

All we have is hope



BASS member Matt Spence braves the Irish elements and British politics in the hope that a fish will take his lure and that the minimum landing size for bass will eventually be raised to 48cm

It was September, and an ex-tropical storm followed by a former hurricane sought to ruin my chances of catching from Irish waters.

At times the towering waves appeared apocalyptic and the sea resembled the dregs in a cocoa mug. Had I discovered kelp in the trees it would have been no surprise, but I was there to catch bass on the lure, so I kept moving in the hope of finding cleaner, calmer water.

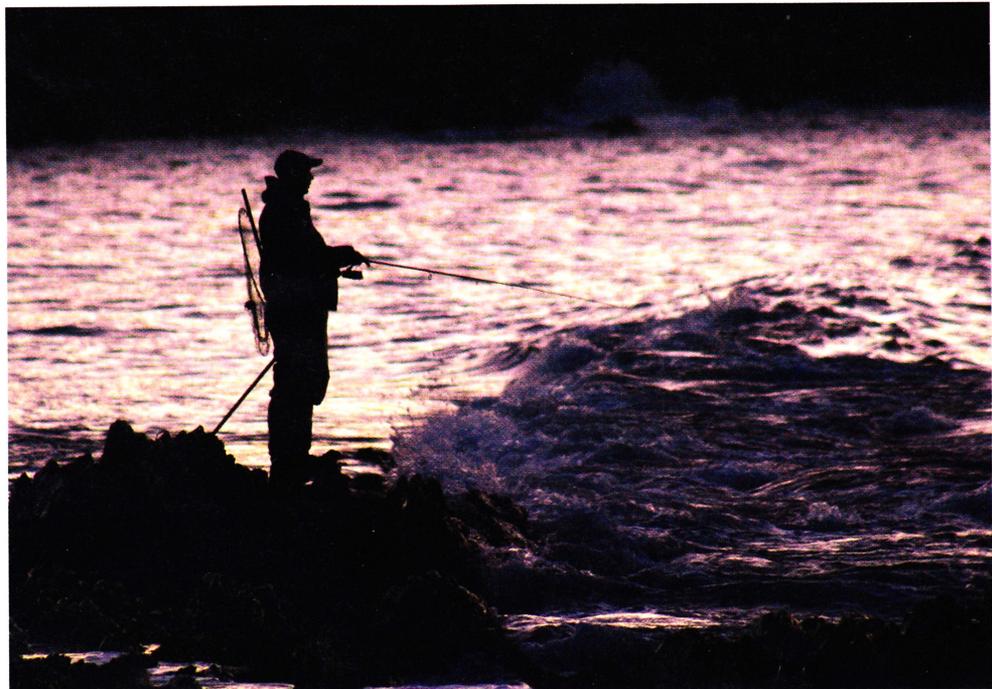
For the whole week I walked numerous miles along the rugged coastline, fuelled only by strong coffee, an overwhelming drive to catch a bass and new hopes gained each time I studied the details on the map.

Memories of that trip reminded me of a John Cleese line from the film 'Clockwise' - words uttered by a man battling never-ending misfortune that conspired against him: "It's not the despair," sighed Cleese.

"I can take the despair. It's the hope I can't stand."

In Ireland hope kept me outside fighting the elements and seemingly improbable odds of success, but it also kept me out of the bars...well, most of the time.

These words come to mind when thinking of the campaigns I have supported to change how our sea fisheries are managed. Although over the years a few victories have been won, I have sometimes been left in despair as hard science and economic arguments have come second to self-interest, short-termism and politics. The bottom line is that commercial fishermen have been highly effective at selling their message to the UK population that they are hard-done-by and barely making a living. In truth they are well organised, well funded and effective in influencing policy,



and their voice is magnified due to many of the areas where commercial fishing is relevant to the local economy being marginal constituencies.

This results in a taxpayer-funded industry, employing a tiny proportion of the UK population, but with disproportionate influence on decision-making - and therefore my occasional despair.

I am terminally optimistic however, and my gloom is usually brief, and normally forgotten whenever a new campaign comes along needing my support.

Fight for bigger bass

The most recent is a proposal led by BASS to the Southern Inshore Fisheries Conservation Area (IFCA) to get the minimum landing size for bass raised to 48cm, thus allowing the stock at least one chance to breed (<http://ukbass.com/2011/11/10/southern-ifca-the-case-for-an-increase-in-the-bass-mls/>).

In December I took a day off work for a 140-mile round trip to support the proposal at the IFCA meeting where it was to be considered. The topic was debated for perhaps all of 10 minutes before being referred to their scientific sub-committee for consideration in several months time.

I could not help feel frustrated at the pace these things crawl along, given my desire for reform right now. As per normal, though, optimism soon regained its hold once I realised this proposal is still moving forward and has a real chance of ultimately succeeding.

Consequently I will again email the IFCA committee (enquiries@southern-ifca.gov.uk) to make the case for change and will continue to encourage anyone who supports our arguments to do likewise.

In Ireland last autumn as I kept trying, the burning expectations of catching many big bass faded to a longing for just one fish while not being

washed out to sea.

So when after a week I finally found cleaner water and a fish foolish enough to fall for my deceptions, it was the most prized 8lb bass I have ever held. Hope after all had not proved to be a burden, but the reason I continued and eventually succeeded in my efforts.

Similarly, I believe perseverance in trying to change how our bass stocks are managed will bring eventual success given the weight of our arguments. One thing is for sure: the greater the number of us fighting to realise these hopes, the quicker our progress, the greater our victories and the better it will be for the bass. **SA**

COMMERCIAL ANTICS
Turn back to page 29 to find out what the Angling Trust has to say about commercial fishing, the way the industry operates, sometimes outside the law, and how it affects your fishing.