

Bass Fisheries Management Plan consultation response - Cornish Federation of Sea Anglers.

Although most aspects of the FMP are of relevance to Recreational Sea Anglers (RSAs), these comments focus on those aspects which directly affect them.

The overall impression is that the FMP is more about managing the aspirations of commercial fishermen than about managing bass stocks. While it is encouraging that RSAs were included in the evidence collection phase (many spent a great deal of time and effort inputting to this) and the draft FMP, there is little to indicate that they are valued as the major stakeholder in the bass fishery that they are, both in terms of participation levels and income generated.

It is important that both commercial and recreational fishers' needs and aspirations are recognised, but at the moment management of the bass fishery appears to focus on the commercial sector. For example, goal 2 discusses delivering the right balance between commercial and recreational access to the bass fishery, but the actions which underpin this include nothing about recreational use. It is a pity that the FMP does not take the opportunity to redress the management balance between the two groups.

The current proposals do not adequately consider the needs of recreational sea anglers. Doing so would greatly increase the economic value of the fishery to local economies, while at the same time minimising the impact on stocks (since many bass caught by anglers are released). "A bass in the surf is worth twenty times one in the fish box" as they say.

We generally welcome the FMP goals. However, there is no mention of developing a fishery which encourages recreational participation by increasing the numbers and size range of fish. There needs to be a much greater focus on building bass stocks back to levels seen in the mid-eighties, and on restoring a more natural age/size profile. The bass angling experience for many RSAs is of poor catches and few of the larger fish (60cm+) they target. More and bigger bass would encourage long-term anglers to remain within the fishery and attract new entrants to the sport, bringing with them considerable benefits for the local economy and tourism.

The setting up of a Bass Management Group (Goal 1) is probably the most important proposal if the group is balanced and effective. We firmly believe that commercial and recreational fishers working together is the way forward.

Fish handling guidance to reduce post-release mortality is already available for related species and should be implemented for bass as a short-term action.

Regarding changes to Bass Nursery Area regulations, we would be strongly opposed to a prohibition on targeting bass recreationally from the shore, but would support the universal use of barbless/de-barbed hooks and a ban on the use of treble hooks to reduce damage to juvenile bass bycatch.

There is much dissatisfaction among local anglers about the fact that blatant targeted gill netting for bass appears to be going unchallenged by the local IFCA and the MMO.