



BLUE MARINE FOUNDATION

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Bass should slip through the net: new report suggests fish should only be caught with hooks

Amateur fishing found to be considerably more valuable to economies and better for fish stocks

The value to the economy of a European bass caught by sea anglers using rod and line is more than three times that of a fish caught and landed commercially, a study for the Blue Marine Foundation has found.

The report also found that bass fishing by anglers also creates three times the number of jobs as commercial fishing, with a lower environmental impact than any commercial fishing method other than hook and line.

According to the research commissioned by the Blue Marine Foundation and conducted by respected fisheries consultancy, MRAG, anglers fishing in Sussex spent £31.3 million on tackle, charter boats and hotels to catch bass in 2012 and created 353 full time jobs. In comparison, commercial sea bass landings in Sussex generated only £9.25 million and 111 full time jobs.

Bass, which appeals to anglers because of its fighting prowess and to commercial fishermen because of its firm, valuable flesh, is in danger of disappearing because of overfishing. Researchers warned that bass was such an important species for commercial rod and line and drift net fishermen that it would be difficult to replace.

The conclusion drawn by BLUE, which funded the study, is that it would be better both economically and environmentally if the commercial fleet converted to charter angling and rod and line fishing, making bass a recreational species as it is in Ireland.

If commercial fishing were to continue, says BLUE, the most environmentally sound and highest value way of catching it would be hook and line as the fish could then be sold for a premium relative to farmed bass.

Charles Clover, chairman of the Blue Marine Foundation which commissioned the study, said: *“The overwhelming economic, environmental and democratic logic of what the report says is that we should only be fishing for bass with hooks and not with nets, especially when stocks are on the verge of collapse.”*

The fisheries consultancy MRAG used the Sussex coast as a way of taking a snapshot of the relative economic value of various fishing methods in use throughout the English Channel: hook and line, drift and fixed nets and pair-trawling as well as sea angling with fly, bait or

spinner.

The identification of wide differences in the value of fish caught by different fishing methods is highly topical as bass stocks are in decline and EU ministers are under pressure to deliver steep cuts in landings next year at annual talks in Brussels in December.



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According to the report, drift-netting accounted for 61 per cent of all the bass taken but it delivered the lowest price for each fish caught. The environmental effects included the possibility of dolphins and porpoises being caught in the nets as well as incidental catch of the rare Twaite and Aliss shad.

Pair-trawling with a net strung between two vessels for black sea bream landed bass as a by-catch. In some areas they were blamed for catching dolphins and porpoises, pair trawlers have been estimated as catching an average of 180 dolphins a year.

Options under consideration by the EU to protect bass stocks include restricting fishing methods that catch the most bass, such as pair-trawling on spawning aggregations, or imposing quotas upon all methods of fishing for bass. The EU has already suggested that anglers should be subject to a tough bag limit of one bass per trip.

Recreational fisheries are widely regarded as having few environmental impacts apart from the direct removal of fish by anglers, which can be significant, and those that die after being caught and released.

France takes 66 per cent of the bass caught in the Channel, with pair-trawlers estimated to take 25 per cent. The French recreational sector takes the second highest number with 17 per cent. UK anglers take six per cent, the same as drift and static nets.

The report said the UK could be doing more to protect bass nursery areas, such as the Solent.

Consultations during the study identified that there is an opportunity for commercially rod-and-line caught bass – like that caught by fishermen involved in BLUE’s ground-breaking Lyme Bay project – to be marketed as a premium product, rather than going to wholesale and export as is currently the case.

Callum Roberts, Professor of Marine Biology at York University and a trustee of BLUE, said:

“It would make excellent economic sense to switch the sea bass fishery to hook and line fishing only.

“This transition would yield the biggest economic reward, it would reduce fishing pressure, solve the problem of overfishing and allow rebuilding of the stock to healthy levels.

“It would eliminate most of the environmental impacts associated with the commercial net and trawl fisheries, including prevention of damage to sensitive near-shore bottom habitats and by-catch of dolphins and porpoises.

“A switch to recreational angling only has been made for very similar reasons in the US striped bass and Texan red drum fisheries. These species share similar characteristics with European bass, including high recreational value and much lower value, combined with heavy overfishing, in the commercial net fisheries. These switches have led to successful rebuilding of both stocks and increased economic value. Many former commercial fishermen now work with recreational anglers.”

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About the Blue Marine Foundation:

Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE) is a UK-registered charity that was established in 2010 by the team behind the award-winning documentary film on overfishing, *The End of the Line*. BLUE aims to increase the amount of global ocean under active and effective protection to 10 per cent by 2020.

For more information on BLUE¹'s work, please visit:
<http://www.bluemarinefoundation.com/>

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