearly all the replies. The length of time for setting fixed nets did vary between the two meetings with most Kent fishers suggesting 12 hours and Essex fishers suggesting 24 hours.

As with other technical parameters, attendees emphasised that final operational details would need to be agreed with the fishers participating in the trial. However, workshop feedback clearly demonstrated that the proposed trial parameters would **reflect normal fishing practices** used within the district, supporting both realism and industry buy-in.



Scoping – monitoring and bycatch

Monitoring methods and bycatch mitigation, particularly of sensitive species, were considered next in the workshop voting and discussion.

Main points from meeting – monitoring

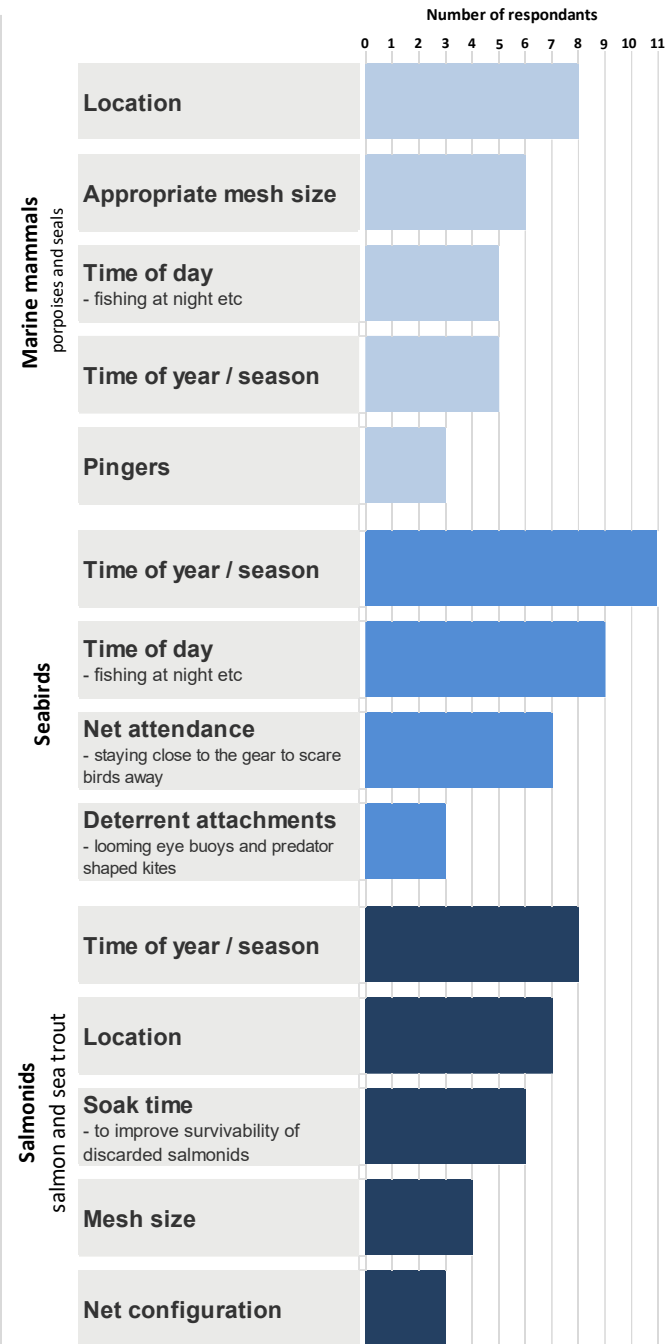
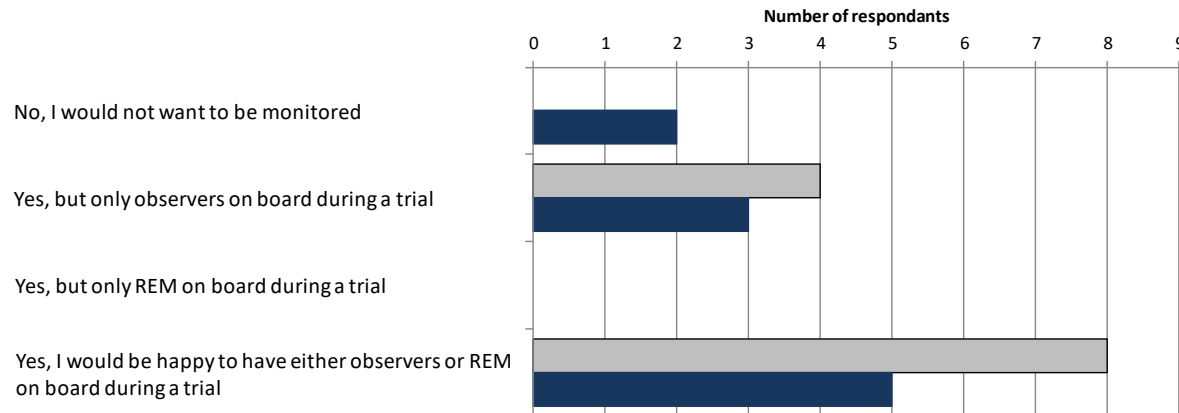
There was strong agreement among attendees that robust monitoring would be a critical component of any drift net trial. However, views were more mixed regarding the use of **Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)**, such as onboard cameras recording fishing activity and catches.

Several fishers showed a preference to run the trial with **observers only** and no REM, however a greater number indicated that they would accommodate observers or REM on board as part of the trial.

It was noted that CEFAS is currently running the “Clean Catch” project using REM to monitor bycatch in net fisheries, which a drift net trial could seek to build on.

Given that the trial could be developed **iteratively**, there was general support for an approach whereby the initial phase is led primarily by IFCA observers, with the option to trial REM on one or two vessels to assess practicality and value before considering wider deployment.

Would you be willing to participate if the trial was monitored with on-board observers and/or REM?



Main points from meeting – bycatch

A strong view that the use of drift nets and shorter soak times is an effective way of minimising sensitive species bycatch.

Participants drew a clear distinction between small-scale inshore drift netting and offshore drift net fisheries, described as using many kilometres of net over extended soak times and capturing marine life indiscriminately. In contrast, inshore drift netting was characterised as highly selective, using relatively short net lengths (typically 1,000–1,500 m) and very short soak times, usually limited to a few hours, with vessels staying close to their gear.

Across both workshops, fishers reported that **bycatch of marine mammals, seabirds and salmonids is very rare** during normal fishing.

Generally location and time of year were the most important factors in avoiding sensitive bycatch. While different species may require different approaches, most felt that operational decisions were more effective than additional deterrent devices (pingers/ visual attachments).

Other Authorisation report recommendations

Main points from meeting

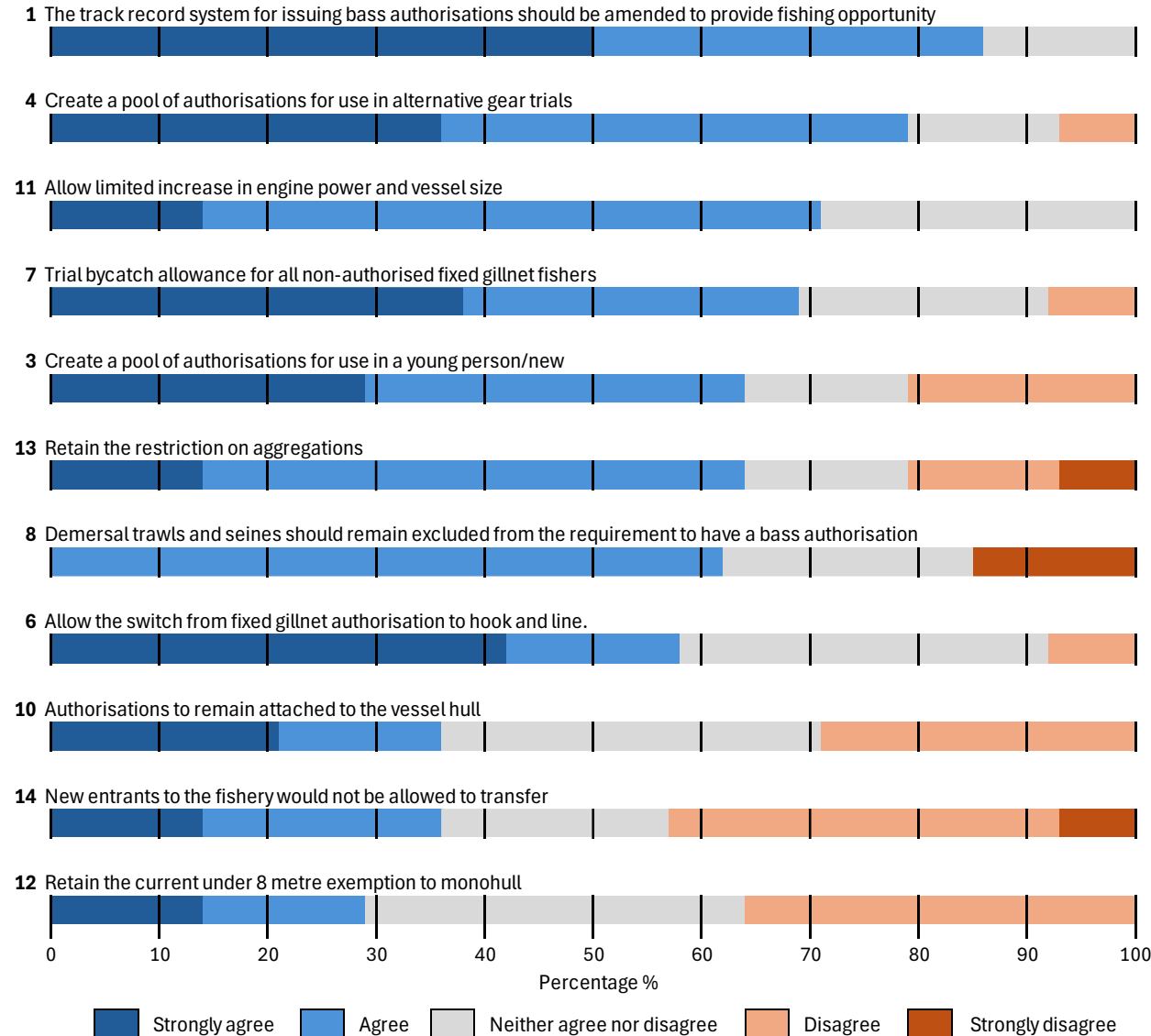
Officers presented **other recommendations from the Bass Authorisations Review Report** at both meetings. Less time was spent on this discussion at the Essex meeting, and consequently fewer fishers completed the questionnaires (6 in Essex and 8 in Kent).

As the recommendations are national in scope and have the same implications for fishers in both counties, responses were combined and **ranked** from those with the greatest support to those with the least.

The recommendation receiving the strongest support (over 85% agreement) was that the **track-record system** for issuing bass authorisations should be removed to increase fishing opportunity. There was also broad support for **gear trial authorisations** (reflecting support for a drift net trial), and for **increasing engine power and vessel size limits**, which fishers felt would enable them to upgrade vessels to meet modern safety and operational standards.

Most other recommendations (4, 11, 7, 3, 13, 8 and 6) received over 50% positive support, although each also attracted some opposition. The recommendation that **demersal trawls should remain excluded** from the requirement to hold a bass authorisation was supported by over 60% of respondents, but was strongly opposed by approximately 15%. Recommendation 13 (**retaining restrictions on aggregations**) generated particularly mixed responses, with strong support from some fishers and strong opposition from others.

The three lowest-ranked recommendations (10, 14 and 12) received limited support, with **some fishers expressing significant objections**. In particular, there was strong verbal disagreement with proposals that would prevent transfer of bass authorisation when a vessel is sold, which was viewed as a barrier to business continuity.



Conclusion and Next Steps

This report will provide a **baseline record of local industry views** on bass management, captured through targeted workshops with KEIFCA fishers. The findings will be used to inform ongoing engagement and will be **reported to Defra and the Bass Management Group**, ensuring that regional industry perspectives are clearly represented within national bass management discussions.

Feedback from the workshops will be **directly incorporated into future proposals for a scientific drift net trial**, helping to ensure that any trial design tests issues of practical relevance to KEIFCA's inshore fleet and reflects real-world fishing conditions.



Overall, the workshops demonstrated a clear willingness from **industry to work collaboratively with regulators and scientists**. Fishers expressed support for a transparent, evidence-led approach and engagement in the design and delivery of a trial that balances operational reality with conservation and monitoring requirements.

What would a future trial proposal contain?

- **Collaborative study design**, combining feedback from KEIFCA and EIFCA industry engagement with scientific advice and input from CEFAS.
- **An iterative trial approach**, beginning with a small-scale feasibility study and including the option to increase scale if initial outcomes are successful.
- **An initial feasibility study phase**, ideally in autumn 2026, involving approximately four vessels and primarily monitored by IFCA observers.
- A **regionally targeted** focus on the East coast, reflecting local needs.
- A **comparative assessment** of drift nets and fixed gillnets, examining relative catch rates, bycatch, and the extent of seal predation.
- Application of robust **technical conservation measures**, including agreed gear specifications, soak times, vessel size limits, and bycatch mitigation controls.
- **Full monitoring**, using IFCA observers and, where appropriate, Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) to support data collection and assurance.
- **Collection of scientific evidence** to inform bass management decisions.

