

**INTRODUCTION OF A NEW BYELAW FOR THE HEYSHAM BASS NURSERY AREA**

**Recommendation**

**To make it illegal to undertake commercial or recreational fishing activity in a closed area within the Bass Nursery Area throughout the year.**

**Introduction**

1. The Heysham Bass Nursery Area was established on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1990 under a Statutory Instrument (copy attached at Annex A). This made fishing for Bass from a boat inside the Heysham Bass Nursery Area illegal but did not exclude other shore fishing activity, including set and stake nets, set lines and all aspects of angling.
2. In 1992, the North Western and North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee held a public meeting at Morecambe Town Hall in response to receiving a written petition of 33 signatures. The petition asked for all aspects of fishing to be prohibited between the 1st June to 30<sup>th</sup> September in the Heysham Bass Nursery Area in line with the original period stipulated when the Statutory Instrument was established.
3. During this meeting some of the anglers present became concerned at the size of the Heysham Bass Nursery Area affecting other species they targeted. As a consequence no further progress was made in establishing the new Byelaw.
4. The Heysham Bass Nursery Area closed period has since been amended and is now an all year round Nursery Area.

**Requirement for a new Byelaw**

5. To promote and protect the Bass fishery throughout the Morecambe Bay area.

**Objectives of the new Byelaw**

- a. To allow the Heysham Bass Nursery Area to become a credible protected area for juvenile Bass.
- b. To stop the fishing of undersized Bass.
- c. To stop the damage to undersized Bass both internally and externally by the landing and returning of the fish to the sea.
- d. To stop nets being set by fishermen.
- e. To stop nets being left unattended and unmarked over several tides.
- f. To remove conflict between commercial and recreational activity.

The proposed new byelaw is attached at Annex B.

### **Proposed closed area**

6. To cover all the existing Heysham Bass Nursery Area – see attached map.

### **Observations**

7. Throughout the history of the Heysham Bass Nursery Area there have been problems with very high concentrations of undersized Bass. This has been caused by Heysham 1 and 2 Nuclear Power Stations returning sea water into the Bay via outfalls channelling warm water over Middleton Sands and into Heysham Lake. As a result, both anglers and netsmen have been attracted to the area and tensions have arisen. The netsmen have worked along the outfalls at both power stations and along the bottom of the sea wall whilst anglers have fished along the sea wall at high water and at the end of the power station outfalls at low water.
8. Complaints from anglers are as follows:
  - That nets are set too close to the sea wall, causing them to snag and lose gear.
  - Nets catch both undersize as well as legal size fish.
  - Fish caught are either taken or returned to the sea when dead.
9. Complaints from netsmen are as follows:
  - (1) Nets are cut and vandalised on a regular basis.
  - (2) Nets have been stolen.
  - (3) Nets have been cut adrift.
  - (4) Continuous loss of ID buoys.
10. Conflicts have also been encountered between comparable activities with anglers confronting other anglers regarding the taking of undersize fish. Although conflict between anglers has remained verbal, this cannot be said for the netsmen. Competition in this activity has seen one fisherman admitted to hospital with serious head injuries after an altercation with another fisherman whilst checking his nets over an evening tide.

### **Conclusion**

11. I have discussed the proposal of the new Byelaw with commercial fishermen and all have responded favourably to the idea. Having listened to anglers complaining about the amount of undersized Bass being landed I would hope they would also agree that a new Byelaw is needed.
12. Without this new Byelaw in place, Fishery Officers will continue to encounter problems in policing the Heysham Bass Nursery Area due to:
  - The heavy concentration of effort by anglers along the sea wall.
  - Having limited access to the anglers because the area is only accessible via the Heysham Power Station nature walk along the perimeter fence.
  - This lack of accessibility also allows plenty of time for under size fish to be returned to the sea.

- Officers are visible to the anglers for a considerable period of time, because of the length of the approach.
- The lack of accessibility to both anglers and netsmen over low water periods due to both outfalls being only accessible via the sea wall.

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