



Bass anglers must fight for the future of their fishing

Photograph by Matt Spence

# Whose resource is it anyway?

*Julian Fox explains the continuing pressure on bass stocks and wonders what effect it will have on his fishing this coming season*

**I**t is just about spring, and our thoughts turn to the first day of serious bass fishing. It is always a melancholy time of year for me. As I dig out the lure bag and dust off the detritus of a long winter, I wonder if there will be any big bass to catch this year.

Decades of legal and criminal exploitation have left our fish stocks in a perilous state. The European fish quota negotiations seem to be the annual nail in the coffin. Every December our Fisheries Minister makes his way to Brussels for the annual fish quota negotiation. After every meeting, the Ministers say it's a good deal, the fishermen complain and the fisheries

scientists say that no-one is taking any notice of their advice. Nobody seems to be learning from past mistakes.

This matters on so many levels, starting with the politicians who still believe that the UK fishing industry actually matters to the UK. Soon after the December 2011 negotiation the commercial fishing spokesman bemoaned the serious impact of the new arrangements on fishermen's livelihoods. Utter rubbish of course, there are far more badly-off sectors in the UK economy, but it doesn't stop the BBC and the fishing industry PR machine taking the same stance.

To commercial fishermen a dead fish in the bottom of the boat is quite simply money. On one level (and probably the most important one) it's as simple as that. Commercial fishermen only see a fish as a source of revenue, while recreational anglers see something entirely different. No wonder we don't get on.

The heart of it all is that anglers are a mistrustful bunch, and bass anglers are more mistrustful than most. Some would not tell their own mothers their best fishing spots. It is a necessity, but embarrassing as well. We are a solitary bunch, in the main devoted to enjoying ourselves on a level that many cannot (or will not) understand, but our deeply mistrustful nature and our wish to be left alone does us no favours at all.

In the face of overwhelming environmental and scientific evidence we let a small number of greedy commercial fishery leaders swindle us out of a sea full of fish - and they were swimming right under our noses too. And yet still we sea anglers are mistrustful.

More worryingly the UK has been swindled too. Sea angling supports 20,000 jobs in the UK, generating in excess of a billion pounds a year and providing other more esoteric benefits that

far exceed a monetary value. These, however, are lost to the politician who can only see the image of a wizened old sea dog mending his nets next to a sun dappled rippling sea; an image placed in his mind by a commercial fisherman rubbing his hands together with glee as another dead fish drops into the hold.

Anglers really ought to get together, we really should. Getting together provides money, that money provides PR and PR gives influence to spread the angling word.

PR is what many anglers abhor, but if we want more and bigger fish to catch then we as anglers need to change what we are doing. If we carry on the way we are going and let the policymakers walk all over us we shouldn't expect anything to change. Let's try and make a difference this year. If you'd like to help, get in touch with BASS (details on ukbass.com) and we'll show you how. **SA**