

It has come to my attention that some in the fishing industry believe that the conservation measures proposed for bass in Wales have arisen as a result of science undertaken by Bangor University working with the fishing industry in Wales. This is untrue and has no basis.

The conservation measures currently proposed for bass have their origin in advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) which is a body that provides fisheries advice to the European Commission. ICES integrates scientific information from member states. CEFAS is the body that represents England (and Wales) in this capacity. The advice is based on information regarding landings of bass and catch composition. The science undertaken by Bangor University has not been considered by CEFAS in this advice process.

The science undertaken by Bangor University with inputs from the Welsh fishing industry has found the following key results:

There appear to be clearly separated sub-populations of bass in Welsh waters with little mixing between bass in the south with those in mid and north Wales.

The majority of bass in the north are female fish, the sex ratio is more balanced in the south. This means that fishing in the north tends to remove more female fish than male fish.

Bass in Wales appear to have two strategies, some fish spend the early years in estuaries and then move offshore and stay there. Other fish spend their entire life in estuaries, even when they are very large.

For the two years for which recruit surveys of juvenile bass were undertaken, there was recruitment failure in 2013, and there was weak recruitment in 2014. This represents only two years of data and hence, while a useful start, would need to be monitored going forward to build up a robust index of recruitment.

Fish in Wales appear to have a length of maturity of approximately 39-40 cm which is lower than the currently proposed 42 cm MLS put forward by the European Commission.

There is some indication that there may be spawning populations of bass in Welsh waters which would provide evidence for a locally based management strategy for Wales.

A full report on our findings will be published shortly on our open access website <http://fisheries-conservation.bangor.ac.uk> and at four open meetings to be held around Wales in May 2015 which will be advertised shortly in the Western Mail and via the chairs of the fishing associations.

Bangor will work closely with the Welsh Fishermen's Association, Welsh fishing industry and Welsh Government to develop the scientific evidence gathered in Wales into a form that can be used to inform current considerations of bass measures that are proposed by the Commission and thereby to ensure that they are appropriate for application in a Welsh context.

Michel Kaiser