

**NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw
Committee**

7th February 2017: 10:00 a.m.

**AGENDA
ITEM NO.
10**

C-BASS PROJECT REPORT – TO BE TABLED AT MEETING

POPULATION STUDIES IN SUPPORT OF THE CONSERVATION OF THE EUROPEAN SEA BASS

Purpose of report: to inform TSB of latest developments

Background:

As previously reported to the Authority NWIFCA science officers have been attending the external project steering group meetings of the Defra Project (MF 1233) on Bass populations over the past 12 months. The key aim of NWIFCA involvement in the project has been to look for opportunities for research into seabass populations in the north-east Irish Sea.

Update:

On 2nd February, the Senior Scientist attended the final External Project Steering Group meeting for the original C-Bass project (<https://marinescience.blog.gov.uk/category/cbass/>) whose three year finding finishes at the end of March 2017. A small pot of Defra underspend from the project has been allocated to carry out fishermen's stakeholder engagement in the NWIFCA District by the end of March, and Cefas scientists have asked for NWIFCA assistance in making that engagement happen through a series of workshops / meetings. The summary text to Defra for this funding is produced below.

The purpose of the engagement is to show north-west fishers (both commercial and recreational) the results to date from the tagging studies and modelling of bass movements in the southern parts of the country. C-Bass has been working collaboratively with Iframer in France, and pooling data obtained from tagging carried out over the past three years. Cefas will be asking fishers about timings and locations of bass (adult / juvenile seasons & prime locations, and best times to DST / mark ID tag & record), and for volunteers to be trained in tagging techniques in order to carry the project forward in to north-east Irish Sea waters, under the next phase of the project (subject to funding bid success).

This is a key opportunity for the NWIFCA to strengthen its relationship with other agencies, in particular Cefas, in a research project that aims to improve understanding of the District's bass population(s) and its connectivity to other UK / European populations. Data obtained will assist in future management decisions over bass management, and answer some long-standing questions around the discreteness of the population in our District. In view of the severity of the recent EU Bass measures and the concerns about the stocks, now is the time to embark on this work.

NWIFCA officers will assist Cefas in identifying stakeholders across the District and to set up and run the meetings – which are likely to be three or four during March. Other than officer time, all costs will be met from the Defra underspend.

**Mandy Knott
Senior Scientist
6th February 2017**

Summary text to Defra

“Gathering new evidence to inform upon whether a separate UK bass stock exists within eastern Irish Sea waters of the UK which should be exempt from the remainder of the “EU stock”

Numerous reports and preliminary scientific evidence suggest that sea bass present in eastern Irish Sea (off North West coast, UK) are not the same stock as those present in the other areas of UK and EU waters. Recent research from scale isotopes provides evidence that there may be two discrete populations within Irish Sea region. To date the reconstructed movements of tagged adult bass from the Cefas-led C-Bass project released in the Western Channel found that only a limited number of these fish moved west out of the English Channel, then North, but none of the fish migrated further North than the Bristol Channel. Additional resource would allow a for evidence gathering of spatial occurrence of bass within the region based upon initiating a supplementary release of DST-tagged North Western bass (with a match fund of costs mitigated by working with the NW and DSIFCAs). Release of DST-tagged bass during 16/17 would allow for evidence of spatial data (during 17/18 under C-Bass extension) to inform upon any existence of either i) a separate eastern Irish Sea stock which would require consideration for new management measures or ii) bass populations that are part of the established “EU stock” with no requirement for separate management measures.

Deliverables:

- Engagement Workshop (in partnership with NWIFCA)
- DST / Mark ID collaborative tagging programme (commercial / recreational)
- report on findings – to take forward into C-Bass extension 2017 - 2020