

BASS

Restoration Project
Newsletter



The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

Newsletter number 6

Winter 04/05



In this Issue

B.A.S.S delivers its plan

The Bass Management Plan is presented to DEFRA and Government agencies with a comprehensive package of recommendations to safeguard the future of our bass stocks.

Sea anglers' vigilance saves North Wales bass from devastation

Swift action rectifies byelaw oversight and leads to better understanding between anglers and Sea Fisheries Committee.

Guernsey summer bass slaughter

Anglers threaten to boycott holiday isle destination, as free-for-all causes outrage

Calls for the closure of the Offshore fishery reach Brussels

The minister takes the fight to Europe, then announces that the UK will ban pair trawling for bass. B.A.S.S members react with cautious optimism.

Protection and Enforcement

More news from the people at the sharp end of bass protection.
It's a tough job – but someone has to do it.

Rod raffle is a nice little earner

How much did the Thomas and Thomas fly rod raffle bring in £100..... £200?
It's good news for The BASS Restoration Project, thanks to the generosity of T&T

More news from the front

Updates on the campaign

Published by B.A.S.S
www.ukbass.com



Illegal netting threatens our sport.

Just one glance at this picture will sadden any angler, but a closer look reveals over eighty dead MLS - sized bass.

These fish were confiscated by the Environment Agency Wales, in a joint surveillance operation with the sea fisheries inspectorate, on the river Dee in North Wales. The two culprits were fined a total of £3,000, including costs, when they appeared before Flintshire magistrates. They claimed to be fishing in the designated bass nursery area for 'beer money', but instead their poaching activities netted them the equivalent of 1,200 pints of best bitter.

The real cost however, is the loss of those bass to the Welsh economy. Based on the spending of anglers who may well have practiced catch and release, bringing jobs and repeat business to an area that relies heavily on its natural resources, these fish could have generated ten times their basic illegal catch value.

With the recreational value of bass, at last being realised and talk of licences for sea anglers, can we expect heftier fines and boat confiscations, for those who ruin our sport?

Read about our thoughts on this thorny subject and the B.A.S.S proposals, to revive the bass sport fishery.

Anglers' vigilance averts bass catastrophe.

The vigilance of sea anglers, has averted a potential disaster in North Wales.

Byelaw changes, intended to protect spring-run salmon and sea trout, had inadvertently opened a major loophole, in allowing netting around Anglesey and the Conwy estuary, during the summer and late autumn.

Previously, byelaws intended to protect game fish and only allowing mesh sizes of 250mm or larger, were effectively offering similar protection to juvenile and young adult bass in this area of outstanding natural beauty.

Whilst focusing on saving the large salmon and sea trout, returning to spawn in the Conwy each spring, the local sea fisheries committee and environment agency had overlooked the fact that by relaxing the netting restrictions later on in the year game fish and bass would be subject to an increased in netting pressure between July and November, when restrictions had previously applied.

Fisheries byelaws are notoriously complex and there was a great deal of confusion over whether the amended byelaws offered greater protection, as the sea fisheries committee claimed, or the exact opposite, as local anglers feared.

Full details of the byelaw amendments can be found at www.nwnwsfc.org

The issues were widely discussed on internet forums, including the Sea Anglers' Conservation Network and the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers. Leon Roskilly (SACN), Glyn Hope (WFSA) and Geoff Hancock (BASS), were amongst many who wrote to the **North Wales and North Western Sea Fisheries Committee**, for clarification.

Due to the unprecedented amount of correspondence, that these byelaw changes had solicited, the NW&NWSFC agreed to hold a meeting to discuss, with anglers and other interested parties, their concerns. Further

Geoff and Leon attended the meeting and provided and mu the following report.

Deganwy Castle Hotel. Conwy. North Wales 25th May 2004

The meeting was chaired by SFC Chief Executive – Dr Jim Andrews, with the support of the Environment Agency in the form of Mr A Winstone (Area Environmental Manager) and a number of committee members.

Dr Andrews opened the meeting by explaining that the SFC had had an unprecedented response to its byelaw changes (mainly regarding bye-laws 24 and 25 - fixed nets and drift nets respectfully) from sea

anglers and political representatives (driven by anglers) including MPs and that this had occupied a significant amount of the SFC time during the past months.

Dr Andrews and Mr Winstone then went on to provide an explanation of the reasons behind the changes. In essence, the changes were made to enable a more effective management and enforcement of netting within the areas specified, in relation to salmonids, in that the old bye-laws contained loop-holes whereby it was impossible to control drift netting through authorisation restrictions. i.e. it was impossible for the SFC to refuse drift netting applications under bye-law 25. Furthermore, certain individual netters (fixed and drift) were proving difficult and the EA were concerned about the prosecution of especially large salmonids, during the early part of the season.

Following this explanation, the SFC faced a 'barrage' of issues from the various angling groups. Most of these issues resulted from the 'inadvertent' removal of all netting prohibitions during peak periods (July to November inclusive) and the potential severe consequential damage that would ensue to species other than salmonids, though salmonids too would suffer!

From the SFC reponses to these issues it was clear that they had not given full consideration to other species whilst trying to accommodate bye-law changes, in an effort to protect salmonids.

Mr Andrews went on to explain that the new bye-laws were in place and could not be changed or amended easily within a short space of time as a result of various legal issues relating to process. HOWEVER, as a result of the unprecedented response from anglers and additional requests from the EA (who had now realised the full effect of their proposed bye-law changes) the SFC were very keen to give and been seen to give their full support behind amendment actions that were driven by sound reasoning by anglers!

Further more, the EA had formally written to the SFC with suggestions that, in effect, would restore netting prohibitions within the areas of interest. In addition, if the new suggestions were put in place it would mean that the total level of netting then allowed would be significantly less than the original bye-laws allowed and would be much easier to police.



cont...

The SFC have agreed and are supported by the EA, to motion and approve a TOTAL CLOSURE of netting in the specified areas during July 04 to November 04 (inclusive) so that time can be gained to introduce the additional prohibitions within the bye-laws. This was conditional upon legal approval before July, however, Dr Andrews believed that within the next two weeks the Scientific and legal sub-committee should be able to further this motion.

I have to say that I found the NW & NWSFC very open minded and EAGER to work with angling organisations and that from this extremely positive experience (so far) the opportunity to promote best valuable, sustainable RSA changes seems a possibility!

When discussing the issue of bass, Dr Andrews was keen to receive recommendations from anglers to increase the Minimum Landing Size to 42cms or above through the presentation of our arguments! He was of the opinion that even some of the commercial fishermen would back this direction!

He explained he would require the backing evidence that we have, in order to instigate process towards MLS increase, even though he is fully aware that other SFCs have not gone as far as this.

A future meeting was fixed for 12th October and the SFC confirmed they would keep us informed at regular intervals during the next few weeks in order for us to follow events. NB. Existing Bass Nursery Area legislation is unaffected by the bye-law changes.

We are pleased to report that further meetings have taken place and the by-law changes have been fully reversed, allowing the protection afforded to bass and other species such as mullet, as a by-product of salmonid netting restrictions, to prevail.

We would like to congratulate all those who took part in the consultation and subsequent discussions, as a number of important issues have been raised and will now be discussed at six-monthly meetings between sea angling reps and the NW&NWSFC.

We would particularly like to thank Dr Jim Andrews, for his open and honest approach to resolving this worrying situation. His speedy response to our

concerns has ensured that a potential disaster has been averted and has opened the way for continued dialogue, with regard to those species of importance to recreational sea anglers.

A follow-on meeting has already taken place and the NW&NWSFC are considering increasing the MLS for Bass along with other enhancements.

Guernsey Bass Massacre

Reports of massive hauls of large bass, found just outside of Guernsey waters during the spawning season, prompted many UK sea anglers to threaten boycott of this popular holiday destination.

Guernsey has long been famous for the quality of sea angling and has an enviable reputation for above average-sized bass. How tragic then, that Guernsey based commercials and so-called anglers descended on these dense bass shoals in a free-for-all, that was more like shooting ducks in a barrel.

The back-lash has been felt throughout the Bailiwick and the Islands foremost newspaper, contained a report on a call by "**La Societe Guernesaise**" Guernsey's largest conservation group - to ban pair trawling for bass.

'Pair trawling is widely recognised as an extreme destructive and unsustainable fishery and the link between this method of fishing and dolphin death well established through scientific and anecdotal evidence accumulated over the past decade. 'La Societe is also concerned about the long-term sustainability of the sea bass population, which being persecuted in such an intensive manner. 'Up to 14 pair trawlers were observed off Guernsey coastline in one single day earlier this year.

UK Ban on Pair - Trawling?

Bass anglers have received the news that pair-trawling for bass will be banned within the UK's 12-mile limit with cautious optimism.

Shortly after the announcement at this year's Labour party conference, it is thought that fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw came under intense pressure from the commercial sector to modify the ban.

It should of course be pointed out that this is not intended as a bass conservation measure, but to protect dolphins and porpoises from accidental capture – known as cetacean bycatch. No one would criticise the Minister for taking such action – in fact we applaud his bold stance, after his attempts to broker an EU-wide ban were scuppered. It is vital that the ban is in force in time for this winter's pair-trawling season. Several dolphins have already been reported washed up on SW beaches and the bass are already congregating out to sea.

If you support the proposal to ban pair trawling within the 12-mile limit, then write to your MP and to Ben Bradshaw MP. Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries Defra. Nobel House, 17 Smith Sq. London. SW1P 3JR

Tell him to resist the commercial's pressure !

The Bass Management Plan

Newsletter # 5 (spring issue 2004) gave details of the Government Strategy Unit's study and report on the medium and long-term future for the Fishing Industry. This review was also expressly tasked with including the impacts on sea angling and tourism.

After a public consultation period and a series of stakeholder meetings, the Unit's report was published on 25 March 2004 and included such observations as –

- In 2002 around 2 million people went sea angling at least once in England and Wales
- The total expenditure by sea anglers in the UK on their sport 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
- The recreational fishing sector is a potentially high contributor to local economies in coastal areas
- 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.

Amongst several recommendations, aimed at addressing these issues, the Strategy Unit concluded that -

Fisheries departments should review the evidence supporting arguments for the re-designating of commercially caught species, for wholly recreational sea angling, beginning with bass, by the end of 2004.

B.A.S.S was already in discussions with Defra regarding a number of initial proposals ,intended to revive and restore the bass sport fishery. It was therefore decided that we would produce a proposition document, in order to provide the evidence for the re-designation of bass, as a *mainly* recreational species.

This paper would also include a robust blue-print, designed to achieve More and Bigger Bass, by introducing a comprehensive set of management objectives and covering the necessary legal framework, which would enable these to be implemented and enforced.

It has taken the restoration team several months of research and consultation, in order to produce the definitive document.

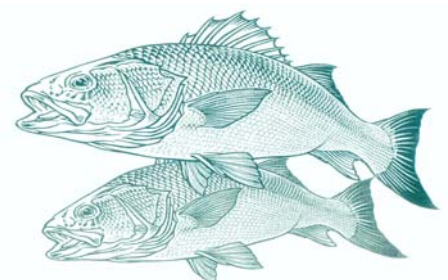
We believe that we can conclusively prove the superior value of the recreational use of the bass resource and can demonstrate that the current legislative protection for bass can be strengthened.

Our objectives are –

1. To ensure that a higher proportion of mature bass are protected, to restore the stocks' natural age structure.
2. To ensure that the most productive fish have the opportunity to reproduce
3. To ensure that unregulated inshore netting does not prejudice the benefits of the superior value of rod and line capture.
4. To ensure that illegal fishing does not erode the considerable benefits of a structured Bass Management Plan.
5. To ensure that **Best Value** is derived from the UK's bass resource.

In order to achieve these objectives, the Bass Management Plan advocates the introduction of –

1. Licences - for the commercial retention of bass.
2. Carcass Tags – for the sale of wild bass and to improve traceability.
3. Bag Limits – to limit the retention of bass and to aid illegal fishing detection.
4. Closed Season – to protect spawning bass, when they are vulnerable.
5. Increases in Minimum Landing Size – to strengthen the brood stock.
6. Improved Nursery Area enforcement – to protect juvenile bass.
7. Near-Shore Netting Restrictions – to protect our fragile coastal zones.
8. The creation of '**The Bass Act**' - to cement the various protection measures into primary legislation.



So, where do we go from here?

In early November ten copies of the Bass Management Plan (BMP) were sent to Defra, so that they may study and evaluate the content. It is likely that members of the restoration project team, along with NFSA and SACN supporters, will meet with Defra fish conservation officials in January 2005 to progress the proposals.

A presentation has already been made to an audience, representative of a wide cross-section of the sea angling fraternity and the support for the BMP was unanimous.

Here are some of the comments so far received:

To all at BASS.

Well done and congratulations on producing such a comprehensive and excellent document. The whole of the UK's sea anglers are indebted to you.

Regards
S C

My initial thoughts are it is an incredible piece of work that the restoration team should be massively proud of.

Fantastic.
Cheers,
Ian

It was a really interesting presentation and an issue EFTTA supports. We will circulate the information to our members and I will forward the documents to our lobbyist in Brussels too.

Kind regards,
EFTTA

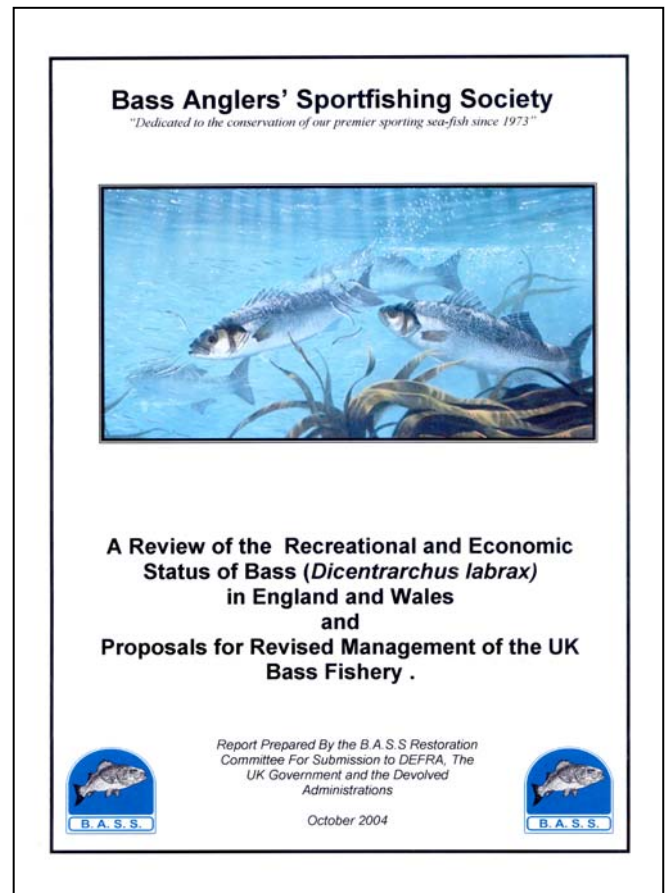
I have to say what a great piece of work and a great credit to all those who contributed. I sincerely hope that the BMP will be accepted in full and that there is no political fudge. BASS are very fortunate indeed to have such an able team. Kind regards R

Stunning! A first class document.
A brilliant example on how angling should react/promote our cause for a sustainable future. Please pass on our heartiest congratulations to your team for a first class job, professionally done.

Many thanks. D B

But don't just take their word for it!

You can view the BMP yourself, via the home page of www.ukbass.com Just click on the words - [Bass Management Plan](#) The 60-odd pages will take a minute or two to download as it's a 1MB file. Broad-band users will find that it's much quicker of course.



The Bass Management Plan – Looking resplendent, with its artwork by David Miller

An advertising campaign is planned, to raise awareness of the proposals and to ensure that the messages are not mis-interpreted. It's vital that the whole of sea angling gets behind the plan, as it could act as a blue-print for the recreational sector to regain some of its most important species, such as wrasse, flounder, mullet, and rays which have become the target of inshore commercial fisherman

Keep an eye out for these in the sea angling press and if you get the chance, write to the editor, your local MP **Ben Bradshaw MP** Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries Defra. Nobel House.17 Smith Sq. London. SW1P 3JL

Tell them that you support the BMP and that they should. On the back page of this issue you will find an outlaw-s WANTED poster, promoting the Bass Management Plan

It is easy to photocopy or to scan and print, so why not take a few down to your local tackle shops or angling clubs and pin them up on the notice boards. You could even laminate them and spread the word at pier or slipway - hand them out or, or as the outlaws say in all the best western films **STICK 'EM UP !**

Enforcing the Rules

The photo on the cover of this newsletter gives a graphic illustration of the scale of illegal bass netting in some areas. Bearing in mind that this haul was from just one illegally set net, the problem is probably many magnitudes greater, as only a small section of our coastline and estuaries can be patrolled effectively by the enforcement agencies.

The job of policing our bass nursery areas and inshore waters falls to fisheries enforcement officers, who have a tough job and often their efforts are not sufficiently recognised.

We tend to think that the deterrents, such as confiscations and fines, are nowhere near harsh enough, but first the culprits have to be apprehended and a case brought before the courts, which takes up valuable time and resources.

Often it is the judiciary who let us down; handing out ineffective fines or community service orders, rather than confiscating boats and vehicles, as usually happens in such cases in the U.S.A.

The patrol officers of the local Sea Fisheries Committees and the Environment Agency are endeavouring to dramatically reduce the setting of illegal nets, especially in estuaries with salmon and sea trout runs, which are often also bass nursery areas. They need all the help they can get.

In Cornwall, The Environment Agency has been busy –

Gillnet seizure in River Fal

Just weeks after being launched, a new Environment Agency patrol vessel made its first illegal net seizure.

Agency officers swung into action on June 16 after an illegal monofilament net was spotted in the Fal Estuary. They were tipped off by the Truro Harbourmaster in response to growing concerns about the level of illegal netting within the Fal.

An unattended net, measuring approximately 50 metres long, was recovered from the estuary near Mylor. A number of fish, including bass and pollack, were removed from its meshes and released.

"Any fishing for bass from a boat within the Bass Nursery areas of the upper reaches of the Fal estuary above Turnaware and Restronguet and within the Percuil River is prohibited. The use of an unattended drift net or a fixed net is prohibited throughout the estuary," said Holly Whitting for the Environment Agency.

Anyone caught fishing with an unattended net, also known as a fixed engine, can be fined up to £2,500.



Holly untangles a mullet – it could easily have been a bass

The new fisheries patrol vessel, a six metre RIB, has been on station since last month and has already been on several patrols and training exercises. It will work in conjunction with three existing patrol boats covering the Cornish and Plymouth estuaries and will operate mainly in West Cornwall.

As the Sea Fisheries Authority within the Estuary, the Agency is responsible for controlling fishing activities within the Fal estuary and also has responsibilities under the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975 in the estuary and in restricted netting zones such as within Gerrans, Penzance and St Ives Bay.

Anyone witnessing illegal fishing activities can call the Environment Agency's free 24 hour Emergency Hotline

0800 80 70 60

Why not key this number into your mobile 'phone **now**

Update: In the early hours of 6th December 2004 an Environment Agency patrol vessel seized 1,300 m of illegally set bass nets off Crinnis Beach in St Austell Bay, Cornwall. Four full nets were seized with the longest being 800m. Several of the nets were located through floats seen on the surface of the sea. The remaining nets were set with the head rope of the net just under the surface.

St Austell Bay is a restricted netting area for gill nets set in a certain way. It is not illegal to fish for bass but it is illegal to set anchored nets which fish within 3 m of the surface of the sea. The net restrictions are designed to protect salmon and sea trout which use the bay as a holding and feeding area prior to migrating into the R. Fowey to spawn.

Illegally set bass nets in St Austell Bay, at this time of year, is a recurring problem for the Environment Agency. Over the last 18 months approximately 4.5 km of illegal net has been seized from this one area alone.

In response to this latest seizure the Environment Agency will now be stepping up patrols and observations and will seek to prosecute any fishermen caught setting nets illegally. The seized nets will be retained in the event that any fisherman would like to claim them but will be destroyed after one month.

Restoration Rod Raffle Reaps Remarkable Rewards – Steve Pitts

The **Thomas and Thomas** fly rod, donated by Martin James, was the subject of a postal raffle in the last newsletter. I was hoping that £250 would be raised for the restoration project funds, but had to lower my sights when B.A.S.S decided not to attend the Game Fair due to the 'out of our price range' exhibitors fees.

Not to be short-changed by this change of plan, I set about using the internet, to solicit bids from our members and forum readers of Sea Anglers' Conservation Network (SACN) and UKSWFF.com (UK Salt Water Fly Fishing web site) and I was relieved when our target was eventually reached.

To be more accurate my postings were more like a bombardment of reminders. At one stage the cheques were coming in thick and fast and by mid August, we were up to the £200 mark. Then I received a couple for £30 and one for £50 in the same day and then, as the closing date of 31st August drew near, another flurry of requests landed on the door mat, pushing the total ticket sales well past £400.

When the raffle was declared closed, I just couldn't believe it - When I made the final tally we had netted the remarkable sum of **£595** – well over twice our original aim.

I made arrangements to meet up with Martin to make the draw, at the Watermarks Fishery, near Southorney. Glos and David Riley joined us to ensure fair play was upheld.



And the winning ticket belongs to.....Andy Rye!

Having made the draw and thanked Martin for his generosity; all that remained for me to do was to break the news to Andy. In a typically modest fashion he replied –

The truth is; that I had no intention of winning at all and the ticket purchase was supposed to be a donation and not an investment. I'm delighted nevertheless. I was made up when I heard that I'd won the rod and it is just perfect for fly fishing the salt.

I really would like to thank all those who participated in this fund-raising event and for making it such an outstanding success –

- The 39 entrants, who hailed from afar – a field as the Channel Islands, Eire and The Netherlands.
- Broadcaster and globe-trotting reporter Martin James.
- **Thomas & Thomas Rods**

And now for this issue's raffle!

Veals Mail Order Hopkins and Holloway & Harrison Blanks

Have donated all the bits and pieces to make a unique, top-end spinning rod for some lucky plugger to win. Not only that; but we have managed to persuade custom rod builder **Mike Oliver** to hand-build the rod to his usual exacting standards, so it will be something really special and a complete one-off.

Here's the spec:

- 2-piece 10ft Harrison 15-60gram blank
- Fuji BLVLG rings throughout
- Fuji BPLT tip ring & Fuji RBC Butt cap
- Hand-turned Harrison Rod cork grips
- Fuji DPS reel seat
- Black tyings and trim wraps
- Personalised for the winner

The finished rod will be a masterpiece of top-quality craftsmanship throughout and the owner will surely be the envy of fellow lure - tossers.

Fancy your chances ?

Here's what to do:

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.

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

Don't forget to include your name, address and telephone number. We will arrange for the rod to be delivered to you if you're the lucky winner. You stand more chance of winning this rod than the Lotto – ask Andy Rye. GOOD LUCK!

N.B Closure date 01/03/2004

All proceeds to the Restoration project fund

WANTED

By Sea Anglers



THE RETURN OF BIGGER BASS

**The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society
Has Produced A Bass Management Plan
The Plan Lays Out How We Can Restore The Numbers of
Larger Bass Available to Sea Anglers by Introducing:**

- **INSHORE GILL NET RESTRICTIONS & NET-FREE ZONES**
- **MORE PROTECTION FOR BASS NURSERY AREAS**
- **A CLOSED SEASON - TO PROTECT SPAWNING FISH**
- **BASS DAILY BAG LIMITS - TO AID CONSERVATION**
- **INCREASED BASS MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT**
- **LICENCES FOR COMMERCIAL BASS FISHING &**
- **CARCASS TAGGING - TO CURB ILLEGAL LANDINGS**

**Reward:
More and Bigger Bass For You**

For full details of the Bass Management Plan visit www.ukbass.com
Write to your local MP and Ben Bradshaw (House of Commons, London)
stating that you support the Bass Management Plan and would like to see
its speedy introduction, to save your sport.