

NWIFCA Technical, Science and Byelaw Sub-Committee

10th February 2015: 10:00 a.m.

AGENDA
ITEM NO.

6

BASS UPDATE

1. Members are likely to be aware that the status and future management of Bass has been reported in the press recently. This paper is intended to give members
 - An update on the status of the stock
 - Current negotiations and measures that have been brought in recently
 - Current regulation of Bass fisheries that applies to the district

Update on Stock Status

2. The International Commission for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) have identified Bass as being particularly vulnerable to over-fishing due to :
 - Slow growth and maturity at around 31-35cm in males and 40-45cm in females
 - Aggregating behaviour
 - Vulnerability to low sea water temperatures – especially in the northern limits of their range
3. Current ICES advice is that Bass stocks are suffering from a rapid decline in biomass and that the “current spawning stock biomass is declining to lowest historically observed level” due to:
 - Increasing fishing mortality – currently 4 times what the stock can sustain
 - Declining recruitment into the stock
4. Historic trends in the stock:
 - Biomass increased through the 1990s to the mid-2000s
 - A decline commenced in the 2000s
 - The cold winters since 2008 have caused further concern around the juvenile stock

Negotiations and Recent Developments

5. Negotiations on the management of Bass stocks have been on-going at EU level since 2012.
6. The UK unsuccessfully attempted to secure a one-fish bag limit in the recreational sector at the December 2014 EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council Meeting.
7. At the same meeting no agreement on addressing the declining Bass stock levels was reached other than a commitment to work with member states to reduce fishing pressure at the start of 2015.
8. Following on from the above the UK requested that the EU commission take action under article 12 of regulation of the Cod recovery regulation 1380/2013. This article gives provision for emergency measures, when justified, in response to a serious biological threat to a species. This is done in response to a request from a member state and is time limited to 6 months.

9. The UK made such a request in writing on the 19th December by closing Irish Sea (area VIIa, IFCA district) as well as Celtic sea, Channel and southern North sea to:
- Pelagic trawls
 - Mid water trawls
10. This ban will be in place until the 30th April 2015 to protect the Bass breeding season.
11. On the 26th January 2015 the Commission announced that this ban was being replicated across all member states.
12. In addition the Commission is making “a renewed and urgent effort” in order to bring further measures into place, inclusive of:
- A 3 fish per day bag limit
 - An increase in the MLS to 42cm
 - Limits on fisheries other than pelagic fisheries

IFCA District

13. Current regulations and restrictions that apply within the IFCA district are as follows:

Byelaw 19	Applies a 36cm MLS to all vessels (not foreign) and individuals
Byelaw 5	The fishing for sea fish prohibition in the Heysham Bass nursery area – applies to all vessels and individuals
Byelaw 7	Creates target species for small mesh sizes
Byelaw 8	Inter-tidal nets 89mm 2mm gauge
Byelaw 11	Requires gear marking and spacing between nets of 137.5m and maximum length 275m
Byelaw 26/27	Estuarine box closures 1 st May- 30 th Nov
Byelaw 10	1 st Oct – 31 st Mar upper Solway Estuarine boxes 1 st Dec – 31 st May
SI 75 of 1990	Applies Bas prohibition to the Heysham box to licensed registered vessels – box replicated in byelaw 19 Dee Bass nursery area from 31 st May – 1 st Oct 4 Use of Sandeels as bait prohibition (amendment)
SI 1285 of 1989	Gives national MLS of 36cm
UK Licence annex	Bass quota limit – 5 tonnes per week or 15 tonnes per month on issue of a Bass notice of variation
Annex XII of 850/98	EU level 36cm MLS applies to all registered vessels including foreign
850/98 article 11 and annex VI	Applies to licensed vessels: Bottom set nets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70% target species • Vessels targeting Bass mesh size 90-99mm