

By: Chief IFCO

To: Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation
Authority – 20 May 2016

Subject: **Bass update**

Classification Unrestricted

Summary:

This report will provide Members with information on the action undertaken by officers, solely and jointly with the MMO, following the introduction of the new bass legislation in January 2016.

Members will also be provided with information on the research that has and will be taking place and the implications of making any byelaws affecting bass in this District

Recommendations:

- **Members are asked to consider the request by Mr Sharp requesting the review and amendment of netting byelaws affecting Bass across the district, taking into account the byelaws already required to be reviewed; and**
- **Members are asked to note and comment on the report**

1. Background

Sea bass is a high value, iconic species for recreational and commercial fishermen. Scientific advice has clearly identified the need to drastically reduce catches of this species, following an increase in fishing pressure and a reduction in reproduction. The European Commission has been working with member states and their scientific advisors on a range of measures to reduce bass fishing mortality and has introduced a range of management measures over the last 2 years. In January this year, a range of new measures were introduced for commercial and recreational bass fishermen.

The measures pertinent to the main gear types in use in the KEIFCA district include the following: For commercial fisheries: From 1st January to 30th June

2016 there is a prohibition on commercial vessels fishing for bass except for; demersal trawls and seines which are permitted a 1% bass by-catch; fixed gill nets (not including drift nets) which are permitted 1,300kg per vessel in January, April, May and June. The fixed net fishery is closed in February and March. From 1st July to 31st December 2016 monthly catch limits apply to all vessels. 1,300kg per vessel per month for fixed gill nets (not including drift nets) and 1,000kg per vessel per month for all other gears.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Recreational												
	Catch & release only						1 bass / day / angler					
Commercial												
	<p>A prohibition on commercial vessels fishing for bass except for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demersal trawls and seines which are permitted a 1% bass by-catch ● Hooks and lines and fixed gill nets which are permitted 1,300kg per vessel in January, April, May and June with fishery closed in February and March. 						<p>Monthly catch limits apply to all vessels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1,300kg per vessel per month for hooks and lines and fixed gill nets (NB: this does not include drift net fisheries) ● 1,000kg per vessel per month for all other gears 					

For recreational fisheries: From 1st January to 30th June 2016 catch and release only permitted From 1st July to 31st December 2016 one bass per fisherman per day It is recognised that these measures will create difficulties for fishermen within the district, especially given the non-quota position of bass which means it has in recent years made up a significant percentage of an inshore vessels annual income.

2. Education and enforcement actions

These measures have been put in place relatively quickly and officers have been working with MMO and other IFCA's to try and introduce them in a coordinated manner. The new legislation significantly alters the legislative landscape which fishermen are required to comply with which is why this work stream has been given a significant priority within this year's Annual Plan. It should also be noted that whilst enforcement of bass is important there are also a range of other fisheries and MPAs that also require specific enforcement prioritisation and there has been no additional funding to pay for the increased level of national work.

Enforcement patrols – land - Targeted shore patrols in ports and in key angling hot spots have taken place over the quarter. Officers have followed up intelligence from the public and used this in conjunction with their own observations to develop a more coordinated enforcement approach for future

enforcement actions. A lot of focus has been on trying to inform and educate anglers about the new legislation and what it means for them.

Enforcement patrols – sea - Sea based enforcement initially has focused more on gathering intelligence that we could use to help inform ourselves and the MMO, and use to help target specific enforcement. As the year progressed and larger bass entered the Thames in significant numbers, sea based enforcement began to prioritise the targeting of these larger individuals.

Letter and information for charter boat skippers - Angling charter boats have been particularly affected by the new 2016 bass regulations and officers prioritised this sector as the first to start engaging with. After discussions with local charter boat skippers concerning the enforcement of the new bass regulations, KEIFCA officers developed a number of notices and information stickers to help charter boats explain the new legislation to their customers. A covering letter written by officers also encouraged charter boats to engage with the Authority and help provide indications of the financial impacts of bass management and suggest future management. Over 40 packs were sent out to the charter boat fleet in our District; in general we have received positive feedback to the stickers and the posters and they have also been very popular with some of the tackle and bait suppliers and boat launching facilities in the District. Charter skippers as well as tackle and bait shop owners are reporting some impact upon their businesses but unfortunately as of yet we do not have any firm figures on this.

Stickers and notices for anglers (inc. non-english speaking) - One of the issues that arises in any discussion with anglers is the enforcement of the legislation on the commercial sector and on non-english speaking anglers. In an attempt to address the issue of non-english speaking anglers, our angling officer held a meeting with a migrant angling liaison officer and received a lot of advice and support in trying to engage with this sector. As a result a multi-lingual poster has been drafted so that it can be put up around the district.

IUU launch by the MMO - Following consultation with stakeholders, the MMO have prioritised the illegal, unregistered, unlicensed (IUU) work stream, and are running a high profile media campaign to help address this issue. In discussions with local stakeholders it is these illegal operations that pose one of the most significant fisheries compliance issues both in volumes of illegal landings and in illegal selling of catch. Although this is primarily an MMO lead issue, KEIFCA officers are supporting and promoting this campaign within the KEIFCA District as well as collecting intelligence and helping focus future enforcement efforts.

Joint working with the MMO - Working closely with the MMO is key to the effective and even handed enforcement of the new bass legislation. At a strategic level IFCA's are working closely with the MMO to develop a shared intelligence platform and implement a joint training program. Both these two actions will provide better coordinated long-term enforcement, of which the enforcement of bass stocks will benefit. On a short and medium term timeframe both organisations have stepped up their intelligence sharing and joint operations planning to address serious non-compliance issues with bass enforcement within the District.

3. Research

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS ON THE DEFRA-FUNDED PROJECT MF1233 'POPULATION STUDIES IN SUPPORT OF THE CONSERVATION OF THE EUROPEAN SEA BASS (C-BASS)' AND ASSOCIATED R&D.

A C-bass project steering group meeting was held on 10th March 2016 in London, with attendees from Cefas, Defra, the University of Bangor, BASS, IFCA, Angling Trust, NFFO, University of Plymouth, University of Exeter, Seafish and NUTFA. A summary of the findings are provided below:

BEHAVIOUR AND MIGRATION (VICTORIA BENDALL, CEFAS): 11 of the 97 floated Cefas 'G5' tags released off Weymouth (Nov. 2014) and Dunwich (May 2015), have been recovered to date, with data records ranging from 8 to 383 days of behaviour data. A Hidden Markov Model is being used to reconstruct the movements from the returned tags based on recorded temperature, maximum depth and tidal data, where present. Reconstructed migrations show wide movements through several management regions over the course of an annual cycle. Fish released off Weymouth generally migrated west initially, out into the Western Approaches, with three individuals migrating up into the Celtic Sea during the expected spawning period. Fish returned to the Channel in quarters 1&2. The longest track showed an individual migrating west from Weymouth out to the Western Approaches, then east along the Channel and into the N. Sea, where it flanks the continental European coastline, eventually bearing NW up along Dogger Bank, then finally turning south again during September where it was intercepted by surface nets off East Anglia. There is considerable variability between the tracks generated to date, but some common features were observed, including the aggregation of a number of individuals off the Scheldt Estuary, between Belgium and Holland. Bass were rarely recorded in water of less than 8°C. One of the tagged fish was consumed by a seal.

So far, the 'C-bass' tagging workshops have been enthusiastically received. Returned tags have an important role to play in determining the vulnerability of bass to different gear types and predation, in different locations and seasons. There is added-value in using natural tags from returned fish carcasses (e.g. otolith microchemistry and stable isotope analysis). Repeated behaviour patterns e.g. spawning, have not yet been confirmed from the tagging data.

LOCATIONS AND EXTENT OF NURSERIES (KIERAN HYDER, CEFAS): A coupled physical-biological (pelagic) model is being developed to predict the locations and extent of seabass nurseries. It compares the movements of eggs and larvae in a good versus a poor recruitment year. In the model, different developmental phases (egg/hatch/larva/fry) are assigned different characteristics, with overlaid environmental conditions. So far, self-seeding & connectivity have been found to vary by location and by year, with cross-Channel linkages being more extensive in the 'good' compared to the 'bad' recruitment year. The duration of the pre-settlement phase was similar between the years, but with some local variation. Model predictions are sensitive to spawning temperature thresholds. In good years there was more mixing across areas, supporting potential weak linkages. An adult movement model is also in development, with an initial focus on spatial structure and movements, and then defining and testing potential management measures.

OTHER BASS R&D: Giulia Cambie from the University of Bangor has found that stable isotope analysis can be used to identify sub-populations of bass in Welsh waters, with little mixing between southern seabass and those in Mid and North Wales. Separation is based on fish locations during the feeding season, with mature fish spending extended periods of time feeding in regional inshore areas and a portion of the largest sea bass adopting estuaries as preferential feeding areas.

4. Future management

Short term

With the stated EU goal of reaching Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) by 2018, there will inevitably be more cuts in fisheries effort over the next two years, which will lead to tighter regulations. It is likely that fishing effort would have to be reduced by an additional 50%. The implications of this could be significant on all sectors and in an extreme scenario could lead to a moratorium on landing bass. In the light of this it is important that KEIFCA and the key sectors impacted by bass management work together to pass on ideas and key biological and economic information to Defra so that the minister is best placed for the lead up to the EU Council of Ministers negotiations in November/December. Discussing this issue as an agenda item at the next Authority meeting, inviting Defra and writing a summary letter, might be the best way of focusing efforts and influencing the creation of new management measures.

Medium term

As well as negotiating at a European level, Defra has started the review process of the bass nursery area Statutory Instrument. Discussions have been held with Defra regarding whether a revision of the SI or IFCA's making new byelaws would best legislative mechanism to introduce bass management. The conclusions from these discussions resolved that updating the SI would create a more uniform management process, helping to manage bass stocks on a national scale. Defra has started this process and an initial assessment of relevant data sets has been undertaken by CEFAS. KEIFCA officers have offered support and input of local knowledge into this project, especially as it gathers pace and seeks engagement from local stakeholders.

Reviewing IFCA byelaws

KEIFCA inherited a large number of byelaws from Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee, Eastern Joint Sea Fisheries Committee the Environment Agency as well as from Kent and Essex Sea Fisheries Committee. As new legislation is developed the old byelaws have been revoked; however, there are still a large number of byelaws that need to be rationalised and synchronised in the KEIFCA District. Over the last four years efforts have been made to develop a logical systematic process to address this task and workshops and approaches have been developed by the Authority, however at the same time as this process has been taking shape the introduction of management for Marine Protected Areas has also been a priority.

In our 2016/17 annual plan specific resource has been allocated to address this very significant need, with the aim of presenting a next steps paper at the September/November Authority meeting. At present KEIFCA have the capability of making 1-2 byelaws a year and although this paper could help set out a longer-term pathway there are a number of immediate issues the Authority has already indicated would need to be addressed by making byelaws over the next 18-24 months.

- Trawling in Essex Estuaries SAC (needs to be completed by end of 2016)
- Fishing using bottom-towed gear in the Margate and Longsands SAC (needs to be completed by end of 2016)
- Oyster dredging in Essex Estuaries SAC
- Synchronising and reviewing vessel length and engine size byelaws across the district

It is in this context that the Authority would be assessing Mr Sharp's letter asking to review and amend netting byelaws affecting Bass across the district (Appendix 1).

Financial Implications:

None identified in relation to agreed budget headings.

Recommendations

- Members are asked to consider the request by Mr Sharp (Appendix 1) requesting the review and amendment of netting byelaws affecting Bass across the district, taking into account the byelaws already required to be reviewed; and
- Members are asked to note and comment on the report

8th February 2016

Request for an urgent review of the netting byelaws throughout the Kent & Essex and the Eastern IFCA districts to prevent the total collapse of Bass stocks.

Dear Will

At our recent informal meeting of independent anglers, tackle shop owners and charter boat skippers held at the Thurrock Hotel, Aveley on the 2nd February 2016, the group voiced concerns over the lack of local conservation measures in place to protect Bass stocks in rivers and estuaries of Kent, Essex and Suffolk.

The group felt that there was a strong case for both the Kent & Essex and the Eastern IFCA's to jointly exercise the conservation powers each has by urgently reviewing and amending netting byelaws affecting Bass across each district.

We are now writing to you formally and requesting that these powers be initiated and a proposal developed recommending changes to each byelaw in time to present to the next authority meeting.

The group are not alone in having real concerns for the remaining Bass stocks in each district, and the ability of the remaining adults to reproduce enough juveniles for a future sustainable fishery. Conservation groups and members of the public are appalled by the continued unsustainable exploitation of this important species.

The reasons given by the group for the urgent need to take action are listed below:

1. The moratorium on Bass fishing put in place by the EU to protect Bass spawning activity during February & March 2016, fails to protect those fish that spawn off the Kent, Essex and Suffolk coast and within each district.

Spawning activity in the Southern North Sea takes place later, normally April and May, and these spawning aggregations will be targeted by gill netter's during this important part of the breeding cycle.

Co-incidentally February and March is when Kent, Essex and Suffolk Bass landings are very low in any case.

For January, April, May and June the moratorium is designed to reduce the overall impact on Bass stocks by some gear. However, by switching gear to methods allowed during these months opportunities intended to be restricted will be maximised for legitimate Bass fishers with a catch allowance.

2. After spawning, Bass fry from the Southern North Sea enter the important habitats of the rivers and estuaries of Kent, Essex and Suffolk where they live and grow into the adults. These fish require protection from some netting methods as they are essential for any recovery.

3. With no statutory requirement for proper recording or monitoring of Bass landings by the under 10m fleet throughout both districts and the existence of the loophole within the Buyers and Seller Registration legislation (This allows the direct sale of up to 30kg of a single species of fish to the general public for their own personal consumption) will lead to further unmeasured impacts on the stocks.

4. Huge pressure on the remaining stock has been caused by increasing the catch allowance for fishermen using 'fixed gill nets' to catch Bass from 1 tonne to 1.3 tonnes per month for 10 months of the year.

5. The nationwide reduction in Bass landings by other means (trawling, drift netting etc) will increase the price of wild caught Bass and therefore it is highly likely that there will be an increase in the amount of illegal netting activity throughout the district.

The opportunities available for unlicensed commercial rod and line fishermen to exploit this expected increase in demand are also expected to rise.

6. International scientists have recommend a Minimum Sustainable Yield (MSY) of 561 tonnes. The European Union have ignored this advice and predict that with the new measures introduced for 2016 landings would total 1,449 tonnes or 2.6 times the amount recommended.

This was further watered down by the Council of Ministers allowing a 1% trawl/seine by-catch landing, a reduced close season for fixed gill-nets and hook & line fisheries, and, as stated above, an increase to 1.3 tonnes for those fishing methods. The effects of relaxing the original proposals will mean that the 1,449 tonne will itself be exceeded.

Members of the group would be delighted to assist in any review and help to recommended any amendments, provide support in collecting evidence and present any supporting information to the authority.

We also recommend a short informal meeting in good time before the next authority meeting so that we can improve the chances of successfully passing this important conservation measure.

Many Thanks

Mike Sharp

Rob Wilks

Tony Read

Leon Roskilly

John Cooledge

Peter Holborn

Tom Pinborough

Tony Hills

Contact details