

Dear [INSERT NAME OF MP]

I am writing to make you aware of the current parlous state of sea bass numbers around the inshore waters of England and Wales and the long overdue need for the government to introduce emergency measures to prevent a catastrophic stock collapse.

Following scientific advice in 2013 for a 36% cut in catches, which was not acted upon, the latest advice from ICES in June 2014, advises that an 80% cut in catches of sea bass across the EU is required in 2015. Increasing commercial fishing effort and successive years of recruitment failure are cumulatively driving bass stocks towards a precipice. Unless action is taken immediately to protect the remaining stock a total moratorium on bass fishing in Europe will be the only option available to protect and restore this important fishery.

This would be disastrous for recreational sea angling which, according to Defra's own Sea Angling 2012 report shows there are **884,000 sea anglers in England who directly pump £1.23 billion p.a. into the economy** and upon which 10,400 full time jobs are dependent. When induced and indirect impacts are taken into account these figures soar to £2.1 billion and 23,600 jobs. **The VAT alone which is collected from sea anglers dwarfs the entire value of all commercial fish landings in England.** In purely economic terms, we would be better off if bass were retained as a line caught species only with the bulk of the market demand met by farmed fish. This would immediately revive the UK fishery for both the inshore under ten metre commercial fleet, who would be in position to provide a premium product caught in a sustainable way, and the recreational sector - the majority of whom practice catch and release.

The 6000 commercial fishermen remaining in England land £160 million worth of fish [all species] 80% of which are of no interest to anglers. Of the remaining 20%, £32 million is made up of those same fishery resources upon which the £1.23 billion sea angling industry is dependent and include £5 million worth of commercially landed sea bass.

Bass is the favourite fish targeted by recreational sea anglers, who are extremely frustrated by the failure of successive governments over the last 15 years to follow their own scientific advice and introduce **a sustainable bass management plan with sensible minimum size limits to allow the species to spawn at least once before harvesting.**

Whereas some measures do need to be introduced at a European level to be fully effective, the scientific information available points to the risk of local depletion given the site fidelity of both adult stocks to inshore feeding areas, some breeding areas, and of juveniles in biological nursery areas. **There is significant scope for national and regional measures to conserve valuable inshore stocks that support both important recreational and small-scale commercial fisheries.**

Other countries have acted to protect their bass stocks and the jobs that depend upon them and it is about time that the UK did the same.

Ireland banned the commercial fishing for and landing of bass in 1990 after stocks collapsed due to commercial overfishing. **Bass has been managed by the Irish Government as a**

recreational angling only species ever since at considerable benefit to the Irish economy.

In addition, the Dutch government is introducing a series of national measures to protect bass including; banning pair trawling in certain areas from September-December, capping monthly landings of bass at 5,000kg per vessel, increasing the minimum landing size from 36cm to 42cm for all fishers, a bag limit of 20kg for recreational fishers and a cap on the small-scale commercial rod and line fleet. The measures are being taken because action is needed now and because the outcome of the EU process remains unknown. The Dutch fully recognize that their measures may need to be amended as a result of an EU intervention but are no longer prepared to stand by as bass stocks collapse. This is the sensible precautionary position that the UK should also be taking.

I have attached an excellent briefing on bass conservation from the Angling Trust which I urge you to read. It asks you to raise the issue with the Fisheries Ministers and to table parliamentary questions pressing for action to save our bass. **In particular we need an immediate increase in the current minimum landing size from 36cms to 45 - 48cms in order to allow bass to successfully reach their optimum spawning size of 42cms and to complete their life cycle.** Furthermore I would like you, as my MP, to press for an end to commercial harvesting during the spring spawning period, restrictions on pair trawling and trammel netting, which have done so much damage already, and for a significant expansion in estuarine bass nursery areas where juvenile fish can be afforded greater protection.

We simply cannot await the results of EU wide deliberations and I'm asking you to urge the minister to take immediate action nationally and to give guidance to the local Inshore Fishery Conservation Authorities (IFCAs).

There can be no escaping the fact that fish mortality must be reduced significantly, and this will mean constraints on both the commercial and recreational bass fisheries. We are running out of time and doing nothing is no longer an option.

I look forward to hearing from you and will be sharing your response with the Angling Trust that they can make recreational sea anglers aware of which MPs are prepared to act to support the survival of the British bass.

Yours sincerely,

[INSERT YOUR NAME]