POWER TO THE PEOPLE!

Now's your chance to back the bass campaign

SUMMERTIME, AND THE LIVIN' is easy, fish are jumpin' and... the EU Commission has opened its annual public consultation on next year's Fishing Opportunities. Time to head over to saveourseabass.org and get your voice heard by replying to the consultation.

Last August, hundreds of sea anglers from the UK, France, the Netherlands and elsewhere emailed the EU Commission, telling them to get the nets out of the bass fishery. The Commission listened, and now it is illegal to target bass with nets.

This was an unprecedented victory and, says David Curtis, of the Save Our Bass (SOS) group, demonstrated the power sea anglers have when we work together to put pressure on the fishery managers.

FIXED NETTING

However, the Fishery Ministers cynically fudged it in December and gave fixed netters an 'unavoidable by-catch' allowance of 250kg a month. In fact, the UK Government initially tried to say this was a targeted allowance, until the EU Commission told it where to get off.

BASS has said from the outset that this law is completely unenforceable – there is no way for an enforcement officer to tell the difference between targeting and true by-catch. Who can tell what a fisherman is targeting when he puts a net in the sea? We are hearing from fishing communities that many fixed netters are illegally treating this as a 250kg allowance to target bass.

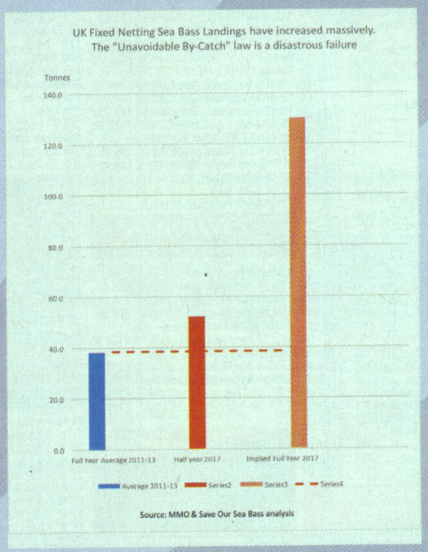
The most recent landing data bears this out. The graph (right) shows that, in the first six months of 2017, UK fixed netters caught over a third more than they normally catch in a full unrestricted year.

At this rate, by the end of 2017 they will have caught almost two-and-a-half times more than normal – an absolute outrage.

It is clear that the fixed netters' 'unavoidable by-catch' law has been a disastrous failure. We need either a complete ban on fixed netters landing bass, or to restrict their bass landings to three per cent of their total catch (such a small amount that it can only be used for genuine by-catch). This three per cent rule already applies to demersal trawls and seiners.

HOOK AND LINE

BASS supports commercial rod-and-line bass fishermen as the most sustainable form of commercial fishing. But sea anglers have had an 84 per cent cut in their landings, from 1,473 tonnes to 230 tonnes (figures from STECF and Cefas), while hook and liners have so far suffered no cuts at all in their landings. They have been "restricted" to 10 tonnes of bass per annum, but that is a complete joke because in 2015 and 2016 not one vessel landed more that 10 tonnes. If the limit was cut to a more realistic one tonne per annum, the 90 per cent of hook and line vessels that are fishing at sustainable levels would be completely unaffected and yet we would reduce bass landings by two thirds.



SPAWNING AGGREGATIONS

With the bass spawning stock now in a perilous state, it is crucial to protect bass during their spawning period. Any hope of regenerating the stock is entirely dependent upon these spawning fish.

There was a moratorium on retaining bass for sea anglers between January 1 and June 30, 2017. This must now be extended to all commercial fishing – no-one should be allowed to land bass in the first half of the year.

GET YOUR VOICE HEARD

The EU Commission consultation closes on September 15, so don't waste your chance to tell them what you want. You should go to saveourseabass.org and reply to the consultation.

A few minutes of your time now could make all the difference and improve the quality of our bass fishing forever. ■

■ *Keep up to date with BASS on its blog on www.ukbass.com or on Facebook or Twitter.*