

# BASS

Restoration Project  
Newsletter



The Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

Newsletter Number 8

Spring 2008



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### Minister's U-turn on bass Minimum Landing Size

After a 2 year period of deliberation, Fisheries Minister Jonathan Shaw backs down due to commercial pressure and leaves the MLS for bass at 36 centimetres.

### Wales also decides that bass MLS is not to be increased

Results of public consultation Ignored as proposals to safeguard an important part of the Welsh tourism sector are cast aside.

### BASS presentations roll out

Spend an evening with BASS and 'Come On - Let us entertain you'.

### BASS sponsors catch & release competition in Dorset

In a new initiative, the Society forges links with the Poole Bay Small Boat Angling Club and seeks to extend the concept of C&R in club comps - A very promising start.

### Defra announces consultation on a Strategy for Sea Angling

Certain to be controversial - Bag limits and licences are just two of the items included for discussion in this debate.

### How do you measure up?

Don't be left guessing how heavy your bass is - get a unique BASS measure and let our extensive records be your guide to its length and weight.



## Will this soon be a rare sight?

A shoal of bass swim over a kelp-covered reef off the South Devon coast - but for how much longer? The decision not to increase the Minimum Landing Size for bass has put doubts over the long-term future of our inshore stocks, which are of vital importance to both small-scale commercial fishermen and recreational sea anglers alike.

Pressure on other fish stocks is having a knock-on effect on non-quota species such as bass and in this issue we look at the reasons given by Jonathan Shaw for his rejection of - the public consultation outcome; scientific advice on size at first capture and the irrefutable economic evidence which together, supported the case for an increase in the MLS to 45 centimetres.

With the MLS announcement still ringing in our ears Defra announces plans to introduce bag limits and licences for sea anglers. What can we expect in return? No-one seems to know, but we take a peek under the glossy cover of the pros and cons of a *Recreational Sea Angling Strategy for England*.

Despite the recent bad news and doom and gloom that we hear about the poor state of our fish stocks, we remain optimistic that our messages contained within the Bass Management Plan will get through and succeed - eventually.

We wouldn't be anglers if we weren't optimists.

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## New Minister discards MLS increase –

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> October will go down in the annals of BASS and fisheries management history as the day reason and common sense were thrown out of the window by Fisheries Minister Jonathan Shaw, when he announced that the Minimum Landing Size for bass was to remain at 36 centimetres, despite his predecessors' promise to increase the MLS to 40cm in April 2007 and review again in 2010.

So – Just what happened to make the new Minister reverse Ben Bradshaw's decision? What could have over-turned the wave of public opinion, the scientific advice and the substantial economic benefits which were forecast, leading Mr Bradshaw to comment -

*I have accepted the arguments for a bigger minimum landing size to help increase the quantity and size of bass. This will also give better protection for the stocks. There may be short-term costs from this measure before we see future gains but it is vital that fisheries management takes a long term view. The recreational fishing sector makes a major contribution to our economy and it is important that their voice, as well as that of commercial fishermen, is taken into account in fisheries management.*



Perhaps we shouldn't be blaming Mr Shaw.

After all, he had only been appointed Fisheries Minister a few weeks earlier and had inherited the decision on the bass MLS, which was then in limbo due to 'new evidence' which

had come to light from the commercial sector. But given his inexperience and lack of background in both the consultation and the Bass Management Plan, which had proposed the increase, he sought guidance from those who *had* been part of his department during the run-up to and throughout the consultation process. Guided by Defra officials, he decided that bass were not an important species to sea anglers and that the jobs of commercial fishermen were more important than those in the angling sector.

## So – what was this 'new evidence'?

During the MLS consultation, the commercial sector had mounted a campaign to both discredit the data that BASS had put forward and at the same time claimed that –

- Fishermen's livelihoods would be at stake and redundancies would follow.
- Plate-sized fish of 36cm were preferred by the fish-eating public.
- Bass move offshore when they reach 36cm and bigger bass were therefore uncatchable inshore.
- Sea anglers did not support an increase in the minimum landing size for bass.
- Foreign boats would clear out our bass stocks and our fishermen would have to throw back dead fish.

All of these red herrings were taken into account, considered and rebutted by BASS. Our evidence was solid and backed by not only the scientific community, but also Defra's own catch statistics and data. This is the reason that Ben Bradshaw made his decision, when he said in August 2006

*I have listened very carefully to the representations made and have not taken this decision lightly.*

However – we were not aware of a short-duration study that was being conducted by Defra appointed scientists on discards in inshore trawl fisheries, something which appears to have been kept secret until the findings were presented to Mr Bradshaw by representatives of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation on March 14<sup>th</sup> '07.

Two weeks before the implementation of the first stage in the increase, on the 21<sup>st</sup> March, we received a letter from the then Minister announcing that representatives of the commercial sector had convinced him to stall the increase and he had no choice but to review the report, which indicated that trawlers fishing inshore waters were likely to experience an increase in their catch rate of bass below the new MLS. Whilst the legislation to increase the MLS had been laid before Parliament, a counter Statutory Instrument had been laid to counter it – All within one week. So near....Yet so far.

## **Ben Bradshaw's letter continued –**

*I appreciate that this news will not be welcomed by anglers and realise that it will create uncertainty for both the recreational and commercial sectors. However, I need to ensure that all available evidence is considered carefully before legislation is introduced. I would like to resolve this as soon as possible.*

A copy of the CEFAS discard report was enclosed and BASS was asked to respond to the findings within a short timescale of just 2 weeks.

Analysis of any scientific paper is never an easy task, but the team set to work on the CEFAS report immediately and what soon became apparent was the limited amount of sampling which had been carried out in some of the fisheries concerned, in fact it was confirmed in the section headed **Data collection** – *There has been no targeted sampling of vessels fishing specifically for bass.*

Then, in **Data analysis and results**, the admission that - *There was insufficient information for most bass stock area/mesh size combinations to investigate the influence of recruitment patterns on discard patterns. For the same reasons, only 8 stock area/mesh size combinations had sufficient data to obtain meaningful results.*

Then came the bombshell revelation that in fisheries area Div. VIIId (Portland to Dover) the level of bass being discarded by trawlers using 80mm nets was already a massive **64%**. Nearly 2/3rds of the bass catch was under 36cm. Most of these fish would be discarded as dead fish – yet here we had the commercial sector claiming that increasing the MLS would lead to discards – What crass hypocrisy.

Clearly – the English Channel and in particular the Solent, is a giant bass nursery area with high densities of juvenile and <36cm 'basslings'. Yet this did not stop the trawlers from catching large numbers of small bass, instead of moving to other areas, in an effort to avoid small fish and reduce the high levels of bass discards.

Data was also collected from fish merchants in three locations – Plymouth, Bideford and Scarborough. Landings of pair trawlers into Plymouth were almost entirely made up of fish of 38cm and above. In fact the highest proportion

of bass landed by trawls was in the 46-55cm range for the three years (2003 – 2005) that were sampled. So a 40cm MLS was unlikely to generate large discards in this fishery.

The data from Bideford (N. Devon) was obtained from the landings of just one vessel, a twin rig demersal trawler operating in the Bristol Channel, which is known to fish for bass in the shallow waters and sand banks off the South coast of Wales. The size of the fish was variable (probably depending on the areas fished) and in 6 out of the 9 catches sampled around 70% of the catch was made up of bass which were 42cm or bigger.

The data from Scarborough was patchy. Taken from two pair-trawl teams fishing between January and April 2006 the report states that – *The data were not separated into size categories and no length data were provided. Given the estimate (by the data supplier) that 90% of the catch was below 40cm it is estimated that only 0.4tonnes of the 4tonnes landed could be landed in the future.*

So, yet again, we have large numbers of immature and juvenile bass being caught by trawls and we wondered - if 90% of the catch was below 40cm, how many fish of less than 36cm had been discarded at sea, before the catch reached the port?

All of the evidence – the 'New Evidence' which the commercial sector was now using to overturn the increase in the MLS, was pointing in one direction. **Trawlers, fishing inshore shallow waters, were likely to be responsible for a very high rate of discards of bass below the existing 36cm mls.**

There was certainly the likelihood that discards would increase with a 40cm MLS, if the trawlers carried on fishing the same areas, where up to 64% of bass were already being discarded. But surely, it would make sense to tackle the discard problem at its source and ensure that discards were reduced by forcing trawlers out of the shallow inshore waters, where juvenile bass and other species spend the early stages of their lives. This would dramatically reduce the threat from the main culprit and allow small bass to grow to the new MLS of 40cm, without massive discard losses to the prolific 2002 year-class.

This principle was the strategy recommended in the BASS response, to the discard report.

BASS wrote –

- High speed inshore bass trawls are the most likely trawling method to catch quantities of bass smaller than the new 40cm MLS
- High speed bass trawling is a minority method when viewed against all other methods. The benefit realised from reduced exploitation on immature bass caught in high speed trawls will benefit the majority of other stakeholders - both recreational and commercial.
- Undersized bass can be caught in trawls and returned alive, as evidenced by tagging research. However, this does mean a change in tow time and tow speed is needed to ensure that discarded bass have a higher survival rate.
- Defra must not accept accidental ‘targeted’ commercial trawling on bass <40cm as a publicity stunt to overturn the mls increase. Strong enforcement will be essential, as will a robust public stance denouncing such behaviour.
- The commercial fishing industry must understand that as with diversification in farming, so there is a requirement for fishermen to diversify in order to ensure that fish stocks remain in good condition for all users.

Despite the apparent urgency for a reply from BASS our submission appears to have sat on a civil servant’s desk for some time, because we received no response until Jonathan Shaw invited members of the commercial fishing industry and sea angling representatives to a joint meeting last October.

At that meeting Mike Smith of CEFAS presented an overview of the bass fishery and maintained that bass stocks were the strongest that they have been during the past 20 years.

This somewhat conflicts with our experiences as bass anglers and it also doesn’t tally with commercial catches, where landings of bass have been declining in some areas.

However; Jonathan Shaw was swayed by this news and the protests from the commercial sector that, due to recent quota cuts in cod and sole, they were now heavily reliant upon bass.

The writing was on the wall and the team representing BASS were left with a sense of foreboding as they left the Ministry in Whitehall. A week later their fears were confirmed when, in a brief announcement, Jonathan Shaw said:

*“Having considered the science and evidence, and having listened carefully to the concerns of anglers and commercial fishermen, I have decided not to increase the MLS for bass. Bass is important to the inshore fishing fleet, which would have borne the brunt of the cost of increasing the MLS. I could not justify introducing a measure which would have had such an impact on those fishermen given the current pressures they face and the healthy state of the stock at present.*

So – Mr Shaw claims he had reviewed all of the evidence and not just relied on his advisers to come to his decision on the future of bass. Due to cuts in quota species and mounting pressure from the commercial sector –

He ignored the outcome of the 3 month public consultation, where out of 2,750 responses **87%** were in favour of an increase in the MLS

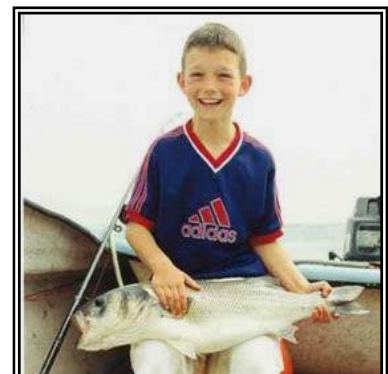
He ignored the CEFAS consultation assessment which recommended an increase to 45cm.

He ignored the economic and biological facts.

He ignored the BASS recommendations on discards and then, in an act of unsurpassed short-termism, he gave the inshore bass stocks to the commercial sector as a sacrificial lamb.

In capitulating to the minority, he has also consigned us as bass anglers to a future of dwindling catches of smaller and smaller fish, as our bass stocks will continue to be cropped at a size significantly below that at which females become mature. What a travesty.

We hope this young lad has a good memory. It could be some time before he catches another bass of this size.



## BASS Presentations – Now for some good news

BASS has created a team of BASS members up and down the UK who have the knowledge and experience to do a presentation about BASS, bass and bass conservation.

Our first presentation was to the Poole Bay Small Boat Angling Club (PBSBAC), where Allan Hughes, Mike Ladle and Steve Pitts braved the December gales to meet 70 of the club's members at one of its monthly meetings.

The material covered included the following –

- The Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society – an overview of what the Society is, what we get involved in, benefits of being a member.
- The types of fishing members practice - shore, boat, kayak, fly-fishing, and techniques used.
- The biology of bass - scale reading, tagging projects, breeding.
- The bass fishery - overview of recreational and commercial interest in bass, minimum landing sizes, pressures on stocks.
- Recreational Seas Angling (RSA) explained.
- Campaign history to establish anglers rights.
- The Bass Management Plan (BMP) overview.

A good time was had by all and there were lots of questions and suggestions put by the club's members – many of whom are experienced bass anglers. Following the presentation, Paul Jennings and Rich Swain both agreed that the presentation had been '*interesting, educational and entertaining*' in fact, they were so impressed that they joined BASS.

Encouraged by the reception that the BASS presentation had received, Allan then approached the club's committee and asked if they would consider adding a new angle to their competition diary – which would include a bass Catch and Release (C&R) trophy.

Now – its worth pointing out that BASS is not a C&R only group. We see nothing wrong in taking bass for the table, but it was felt that it would be fitting if we could encourage the return of large bass, so BASS has sponsored two trophies dedicated to the release of large bass by club members - one for the largest bass released by a member during the year and the other for the largest bass released during the club's existing 'bass only' competition.

The first winner of the annual trophy, Allan McAvoy, was well deserved as Allan has caught and released many double figure bass.



Allan with his trophy-winning bass

**The winning fish was a specimen of 13lb 6 oz**

In addition to the trophy, we managed to gain supporting sponsorship from both VEALS MAIL ORDER and PENN FISHING TACKLE EUROPE in the form of a £40 VEALS tackle voucher and a PENN boat rod and reel outfit valued at over £100.

Our association with the PBSBAC has been a great success and at the annual dinner and awards ceremony, which was attended by Steve Binckes, editor of the BASS magazine and John Taylor of the BASS Committee, PBSBAC Chairman, Martin Burt, presented Steve Binckes with a cheque for £200 as a donation to the BASS restoration project fund.

Subsequent presentations have been held at Axminster, Portsmouth, Birchington in Kent, Broadstone and Wimbourne in Dorset, to the Game Anglers Instructors Association at their AGM held in Rutland and more are scheduled for Herne Bay, Starcross and Wyvern NFSA.

We would like to hear from any members of other clubs, or members of BASS who have contacts with other sea angling groups, who feel their membership would be interested in attending such a presentation. It takes around one and a half hours to present it in its entirety, but we can tailor it to suit the time available.

A minimum of two BASS presenters will make the presentation, which BASS is prepared to do provided that there is an audience of at least 25 people. There is no fee for BASS to make the presentation and all expenses of the presenters will be covered by BASS. Please contact our presentations co-ordinator at - [presentations@ukbass.com](mailto:presentations@ukbass.com)

## Wales consults on the bass MLS



In line with the consultation held by Defra, on proposals to increase the Minimum Landing Size for bass, The Welsh Assembly Government also ran a consultation during spring of 2006.

On 11 October 2006, Carwyn Jones, Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside, announced the results of the consultation. Despite 79% of respondents voting for an increase in the MLS it was decided to only increase MLS size in the Northern parts of Wales to 37.5cms, to match the MLS already prevailing in South Wales.

In addition – the Minister announced plans to introduce bag limits on bass for recreational sea anglers in an effort to control the unlicensed sale of bass, which was considered by Welsh anglers and commercial fishermen as a problem. No further measures were announced which would control commercial fishing

Following the announcement BASS wrote to the Minister expressing its dismay and concerns over his decision.

*Our society and other angling organisations are dismayed at your decision not to increase the mls for bass to 45cms. An opportunity to protect and develop the brood stocks of Wales' bass has been wasted, in favour of pandering to the short-term profiteering of a vociferous minority of commercial exploiters.*

*Clearly, the views of the angling community have fallen on deaf ears, despite the consultation responses being in favour of increasing the mls, by a margin of 5 to 1.*

*The fact that bass will still be targeted before the majority will have spawned will certainly ensure the continued decline of the recreational sport fishery and within time, the demise of the commercial fishery, for without a robust brood stock the juvenile fish, which currently support commercial exploiters, will dwindle in numbers to the point where they become uneconomic to pursue.*

*Certainly, a standardisation of mls was long overdue in Welsh waters and catch restrictions, to reduce black fish landings, can be supported by anglers – **But only as part of a package of conservation measures which, include an increased mls to 45cm and capping of commercial effort on bass,** which have been outlined to the Minister in our consultation responses and at the meeting held with angling representatives.*

*The announced measures merely tinker around the edges of the problems, which face the inshore bass stock, from unlimited commercial pressure and all that this announcement promises is the preservation of bass for commercial exploiters – not a strengthening of the stock, or an increase in the size and availability of bass for the recreational sector, which was the stated objective of the proposals.*

*In our opinion - if a management plan were ever required to -*

- *Eradicate bass from the coast of Wales*
- *To discourage anglers from holidaying in Wales*

*Then it would look remarkably similar to the measures outlined in your announcement.*

*We therefore reluctantly find ourselves unable to support the introduction of bag limits, without a meaningful increase to the mls for bass and the capping of commercial effort and will be recommending to our membership that they oppose such measures.*

More recently, in a classic U-turn and mirror image of the English MLS decision, it has been announced that bag limits will not now be introduced and the MLS will remain at 36cm in North Wales.

The reasons given by the Minister?

*'Scientific evidence indicates that Bass stocks are being fished sustainably and changes to the Welsh minimum landing size would disadvantage the Welsh inshore industry, as the European and English minimum landing size would remain at 36cm'.*

So two years after these consultations were launched BOTH Governments have adopted option 1 - **DO NOTHING**. Then they have the affront to call themselves fisheries 'managers' and to get paid for **doing nothing**.

# A Recreational Sea Angling Strategy for England.

## Golden opportunity or poisoned chalice?

Defra has launched a 4 month-long consultation period, during which it wants feedback on a strategy for the future of recreational sea angling (RSA).

In doing so it has unleashed upon the RSA fraternity a set of proposals that will either prove to be the saviour of our sport, or herald its demise. At the moment, it would appear that many anglers haven't even heard of the strategy and those who have are split down the middle – some for and some against.

In an effort to widen the awareness of the strategy proposals, we are covering them in this issue of the BASS Newsletter. Not because we want to sway opinion, but because the decisions that Defra take on this hot topic will form the basis of changes that will be far reaching. It's therefore important that as many anglers try to understand the reasons behind and the consequences of the strategy and if possible, contribute to the debate, as individuals or groups. BASS will be making a submission to the consultation and we would like to encourage the membership will take the opportunity to have their say too, by putting pen to paper or finger to keyboard.

## So – what's it all about?

The RSA strategy is the brainchild of NFSA Chairman Richard Ferré, although some of the proposals bear a striking resemblance to subjects covered in the Bass Management Plan.

Mr Ferré presented his basic proposals to Defra, in an effort to get some principles established on what RSA wanted and how these could be met. Defra then handed the draft concept over to the Inshore Fisheries Working Group RSA Sub-group, of which BASS is a member. Despite being a sub-group for sea anglers, out of a membership of 18, only 4 seats are allocated to angling reps. The other seats are allocated to Sea Fisheries Committees, commercial fishing representatives and Government agencies so, as you can imagine, the original draft strategy papers looked like a recipe for the demise of RSA. Defra wanted licences and bag limits. SFCs wanted a slice of the licence fees.

CEFAS wanted to be awarded the contract for the work involved in assessing fish stocks of interest to RSA and for monitoring the success or failure of some of the proposals. The commercials were happy to see RSA being charged and restricted and resisted any mention of reducing commercial fishing in areas which were important to anglers, such as estuaries and fishing marks close inshore.

A small team of BASS members were tasked to review the draft and worked hard to redress the imbalance, by including some strongly worded caveats to the proposals.

**On the strategy aims** – they commented:

*The fundamental requirement must be more and bigger fish. Without more and bigger fish the other elements are irrelevant. It doesn't matter how good the access is to a fishing mark, if the calibre of fish that attracts anglers aren't available. It is important to provide improved availability of quality fish first.*

**On licences** – they wrote: *Sea anglers have seen their catches diminish year on year since the introduction of mono gill nets in the 70s. The average size of the fish they expect to catch has decreased quite dramatically. As a product, sea angling is not good value for money. To charge anglers a licence fee to enable them to take part in a sub standard sport, when they used to enjoy good sport free of charge is asking too much too soon.*

**On bag limits:** *The subject of bag limits is contentious amongst anglers, but within BASS, the concept of bag limits for bass is accepted and promoted as part of an overall species management plan, which also includes the capping of commercial effort, as proposed within the Bass Management Plan.*

*We would support the implementation of bag limits, on the condition that similar controls were implemented on the commercial sector at the same time. To impose bag limits on anglers under any other circumstances would be to restrict anglers for the benefit of the commercial fishing sector. This would be discriminatory and would further deteriorate the angling experience. Imposing bag limits on anglers, as part of a pseudo-conservation measure, when the underlying motive is to allow and encourage greater commercial levels of prosecution, will be vigorously opposed by BASS.*

In the event, some of these caveats were included in the final draft and some were omitted, but given the amount of hostility to these changes from some quarters, the beefing up of the wording was as best as could be achieved. Defra weren't for dropping licences and bag limits and we weren't for dropping 'More and Bigger Fish' as one of the stated and fundamental aims of a strategy for RSA.

## **A change for good or just empty words?**

One of the appeasements in the bass MLS announcement was that sea anglers were going to see benefits, which would outweigh the decision. The RSA strategy was held up by Jonathan Shaw as one of the antidotes for the bitter pill that he had just force-fed sea anglers.

With the bass MLS debacle out of the way (or so he thought) Mr Shaw gave the go-ahead for Defra to launch the RSA strategy in early December '07. In Wales the Welsh Assembly Government has published its own strategy for fisheries, with less emphasis on RSA issues.

With a 25 page consultation document and accompanying notes; to cover all of the detail in this newsletter would be like trying to write the Lord's prayer on a grain of rice, so for those requiring access to the full set of papers, they can be obtained on-line at – <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/sea-angling/index.htm>

If you want a paper version you can either telephone the consultation team on - 020 7238 4605

Or write to -  
Nicola Clarke  
Fishing Industry Management Division  
Area 2C  
Nobel House  
17 Smith Square  
London, SW1P 3JR

For those with less time on their hands, we have prepared a summary, with some additional information, which you may find helpful.

### **Summary**

The aim of the strategy is:

**'To enhance the recreational sea angling experience in England in a holistic and environmentally responsible way whilst following the principles of sustainable fisheries management'**

### **There are four main goals to the Strategy:**

- To provide more and bigger fish within a healthy and sustainable ecosystem and environment.
- To capitalise on the economic potential of the sport to the benefit of the UK economy and identify ways to re-invest expenditure to provide further benefits.
- To sustainably maintain and increase participation in RSA across all sectors of society to provide socio – economic benefits
- To increase awareness and understanding of RSA through improved communication, education and participation in fisheries management.

The strategy consultation document is then broken down into 9 further sections, covering

### **Fisheries Management**

Summary -

- Ensure there is a flexible management framework that enables all those with a stake in the marine environment, including the RSA sector, to be involved in decision making.
- Fisheries management decisions will be taken at the appropriate level.
- The framework will enable managers to anticipate and take action quickly using a range of tools.

### **Species, Stock Impact and Habitat**

Summary -

- Providing more and bigger fish using a variety of tools and mechanisms.
- Species management plans for key species of importance to anglers-including consideration of recreational only species.
- Measures that promote fish production (such as minimum and maximum landing sizes, nursery areas or protection of spawning aggregations) to be considered.

### **RSA Management**

Summary -

- A sea angling licence will be considered. Costs and benefits will be clear and transparent, and additional revenue returned to the angling sector to provide benefits.
- As part of a balanced package of conservation measures, effort control (such as increased MLS, voluntary codes of conduct, bag limits or log books) should be



considered on a species by species basis. Objectives for such measures must be clearly be defined.

### **Voluntary Measures: Codes of Conduct and Best Practice.**

Summary –

- Develop a national Code of Conduct that promotes best practice for Recreational Sea Anglers.

### **Access and Development.**

Summary –

- Providing support elements to improve the angling experience by building relationships with key organisations, accessing funding sources or self-funding.

### **Communication.**

Summary –

- Improving internal and external communications to ensure the sector is co-ordinated and represents a balanced view in multi-stakeholder discussions.
- Management bodies to ensure RSA has a legitimate place in stakeholder discussions and the decision- making process.

### **Information and Measurement.**

Summary –

- Gathering data and building a reliable base to inform management decisions and monitor their impact.

### **Implementation and Success Criteria.**

Summary –

- Monitoring the success of the Strategy and ensuring it remains a useable document.

### **But - is the Devil in the detail?**

If you want the detail, chapter and verse, then you would be best advised to get hold of a full copy of the consultation papers, as outlined on page 8, but we should look at some of the more contentious proposals here, just to whet your appetite. If you have a look around some of the angling web forums, you will see that the most talked about topic is the introduction of a rod licence. Apart from the school of thought which poses the question ‘Why should we pay for something that has always been free?’ (which is a valid enough question in itself) perhaps the main causes for concern are ‘How will the money raised be spent?’ and ‘What will we get in return?’ Ask anyone to part with hard-earned cash and you would expect the same questions.

On the first question Defra suggest –

*All fisheries stakeholders have a responsibility to share the cost of science and fisheries management. A combined mechanism that would raise money for the benefit of sea anglers, provide an effective communication tool, gather information to better understand anglers’ needs promote fuller participation in management fora, and enable effective monitoring and enforcement would underpin other elements of the RSA Strategy.*

So, licence revenue could be used to subsidise the existing fisheries management structure of Sea Fisheries Committees, Defra, Cefas and perhaps the Environment agency. This notion is confirmed in the subsequent paragraph –

*A sea angling licence (operating in a similar way to the freshwater angling licence) could meet these needs. The costs and benefits must be transparent, justifiable and clearly understood. Additional revenue would need to be returned to the angling sector through a range of projects and programmes that would enhance the angling experience.*

What sort of ‘projects’ does Defra have in mind for any surplus funds raised (after we have paid for the ‘science and management’?) In a reply to this vexed question, as posed by Conservative MP Bill Wiggin (Leominster) in the House of Commons, our esteemed Fisheries Minister Jonathan Shaw replied –

*‘The revenue raised from a recreational sea angling licence would be used to help support measures such as:*

- *Protection and improvement of shore access and parking.*
- *Provision of more small boat launching facilities.*
- *Access to existing and new shore structures  
Creation of artificial inshore and offshore reefs and*
- *Clear displays of relevant rules, codes of conduct and other useful data on the shore, at boat launch sites and on charter boats.*

*The revenue would also cover the costs of administration, monitoring and inspection and evaluation of any measures introduced’..*

In a nut-shell then - We can’t have an increase in the bass MLS, but as compensation, if there is any money left, we can pay for more car parks, footpaths and signs. Ain’t that just great

Bill Wiggin MP also asked Jonathan Shaw –  
*‘What estimate has he made of the revenue that a recreational sea angling licence would raise?’*

The Minister replied –  
*‘The Marine Bill White Paper, published in March 2007, includes proposals to introduce a chargeable licencing scheme for recreational sea angling. The regulatory impact assessment (RIA) accompanying the White Paper estimated that the revenue from such a scheme could generate £9 million to £12 million per annum in licence fees, depending on uptake and the rate of the charge. The RIA also estimated the one-off set-up cost to the Government could be between £0.1 million to £1.5 million, with annual running costs, including enforcement, of between £1.2 million and £2.8 million, depending on how the scheme is implemented and the level of compliance.’*

Bearing in mind the budgets of the management agencies involved, it is difficult to see whether any surplus revenue would be available for RSA, after running costs and enforcement had been taken out of the licence scheme.

## **Management – What Management?**

The Strategy consultation paper states  
*There is relatively little management of sea angling activity in comparison with the commercial sector, with SFCs and the EA being the main bodies taking action. This may be a contributing factor to the broad appeal of the sport. However, with relatively high angling participation levels, and a possibility that this could increase in future, anglers have the potential to have an impact on some stocks. Everyone who catches fish has a responsibility to respond to changing stock levels to prevent overexploitation.*

Note from the editor.....

We haven't had a decent picture of a bass for 4 pages, so here is a gratuitous picture opportunity.



Dave Bourne with a fine bass

The consultation document continues –  
*Other tools to manage the potential impact anglers and other sectors have on stocks should be considered as part of an overall package of measures designed to manage and improve stocks. These tools should be flexible, enable action to be taken quickly if necessary to protect vulnerable stocks as well as look to the longer term, and be driven by clear scientific evidence or the precautionary approach. The conservation benefits of taking any action would need to be balanced and proportionate to the potential impact anglers have on stocks. Possible management tools include voluntary codes of conduct, log books, closed areas or seasons and ‘bag limits’. SFCs already have powers that would enable the introduction of some local management measures, such as bag limits and fixed engine byelaws. Where measures are justified, pilot schemes could be considered by SFCs, working with local anglers and scientists to introduce, test and monitor the impact of the measures. SFCs should work together to ensure measures cover a full range of situations and locations. This would build evidence to inform decisions about using such measures on a wider and national basis.*

It would appear from the preceding extracts that ‘management’ of RSA, rather than fish stocks, is on the way.

Of course, the question could be posed ‘Why should we pay for all this new management when the treasury already gets around £90 million a year from the VAT on tackle sales’ and ‘Why should sea anglers pay for any of this, when other users, like bird-watchers, divers, surfers and ramblers don’t?’ After all, they will be using the car parks and footpaths and public toilets that our licence fees will pay for, so will licences also be introduced for these leisure activities too?

It should be pointed out that it is not the RSA Strategy that has proposed licences and bag limits. These new management measures first appeared in the Marine Bill White Paper to which BASS commented in June 2006 –

*It is well known that bag limits for anglers are a very popular proposal with commercial fishermen, yet recent proposals to improve the quality and quantity of bass stocks, have met with vociferous opposition by the commercial fishing lobby.*

*If, as appears likely, the outcome of the recent consultation on the bass MLS proves to be yet another appeasement to the commercial sector and the proposals from anglers for a revised MLS of 45cm, on the grounds of improving and restoring the quality and abundance of the stock is not progressed, then sea anglers will perhaps rightly conclude that their requirements are not being met and would justifiably oppose the introduction of a sea angling licence*

*Our members and sea anglers in general, require more than lip service and vague platitudes, if we are to accept any proposals for bag limits and licencing.*

Like it or loath it, the RSA Strategy certainly poses some interesting questions and if nothing else, it may get anglers united behind a common cause. We would encourage all BASS members to have a crack at answering the following set of questions, which are taken from the consultation document annex and then send your replies to the address given on page 8 or you can send them by email to: [rsa.strategy@defra.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:rsa.strategy@defra.gsi.gov.uk)

The public consultation closes on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.

Questions –

- What are your overall views on the Strategy?  
Does it miss anything?  
Which part would you change and how?
- How often do you go angling?  
Where do you mostly go angling?  
Do you go on angling holidays?
- What sort of angling – shore, own boat or charter vessels?  
Why do you go sea angling?  
What are the key reasons for your participation in the sport?  
What is the biggest issue for you affecting your angling?
- Do you agree with the aim and objectives of the Strategy? Which objective do you think is most important?
- How do you think angling needs can be reflected in fisheries management decisions and policy? What do you think is the best way to achieve this?
- Which species do you value most?  
What action would you like to see taken to improve these stocks?

- If a sea angling licence were introduced and the revenue spent to provide benefits for sea anglers, would you be willing to pay and how much?
- Would you support a bag limit for certain species where there is a conservation need and there are controls on commercial exploitation of the same species?
- What would you spend money on to improve your enjoyment of sea angling?
- What new sources of information are you aware of that are available to build an evidence base? E.g. data on catches, social studies, angling business turnovers, numbers of people going on charter vessels year on year etc.

### How was it for you?

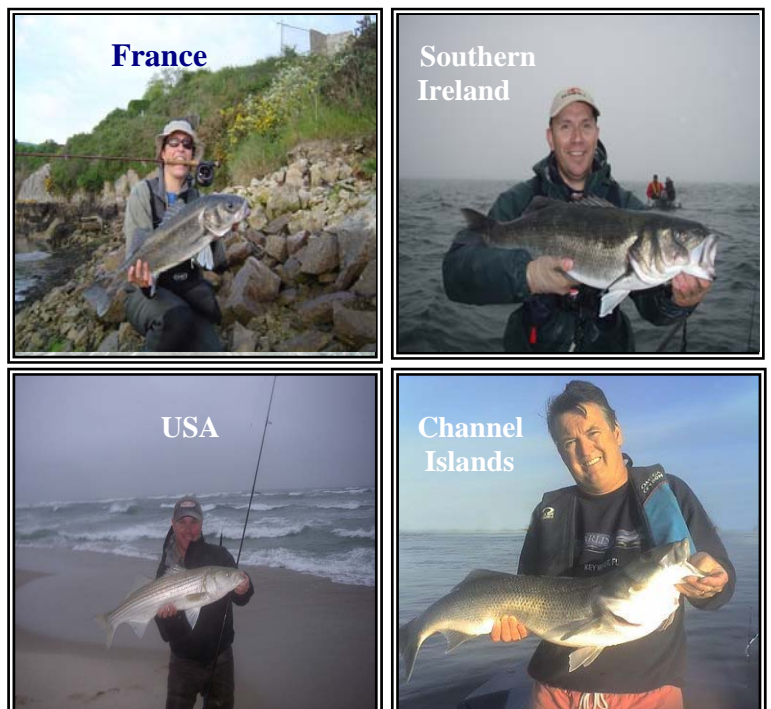
So there you are – a run-down of the public consultation and hopefully, some background to encourage you to let Defra know how you feel.

From the Oxford dictionary:

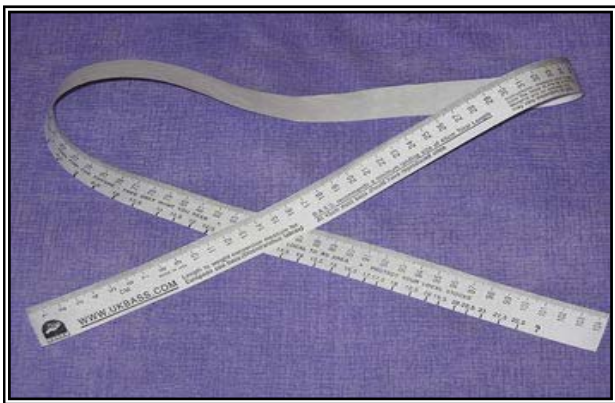
**Strategy**, *n.* the art of war, esp. the part of it concerned with the conduct of campaigns.

Judging from the initial comments on the BASS forum, it looks like Defra may have a fight on its hands.

### And they wonder why anglers go abroad to fish?



## We've got it taped.



The BASS tape measure is one of those things you'll wonder how you ever did without. It has been designed to enable bass anglers to have a packable and durable piece of equipment which does away with the need to carry a set of weighing scales. On one edge are the measuring increments (in **centimetres**) and on the opposing edge the length to weight calculations (in **lbs and ozs**). NB - the length to weight calculation is only applicable for European sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*).

Whether you retain the occasional bass for the table (our recommended MLS is 45cm) or release all your catch, the tape allows you to measure your bass and be able to read off a scientifically calculated weight from the length measurement. To obtain the most accurate reading from the tape, it is best to measure the total length of the fish i.e. measure from the nose of the bass to the end of the flattened down (and closed) tail.

The tape is made of a product called Tyvek, which is rip-proof, rot-proof, water-proof - in fact it appears near enough indestructible (so ideal for a saltwater environment). It also does not stretch (so you can't exaggerate!).

The tapes can be purchased by non-members as well as BASS members and are available for the princely sum of £2.00 (two pounds sterling) each inc. UK postage, with all proceeds going to the BASS Restoration Project Fund. For details on how to order your tape please see the BASS website page - <http://ukbass.com/2007/08/bass-measuring-tapes.html>

Don't forget that all proceeds from the sale of the new BASS mag CD also go to the Restoration Project fund. Check out the forum for full details on how to get your copy.

## Old warhorse goes out to grass.

Founder member of the BASS Restoration Project, Malcom Gilbert, has retired from active duty in order to spend more time with his family and to do more fishing at home and abroad. He is a regular visitor to Southern Ireland and the East-Coast States of the USA.

Malcolm, who along with Roger Baker and Bob Cox, was instrumental in galvanising the Society into forming the Restoration Project in 1999 has campaigned tirelessly on behalf of the Society for the past 9 years. In the furtherance of the aims of BASS and RSA in general, MG as he is affectionately known, has travelled the length and breadth of the UK and visited Brussels on a number of occasions, to make representations at the highest levels of Government and EU fisheries management.

He had a seat on the Cornwall SFC for some years and been an active participant in the Invest in Fish SouthWest initiative, as well as being a well- respected leading light within the tackle trade through his business AMMO.

It goes without saying that we wish Malcolm a very long, healthy and fish-filled retirement.



## And Finally .....

The tackle trade are due to receive a presentation at their Association's annual general meeting about the negative effects that Government policy, including the RSA strategy, is having on our sport and the effect that this will have on sales and profits. Bob Cox is making the presentation along with another chap called .....Malcolm Gilbert. That was a short retirement Malcolm!