

BASS

Restoration Project
Newsletter



The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

SPECIAL ISSUE

Spring 2004

Newsletter number 5



In this Special Issue

B.A.S.S spells out its vision

The team travel to London, to put forward-thinking ideas to DEFRA.

New management measures for bass could generate a 5-fold increase, in the value of the bass fishery, within the next six years.

Government consult on the future of the fishing industry

Ground - breaking recommendations as

Think-tank calls for greater angler consultation, and consideration for bass to be managed wholly for sea angling.

Questions asked in the House

Robert Key MP, asks questions on behalf of country's 1,000,000 sea anglers. The Minister replies.

Calls for the closure of the offshore fishery mount

Petition signatures and Gov. report in conflict.

MEPs lend their support.

The value of Sea Angling is recognised.

DEFRA's economic study, into the value of sea angling, is an eye-opener. Massive spending figures, reveal the true extent of our sport's contribution to the nation's economy

Protection and Enforcement

Shake up of inshore policing on the way?

Published by B.A.S.S
WWW.UKBASS.COM



John Morgan and Mike Oliver

Photo by Allan Hughes

Value Added Bass.

Campaigning sea anglers have achieved a number of important goals within the past few months. Their responses, to the Government's strategy Unit consultation, saw record numbers of questionnaires being completed.

During the same period, Drew Associates, who were conducting a study into the value of recreational sea angling, on behalf of DEFRA, have completed their assessment. The response from sea anglers was over-whelming and proves that anglers are keen to voice their opinions.

November saw another consultation exercise concluded.

This time, Marine Protection and Enforcement were on the agenda and both the society and the restoration project stakeholders submitted their views and concerns, on these important issues, that affect us all.

There can be no doubt that our inshore fisheries are under severe pressure and that catches of bass, like those in the above picture, now represent red-letter days. Our aim is to ensure that anglers like John and Mike can continue to enjoy an improvement in the quality of their sport and to see the restoration of bass stocks to their former glory. It can happen, but only if we commit ourselves to protect and manage our bass stocks in a new, dynamic way, where **best value** is the foundation of future management objectives.

In this publication, we outline our vision for the future. Please be part of it.

Steve Pitts – B.A.S.S Restoration Project Chairman

Government consult on the future of the fishing industry.

During the summer of 2003, the Governments' Strategy Unit, an advisory body operating at the highest level of government, were asked to study and report on the medium and long-term future for the Fishing Industry. It was also expressly stated that the study should include sea angling and tourism.

A public consultation paper was issued and the 30-page document, with its 46 questions, was circulated widely. It represented a rare opportunity to reach the Prime Minister's ear, so the Restoration team set to, compiling answers to the questionnaire.

BASS members were also encouraged to participate and, undaunted by the apparent complexity of the issues covered, around fifty individuals replied.

A summary of responses, from those who did not wish to remain anonymous, can be found at:

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/output/Page4661.asp>

For those without internet access, here are a few of the comments, including some of our own.

Q. Do current management systems balance differing interests (commercial, recreational, tourism)? If not, how should a balance be achieved and measured?

The Association of Sea Fisheries Committees wrote:

'Sea Anglers undoubtedly contribute to the local (tourism) economy, but they also represent a pressure on fish stocks, possibly not less than the local inshore fleet in some areas.

Retention of fish by sea anglers (particularly boat anglers) needs to be addressed.'

'If the Government believes it is essential to have a viable commercial fishing industry, to supply a significant part of the county's diet, then the interests of that commercial fishing industry really should take precedence when looking at marine resources, over recreational activities and tourism'.

'At the moment the industry does not feel that the balance is reasonable'

In answer to that same question, The Environment Agency commented:

'No. Current Government policy still tends to reflect the historic importance of the commercial fishing interest, rather than the modern circumstance.

For example, current policy takes insufficient recognition of the economic impact of recreational sea angling to local communities'.

We were extremely pleased to see that a number of our Restoration Project Stakeholders were included in the consultation exercise and took the opportunity to respond.

To the question: How do you see Government fisheries policy developing over the next ten to fifteen years?

Tony Caton, Managing Director of



stated that:

'The Government's policies are too narrow and slow and without a drastic shift in policy there will soon be no fish left to legislate for!

A massive opportunity in the field of recreational sea angling is open and ready to be developed.

This is an area which will be of great environmental and economic importance, if given the chance.'

Tony also commented:

'Recreational fishing (acknowledged as being environmentally friendly) brings with it sustainable levels of fish mortality and minimal damage to the marine environment.

This must be considered when governing bodies determine future policies'.

T.V presenter and author, John Wilson wrote



'I would make a further suggestion, to fully protect the bass, that we should make this fine species our first national 'sports fish' so it can enjoy more status as a returnable capture, than an edible commodity'.

The Questionnaire went on to ask:

Are there other countries that the UK and EU should be learning from in terms of fisheries management? What are the attractive features of these systems? How transferable do you think they are to the UK situation?

To which B.A.S.S replied:

'The Government should investigate Fishery management schemes, like those now adopted in many other countries, which assist the development of sea angling and sea angling tourism, by boosting the availability of larger fish.

The striped bass management plan on the East Coast of the United States, managed by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, could be adapted to the European bass in the UK.

Other examples include the current legislation and management of bass in Ireland.'

All in all, B.A.S.S members, stakeholders and other supporters of Recreational Sea Angling, generated 68% of the 149 responses, received by the Strategy Unit.

This was the highest percentage of any stakeholder group and a brilliant effort and show of support, for which we are extremely grateful.

As a follow-up to this consultation process, (covered on page 2 of this newsletter), **a stakeholder workshop was arranged by the Strategy Unit, for the 1st October 2003, at the Swallow Imperial Hotel, Newcastle upon Tyne.**

Many of those B.A.S.S members, who had submitted written responses to the review consultation, received personal invitations and many took the effort to arrange time off work and investigate travel options, in order to attend.

Imagine their shock, when they were then informed that they had been "invited by mistake" and that their presence was no longer required!

Despite the number of responses from the Sea Angling sector, only **five** delegates would now be allowed to attend. Needless to say, we did not have difficulty in finding volunteers to fill those seats, in fact we managed to secure an additional delegate for one of our stakeholder supporters.

There was a good deal of annoyance at this development and a number of those who had been 'un-invited' contacted the organisers of the event and the Strategy Unit itself, in order to complain. A number felt so aggrieved, at the way that they had been treated, that they contacted their local M.Ps to remonstrate.

Having subsequently reviewed the full written responses, which were posted on the Strategy Unit's web-site, we found it difficult to equate the large number of responses from sea anglers, with such a low number of seats, being allocated to sea angling delegates.

Further analysis revealed the following breakdown of delegates in respect of each 'stakeholder sector'.

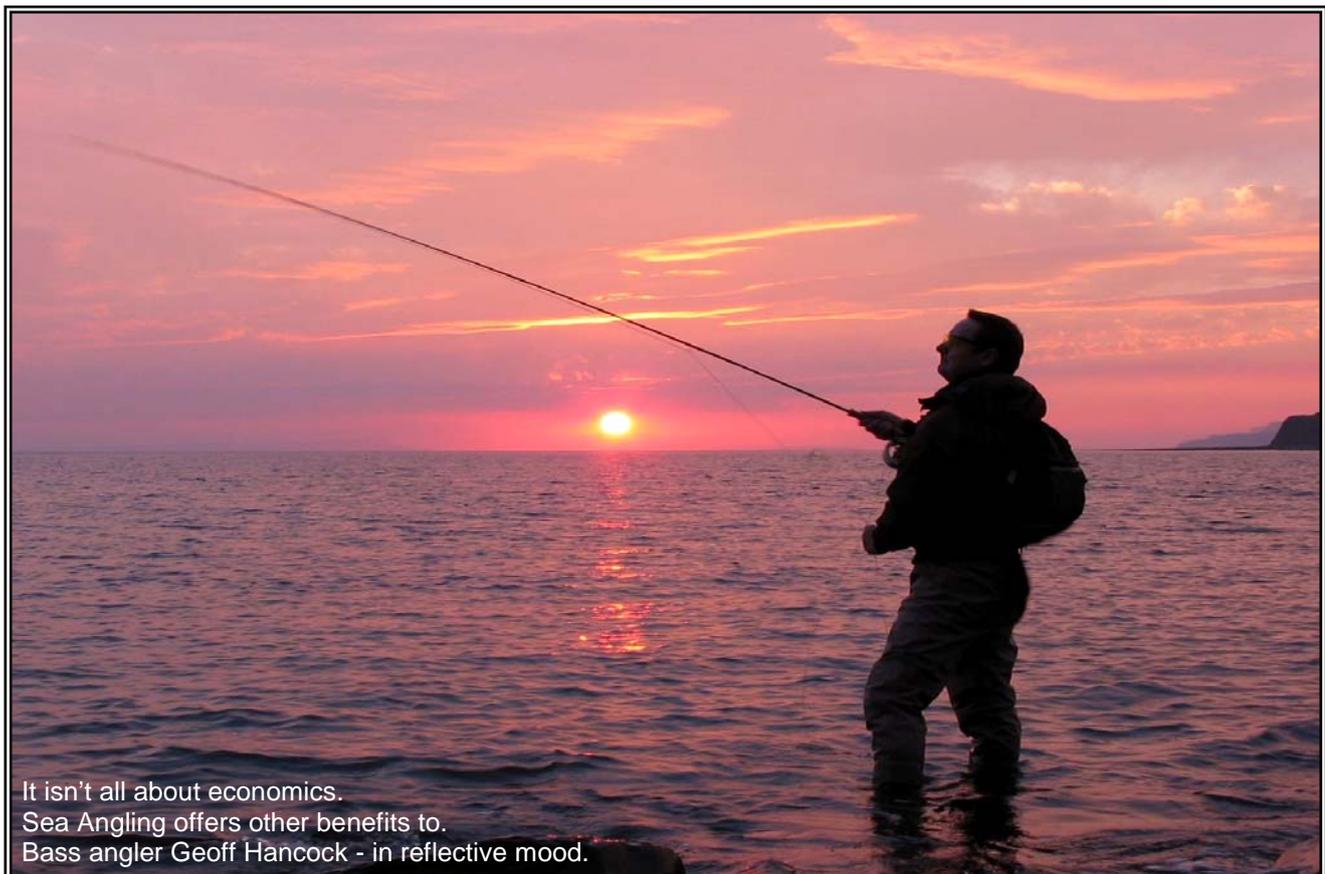
C.S = Catching Sector (Commercial fishing interests)
M.A = Management or Advisory Group
A.E = Academic or Environmental Group
R.S.A = Recreational Sea Angler rep.

Total %age of responses.	Newcastle delegates
C.S = 14%	9
M.A = 10%	4
A.E = 11%	3
R.S.A = 68%	5

So, despite representing 68% of the responses, the Recreational Sea Angling sector was offered the lowest number of delegates, in relation to those responses, out of all the stakeholder groups.

Taking a philosophical view - that it is quality rather than quantity that counts, R.S.A interests were represented by a small, but very capable team of campaigners.

It should also be borne in mind that members of B.A.S.S (John Leballeur, Bob Cox, Tom Pinborough & Leon Roskilly) and the N.F.S.A had met senior members of the Government Strategy Review Unit, during the run-up to the consultation period, at Brixham and at the Cabinet Office in London. Subjects covered included; gill nets, minimum landing sizes, socio-economic studies, sea fisheries committees, fish management schemes, nursery areas, recreational fishing areas, examples of other fisheries from around the world, tourism, etc. See page 11 for the Gov. S.U's recommendations.



It isn't all about economics.
Sea Angling offers other benefits to.
Bass angler Geoff Hancock - in reflective mood.

DEFRA launches review into marine protection and enforcement.

In October 2003, DEFRA circulated an on-line questionnaire, to ascertain the future direction of its policy on marine protection and enforcement.

B.A.S.S was asked for its views, on these important issues and we forwarded copies of key questions to nearly 50% of the membership, who had previously supplied us with their e-mail address contact details. The deadlines were tight, with only a few weeks to compile responses, but I am pleased to report that a substantial number of members took the time to get to grips with the complex nature of the consultation questionnaire and submitted their own thoughts, on the short-comings of the existing system of protection and enforcement and how they would like to see a number of improvements in legislation and enforcement, to protect our inshore recreational fisheries.

Here are some of those thoughts, which I am sure we all share:

I am a Recreational Sea Angler, who is concerned at the declining state of fish stocks. I am especially concerned with the dramatically reduced number of medium to large bass, available to anglers, due mainly to commercial over-fishing. **C.C**

I would argue that the main purpose of any enforcement is to ensure that the current regulations are upheld, by all who exploit our marine environments, whether that is for commercial gain, leisure or scientific study. **S.P**

A balance, between encouraging truly sustainable use and the need to supply food for the nation, needs to be achieved. In many instances, the superior value derived from the recreational use of our marine environment, including our inshore fish stocks, is not recognised by the Government and as a result, our enforcement agencies are not equipped with the guidelines or central legislation which would promote and encourage **best value** principals and sustainability to be achieved. **R.B**

There is a great deal of resentment among the sea angling community about the lack of enforcement, to the extent that transgressors do so with impunity. There have been incidents where illegal activity has been reported and no response has been made, or if there is a response it is far too late to apprehend the offenders. A kind of free for all culture seems to exist, resulting in the steady deterioration of the marine environment and stocks of some fish species in particular. **M.D**

The damage done to sensitive environments or species, to young or immature fish and to the quality of our sport as a result, appears to go unregulated and unpunished. **D.R**

One B.A.S.S member wrote:

Recreational sea anglers contribute hugely through the payment of taxes, but very little of this revenue is being effectively used to protect the resource. In VAT alone, recreational sea anglers contribute £194 million per year to the exchequer.

It does seem as though the authorities have lost the plot. Enforcement should be about protecting the resource, i.e. fish stocks and the marine environment. Instead the management system seems to favour one stakeholder – commercial fishermen. Meanwhile we have seen bass stocks in particular desperately over exploited, with the problems of by catch and environmental damage recognised but not effectively addressed. If Britain were a third world country this situation would be easier to understand. The lack of positive action here to protect the marine environment has been lamentable, especially compared to the measures being taken in other developed parts of the world.

Enforcement should be aimed at ensuring that exploitation is stopped and true sustainability achieved through radical change away from “safe limits” to enable stocks to flourish There is too much consideration given to the views of the few i.e. commercial interests (exploitation) who's interest is short term gain and virtually none to those who's interest lay in sustainability and of the societal benefits that recreational fishing for bass can bring. **T.S**

With specific relation to sea bass management, I would like to see

- An increase in the MLS for bass from 36cms to 55cms.
- A ban on the use of nets of any kind, whether fixed, towed or drifting, within 1 kilometre from the high water mark.
- An increase in enforcement patrols within designated bass nursery areas.
- Substantial fines, confiscation of equipment, boats and vehicles for those caught infringing bass nursery area legislation, revised MLSs and netting regulations.

We should investigate alternatives and visit other countries, which have a successfully integrated marine management program and enact their best practices. This could mean centralising marine management and enforcement to a specialist agency (such as the Wildlife, Fish and Game agency, in the USA). Perhaps the Environment Agency, who has an excellent track record in managing our freshwater resources, would be able to take on this role. **P.B**

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY WARNS BASS GILL NETTERS 'KEEP IT LEGAL'.

In February, an Environment Agency fisheries patrol boat seized 1,000 metres of illegal fixed bass gill nets, close to the shore in St Austell Bay, where large numbers of pilchards were attracting unprecedented numbers of bass.

When the Agency discovered the 5 fixed nets – four joined together plus one 200 metres long – they contained few bass although they did hold a large sea trout, dogfish, wrasse and pilchards.

The Agency has now removed and destroyed almost 2 kilometres of illegal gill net worth approximately £1,500 from the area in the last six months.

St Austell Bay is used by salmon and sea trout making their way to and from the River Fowey, one of the south west's major salmon and sea trout rivers. Netting restrictions, which apply in the bay for the protection of salmon and sea trout, make it an offence to set a fixed net within 3 metres of the surface of the sea, at any time or tide state, within one mile of the shore, irrespective of the species of fish targeted.

During the Agency's night patrol in the early hours of Saturday morning (Jan 17) four commercial fishing vessels were stopped in the restricted netting area and questioned about their knowledge of the law and how their nets were rigged for fishing. All boats questioned were fishing legally and were not detained. All the fishermen were fully co-operative with the Environment Agency officers.



The restricted netting law covering St Austell Bay and other coastal areas in Cornwall is the 1987 Cornwall Sea Fisheries Fixed Engine Byelaw.

This byelaw makes it an offence for any person to set a fixed net (net secured by anchors) such that the top of the net falls within the top 3 metres of the surface of the sea at any state of the tide. The byelaw was created specifically to protect salmon and sea trout which migrate from the sea close to shore to spawn in Cornish rivers.

Congratulations to Cornwall E.A, for a job well done!



The Environment Agency has also been active in Dorset.

Here is a recent report from Mike Dunning:

Poachers Netted in Poole Harbour.

Two men claimed they 'only wanted some fish for a barbecue' after they were caught red-handed in Poole Harbour with an illegal fixed net.

Environment Agency fisheries officers pounced on the pair after they returned to their gill net to recover their catch. The net was discovered during a routine boat patrol on July 23, 2003. On inspection it was found to contain several fish including bass, mullet and flounder.

The net was held in position by an anchor and attached to two floats and a rope near a catamaran moored off Lake Road, Hamworthy. It was not visible from the surface.

The two men, Benjamin Cook and Luke Winters, were apprehended after they returned to the net in a small dinghy to retrieve the net and remove any fish. When questioned one of the defendants, Cook, said they only wanted the fish for a barbecue.

Cook, of, Hamworthy, Dorset, was fined £220 and ordered to pay £280 costs by Bournemouth Magistrates, who found him guilty in his absence, to placing an unauthorised gill net in tidal waters in contravention of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 and the Salmon act 1986.

His fishing companion, Luke Winters, also from Hamworthy, who owned the boat, was dealt with at an earlier hearing where he was ordered to pay £100 costs and given a one year conditional discharge.

"The two defendants were fishing illegally. The law clearly states the use of fixed nets is not permitted in Poole Harbour between April 1 and September 30," said Clive Tyler for the Environment Agency.

In both cases, the illegally caught fish were forfeit and the nets destroyed by the Environment Agency.

**If you suspect illegal netting, ring the E.A's
24 hour hotline on**

0800 80 70 60

Our voice is heard at Westminster



Tom Pinborough, Leon Roskilly and Bob Cox, met with Roberk Key (M.P Salisbury) to appraise him of the B.A.S.S campaign.

On Monday 8th September 2003, Robert Key spoke on behalf of the nation's sea anglers, when he addressed the House of Commons in the Recreational Sea Angling Adjournment Debate.

"I am grateful to the Bass Anglers Sportfish Society—BASS—the National Association of Sea Anglers and the Sea Anglers Conservation Network for their briefing and advice over many months. I speak tonight on behalf of at least 1 million sea anglers who fish the inshore waters of our islands at least once a year, including about 375,000 bass anglers.

Sea angling is part of our heritage, and an important part of our economy. However, it is no longer basic fishing for the pot. Sea angling is a multi-million pound leisure activity. Today, the angler uses expensive, high-technology tackle, chosen from a wide choice of specialist gear that is available internationally, and today he and she is conservation minded.

Anglers travel long distances to the coast to fish. Many take their families with them, staying in rented accommodation, bed and breakfast, hotels and pubs, contributing much to the local economy. They support many jobs such as tackle manufacturing, the retail industry, mail order business, boat builders and chandlers, boat hire businesses, marinas, electronics, bait suppliers, clothing and footwear suppliers, a thriving specialist press and media and, of course, tourism. The fact is that recreational sea angling is now far more important economically than commercial inshore fishing.

A decade ago, MAFF's Directorate of Fisheries Research at Lowestoft and Portsmouth university's centre for economics and management of aquatic resources published a report that found that sales of commercially caught bass were worth about £4 million, while 361,000 bass anglers spent £18 million on their activities. In 2000, the National Assembly for Wales commissioned a study that found that sea angling made an economic contribution to coastal Wales of £28 million, whereas commercial inshore fishing netted £9 million and offshore commercial fishing yielded just £12 million.

The study suggested that sea angling had huge potential for growth and that modest, low-risk public investment would stimulate local economies, underpin coastal environmental programmes and encourage

conservation of fish stocks. However, the study warned that poor recognition of the economic significance of recreational sea angling resulted in little Government support. It also warned that heavy commercial fishing of some species, especially illegal netting for bass, was undermining the resource base for recreational anglers.

Last year, an independent report commissioned by the Countryside Council for Wales and English Nature put the value of commercial landings in England and Wales at £35 million, while recreational angling generated £140 million for the coastal economy.

Anglers have done their best to make their voice heard during the consultation on the Government's welcome review of the common fisheries policy. I bring their concerns to Parliament as part of that process.

I support the view that certain of our fish stocks should be managed principally for recreational sea angling, so please will the Government accord sports fish status to certain species, including bass?

As a matter of priority, will the Government intervene to tackle illegal and damaging inshore gill-netting.

DEFRA is currently researching the economic benefits of recreational sea angling. The sea angling community expects that it will confirm that the value of sea angling in many coastal communities today is at least equal to that of inshore commercial fishing, which has existed in many places for hundreds of years. Overseas evidence indicates that when stocks are managed to produce plenty of mature fish, the number of recreational anglers increases proportionately. This activity and its economic multipliers support many livelihoods, afloat and ashore, which are every bit as valid as those within the commercial sector.

The sea angling sector is seeking an equal partnership with the commercial sector and inshore fisheries management and regulation to provide taxpayers who fund sea fisheries committees and the Environment Agency with a sustainable and best value return from commonly owned resources.

I therefore ask the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) whether, with well over 1 million recreational sea anglers in Britain, the Government agree that the socio-economic impact of recreational sea angling is now at least equivalent to that of inshore commercial fishing? Has he got the message that the sea angling sector is seeking the Government's assistance just to balance the needs of commercial fishermen's livelihoods with those of recreational sea anglers through the sensible conservation of marine resources and sustainable harvesting?

The sea angling community is concerned that committees and groups set up by the Government are overwhelmingly biased at present towards the commercial sector. That case was strongly made by the National Federation of Sea Anglers to the Minister in

connection with the strategy unit's current review of British fisheries. I therefore very much hope that when considering the future protection of our marine resources and sustainable harvesting of fish the Government will give consideration to the recreational sector proportionate to the support afforded to the commercial fishing sector.

It has been a privilege to speak for hundreds of thousands of sea anglers around our coasts. Now I and they await the Minister's response.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw : The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - I congratulate the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on securing the Adjournment debate, and particularly on its subject, which is an important element of our fisheries whose voice, I accept, has not always been heard as it should have been. Sea angling is a selective, environmentally friendly and low-impact fishing activity, and an estimated 1.2 million anglers engage in sea angling every year in the UK. As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, as well as the substantial economic contribution that they make, they clearly have a role to play in the management of the marine environment, particularly in inshore and coastal waters.

The reformed common fisheries policy reflects the UK's goals for a policy based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. I shall deal a little later with the improvement that has taken place in our Department since we became the DEFRA rather than the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and have taken more notice of environmental and sustainability factors. That is at the core of sea anglers' concerns.

I welcome the fact that the reformed CFP is more inclusive than before, as it will need to be to ensure sustainable fisheries management. Although much of the CFP is specifically directed at the commercial fishing sector, a number of useful gains to recreational sea angling came out of last December's review. Those are the retention of the UK's 12-mile limit; provision for member states to introduce conservation measures within their 12-mile limit, provided such measures are not discriminatory; provision for the establishment of regional advisory councils; and Community action to reduce discards.

I am aware of the figures cited by the hon. Gentleman about the considerable economic contribution that sea anglers make. They and the associated industry make an important contribution to the coastal economy. DEFRA recently commissioned an economic evaluation of that contribution—a study welcomed by sea anglers—and we hope to receive its findings by the end of the year. The report will cover a range of issues, including identifying key areas of sea angling activity in England and Wales, assessing the economic contribution of sea angling, including the indirect benefit, and identifying key trends and future proposals for the sea angling sector.

The sensible conservation of marine resources is certainly in the interests of both anglers and commercial fishermen, although the latter sometimes take some

convincing. We shall continue to aim for a balance in Community fisheries policy that will ensure recovery of threatened stocks and preserve a viable degree of activity for communities that rely on fishing. We shall continue to press for the increased application of an ecosystems-based approach, including multi-annual management plans and action to reduce discarding and to avoid the unnecessary by-catch of endangered species.

Anglers are now represented by ministerial appointees to most sea fisheries committees in England and Wales, and their local issues can be fully considered. My Department is considering the terms of reference for a study of fisheries enforcement issues. That could have a far-reaching impact on sea fisheries committees, and we shall ensure that the voice of recreational fishermen is heard. Sea anglers' interests will also be taken into account in the review of inshore fisheries management.

The No. 10 strategy unit has been tasked with developing a strategy for a sustainable fishing industry in the UK, of which I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware. Sea anglers' representatives have been closely and productively involved with that project, and the National Federation of Sea Anglers is a member of the strategy unit stakeholder advisory group.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of threats to certain stocks, and of some of the equipment and techniques used by commercial fishermen whom he believes to be in contact with those on whose behalf he has spoken tonight. **The latest science is not quite as depressing as he seemed to suggest. Certainly, the measures that he recommended do not seem necessary at this stage. The Government do, however, take a precautionary approach to stock levels, and we shall continue to keep the situation under review.**

We recognise that the continuing development of certain fishing gear and techniques such as gill netting and trawling can, like all forms of fishing, have damaging effects on stocks. That is why technical conservation measures such as mesh size restrictions to allow undersized fish to escape are integral to the common fisheries policy, and they continue to be evaluated and developed.

We work closely with the DCMS, and we are committed to maintaining a constructive dialogue on the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman. As part of that process, the DCMS participates in annual meetings, chaired by DEFRA, with representatives of sea angling and vessel-chartering interests. My Department is always happy to liaise with the DCMS to ensure that full account is taken of the needs of sea angling in consideration of future policy on fisheries issues.

We are indebted to Tom, Leon and Bob, for ensuring that the issues surrounding the future management of bass and other important recreational species, were debated and that assurances from the minister have been secured, regarding our place in the decision making process. We also thank Robert Keys MP, for being the voice of sea anglers in the House of Commons.

B.A.S.S meets with Defra

On Wednesday, 9th July 2004, a small delegation from B.A.S.S, were ushered through the corridors of a Whitehall building, after passing through stringent security checks.

We were visiting Defra to clarify two specific issues, concerning our interpretation of the review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) and then to outline our vision for the future management of UK bass stocks, based on the sound principals of 'Best Value'.

Our meeting began with a presentation, which posed one basic question and then sought to explore alternative management objectives:

Does the option for UK unilateral management exist?

- There are two critical prerequisite elements to the proposals by B.A.S.S --- One is biological and the other is legal.
- The UK has to be confident that the potential benefits of unilateral management measures, in territorial waters (inside 2 miles) will accrue to UK exploiters. This is not to say that ALL benefits must accrue, but that the net benefits for the UK will exceed current values, even if a proportion of benefits spill over into waters outside 12 miles. This is essentially a biological assessment.
- The UK has to be confident that any management measures implemented, inside territorial waters can be applied to foreign vessels fishing under historical rights as well as to UK vessels. Recent legislative changes, following the reform of the CFP, are believed to facilitate this objective. This is a matter for legal assessment.

Changing fortunes of bass

- The increased recruitment of bass, derived from a succession of highly successful year classes, is currently being squandered.
- 36-41 cm bass (500-750 gramme fish), compete head to head with 55,000 tonnes of imported, supermarket-sized, farmed bass.
- In the mid-eighties, bass frequently sold at a first hand sale value of £2.75 per lb. (£6.05 per kilo). Adjusted against the RPI, this would now equate to £12/13 per kilo. This past winter's bass price has been approx. £3/4 per kilo.

In real terms, the price of bass has decreased, since the mid-eighties, by approx. two thirds!

- The average value, being realised from a single wild-caught bass, currently **varies between** £1.50 and 2.00

How can this be considered as achieving BEST VALUE?

Our vision

- Currently, commercial fishing mortality focuses on juvenile/adolescent and young adult bass and is severely limiting potential growth in the recreational bass fishery.
- These 5/6 year old fish (36 - 41 cms) weigh 0.5 to 0.75 kilo and will not have had the opportunity to reproduce.
- B.A.S.S wish to see future bass management aimed at producing larger fish, in excess of 55 cms, weighing 1.75 kilos and above.
- It is believed this would translate into an improved abundance of relatively large fish, thereby, significantly enhancing the value of the fishery.

Benefits to the recreational fishery.

- B.A.S.S maintain that an opportunity exists to realise an economic value, far in excess of that, currently derived from targeting smaller fish of 36-41cms, based solely on commercial exploitation.
- More and bigger bass will stimulate within sea angling, higher levels of participation and consequential socio-economic impact.



Andrew Syvret, with a beautiful rod-caught Jersey Bass

Best value? You bet.

Proposed management measures, aimed at optimising the beneficial effects of climatic change.

- The proposition is that climate change is affecting the distribution of the European Sea Bass. Climatic change is also having a positive effect upon recruitment and survival rates of young bass.
- Not only are more young bass reaching maturity, due to lower mortality rates, but also in some areas of the UK they are growing faster, due to extended growth periods, brought about by warming sea temperatures.
- An opportunity now exists to develop strategies to enhance and protect the resource.

Based on the results of the joint B.A.S.S / CEFAS tagging study, we continued:

In addition, there is evidence to suggest that fewer UK bass now recruit to the winter offshore fishery.

- This may be as a result of a number of factors such as:
- Changes in migration patterns, perhaps due to climate change, causing warmer sea temperatures and lessening the requirement for mature and first year spawning bass to travel to the western approaches during the winter months, to prepare for spawning.
- Linked to the above scenario, pre-spawning aggregations may now over-winter for a shorter period than has previously been experienced, thereby reducing the 'availability window' of bass to the offshore commercial fishery.
- Sustained exploitation of pre-spawning stocks, mainly by pelagic pair trawls over the past decade, has altered the structure of the bass stock. Larger fish are now rarer and according to CEFAS and ICES, in their 2002 assessment of EU bass stocks, the offshore winter bass fishery is now classified as a recruitment fishery; comprising mainly of smaller adult fish.

Bass; from a different

perspective.

Currently, juvenile and adolescent bass make up the majority of recreational catch, as the middle and upper-weight ranges of fish are missing.

The recreational fishery requires an abundance of fish up to and over 55cm, both from boats and shore. This requires a more imaginative approach to the MLS, one not based on so-called commercial 'sustainability' but for **best value**.



Mike Oliver, with a near double figure bass, which was released unharmed.
Best value in action

- There has never been a better time to harness the beneficial effects of climate change, by structured increases in the Minimum Landing Size of bass, to match the abundance and growth rates of successive year classes.
- The decline in the quality of the recreational bass fishery (fewer larger fish) may not have decreased the numbers of participating anglers, but it has suppressed the expected increase. After the exceptional year class of 1989 and the subsequent 13-year run of year classes that were above the pre 1989 average recruitment, a rapid increase in angler numbers was envisaged.
- The recent changes, within the CFP, may now allow specific fisheries management measures, to be taken by member states within the 6 to 12 mile limit. Allowing the UK the ability to develop its inshore bass fishery autonomously.

Therefore:

- B.A.S.S recommend that the UK- wide MLS for bass should be raised without delay, to reflect previously 'lost ground' and that further, structured, incremental increases should be timed to coincide with the recruitment to the fishery of strong year classes.
- B.A.S.S would ultimately like to see structured increases, to obtain an MLS of 55cm (approx. 22 inches) thereby allowing fish the opportunity to spawn several times.
- These proposed increases in the MLS, **as part of a revised management package**, would benefit all inshore stakeholders.

BUT....

- A fundamental requirement for success, however, is for DEFRA to unequivocally and publicly recognise that the sport fishing sector is a direct user stakeholder of fish stock resources and that, in the future, management measures for those species of direct interest to sport fishing must reflect the specific requirements of that sector.
- The policy being promoted by B.A.S.S is already well established for freshwater fish resources and is administered by the Environment Agency. The agency actually has a statutory obligation to promote and develop recreational angling for its socio-economic benefits, especially to rural areas. For sea fish stocks, similar policies would halt and then reverse the decline that has been the tragedy, witnessed by a generation of sea anglers.

Following a discussion, confirming that these proposals were at least tenable, the meeting closed with an open invitation from Defra, for B.A.S.S to return with specific management proposals for bass.

Since then, the restoration team have been preparing a detailed strategy, to ensure that our vision is supported by as wide a range of stakeholders as possible.

We have also been awaiting the outcome of the results of the Defra sponsored:

Economic Review of Recreational Sea Angling,

Conducted by DREW ASSOCIATES.

B.A.S.S Chairman, John Leballeur, met with representatives of Drew Associates, along with NFSA representation, in order to advise how best to gain the information, that they were seeking.

A questionnaire was then formulated and distributed to volunteers, who would make visits to popular sea angling venues, in order to gain the participation of anglers and to quiz them on their fishing and associated spending habits.

Questions included:

Can you tell me, **on average**, how many **days** you went sea angling **in England and Wales** in the last 12 months?

What **type** of **sea** fish do you **mainly** catch?

What **species** of sea fish do you **mainly target** and **catch**?

Do you **mainly** fish from the shore/pier or a boat?

How much do you spend **on average on transport costs per trip** (including harbour dues, boat fuel and car parking charges if applicable) to travel from your **home** to your **usual fishing point or area**.

Can you tell us how much you spent **personally** in **England and Wales** on sea angling during the **last 12 months under** these different categories? (Where sea angling was not the main purpose of a trip – e.g. family holidays – only include the additional costs incurred on such trips)

How many years have you engaged in sea angling?

How did you get involved in sea angling?

How did you get involved in sea angling?

These questions were also supplemented by a number of option style questions, e.g. would you prefer this or that? Do you think A, B or C etc?

B.A.S.S circulated this questionnaire to its members and I am pleased to say that over 100 completed questionnaires were returned, by those wishing to participate in this important study.

These results have been fed into the Government's Strategy Unit review of Fisheries and have been instrumental in the groundbreaking recommendations, about which, you can now read.

Cabinet Office, Strategy Unit Report on Fisheries.

On 25 March 2004 the Cabinet Office, Strategy Unit, published their long awaited report on the UK Fisheries, titled, 'Net benefits, A sustainable and profitable future for UK Fisheries'.

We publish below, an extract from that report, which is relevant to the UK Bass Fishery and the Recreational Sea Angling sector. It makes very interesting reading.

A copy of the report (1,170 KBS) can be downloaded from www.strategy.gov.uk/output/page3854.asp

An Extract from the Cabinet Office, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit Report on Fisheries.

Net Benefits A sustainable and profitable future for UK Fisheries March 2004

9.6.3 Developing the recreational sea fishing sector Summary:

- The recreational fishing sector is a potentially high contributor to local economies in coastal areas.
- There is a need for better data on the value and contribution of this sector.
- Fisheries management policy should recognise that sea angling may, in some circumstances, provide a better return on the use of some resources than commercial exploitation.

Role of the recreational sector

The majority of recreational sea angling takes place in the inshore zone.

In 2002 around 2 million people went sea angling at least once in England and Wales; there is no comparable data for Scotland and Northern Ireland. The total expenditure by sea anglers in the UK on their sport (eg on fishing equipment, travel, food and accommodation, etc.) is estimated to be at least £1 billion annually.

The quality of the sea angling experience is reported to have diminished in line with the decline in local fish stocks, resulting in lower UK trip rates by serious anglers and an increase in angling trips overseas. It is likely that the recreational catch of commercially caught species is significant in some areas. In view of their impact on, and use of, commercial fish stocks it is necessary to include representatives of recreational sea angling interests in relevant fisheries management bodies.

In some circumstances the economic and social benefits of sea angling for specific species may provide a greater contribution to society than if they are commercially caught.

This is the case in parts of many other fishing nations such as New Zealand, Australia and the USA, where recreational sea angling has been aggressively promoted.

Governmental responsibility for recreational fishing is often unclear.

For example, in England and Wales freshwater angling is managed by the Environment Agency, but responsibility for sea angling is shared by DEFRA and DCMS.

A single government organisation should be identified to represent the needs of the recreational sector at the national level. Recreational sea anglers should also be represented in the fisheries management process at the local level.

There is limited information available to determine the true extent and national impact of recreational sea angling on local economies and fish stocks. To improve this situation it is recommended that a voluntary licensing scheme is introduced, along with provision for sea anglers to provide voluntary catch data via a web-based survey system, supplemented by independent research. It is also important to improve our knowledge of the impacts of recreational fishing through targeted research.

Funding for additional research could be raised by a voluntary administrative levy administered through existing sea angling organisations. For example, a £10 per year levy raised from 40000 anglers would fund £400,000 worth of annual scientific research.

Organisations representing anglers at the national level should work with national fisheries departments to assess the case for designating specific species for wholly recreational use, eg bass.

Recommendations

- The UK Government and the devolved administrations should determine the most appropriate body in each region to represent the needs of recreational sea anglers by the end of 2004.
- Fisheries departments should ensure that angling needs are represented at the local fisheries management level during their reviews of inshore management.
- Relevant departments should determine the funding and administrative requirements of operating a voluntary licensing and catch record scheme for sea anglers, which would be developed in co-operation with representative sea angling organisations.
- Fisheries departments should review the evidence supporting arguments for re-designating commercially caught species for wholly recreational sea angling, beginning with bass, by the end of 2004.

Stakeholder Project up-date

The following companies have joined the B.A.S.S. Stakeholder Project, in order to support our aims.

We are pleased to welcome:



**PURBECK
PRODUCTIONS**

Oceanflies
www.oceanflies.com

YYS
INTERNATIONAL (UK) LTD

Andy Rye, Stakeholder project manager said

'It is encouraging to know that there are a significant number of companies, who produce and provide goods and services for sea anglers, who have also made the connection between what we are trying to achieve and the continued profitability of their businesses. Welcome on-board.'

All of the above businesses, donated items for the traditional raffle, held at the 2004 Annual General Meeting, as did **Fulling Mill, Snowbee, PENN** and **Veals Mail Order**.

So, next time you are looking to buy any item of tackle, clothing or bait, please remember:

Our stakeholders support our work – there are still many who do not.

Our postal auction, for the PENN flotation suit, raised £100 for the Restoration Project fund.

Many thanks to PENN and Veals Mail Order for their generous donation of this excellent piece of safety equipment.

Now for this issue's fund raiser.

Broadcaster and globe-trotting fly-caster, Martin James has kindly donated a Thomas and Thomas S.C fly rod, to the restoration project, as an item to raise funds for our on-going work.

The rod is a 9ft, four-piece, saltwater #10 weight and is finished in aquamarine blue, with complementing whippings and saltwater quality fittings throughout. This individually numbered rod, is a masterpiece and would be more than suitable for bass, or exotic species, like jacks, tarpon, barracuda snook and permit. It comes with a tough aluminium travel tube and cloth bag to keep it in pristine condition.



You can win this rod (and who wouldn't want to) by entering an open raffle. As the rod is just too valuable to let go for a song, we are planning to offer 'tickets' to B.A.S.S members and to the general public, at the CLA Game Fair, later this year. We hope to raise at least £250, which is around half its retail value.

It will cost £5.00 for each entry to the draw and you can have as many goes as you like e.g 4 'tickets' = £20.00 Your name will then be entered into the draw, equal to the number of 'tickets' that you have bought. We hope that Martin will be able to spare the time from his tropical fishing trips, to make the draw and announce the lucky winner, in August 2004.

Fancy a go?

Then send your cheque, made payable to:
The B.A.S.S Restoration Project,

to Steve Pitts at –
18 Highfields Close. Stoke Gifford. Bristol. BS34 8YA



BASS meets the Liberal Democrats

On Friday the 5th of March 2004 at Weston Super Mare, Liberal Democrats, Graham Watson MEP, Brian Cotter MP, prospective parliamentary candidate for Bridgwater West, James Main and prospective parliamentary candidate for Wells, Tessa Munt, and a group of sea anglers assembled on the beach to launch the Liberal Democrat Euro campaign on the UK Bass Proposals in the South West Region.

Sea anglers at the meeting included members of the Bristol Channel Federation of Sea Anglers, members of the Birnbeck club, members of the Burnham boat club and their boats, members of BASS, a representative from the NFSA, three local tackle dealers, a representative from Veals Mail Order, a BBC Points West camera crew, a press photographer, several journalists and a number of members of the public.



L to R Graham Watson, James Main and B.A.S.S Chairman, John Leballeur, discuss increased size limits, at Weston-Super-Mare.

The Bass Management Proposals include the following:-

1. That the UK introduce a non-discriminatory closed season for the retention of sea bass as a conservation measure from the 1st January to 31st March, applicable in all UK territorial waters.
2. There should be a phased increase to the minimum landing size of sea bass within all UK territorial waters from 36cm (approximately 1lb weight) to 55cm (approximately 3.5lb in weight)

The proposals aim to stop the pair trawling of the bass spawning shoals in UK waters, during the closed season, where most of the pair trawling and spawning now takes place. An increase in the minimum landing size in phases from 36 to 55cms, should encourage an increase in the average size of bass in UK waters. Nets set for bass would need to use a bigger mesh size; in practice this would also benefit other species.

The proposals should provide more and bigger bass for sea anglers to catch outside the closed season, ensure a better representation of the age range in the stock, providing extra cover for bad spawning years.

B.A.S.S on the Box



Just some of those who turned out to support us.

A brief report was shown on BBC Points West and Sunday's Politics Programme; Graham Watson MEP said

'The value of recreational fishing to the UK economy is around £1.3 billion, I think it's worth around £100 million to the South West.

The value of commercial fishing is much, much less than that and the numbers involved in commercial fishing are smaller than those in recreational angling. Sadly, the Government seems far keener to listen to commercial interests, than it does to individual citizens, who are enjoying fishing and add a lot to the economy in doing so. I think that the Government have got it wrong'.

Local BBC Radio also broadcast reports involving Liberal Democrat Graham Watson MEP and BASS/SACN members on the UK Bass Proposals and the threat of pair trawling in the morning news bulletins. A number of articles have already been published in local papers and more are due to appear shortly.

James Main emphasised that it was now vitally important for sea anglers to write to MPs asking them to bring their support for the UK Bass Proposals to the attention of Margaret Beckett, The Secretary of State at the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Although the Liberal Democrat campaign is only to run in the South West, the UK Bass Proposals would apply to the UK; anglers in other regions who support the proposals should therefore also write to their MPs since maximum support is essential.



B.C.F.S.A members, James Main, Frank Beaugendre and John Leballeur, with the best value bass poster.

Offshore fishery news

In line with many conservation organisations e.g Greenpeace and the Wildlife trusts, B.A.S.S has circulated a petition, for the closure of the winter offshore bass fishery, amongst its members.

Our aim was to support the Collectif Bar European (CBE), our French counterparts, in raising the issue in Europe, where very little concern appears to be shown toward the dolphin by-catch, or the depletion of bass stocks, due to pair trawling.

B.A.S.S. members raised nearly 1,500 signatures, but special mention and thanks must go to Alistair Dickson, who obtained well over 120 signatures of support and to the Plymouth Federation of Sea Anglers who also made a concerted effort to fill nearly as many petitions. It was also very heartening to receive a completed petition from Graham Watson MEP and his fellow South West Region, colleagues, Glyn Ford and Neil Parish, were keen to support the closure of the offshore fishery.

Greenpeace sail into action.

The largest ship in the Greenpeace fleet, the Esperanza, has been observing and documenting the activities of the bass pair trawler fishing fleet operating in the Western Approaches. On Friday 6th of February 2004 the vessel discovered five dead dolphins in the vicinity of two sets of pair trawlers. All of the dolphins, found 20 miles off the coast of Plymouth, had cuts to their beaks, fins and flippers suggesting obvious entrapment in nets.

Evidence of cetacean deaths, from Defra's website:

	2003	2002	2001	2000
January - March (Q1)	379	244	155	125
April - June (Q2)	165	150	121	99
July - September (Q3)	109	117	152	88
October - December (Q4)	121	115	102	102

The actual cause of death of the cetaceans examined at post-mortem (180 in total) during 2003 was as follows:

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Physical trauma, by-catch	25	7	7	5
Starvation / Hypothermia	6	6	2	3
Pneumonia	4	7	0	5
Dolphin attack	3	11	8	7
Parasites / infection / encephalitis	8	7	7	4
Boat strike	1	0	0	0
Live stranding	6	9	5	4
Asphyxiation	1	0	0	0
Cause not established	9	6	7	0

The main cause of fatalities is increasingly by-catch

In late, March Fishing News reported that 12 Scottish trawlers 'displaced' from the whitefish sector, were steaming 650 miles South, to target bass, stopping off first in France, to collect mid-water trawl gear. Rumours have been circulating that landings of between 27 and 30 tonnes of bass have been made.

John Leballeur went to Plymouth to investigate:

I attended the Plymouth Fish market yesterday and can confirm the following:

On Friday 26th March 21.8 tons of bass was landed by 5 pair teams who have joined the fishery. They were working 30 miles due south of Start Point These vessels have been given the choice to sign up for either 5tonnes @week or 15tonnes @month.

The main effort continues to the west between the 6- 12 mile limit, as it has all winter this year. 11 French pair teams were sighted fishing during the week in this area, besides the Scottish boats.

I carried out a full inspection of 3.2 tonnes of fish, which was on the market yesterday morning, upon arrival with Graham Pickett. We carried out a biological sampling of this landing, taking length & scale samples. These fish were in poor condition, devoid of scales, having been in the cod end for a long time. Mostly spent fish, but a few still running with eggs. The average size was 45 cms. however they had one individual fish of 91cms which weighed 8.26 kilos or 18lbs 2ozs .

A survey of a recent bass landing into Plymouth

Number	size	weight range	
11 kilo	size 6	(under 0.5 kilo)	
2000 kilo	size 5	(0.5 – 1 kilo)	53 %
1400 kilo	size 4	(1 – 2 kilo)	38 %
300 kilo	size 3	(2 – 3 kilo)	8 %
10 kilo	sizes 2+1	(3 – 5 kilo)	0.25%

The Fellowship of the B.A.S.S

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the formation of the Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society.

The committee agreed to celebrate this occasion, by introducing a recognition award, for those who have been instrumental in helping the Society to achieve its aims in bass conservation and the restoration of our premier sporting sea fish.

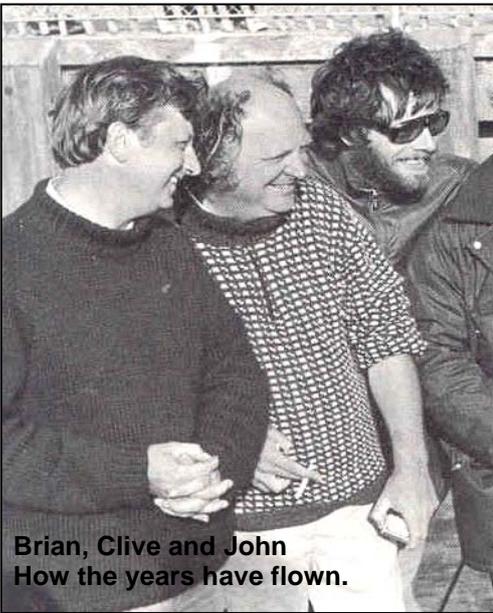
It was decided that this award would be in the form of a Fellowship, bestowed upon our most respected members, as a token of our gratitude for their contributions and efforts.

The first Fellowship awards were presented at the AGM on the 28th March 2004, to the following recipients, for the following reasons.

Brian Harris and Clive Gammon.

Both, founder members of B.A.S.S

John Darling, also a founding member, who sadly passed away earlier this year.



Brian, Clive and John
How the years have flown.

Bob Spurgeon -

Who steered the society through difficult times, enabling it to emerge stronger and more focused on conservation issues.

Dave Cooling -

For the vital work that he undertook on behalf of the society, to ensure the successful implementation of the bass nursery areas and increases in the minimum landing sizes for bass in the late 80's.

Dave has also been a long-term committee member, past treasurer and is now web-master for B.A.S.S

Malcolm Gilbert –

Who has worked tirelessly on behalf of B.A.S.S and sea angling in general, to promote and improve the case for specific management measures for bass, based on sound economic arguments.

We have come a long way with the help of Malcolm's guidance and perseverance.

Malcolm Brindle -

Fish recorder of the society and ambassador for our sport. Few anglers alive today know as much about bass and bass fishing as Malcolm.

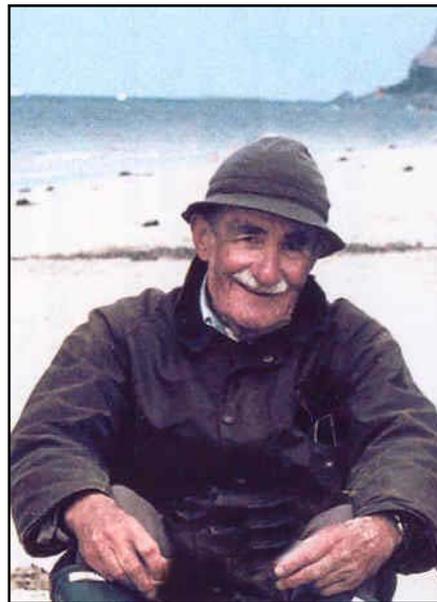


Dave, Bob, Malcolm B and Malcolm G.
Four fellows and brick wall.

And to **Donovan Kelley O.B.E**

For his life-time's work on bass.

We owe so much of our knowledge, of the lifecycle of bass, thanks to Don's unstinting netting and sampling and his meticulous recording of the survival and recruitment of young bass.



Donovan Kelley O.B.E

Bass value poster

On the back page of this issue, you will find a reduced scale version of a poster designed by Bob Cox and Tom Pinborough.

In the original posters, the bass are life-sized and project a powerful message, to anyone who thought that we are currently managing bass for the best value.

The current 36cm minimum landing size is preposterous, when the potential value of larger bass are considered and Bob and Tom's poster is certainly thought provoking. It left representatives of DEFRA speechless when they saw it.