

Bass

Defra update for IFCAs- 25 November 2014

The European Commission has proposed interim measures for bass to apply in 2015. These feature a one fish per person, per day, bag limit for the recreational sector, and for the commercial sector effort and catch limits (at levels to be set) which would apply to pelagic trawlers using particular gear (e.g. pair trawl) in the western Channel during January to April. This proposal requires further development for negotiation in December when Member States agree these measures for 2015.

The current proposal to set a bag limit should be part of a balanced package of measures to reduce catches in both commercial and recreational sectors. Defra therefore recommends a 2 fish daily bag limit and clarification that this limit will not apply to shore based anglers. The limited provisions proposed for the commercial pelagic trawl sector do not go far enough to achieve either the required balance or significant stock recovery. We are working with the Commission and other Member States, to seek an improved solution to address these points.

Beyond any interim measures agreed for 2015, more in-depth work will be needed to develop an EU management plan – and we have Member State consensus to do so. This will include developing ways to reduce catches in mixed fisheries, for example, by improving fishing gear selectivity or through seasonal measures to apply in areas where different age classes of bass are located. The North Sea and North Western Waters Advisory Councils are already providing advice to the Commission to begin this process.

An EU management structure will provide the context to review our UK domestic management arrangements for bass, such as considerations of minimum landing sizes and updating bass nursery area controls. This process will begin as soon as the EU's interim approach is established in December and we will actively involve IFCAs in the considerations particularly in determining which measures would be best delivered at a local level and those nationally.

Meanwhile, the UK position for the purposes of the imminent December negotiations will be an ambitious one in seeking effective EU level conservation measures that will pave the way for the stock to recover and become sustainable.