



Bass – how not to manage fisheries

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What makes commercial overfishing of bass different from commercial overfishing of other finfish?

- Bass is arguably England's most valuable fish
- Other countries take a completely different approach to managing their bass, generating healthier stocks and greater economic values
- Politicians and fishery managers have been talking about this different approach for the UK for more than 10 years
- This different approach means prioritising sea angling for bass above commercial harvesting



Important Economic Statistics

- There are about 884,000 sea anglers in England
- They spend £1.2bn p.a on their fishing
- Of that, c£200m is spent on bass angling
- Anglers are responsible for 25% or less of fishing mortality
- Commercial fishing in England catches fish of interest to anglers which are worth only £35m p.a.
- Of that £35m, only £5m is bass, worth maybe £15m to the economy
- Less than 400 commercial boats have bass as an important source of income
- More than 75% of fishing mortality comes from commercial fishing



The Problem

- Before commercial fishing started for Bass 20+ years ago, Bass were large and plentiful
- 20 years of increasingly effective commercial fishing for non quota Bass, with a very low minimum landing size, has depleted stocks and dramatically reduced the number of large Bass which have most appeal to anglers
- Bass stocks are now below the danger level, causing ICES to advise that in 2017 there should be a moratorium on bass harvesting



State of play going into December EU fisheries meeting

- ICES assess northern bass stock below Blim
- ICES advises a moratorium on harvesting due to this
- UK has taken no measures to protect bass over last 4 years, in anticipation of EU regulation
- UK request EU implement emergency measures in Dec 2014
- EU measures in 2015 and 2016 impact French commercials and recreational sea anglers. UK commercials only lightly affected
- EU proposal for 2017 isn't liked by anyone, so might be the right thing to do



Management lessons from abroad - North East USA Striped Bass

- In 1982 Striped Bass stocks were at an all time low of 5 million small fish - stock managed wholly for commercial fishermen
- Stock restoration measures enforced - stock managed primarily for Recreational Sea Anglers
- By 1996 stock restored to 50 million fish of large size
- Total Allowable Catch split 80% recreational, 20% commercial, with commercial catch back to 1960' s levels
- Angling spend increases from \$85m to \$560m, 25x as much as commercial economic value



Management lessons from Abroad - Southern Irish Bass

- Southern Ireland has the same Bass species as us, but 20 years ago foresaw the economic problems and opportunities
- For 20 years Eire has had a total ban on commercial fishing for Bass in it's territorial waters, with recreational angling controls via bag limits, minimum landing sizes and a close season
- The result is the best Bass angling in Europe
- Bass Angling in Ireland is estimated to be worth £15m p.a. with about half that from visiting anglers (compare that to the total value of all commercial Bass landings in England and Wales of £5m p.a.)



- In the 2004 report “Net Benefits” the Prime Minister said
- In some circumstances the economic and social benefits of sea angling for specific species may provide a greater contribution to society than if they are commercially caught - citing New Zealand, Australia and the USA as examples
- Fisheries management policy should recognise that sea angling may, in some circumstances, provide a better return on the use of some resources than commercial exploitation
- Fisheries departments should review the evidence supporting arguments for re-designating commercially caught species for wholly recreational sea angling, starting with bass



So what did we get in December?

- No moratorium
- EU proposal rejected
- A horse traded deal done in secret by Ministers without public consultation, without any impact assessment, without any sense check on enforceability
- Restrictions on anglers remain severe. A better way was rejected as being unenforceable
- Restrictions on gillnetting but the intended ban on targeting bass (only allowing bycatch) looks unenforceable
- No estimate of impact on stocks in 2017
- No moves to get closer to a fully documented fishery



What now?

- The change of approach seen in the USA and Ireland only happened following a full blown stock crisis
- Is that what it takes?
- In 2017, where are we with evidence based management
- Are politicians too afraid to ever do anything someone might say is “radical”