



## Agenda Item B6

By: Chief IFCO and First Mate/IFCO, Kent (Angling lead)  
To: Kent and Essex IFCA – 30 January 2018  
Subject: Angling within the district  
Classification: Unrestricted

### **Summary:**

This report provides an update on some of the key issues facing anglers and angling sector in the district and makes suggestions as to how KEIFCA could try and help.

### **Recommendations:**

Members are asked to consider the comments made in this paper and **AGREE** the suggested actions:

- 1) Work with CEFAS to promote Sea Angling Diary 2018;
- 2) Ask the CEFAS angling team to present at an Authority meeting;
- 3) Write to angling clubs and charter boats in the district asking for feedback using a tick box/ quick reply questionnaire; and
- 4) Use the feedback from the industry to write a report to the Minister/ DEFRA outlining the key issues in our district, whilst extending an invitation to visit the district.

### **Background**

Although there is a regular quarterly update of angling within the district we wanted to take the opportunity to discuss the challenges and changes that are impacting the sector and try and identify any actions that KEIFCA could take to try and help. The review outlines some of the views from the industry as well as feedback that our officers have collected from around the coast.

## **Update from the industry - Recreational Sea Angling in the South East**

### **Summary**

*Over the last three years I have seen some major changes within the activity of recreational Sea Angling (RSA). I believe that the numbers of people participating in RSA is seeing a dramatic downturn in my area of the south coast (Dungeness and District). I believe these views hold good for the south Kent coastline.*

*-Tony Hills Seagull Fishing Tackle.*

### **Local species assessment**

*With changes of species 'balance' due I believe to a rising ambient level of sea temperature, and 'food' source availability. I'm seeing some major changes to species balance available to the average RSA in my area.*

#### Thornback Rays

*I have seen big changes over the last ten years in the balance and number of this species visiting our coastal areas. A massive increase of thornback rays from the beaches (and boats), these have become a major target for the RSA with fish being reported to 16lb.*

#### Blonde Rays

*Along with thornback rays we are seeing more Blondes reported with fish to 20lb on the Beach and 30lb+ on inshore charter boats.*

#### Whiting

*I have seen an unprecedented explosion of 'pin' whiting in our area, there appears to be millions of 25cm fish inshore. I remember years ago we looked forward to the arrival of 'channel' whiting in October as a precursor to the start of the cod season. Now we appear to have whiting all year round, making it difficult to catch anything else.*

#### Cod

*Over the last three years we have seen another decline in this iconic species; we have reports of plenty of fish down the West Country and up the east coast. On the south coast we are this season in serious trouble with very few fish being available to be caught on either boat or beach. With the change in the weather patterns linked to the growth in pelagic fish like herring, I'm sure they are out there, but we are experiencing major changes.*

### **Changes in RSA activity**

*Over the last ten years it appears to me we have seen major changes on how people use the traditional tackle shops, with the advent and increase in 'online' purchasing. Link this with the sudden growth of social media which in turn has evolved how many RSA purchase tackle and bait as well as acquiring 'peer group' knowledge (not necessarily accurate) about their chosen sport.*

*Social media allows information to be shared good or bad, human nature being that the average RSA wants to belong and be 'on message' so when things are poor it can make it worse. This allows negative information to be promoted; the bottle is*

*half empty...so why bother. The whiting plague, no cod, rays are boring and you can't take a bass, why bother to go?*

*I have seen a change to my customer base over the last few years, with the majority of my customers coming from London, a large 'chunk' were eastern Europeans (Polish, Latvian, Ukrainian and Estonian) it appears a lot of those (post Brexit) have returned to their homelands, we now have a slight increase in Bulgarians and Romanians. But the indigenous population is aging and less committed to the sport.*

*A change in attitude amongst many RSA is that they want to go 'catching' rather fishing. A lot of time can be spent trying to catch the 'big one' rather than enjoy the all-round experience of 'going fishing'. To me it appears that over the last three years we have entered a new 'low' and unless we can break out of this spiral of despair the future is very bleak.*

*The angling trade reflects the downturn in the market, with a smaller cake to share there has been a reduction in suppliers; I have lost several wholesalers, the traditional bridge between manufacture/importer and the retail outlet. With the growth in 'bedroom' tackle shops on facebook, I think this has and will hasten the demise of tackle shops specialising in sea fishing.*

*With fewer shops, I believe it will be more difficult for people wishing to take up sea fishing, yes via social media those who are social media 'savvy' can 'switch' for other angling disciplines, but for beginners it will be a challenge. Anglers will have to be more strategic in their planning; impulse to go fishing won't be so easy without shops supplying fresh bait. With a downturn in activity I believe this could lead to access problems.*

### **Conclusion**

*There is so much miss information out there on RSA activities. I believe that IFCA's can play a major roll to help the sport and supply 'honest' local (and regional) knowledge to encourage more participation...change is not necessarily good or bad...it is just change...what is important is how you manage and influence it. I believe we have to think 'outside the box' the strength of the IFCA is it is not a commercial operation, supplying knowledge and advice, being a 'honest' broker, not just the regulatory body.*

**Tony Hills, Seagull Fishing Tackle**

### **Feedback from KEIFCA Officers**

January 2018 will bring new EU legislation regarding angling restrictions for retaining Bass affecting recreational anglers. At the time of this report it is understood that the proposal is that there will a catch and release fishery only for the whole of 2018. However, it has been suggested that following a review of ICES data in March, there could be prospect of a bag limit later in the year. As soon as this proposed legislation becomes law, KEIFCA officers will pass this information on to anglers within our district.

KEIFCA officers continue to patrol and inspect anglers along the KEIFCA shorelines and hand out the minimum size ruler stickers where needed.

Cefas are running a project called Sea Angling Diary 2018 (Appendix 1) which is an online diary where selected sea anglers note how many angling trips they have had per month, input their catch details and how many fish they have caught. KEIFCA officers are promoting this project whilst out on patrol.

Social media is having an impact on the tackle shops. With anglers able to see what is being caught all around the district through this medium, if poor fishing is reported many anglers are deciding not to go and wait till it is reported that the fishing has improved.

Despite the earlier encouraging signs, cod fishing has been very poor this season, with very few fish reported caught throughout this period, which has led to some anglers deciding to not fish for the rest of the winter.

### **Kent Angling Summary**

Dab and whiting have become the main catches of anglers off the beaches around Kent with more dab being reported on the south coast. The size of the fish has been small with only a few sizeable specimens coming to the rods. Lesser spotted dogfish are still being caught adding variety to catches. The occasional small bass has made an appearance.

### **Essex Angling Summary**

Fishing has been sporadic on the Essex coast with the county piers providing steady sport. Whiting, dab and lesser spotted dogfish are featuring high in anglers' catches; the occasional bass is also being landed. Thornback ray are still being caught, the occasional codling is making an appearance on the Essex coast.

### **Inner Thames and River Medway Angling Summary**

Whiting are still being caught on both rivers, with the occasional small bass being seen. Flounder have started to be caught in numbers in both the inner Thames and the River Medway.

### **Boat Fishing**

Weather has hampered boat fishing through the district. Essex Charter boats have just started report that they are catching codling; these have been mainly small and not in any great numbers, Thornback ray catches have dwindled off but with some effort skippers are still finding a few. Whiting and spotted dogfish are still being caught.

### **Possible Next Steps**

- Work with CEFAS to promote Sea Angling Diary 2018

- Ask the CEFAS angling team to present at an Authority meeting
- Write to angling clubs and charter boats in the district asking for feedback using a tick box/ quick reply questionnaire.
- Use the feedback from the industry to write a report to the Minister/ DEFRA outlining the key issues in our district, whilst extending an invitation to visit the district.

**Recommendation:**

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