



the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

Issue number 4 Summer 2001



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www.ukbass.com



B.A.S.S. member Allan Hughes with a 5lb bass, shortly before releasing it.

Photo: courtesy of Mike Laid

More and Bigger Bass.

Steve Pitts – Restoration Project Chairman.

This photograph sums up all that we are trying to achieve. Wouldn't it be nice to think that we all stood a good chance of catching fish of this quality on a regular basis. Well, the reality is, it's no longer a dream.

Anyone who fishes for bass will have noticed the increased numbers of small fish available over the past couple of years, due to the success of the bass nursery protection measures and the almost unparalleled survival rates of juvenile bass, in recent years. Our aim is to ensure that this windfall is not squandered by excessive commercial exploitation and that the recreational value of bass is realised, by adopting changes to management practices, that place the well being of our natural resources above that of short-term financial gain.

We hope that you enjoy reading of our recent progress, to secure this vision.

Campaign to ban gill nets.

Anyone who is a member of the NFSA, will be aware of the results of a recent survey, conducted to establish the future priorities of the NFSA. Conservation and education issues received twice as many votes as the other responsibilities that the federation carries out.

With this mandate in mind, the NFSA have launched a campaign to restrict or ban the use of gill nets, which are often set close to the shore-line or between high and low water marks, threaten many forms of marine life and make angling virtually impossible in some areas.

The NFSA claim that they receive more complaints about gill nets, from irate sea anglers, than any other single topic and their Conservation group have agreed to address this growing problem by initiating a survey into the problems encountered by sea anglers and other users of our inshore waters such as surfers, divers and boat owners. This cannot be achieved without financial support, so we would urge anyone, who is not already a member of the NFSA, to support this campaign by becoming an individual member. You can join by sending in a cheque for £10 (the cost of a plug or bait for one day's fishing) to **NFSA Head Office, Level 5, Hamlyn House, Mardle Way, Buckfastleigh, Devon, TQ11 0NS**, or you can join on-line at www.nfsa.org.uk. If you are a member, then get a mate to sign up.

Is anything else being done?

The Environment Agency is also aware of the menace that the indiscriminate use of gill nets poses and that many unlicensed commercial fishermen use mono gill nets to target bass nursery areas, estuaries and inshore waters.

EA fisheries officers seized over two kilometres of illegally set nets in a single day, during an operation against poachers in Cornwall. Nets worth approx. £2,000, four of which were set in or around the Fowey estuary, contained many dead bass and one had also sustained damage where a dolphin or porpoise had managed to escape the meshes.

Mark Pilcher of the EA said:

'This is far removed from the romantic image of a poacher taking the odd fish for the table. Poaching on this scale is big business and those caught risk fines of up to £2,500, along with the confiscation of their boat and nets.'

Perhaps the threat of castration would prove a more effective deterrent. Ed.



The Environment Agency hot-line card

If you suspect that illegal netting is taking place on your local patch, give the EA a call on their toll-free, 24-hour hotline. Please make a note of the number or enter it in your mobile phone's memory and report any suspicious netting immediately.

This is a sight that will surely make your heart sink. Just how many dead bass are in this picture is hard to work out. There are no prizes for the correct answer, but there are over 100 fish, averaging between 2-4 pound in this one haul, which was confiscated by the Environment Agency.



It only takes one net, shot around a shoal of bass, to wipe out an entire local population.

The returns from the joint BASS/CEFAS tagging studies show categorically that bass habitually return to the same areas each summer. Therefore, the removal of so many fish would take several years, perhaps a decade or more, for local stocks to replenish naturally.

Rules - What rules?

One defence, often pleaded by poachers, is the lack of widely available information on local bylaws and in particular, the designated bass nursery areas where fishing for bass from a boat, or the use of gill and similar entrapment nets, is prohibited.

When the protective legislation was introduced, back in 1990, MAFF issued a booklet giving precise details of the increases in minimum landing sizes (36 cm), mesh size controls and descriptions of nursery areas showing the sites and duration of any bass fishing closed seasons. Unfortunately this book, which was available from HMO stationary offices (ref:PB 0234), is now out of print. We will also be asking for permission to reproduce extracts from the MAFF booklet but, in the mean time, details of the locations of the nursery sites are available on the B.A.S.S web site at www.ukbass.com

Additionally, there are no information signs positioned adjacent to these protected zones, advising the public, anglers, commercial fishermen or poachers, of the existence of any restrictions on the capture and retention of juvenile bass.

The B.A.S.S Restoration team have identified this as a major oversight and will be approaching the E.A and local sea fisheries committees to jointly fund information signs where designated bass nursery sites exist.



Newyddion Diweddaraf O Gymru

(The latest news from Wales)

It was a pleasure to be invited to make a presentation to the Welsh Institute of Fisheries Managers, last November, by B.A.S.S member Nigel Milner. Writes Steve Pitts.

Looking for a bit of moral (not to mention technical) support, I enlisted the help of Dr Mike Ladle, who had made several presentations to the IFM in the past, in his professional capacity as a fresh-water fisheries biologist.

Our subject matter was B.A.S.S and bass. I covered the history of the society and gave an update on our restoration project work, which focussed heavily on the offshore bass fishery and its destructive effects on inshore bass stocks. Mike then lightened things up with one of his slide shows, giving an anglers perspective of why so many sea anglers love to catch bass.

Several of the audience admitted to having a soft spot for bass

and it was good to see a couple of B.A.S.S members present, including Matthew Dawkins. It was also nice to see Phil Coates, Director of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee in attendance. Phil gave an excellent presentation at the 2001 sea angling conference, held at Cardiff Uni, where he spelt out the need for better conservation of ray species. Although most of those present were fresh water fisheries managers, it was apparent that many also had a keen interest in sea fishing, mainly because several had been under Mike's tuition whilst they were students.

Thanks go to Mike, for making the 250 mile round trip, to spread the gospel. I think that we picked up a couple of new members as a result.

Still in Wales

Local Sea Fisheries Committees are often viewed with suspicion by sea anglers, who generally consider that these bodies are firmly on the side of commercial fishermen. In the past, and in some areas it is still the case; sea anglers are not represented on SFCs despite our obvious interest in sea fish management issues.

It is heartening, therefore, to hear of a Sea Fisheries Committee, standing up for sea anglers, especially where bass are concerned.

The South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee is one of the few regional management organisations that acknowledges the rights of anglers and holds regular consultation meetings with sea anglers. They are also prepared to challenge the wasteful and damaging method of pair trawling, which is used in the offshore bass fishery.

The SWSFCs Director, Phil Coates, has sent a letter to the EU fisheries Commission. The following are extracts (full version available at www.swsfc@aol.com.)

Dear Commissioner Fischler

PELAGIC BASS FISHERY OFF SOUTH WEST ENGLAND - ECONOMIC AND BIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

I write to you on behalf of the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee. The Committee has followed the developments within the seasonal pelagic bass fishery for over five years and has watched events with a growing concern. Indeed I enclose a copy letter to CEFAS fisheries scientists and government administrators dated 26 March 1999 which outlines these concerns.

We implore upon relevant Member States and the Commission to jointly take relevant action for the 2004 season, and we advise that this be a total ban or closed season in the taking or removing of bass and their carriage and landing between 1st February and end of April in each year. This could also encompass a ban on the sale of bass at these times except where these originate from aquaculture sources.

The grounds for such a measure are:-

i) **Protection of the stocks of migratory bass in ICES areas VII and increasingly area IV.**

The stocks being exploited are known to comprise mainly of adult spawning fish which spend their summers further north and over-winter in the south.

As they congregate to spawn they are very vulnerable to capture by these efficient, technologically advanced methods.

These fish must be allowed to spawn.

Perhaps an over simplification, but if you slaughter the cow before it gives birth then a point will soon be reached when there are no breeding cows left.

Scientists tell us that they see no evidence of recruitment over fishing. i.e. No shortage of juvenile bass within coastal nursery areas. That is fortuitous and a consequence of (a) favourable weather which has encouraged good survival of juveniles (This may change quite rapidly) and (b) Conservation measures including nursery areas and increased minimum fish sizes - the burdens of which lie upon INSHORE fishermen and recreational sea anglers, who see the fruits of their restraint taken by (foreign) OFFSHORE interests. Such a mismatch between inshore/offshore and northern waters/southern countries being beneficiaries is INEQUITABLE.

ii) **Economic arguments**

The large pelagic vessels do not employ many people. They target bass at a time when the flesh is of

Cont...

poorer quality and out of condition.

Had these fish not been landed (and after spawning) they then disperse to become available to fishermen using a range of methods over a much wider area.

There is an urgent need to assess the wider economic value of alternative capture strategies.

We would maintain that a policy of taking these same fish mainly in the summer and in inshore waters would:-

- Employ far more people.
- Be an essential component of inshore catches the extent of which could be critical to the maintenance of the economic viability of such operations.
- Ensure maximum economic return per fish because (a) They will be in better condition. (b) The market will not be flooded and (c) They will be on average larger. (i.e. having avoided capture for some years).
- Encourage the use of more ecologically friendly methods which are used inshore.
- Provide for greater escapement (on average) leading to greater stocks especially of larger fish.

Finally, there is an economic argument regarding the value of fish species when taken by recreational angling.

Studies worldwide, demonstrate the high value of angling to the wider economy - and anglers are encouraged to participate by the availability of more and larger fish.

The current mismanagement of bass as a species gives rise to fewer and smaller fish. The continuation of the pelagic offshore bass fishery contributes to this situation in no small way.

In conclusion, the Committee are of the view that stringent controls should be put in place immediately to limit the effects of those vessels fishing for bass as described, on the grounds of fisheries biology, economic evaluation, resource apportionment and conservation of cetaceans (the dolphin bycatch associated with the fishery).

The Commission are requested to put in place appropriate and effective control measures on a precautionary basis whilst further studies take place as a priority on fish biology, economic evaluation and gear selectivity, the outcome of which should determine the future of this offshore fishery.

Yours sincerely

P.J. COATES
Director

We would like to congratulate SWSFC on their stance and would encourage B.A.S.S members, particularly those who live in, or visit the principality to fish for bass, to write in support of their views. Don't forget to emphasise that you are an angler. Send your letter to: Mr P.J. Coates, Director SWSFC, Queens Building, Cambrian Place, Swansea, West Glamorgan, SA1 1TW.

News From Ireland.

Irish bass legislation

Dr Ed Fahy of the Marine Institute, Marine Fisheries Services Division (MFSD) in Dublin has forwarded a copy of his annual report on Irish bass stocks.

The heading is:

MFSD -ADVICE

MFSD recommend that all existing by-laws and regulations protecting bass should be continued indefinitely.

These measures include a minimum retention limit of 40 cm, a bag limit of two fish per day, the prohibition of the commercial capture of bass and prohibition of the sale of bass from Irish waters and a close season between to coincide with spawning.

MFSD also recommends

" active enforcement of the regulations."

The report ends:

The accumulating evidence would suggest that bass is an inshore species whose biology requires national, rather than international, protection and management.

But, are these measures working?

The proof of the pudding.

Malcolm Gilbert reports on a recent visit for four guys fishing the Kerry peninsula, 6th - 12th Feb.

During generally mild weather, with minimal weed problems and good surf, myself, Guy Ashworth, Andrew Hornby & Steve Mann, fished every day except Tuesday 11th when a massive ground swell made fishing impossible.

Fish caught	weight lbs	0-2	2-3	3-4	4-5	5-6	6-7	7-8
numbers		17	19	12	6	3	2	4

In addition 2 fish in the 8-9 lb bracket were caught for a total of 66 bass. A total of five bass were killed for the table. Two males & three females.

Steve has fished for bass in Cornwall for 26 years. His first cast on Thursday 6th produced a 7 lb fish --his biggest ever. On the 8th he had a 7.5 lb bass and on the 9th a 7.75 lb fish.

Previously, Guy's largest bass was 2.5 lbs from 20+ years of fishing Cornwall. He had a bass of 6 lbs on 7th. He topped it with a fish of 6.25 lbs on the 8th and then, just prior to departure on the 12th, landed a 9.75 lb bass!

Two very happy anglers!

Irish Sea Workshop.

Regular reader of the B.A.S.S magazine and newsletters will be aware of our involvement in the review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP).

We have been kept up-to-date with developments by Jan Kappel, who is doing sterling work for the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) lobbying for greater involvement by sea anglers in the revised CFP.

One of the key recommendations, which caught our eye, is the development of Regional Advisory Councils to the commission. These RACs will comprise of up to a dozen representatives, gathered from the fishing industry, environmental groups, commercial interests and sea anglers.

One of the marine sectors, to be 'awarded' its own RAC, is the Irish Sea and the Countryside Council for Wales (sponsors of the Nautilus report on the Inland and coastal fisheries of Wales) arranged a workshop to develop proposals for the Integrated Regional management of the Irish Sea Fisheries, which was held in Dun Laoghaire, near Dublin, on the 18 - 19 Sept. The event was co-hosted by the Marine Institute of Dublin and all stakeholders in the protection and sustainable development of the Irish Sea were invited to attend.

B.A.S.S members Julian Fox and Bob Moss represented the society, for which we are extremely grateful. Rowland Sharpe, from the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers made up the remainder of the sea angling reps.

The following, is Julian's summary of the salient issues.

The meeting went very well last week. Short version is we really had to be there. Our views were put forward strongly and welcomed. It was great seeing the BASS attendees right up at the top of the list (ok, so I know its alphabetical, but at least we couldn't be missed)

CCW are pro-RSA, as to some extent are English Nature (one of the EN guys is an Aussie angler, just getting into Bass fishing).

It appears that the case for RSA seems to have got well and truly through to the CCW.

Both Crick Carlton of Nautilus Consultants and various CCW personnel said how pleased they were that RSA was well represented.

The CCW Council members that I spoke to (Richard Jarvis and Professor Lynda Warren) were all supportive of Recreational Sea Angling and understood its value – possibly this came from the Nautilus Report they commissioned. Rowland Sharp (Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers) knows the CCW personnel very well and this was a great help in getting the message across. He has a lot of energy and passion for the cause.

The first afternoon was spent positioning the report.



The presentation by Dr Paul Connolly (Marine Institute, Ireland) was very good with well backed up arguments about the state of the stocks.

Dr Connolly identified the commercial value of fish in the Irish Sea as £70 million, Dr John Taylor (CCW Director of Policy) asked whether he had comparable figures for RSA. He said he didn't, which prompted Bob and I to confirm the Nautilus Report numbers for the Welsh coast.

There was however (as you might expect) a lot of disagreement about the RACs but the impression that I got was that the commercials were a little taken aback at the strength of feeling to get other Stakeholders on board.

Overview

The workshop was a constructive one for building relationships and putting different ideas in minds. Clearly time will tell, but I personally was surprised at the willingness of the participants to listen to other points of view. Perhaps I was naïve but I thought that it would be much more of a shouting match. I suppose it might have been because nothing was actually getting decided here.



Mike Oliver and Geoff Hancock, fly-fish at dawn.

From Little Acorns.

How a chance meeting, lead to a groundbreaking forum on sea angling.

B.A.S.S., once again, takes the lead.

For much of 2002, members of the restoration team have been extending our network of contacts and our influence by attending as many meetings, workshops and forums on fisheries matters as was humanly possible.

We have also been writing to MPs, MEPs, DEFRA, Dept of Culture Media and Sport, the EU Fisheries Commission and local Government offices, in order to reinforce our stakeholder status in the bass fishery.

Our presence and reputation has been significantly enhanced by the unstinting efforts of team member Frank Beaugendre, who has been a one-man force to be reckoned with, by writing dozens of letters, hundreds of emails and personally attending meetings. One such meeting was hosted by Devon County Council, regarding the development of a policy and action plan for sustainable development of its coast.

In May, I received a draft consultation document from Devon County Council entitled 'Our Coast – Our Common Asset' which made interesting reading.



The draft set out the County Council's proposed plans for the future development and use of its coasts, with particular reference to tourism and leisure. For the first time the value of sea angling was mentioned and the County Council proposed to consult on how best to manage the marine environment to benefit anglers and to enhance the potential benefits of angling related tourism.

B.A.S.S. have been campaigning for wider recognition of the value of recreational sea angling, particularly to coastal communities. Our view is that if the true economic value of sea angling were fully recognised, especially as a tourism generator, then our chances of achieving greater protection for bass stocks would be made easier.

We decided to write all of our members who hail from Devon, along with a number of tackle retailers and local businesses, in an attempt to enlist support from the council tax-payers who will have funded the report. A number of excellent responses were sent by B.A.S.S. members, which included this extract from Peter Macconnell, who lives in Plymouth.

"I wish to congratulate you for including within the document references to the importance and value of recreational sea angling.

As you will be aware, much is made in the media, from time to time, about the commercial netting of sea fish

and the supposed economic and social value of this activity to coastal communities. What is often missed, either deliberately or unwittingly, is the fact that recreational sea angling generates five or six times more income for coastal businesses and communities than does netting, and at the same time is, ecologically, a more sustainable way to use and manage fish stocks.

Sea fishing off Devon was until a few years ago a 'world class' asset. It has now largely been squandered, though it could be got back if there was the political will, and an understanding of what really does have value, and add value.

I recently noticed a newspaper report that said that the Irish Government had obtained a European grant of 400,000 Euros to help further promote angling tourism in the Republic. Their Government official was quoted as saying that they believed they could bring at least a further twelve million Euros worth of visitor business to Ireland. Devon can do that. It has as much to offer as Ireland. And, after the Foot and Mouth epidemic, we surely do need it.

Why do anglers like me go to Ireland? Because there, they don't allow their waters to be over exploited. They control netting to make sure that anglers have something worth coming for."

Doors begin to open.

Partly as a result, of responses from Peter and fellow Devonians Andy Rye, Russ Symons and Peter Badcock to the consultation draft, Devon County Council then planned a second workshop, to which B.A.S.S. was once again invited.

Frank's prediction for the DCC's workshop was:

I shouldn't expect too much from the seminar. In my view we are still selling the idea but it would be nice if BASS/NFSA could provide the DCC with a set of proposals for them to digest at a later date. I guess we could even invite an American expert over to impress. He could then tell them how they did it, do it. It would add to the impact and the main thing is to sell the idea at this stage. If we don't demonstrate our interest in the seminar the door will rapidly close.

Little did Frank realise it at the time, that his suggestion to team up with the NFSA and to prepare a set of proposals, to involve an American expert, to educate the decision makers on how fish stocks can be managed to maximise their sporting value and to sell the idea that solutions exist to the spiralling decline in our fish stocks and our sport, would lead to B.A.S.S. becoming involved in what has proven to be perhaps the single most influential project in the history of our campaign.

NB

Congratulations go to Frank for being awarded the B.A.S.S. 2002 conservation award for his sterling work.



Mighty Oaks Grow.

In early July, a meeting to discuss the review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), was to be held in Brixham. Fisheries minister Elliot Morley was in attendance, to discuss with local fishermen 'the way forward for the fishing industry and its dependant communities'

Once again, Frank stepped into the breach to represent the society.

With his usual, keenly observed reflections, on the political posturing that takes place at these events, he offered the following report:

"What an inflated pompous load of ----
I'm sorry but it's true. I heard applications for grants of over 400 million pounds or was it Euros, Escudos or Marks, it didn't matter. It, whatever it was, had millions attached.
It was amusing to hear them complaining about DEFRA and apathy quite as vehemently as some anglers.

More of the same then?

Elliot Morley said all the right things. He stressed the importance of the food chain. Consumption was king. Had I questioned him about alternatives he would have played those down because Elliot was addressing a room full of fishermen so members will forgive me for not making use of the opportunity, suffice to say I thought that was the wisest course of action. Had the minister run sea angling down a little it would have moved angling back in the minds of those who appear concerned by angling.
The whole premise of the meeting was wrong.

Frankly it was embarrassing to think that a minister, even a junior minister, had gone all the way to Brixham to address a gathering which wouldn't have been out of place at an 80th birthday party

Morley was followed by Richard Bayly the Director of the Government Office for the South West based in Plymouth; something I wasn't aware of. He said he would talk about a broad regeneration remit rather than fisheries. Anyway I tried to collar him in the coffee break but a shell fishermen had waylaid him first and there wasn't enough time to put the questions I wanted, although I enquired whether he was aware of sea angling, when I got a chance, and he clearly wasn't but he mentioned a friend who was an angler and his crowning ambition was - you guessed it, to catch a bass."

This brief encounter was to sow the seeds for a further round of meetings where, at last, someone in authority reacts positively to our proposals.

It soon became clear that Richard Bayly is a man of vision. In his capacity as the Director of the GOSW he quickly picked up on the dormant value that well managed inshore fish stocks could derive to the tourism and leisure sectors of the South West.

A B.A.S.S delegation, consisting of Frank, John Leballeur, Andy Rye and Russ Symons, met with Mr Bayly at his office, to present a structured argument for improved recognition of Recreational Sea Angling (RSA) and for greater protection for bass in particular.

Mr Bayly's question was:

'but why has no one done anything with this information?'

Why? Indeed.

With Richard Bayly's encouragement, and with the GOSW acting as a facilitator, it was decided to prepare for a forum for fisheries managers and stakeholders. Initially the meeting was to be held at Mast House, head office of the GOSW. Invitations were sent to a number of central and regional government bodies, to academic institutions and to business interests. Before long the list of delegates was growing and we felt that it was time to commit additional resources to the forum.

Frank's idea, to enlist assistance, with a presentation from American fisheries experts, was explored further and Andi Loftus and Gil Radonski, consultants to the Recreational Fishing Alliance, a US lobbying body were keen to participate in the event.

We also gained support from Andrew Syvret, B.A.S.S member and marine scientist, who has an in depth knowledge of recreational fisheries around the world.

With our sights set on creating as wide an audience as possible, the NFSA were invited to co-host and finance the forum which was to be entitled:
Recreational Sea Angling – A Wealth of Opportunity.

Our venue was then moved to the National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth, and suddenly we realised that this was proving to be our best opportunity yet, to put the B.A.S.S Restoration Project well and truly on the map.



NATIONAL MARINE AQUARIUM

Recreational Sea Angling – A Wealth of Opportunity

On 15th January 2003, The NFSA (Wyvern Division) and BASS, in conjunction with the Government Office for the South West (GOSW), hosted a forum to present the case for the promotion and development of sea angling in the region. The venue was the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth,

The aim was to make the case for the optimal use of fish stocks for sustainable economic value to the South West economy. Recent studies confirm that the economic benefits from recreational angling exceed that of commercial fishing, and that much of the trickle down expenditure contributes significantly to tourism. Yet policy makers have not woken up to this potential.

The forum was chaired by John Leballeur of BASS, and included five presentations. The first, presented by NFSA Development Officer, David Rowe, was entitled: "Who are sea anglers, and what are their objectives".

Malcolm Gilbert, BASS European Liaison Officer and NFSA Fisheries Representative followed this with a presentation called: "Why opportunities have not been realised"

The United State of America

The third presentation was by two consultants, flown in from the USA. Andy Loftus and Gil Radonski specialise in fisheries management and economics. They were able to relate the American experience to our situation, and in particular, the successful restoration of the striped bass and the consequent multi billion dollar recreational industry now supported by these innovative fisheries policies.



Photo: Russ Symons

Malcolm Gilbert, Andy Loftus and Gil Radonski

Andy and Gil gave a thought provoking and detailed account of how fisheries policy was a much more public affair in the US, providing full participation from the recreational sector. They stressed that the key to success was sound fisheries management and demonstrated how sea angling participation levels, and the consequent economic benefits, were directly related to fish stock abundance.

They also recounted how several important species of marine sport fish had been restored, including the undeniable success story of the Striped Bass fishery.

But it isn't a case of 'only in America'

Andrew Syvret



In the fourth presentation, further examples of successful sport fishing development, from around the globe, were highlighted by Andrew Syvret and included success stories from as near as Ireland and as far away as the Turks & Caicos Islands.

Andrew, a fisheries consultant based in Jersey, Channel Islands, described several global examples where the potential for developing sea angling had been recognised and specific policies to realise the benefits had been implemented. He also covered the various scientific and economic studies that, repeatedly, had proven the superior recreational value of species such as bass, when compared to commercial exploitation

During the coffee breaks, and again over lunch, the B.A.S.S and NFSA teams had a chance to engage some of the delegates in conversation. Many held an interest in the economy of the South West.

They included representatives from The Department of Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), The Department of Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), The Environment Agency, Sport England, The South West Regional Development Agency, Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, South West Fish Producers, British Marine Federation, as well as Tourism representatives.

When the audience was asked, by a show of hands, Nearly 50% of those in attendance had enjoyed

Do you come here often?



The B.A.S.S display stands were set up in the Aquarium cafeteria, with material assembled by David Riley. The laminated posters, reviewing the recoveries from the tagging study, were a regular talking point. I'm sure that most of the delegates went away with a changed perspective of anglers and sea angling.

For example:

I noticed one guy looking at the display on the tagging project, so I sidled up to him, asked him if he fished (he didn't) and engaged him in conversation about the latest tag recoveries and how we were proving that Devonian bass are being targeted by the pair trawls.

'Aren't those the fishermen who are killing dolphins?' he asked. We chatted about the dolphin bycatch and he seemed most concerned.

'Could I ask you' I ventured, **'Do you see anglers as being responsible for damaging the environment; a neutral influence, or as conservationists?'**

He replied unhesitatingly:

'I hadn't thought about it before, but now I realise that you are definitely conservation biased'

'Are there bass out there, in the harbour?' he asked next, as if he wanted to go out and catch one there and then. I think that we won him over.

Another delegate, who confessed to being a lapsed B.A.S.S member and who was also on the committee many years ago, was struck by the professionalism of the presentations and organisation of the day's events. Referring to the times when committee meetings were held at Steve Pruett's house, in an attempt to save money, he mused:

'BASS has come a long way from Steve Pruett's front room'.

We think that summed up the achievements of the day.

After the coffee break Russell Weston, Managing Director of Snowbee, a major fishing tackle company based in Plymouth and just one of thousands of stakeholder businesses who are routinely overlooked by the fisheries management regime but whose very existence is dependent on fish stocks, confirmed the need for high quality fisheries management to restore those species of direct interest to angling.

His presentation, **'Recreational Sea Angling – Added Value'** argued that the employment and revenue generated by businesses associated with sea angling, far outweighs the lower value of the commercial catch for many species. His closing statement was:

'Make the European Sea Bass the FIRST officially recognised Saltwater Game Fish. Give it the protection it deserves and it WILL happen!'

The final presentation focussed on **"What can be done"** so that the South West can capitalise on its multi species fish stock resources, many of particular interest to anglers.

During a question and answer session the consensus view was that dialogue between the angling sector and the policy makers should be maintained.

It was during the closing session that the 'quote of the day' was made. A delegate stood to address the forum and thanked those who had made presentations for their enlightenment.

'I think', he said, 'that we have all learned a lot today and that our best course of action, if we wish to preserve our fish stocks, is to take all those commercial boats in the harbour, out into the channel, and sink them'.

A dramatic statement - which no one, it appeared, was prepared to challenge.

Below: The team responsible for the forum along with a number of forum delegates.

L to R: Gil Radonski, Steve Pitts, Geoff Hancock, Andrew Syvret, Russell Weston, Andy Loftus, Andy Rye, John Leballeur, Frank Beaugendre, Crick Carleton (Nautilus Consultants), Martin Williams (E.A), Malcolm Gilbert & Steve Colclough (E.A)



How was it for you?

The forum has received several complementary comments and a number of attendees have requested written copies of the presentations. To accommodate these requests and to inform those who could not attend, of the rationale behind our arguments, we have produced a 30 page synopsis of the forum. Anyone wishing to view this summary will find it under the restoration section of the B.A.S.S web site @ www.ukbass.com

It would have been impossible to stage the forum without the assistance of the following people:

Mr Richard Bayly

and the staff of the Government Office of the South West, for facilitating the forum.

Mr Doug Herdson

and the Staff of the National Marine Aquarium, for providing us with such an appropriate venue.

Our presenters:

John Leballeur (Chairman), David Rowe(NFSA), Malcolm Gilbert, Gil Radonski, Andrew Loftus, Andrew Syvret and Russell Weston, for their enthusiasm, knowledge and generosity.

The Recreational Fishing Alliance USA:

For funding Gil and Andy during their visit.

The forum was organised by:

David Rowe and the staff of the N.F.S.A
John Leballeur, Frank Beaugendre, Andy Rye,
Russ Symonds, Geoff Hancock & Steve Pitts.
And David Riley, who collated data and text.

and the following stakeholder companies:



PENN Fishing Tackle Europe Ltd.

Have donated one of their new Blue-water flotation suits to raise funds for the restoration project. We were going to auction the suit at the AGM, but have decided to offer it, instead, in a postal auction to give the whole society the chance to win this top of the range piece of safety equipment. It will keep the wearer, warm, dry and afloat, even if the worst comes to the worst and you become dislodged from your boat or favourite rock mark.

The One - Piece suit was originally provided in XL size, but our friends at Veals Mail Order have offered to send the winner of the auction, a suit of their preferred size.



Want it sir? Suits you.

Here's what to do sir.

The RRP of this suit is £160, so we feel that a minimum bid of at least £60 should apply.

Any bid below this amount will be disqualified.

The highest bid will secure the suit and the results of the auction, including the name of the winner and amount of the successful bid, will appear in the B.A.S.S magazine as soon as is practicable.

Send your sealed bid (not your cheque), to reach **Steve Pitts**

@ **18 Highfields Close.**

Stoke Gifford.

Bristol. BS34 8YA

not later than 1st July 2003 and don't forget to include your full name, address, telephone or email details, and required suit size, along with your bid.

The winner will be notified by the 10th July 2003 and arrangements will be made for Veals Mail Order to send the suit, of the preferred size, to the winner in exchange for a huge cheque.

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO THE B.A.S.S RESTORATION FUND, SO PLEASE DIG DEEP.

Threat to Yorkshire bass. Worrying development of shore netting - Our friends in the North East fight back.

You will have read earlier of the anti-gill net campaign and possibly thought 'that doesn't effect me'. Well, the enemy is at the door, as local anglers in the Holderness area of Yorkshire have recently discovered.

Nigel Proctor, who is the secretary of the Reckitts Sea Angling Club, Hull, alerted us to the 'experimental' development of a commercial beach netting fishery to target bass, which have recently moved into the area, as the North Sea's waters continue to warm.

The local commercial salmon fishermen, like their contemporaries elsewhere, have experienced dwindling catch rates and are now pressing the North Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee (NESFC) for an extended season to target the bass.

Nigel is a member of the NESFC and is also Benthic Projects Manager for the Institute of Estuarine & Coastal Studies, based at University of Hull. He is therefore well qualified to comment on all aspects of this 'experiment' and has written to the Deputy Chief Fishery Officer of the NESFC, raising the follow points:

Re: Holderness Bass Experiment

Many thanks for your letter dated 15th November 2002, it was useful to receive information regarding the trials at this stage, although somewhat disappointing that it has taken so long, bearing in mind the sensitivity of the project. It was this insensitive approach which principally upset so many recreational anglers, in that, despite stating publicly that it was on the back of recreational angling catch reports that the committee felt there was scope for a viable commercial fishery, anglers were not informed of the proposal until nets were placed on the beaches.

Recreational anglers are now recognised by both the EU and British government as major stakeholders in the marine environment, presently it would appear that the NESFC does not support this view, in that it has taken nearly 2 months into the trials before the recreational sector has been officially informed of the 'experiment' and the rationale behind the project. I would suggest that given time to establish, the recreational fishery for bass would be significantly more valuable in economic terms than a 'small scale commercial fishery'. Of course the real concern is that given the current success of the trials and proposed extension for the next 2 or 3 years, the number of nets will increase, as will the number of commercial netsmen, to the detriment of the recreational fishery. A recreational fishery, promotes conservation as its principal driver in maintaining the local fish stock - unlike the commercial sector that has economics as its driver - until such time as the resource is exhausted and no longer viable.

Commercial fishermen are getting paid for the bass they land and they get paid for the fish (very few) they tag and return. They are not doing it for the love of bass conservation or for the enjoyment of catching bass.

For little effort and financial outlay they are reaping the rewards. Recreational anglers outlay significantly more money and invest a lot more time and effort.

While commercial fishermen have anything to gain financially from any experiment they will rightly do so, which may not be the best way to define the available population structure and its sustainability as a resource.

'This is not an experiment- it's commercial bass netting.'

We would like to thank Nigel for raising awareness of this issue and to congratulate him on such a well-constructed response.

Make no mistake, if this 'experiment, study or preliminary survey', call it what you will, is allowed to continue or develop, then our coastlines are in danger of being shrouded in gill nets.

The 'if he (another commercial fisherman) can catch them (bass) with a beach-set gill net, then so can I' mentality, will spread like wild fire to a beach near you.

Not to let the matter rest with an exchange of correspondence, Nigel and a number of local angling reps called a meeting to discuss the concerns of sea anglers. This was supported by a tremendous turnout and the meeting room was packed to capacity.

Restoration team members, Bob Cox and Malcolm Gilbert travelled up to Hull, from Essex and Cornwall respectively, and BASS was also represented by amongst others, committee member, Phil Arnott.

Nigel reports:

According to the NESFC, in their report to the committee, they have said that there were between 60 - 70 anglers present. So the meeting was well attended by anyone's imagination. 6 local angling clubs were represented and there were 5 local tackle dealers present.

The next meeting is to be scheduled for September 2003, but will definitely go ahead prior to the commencement of the 2003 'bass experiment'. I suspect that this will be an even larger event and hopefully those included in the first meeting of its kind in the UK will attend again.

When questioned by Malcolm Gilbert, the NESFC officers confirmed that the reference to 'Fisheries' in their publication called 'Performance Plan' definitely included RECREATIONAL FISHING. Therefore it has been established that the NESFC have within their overall aim, the goal of developing & protecting recreational sea angling. That is also for me, personally, a 1st!

We will keep you posted on developments, but in the mean time, to have your say, write to the NESFC at:

North Eastern Sea Fisheries Committee
County Hall,
Beverley,
E. Yorkshire

Back page bits and Bobs

How much are you worth?

Our argument, that bass are worth so much more to our economy as a recreational resource, is borne out by a number of studies, carried out over the past decade.

Firstly, there was the 1995 study, '**An appraisal of the UK bass fishery and its management**' undertaken for the UK Government and MAFF, by The Directorate of Fisheries Research, Lowestoft, and The Centre for Economics and Management of Aquatic Resources (CEMARE) - University of Portsmouth. This valued the commercial catch at £3.9 million and the recreational catch at £18.3 million.

In their report, '**Study into Inland and Sea Fisheries in Wales**' prepared for the National Assembly for Wales in 2000, Nautilus Consultants Ltd in association with EKOS Economic Consultants Ltd stated that: **The real economic value of our inshore waters is not appreciated. Around one million sea anglers fish the inshore waters of England and Wales at least once a year, generating an estimated £ 140 million income for the coastal economy.**

More recently, English Nature's '**Symes report**' confirmed these figures. This report, on Inshore Fisheries by Prof. David Symes, suggests values of £35 million and £140 million respectively for commercial and recreational fishing. NB. *The £35 million commercial catch includes shellfish and molluscs, according to DEFRA'S own statistics.*

Even following these and other numerous reports from around the world, that sea angling is of greater value and has a lower impact on our fish stocks, many of our own fisheries managers appear reluctant to acknowledge these facts and resistant to change their management tactics. Their rebuttals are along the lines of: 'Well, these figures might not apply to the UK'

Our response has been 'then why not initiate an economic study to find out'.

As reported in the 2002 Spring issue of the B.A.S.S magazine, last year, we made another approach to DEFRA, to fund such a study.

We can now report that this study has been put out to tender and the results are expected by 2004.

Your B.A.S.S representatives, along with the NFSA and other sea angling groups, have met with DEFRA again, on the 5th March 03 to discuss this and other issues.

B.A.S.S on the Box

By Steve Pitts

Picture the scene:

In his recent series '*Food Heroes*' (BBC 2) Rick Stein visits Essex and bemoans the fact that there aren't as many jellied eel stalls as there used to be. He is next seen sampling locally caught seafood and begins to wax lyrical about the culinary delights of the sea bass.



Oh dear, I thought, another nail in the coffin for the poor old bass.

Cut film to two men in a centre console sports boat, planing down an estuary at a fair old lick, rods in their racks, with Rick Stien talking about the value of the American sport fishery (I think that he might have mentioned striped bass but by now I'm fumbling for a tape to bung in the video and telling the kids to be quiet, so I missed the dialogue)

Our intrepid anglers, one of whom bears an uncanny resemblance to our own Bob Cox, proceed to hook and land a very decent bass in front of our very eyes. R.S then goes on to tell us that these guys aren't here to catch and kill bass but to tag them. One of these blokes (the Bob Cox look-alike) has tagged over 1,000 during the past 30-odd years. But he looks too young to have been doing this for thirty years I thought. The anglers then tag the fish and release it over the side of the boat.

The angler (Bob's clone) then starts to explain to the viewing public that all of this is under threat because of the offshore pair trawls that ravage the adult stocks whilst they are spawning. He graphically describes how they tow huge nets between two powerful boats and then.....blow me, he hooks another fish; Plays it to the camera like a pro and then explains that this 3 (ish) kilo fish is only half grown and then he puts that one back as well.

Rick confesses that he has mixed feelings about watching that bass swim away knowing how good it would taste.

Cut to chef's kitchen where he is about to prepare grilled bass and stir-fried vegetables.

'I'm using farmed bass for this dish'

emphasised Mr Stein, whilst scoring two small bass fillets, with a sharp knife.

Nice one Bob.

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