

chance, say anglers

The battle between recreational anglers and commercial gill netters over the fate of bass stocks is hotting up. **Keith Rossiter** reports on the angler's campaign

Anglers have long pointed out that when it comes to game fish, their economic value as a sporting quarry significantly outstrips their commercial worth on the fish-mongers slab.

And when it comes to bass, the hard-fighting saltwater quarry pursued by dedicated sea anglers all around the southern coasts of Britain and Ireland, that claim is difficult to deny.

Spending on fishing tackle, bait, overnight stays, meals and other costs connected to angling tourism are seen as significant earners for areas like the South West – providing the anglers have fish to catch.

Thousands of anglers have long campaigned for tougher efforts to preserve the slow-growing fish from being scooped up by French pair-trawlers, blamed for drastically reducing stocks off the South West over many years.

Now the sports fishermen have stepped up their efforts to save bass stocks from a catastrophic collapse.

And they are targeting campaign-ing closer to home, calling for a ban on gill-netting, a method of fishing used close to the shore around many parts of the South West.

Scientists warn that bass stocks in northern Europe are now in deep trouble because of commercial over-fishing.

Angling groups in the UK have launched a national campaign to end gill netting in favour of sustainable commercial hook and line and recreational fishing.

But commercial fishermen in North Devon are fighting plans to ban gill netting in the Torridge estuary. Torridge councillor Philip Hackett is supporting the local fishermen and has put a motion to the meeting of the

full council on December 5 inviting Fisheries Minister George Eustice to visit the town.

Anglers are also lobbying Mr Eustice, ahead of an EU Council meeting on December 12.

The European Commission's proposals for 2017 would ban gill nets fishing for bass and give anglers a monthly bag limit rather than the unpopular one-fish-a-day bag limit.

Campaigners are calling on EU Fisheries Ministers – including Mr Eustice – to implement the EU proposals at their meeting on December 12.

Last weekend their bass petition

'We are paying the price for the repeated failure of politicians and fishery managers'

Martin Salter, Angling Trust

was the second fastest moving of all the petitions on the Government's website.

TV presenters Matt Hayes and Henry Gilbey are among those urging Britain's 800,000 recreational sea anglers to back the petition.

The campaign is also supported by the European Fishing Tackle Trade Association and the UK's Angling Trades Association.

The Angling Trust said: "Despite the clear scientific advice issued by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) in 2014 for an 80% cut in bass fishing mortality across the EU area, recorded bass landings by UK commercial vessels actually rose by 30%, from 772



Hand-lining, as here for mackerel, or pole-and-line bass fishing, is seen as more sustainable than gill-netting

PICTURE: QUENTIN KNIGHTS

thing now means we will have failed in our duty. That would be shameful."

In his motion to the council, Cllr Hackett says: "The ban will in effect force fishermen to either forego their maritime heritage or risk their lives to comply with an ill conceived by-law which prohibits local fishermen from catching fish at a sustainable level in the estuary."

The Angling Trust has set up a special bass campaign page with full briefings on the issues, at anglingtrust.net/nomorebassnets

fishery managers to follow scientific advice on bass conservation measures."

Last year recreational anglers were hit with a daily one-fish limit, while catch limits were increased for commercial fishermen.

Angling TV presenter Matt Hayes said: "Our seas are fragile ecosystems and the indiscriminate damage meted out by gill nets clearly isn't sustainable."

"We are custodians of our waters until we pass the baton to the next generation so failure to do the right

tonnes to 1,004 tonnes. The current ICES advice is for a complete moratorium on all harvesting of bass.

"There is no doubt that inshore gill-netting has played a significant part in the decline of bass stocks."

"In 2014, UK gill netters landed 646 tonnes of bass – more than the ICES 2016 Northern Stock advice of 541 tonnes for whole of the EU."

Martin Salter, national campaigns coordinator for the Angling Trust said: "We are paying the price for the repeated failure of politicians and