

The Cornish Federation of Sea Anglers

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George Eustice MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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2016

Dear Mr Eustice,

Bass measures for 2016.

This organisation made representation to you by email on December 8th to which we received neither an acknowledgement or reply. In case our submission never reached you, a copy is enclosed.

There are a great many issues that recreational sea anglers are at best unhappy with but they find the package of measures to be implemented in 2016 completely unacceptable because they are flawed both in 'principle' and on any basis of being 'evidence based.'

For brevity, I will focus on just two aspects.

1. Denial to the public, represented by recreational anglers, to retain a bass for personal consumption during the first half of 2016 is unacceptable, whilst during four of those six months, commercial access for profit remains not only authorised but actually increased for the metier that is responsible for the highest proportion of UK commercial bass landings.
2. Inclusion of fixed gill netting as a 'low impact' fishery flies in the face of all the evidence.

1.

Marine fishery resources are 'public', 'societal' resources. The UN FAO describes them as one of society's natural heritage. The public right to fish in UK waters is owned by the Crown on behalf of the general public. In March 2011, EU Commissioner Maria Damanaki confirmed fishery resources are 'public goods'.

Recreational sea anglers are those members of the public who elect to equip themselves with the tackle and knowledge to access and enjoy public fishery resources, selectively retaining some fish for their own personal consumption just as other members of the public elect to enjoy Dartmoor, the New Forest or the Forest of Dean or those members of the public that elect to forage for wild berries and nuts, or collect wild mushrooms for their own personal use.

Marine fisheries management across much of the globe with the notable exception of Europe reflects the 'public' nature of marine fishery resources by prioritising 'public' access for personal consumption over and above that of commercial access for profit. In the United States, commercial access to species that are important for recreational angling such as striped bass, bluefish, black drum, red drum etc. is ratcheted back and recreational anglers are allocated 75%, 80%, 84% and 87% respectively for those four species, in terms of retained catches.

Ex fisheries minister, Doug Kidd, from New Zealand when interviewed on Radio 5 recounted that in New Zealand, he had three stakeholders all making demands of some fishery resources. He said the priority stakeholder was recreationalists because they represented the public who were the owners of the resource and number two stakeholder were the indigenous Maoris after which IF there was a scientifically harvestable excess, that would be allocated to commercials.

The CFP, whilst specifically developed for commercial fishing and aquaculture, still fails to officially take any responsibility for recreational fishing, although during the last year or so, it is increasingly legislating in respect of RSA. It is as though the prevalent cultural mindset regards recreational fishing as a threat to commercial exploitation. The decision by you and other Member State Ministers to end public access to bass for the first half of 2016 whilst commercial access remains sanctioned confirms the existence of such a flawed mindset. **A far more realistic and accurate take on the situation would be to recognise how decades of failed commercial fisheries management has negatively impacted the entirely legitimate public recreational fisheries.**

Recreational sea anglers fully accept that fishery resources are finite and that there have to be controls on their activities in the form of measures such as minimum landing sizes, bag limits, seasonal closures etc. to protect the public resource from over exploitation.

The Council of Minister's recent decision to deny recreational fishers from taking **any** bass for the first 6 months of 2016 whilst sanctioning commercial fishing for bass during four of those months and even increasing the monthly catch limit for gill netting, is grotesquely unjust, contrary to any rational assessment and potentially illegal. The decision is a symptom of a fisheries management regime that is irrevocably broken and unfit for purpose. You and other Member State Ministers have displayed utter contempt for recreational sea anglers and all the livelihoods that depend on RSA.

The level of contempt that you display in respect of RSA was confirmed by your comments in the Times 17th December. Those comments included that 'anglers always grumble' and that recreational account for 25% of all fishing mortality of bass. We would have hoped you had been briefed about the evidence from CEFAS and more recently the Eastern IFCA how 'official' commercial landings data is massively understated so that the alleged recreational proportion of total fishing mortality of 25% is actually closer to 10% which is highly relevant when considering any mortality levels from recreational C&R fishing.

Your comments replicates the flawed thinking of so many commentators who have highlighted the alleged 25% of mortality attributable to recreational fishing. Even if RSA mortality was the alleged 25%, why does it attract such attention when the three times greater proportion of mortality (75%) that derives from commercial fishing is not equivalently alluded to?

You were quoted in Fishing News as stating the UK recreational bass fishery was worth £200 million. If such a fishery with associated employment and economic impacts is only responsible for 25% of bass mortality whilst the far greater 75% of commercial fishing mortality only generates first sale revenue of around £6 million, half of which is exported, the recreational fishery is the fishery that should be prioritised, nourished and grown. It is commercial fishing mortality that needs to be ratcheted down but instead, the 2015 monthly catch limit for gill nets has been increased at the very same time recreational access has been ended.

2.

The derogation for gill netting for four of the six months during the closure of commercial bass fishing beggars belief. Gill nets are responsible for the greatest proportion of all UK commercial bass landings. **Your own role in the decision to allow gill netting to be excluded from the six month closure was very clearly illustrated when on Spotlight TV you claimed that gill netting was low impact and that the bass measures would have very little effect on the local commercial fishery. So despite the scientific advice that mortality needs to be dramatically reduced, you proudly clamour the measures will have very little effect!** So much for 'evidence based' decisions!

Your assertion that gill netting (shown as blue columns in above graph) which is responsible for the lions share of UK commercial landings is 'low impact' rather begs the question, which metier do you regard as 'high impact'?

The attached appendix 1 lists some of the 'evidence' to show that gill netting is anything but 'low impact'.

As Minister, you will know how your department insists on having the 'evidence' to support decisions, yet you have totally ignored the evidence procured and held by your own dept. in the form of Sea Angling 2012 (and similar findings from a number of previous studies such as the Drew Study and the Cabinet Office report to Government 'Net Benefits'.)

Thousands of Cornish sea anglers feel betrayed by your role in this debacle and a great many of the 10,000+ signatures who have signed the petition condemning the Gill net exemption are from Cornwall. <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/116747>

Members of this organisation want an explanation to the following three key questions:

Please explain why you have played a lead role in ending public access to a public resource for six months whilst allowing commercial access to that same resource to continue during four of those months.

Please explain why you consider gill netting to be 'low impact' given the mountain of evidence to the contrary.

Please explain why you applaud the new measures for their negligible impact on local commercial fishermen when the scientific advice is for a significant reduction in bass catches.

Yours sincerely,

Malcolm Gilbert

Conservation Officer

CC. All Cornish MPs, Media and Angling press.

Appendix 1.

A) To catch a fish on a hook, the fish needs to be feeding. Fish, like other animals do not feed 24/7. Nets catch fish even when they are not feeding. i.e. 24/7.

B) The catching power of mono gill netting was recognised in the early 1980's by the Chief Fisheries Officer of Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee in his report to the Committee in 1983. Here are some extracts

Item 3

“ Gill netting in 1983 began exceptionally well, with Newlyn based netters making very heavy landings of dogfish (Spurdogs). By the end of the first week of January daily landings had peaked to 60 tonnes. By this time the fleet had more than doubled, resulting in several days landings exceeding 60 tonnes.” (note: by 2001 total dogfish landings in Newlyn were less than 100 tonnes annually) “Early in March, the dogfish shoals finally dispersed but fine weather allowed netters to change to wreck fishing. Hauls of ling & pollack often reached 5 tonnes. Offshore wrecks produced catches

in excess of 9 tonne.”.

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*“ Long lining. This method cannot compete with **the catching power of nets**, particularly on dogfish shoals, and, when able, owners are changing to gill netting.”*

- C) The additional pressure which mono gill netting places on fishery resources is comprehensively documented in at least three CEFAS publications:

Defra Laboratory Leaflet no. 69 published 1991 available at:

<http://www.cefass.defra.gov.uk/publications/lableaflets/lableaflet69.pdf> includes:

“The first effect of the new materials was to provide fishing opportunities that were not available to those using traditional gear. For example, gill nets could be set on rough ground, which had once been fished by long-lines but could not be fished by trawlers, and drift nets could be used successfully in daylight, giving netsmen more freedom to choose the timing and duration of their fishing trips. The second effect was to attract new, often inexperienced or part time netsmen into the fisheries, and thus increase exploitation levels on certain stocks.”

*“The lower visibility of synthetic materials in the water, compared with twines of natural fibre, is probably largely responsible for **the greater effectiveness** of modern gill nets.”*

“Monofilament nets are thought to be more effective than multifilament nets, principally because they are less visible in the water”

*“Synthetic gill nets have proved effective in catching a wide range of species, but one of their major advantages has been to enable fishing in areas where trawling is not possible. Many demersal fish tend to aggregate around features such as wrecks, rocky outcrops and shallow sand banks; gill nets can be fished very close to or even right over such features, enabling them to catch fish that are virtually inaccessible to trawls. Although the gear is frequently damaged, the cost of replacement is relatively low. **Another advantage of gill nets is that they can be set and left to fish by themselves while the boat is being used to set or haul more nets, thus increasing the catching capacity of even small boats quite considerably.**”*

Technical Report No 116 on Coastal Fisheries of England & Wales 2002.

<http://www.cefass.defra.gov.uk/publications/techrep/tech116.pdf>

includes at Section 10 for Cornwall:

“Since the introduction of synthetic gill and tangle nets that can be used on wrecks and rough ground, local resources are more heavily exploited than in the past.”

Newlyn: *“The inshore fleet set gill nets for demersal fish, sometimes around wrecks, and for pelagic fish such as herring, bass and grey mullet. Boats of between 8-12 m are capable of setting up to 15,000 m of net each.”*

St Ives: *“Tangle nets are used to catch demersal fish and crustacea, such as lobster, crawfish and spider crabs, with each boat setting up to 20,000 m of net.”*

Hayle: *“A dozen boats under 10 m are involved in netting, and may work up to 10,000 m of nets each. The nets are set on rough ground where trawl gear cannot be used, for demersal fish such as pollack, ling, turbot, monkfish, rays and cod, together with a valuable catch of spider crab in spring and some bass in summer. Some of the nets are fished virtually the entire year round.”*

Conclusions: *“In particular, the market has widened, both at home and abroad, making fishing viable for species for which there was little demand twenty years ago. Nevertheless, the trend in inshore fishing since the late-1980s has been of falling catches and profitability, especially in areas which had been dependent on cod and whiting, which have shown a marked decline. Profits fell through rising operational costs against decreasing catches and, for some species, such as plaice, low first sale prices. **Fishermen responded by increasing fishing effort, usually in terms of quantity of static fishing gear.**”*

An earlier technical report :

<http://www.cefas.defra.gov.uk/publications/techrep/tech100.pdf> includes:

5. *Fixed and Drift net During the last 2 decades, the development of manmade fibres used to construct mono- and multi-filament nets has had a profound effect on the inshore fishing industry of England and Wales. Monofilament nets have proved to be more effective than previously used nets (made out of nylon, cotton or hemp), as they are far less conspicuous in the water, more durable, less bulky and cheaper. **Consequently the fishing capacity of an inshore boat has increased** together with the number of species exploited.*

D) Commercial bass fishermen were so concerned at the potential for mono netting to be deployed in areas where bass traditionally aggregated that a Cornwall Sea Fisheries Committee bylaw was introduced to protect the Manacles and Runnelstones reefs from bass gill nets with bylaw *Mesh of Nets in Parts of* District.

https://secure.toolkitfiles.co.uk/clients/17099/sitedata/Byelaw_review/CIFCA-byelaws-A5-bookletv3Dec16.pdf

E) It is frequently assumed that the under ten metre fleet is largely ‘artisanal’ and that its impacts on fishery resources are negligible. However, inshore boats are quite capable of deploying many kilometres of mono gill nets. If anyone harbours doubts about the increase in ‘fishing power’ of the under ten metre fleet over recent years, even the National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations (NFFO) published a statement at the end of July 2013 which powerfully confirms the point.

At http://www.nffo.org.uk/news/nffo_under10_2013.html the NFFO states:

“The fishing power of an under-10m vessel can be many times greater than its counterpart 20 years ago. As with the fleet of larger vessels, technology has not stood still.”

F) Threat to sea birds. At:

http://www.fishnewseu.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10429:gillnet-peril-revealed&catid=46:world&Itemid=145

We read:

“Gillnets are generally made from fine nylon, making them virtually invisible underwater. Not surprisingly, this poses a particular problem for diving seabirds, which readily become entangled and drown when pursuing their prey underwater. Species accidentally captured include threatened Humboldt penguins and long-tailed ducks, the endangered marbled murrelet, and more widespread species like common guillemot. Seabirds are not the only victims; gillnets also pose a major bycatch threat to dolphins, whales, seals and turtles.”
And **“Gillnet bycatch – the sleeping giant of seabird threats – must now be tackled with the utmost urgency.”**

G) At: <http://www.eurocbc.org/page39.html> we read

In terms of the bycatch levels of cetaceans, seals, birds, turtles, sharks and other non target species, gill nets, or static drift nets, as they are sometimes called, are considered to be one of the most destructive fishing methods, especially the bottom set /sink gill nets.

G) In a letter to a Committee member of the Cornwall IFCA in January 2015, the Chief Fisheries Officer (with a great many years of experience) wrote: *“nets can catch most of the available fish very quickly.”*

H) Across the globe there are numerous examples of restrictions on gill/entanglement nets. One of the most recent is in Australia where gillnetting for barramundi has been banned in areas of the Northern Territories to allow the sport fishing industry to develop and realise its economic potential which far exceeds that of commercial fishing.

Florida: all gill/entanglement netting is banned in State waters. Florida is now a leading international sport fishing destination.

In the Turks & Caicos Islands, a British protectorate, all trawling and netting is prohibited in favour of hook & line.

In Scotland The inshore fishing monofilament gill net order prohibits the use of mono gill nets inside 6 miles.

In the State of Massachusetts, USA; commercial exploitation of striped bass is restricted to hook & line only.

J) The Cornish Land's End Fishermen's Association submitted a request to the Cornwall IFCA in July

2015 for their local waters (including Brisons and Longships) to be made net free.

- K) The Southwest Handline Association made representation to the Cornwall IFCA in August 2015 about the damage being inflicted to pre-spawning aggregations of bass from gill nets.
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