



15 May 2015

Sea Bass Management Measures.

Dear Stakeholder,

Following recent meetings we are aware that there may be some confusion with regard to the EU proposals for new sea bass management measures. I am therefore writing to let you know the current situation.

In January of this year, the European Commission introduced a number of 'emergency' measures (Implementing Regulation (EU) 2015/111) aimed at prohibiting pelagic trawling for sea bass which aggregate for spawning in the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea, English Channel and southern North Sea over the winter. The Welsh Government fully supported these measures and an analysis of their effect on European wide landings in 2015 will be undertaken by ICES and the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF). I can say that no Welsh vessels were involved in these targeted pelagic trawl fisheries. It is possible that these measures (which expired at the end of April) will become a more regular feature of managing the fishery at the European level in the future.

In April, the Commission additionally introduced the 3 fish per day per person bag limit on recreational fishing activity (Council Regulation (EU) 2015/523). This applies equally to individuals fishing from a boat or on the shore. This measure did **not** introduce any increase in the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) of any sort to either the commercial or recreational sectors. The use of the term MCRS has replaced the former reference to the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) as it has done to other commercial fish species.

The Commission is now considering a number of measures that may affect the commercial sector targeting sea bass. We do not have the details yet but our belief is that these proposals could include such things as permanent seasonal spawning closures for certain sea areas, monthly catch limits, the introduction of a new minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) and changes to the rules on mesh sizes of gill nets used to target sea bass.

The Commission has not issued a timetable or details on when these proposals will be put forward, but we estimate that we may have a better understanding during the first two weeks of June. I will, of course, write to you again when we know more.



In regard to an increase in the MCRS the Commission is planning to present its proposal on the 5 June. We believe the Commission is considering a MCRS of 42cm but we are not in a position to confirm this. The Commission's advice, together with a list of questions and answers, can be accessed via the link below:

http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/mare/itemdetail.cfm?item_id=22547&subweb=343&lang=en

To inform the current understanding of bass recruitment in Wales, the Welsh Government will continue to work closely with Bangor University and the Welsh Fishermen's Association on a programme of research relating specifically to the biology and stock status of sea bass in Welsh Waters. The Welsh Government has also commissioned an independent review of data and evidence relating to sea bass stocks around Wales. Both reports will be made available within the next few weeks.

It is important to note that neither the Welsh Government nor Bangor University School of Ocean Sciences have recommended or supplied any data or evidence to support an increase in the MCRS. Any such increase will be an EU measure and, if adopted, will be a blanket policy applicable to all EU Member States and apply throughout all European waters.

In addition to the European-wide measures, the Commission expects Member States to consider further measures should they be necessary to secure the future of this important stock. The Welsh Government is setting up a sea bass Task and Finish Group that will be made up of fishing industry (with a proven interest in sea bass), recreational and government representatives. The aim of the group will be to understand the impact of the measures put forward by the European Commission and to identify if there are any further measures that we may wish to adopt in Wales to further reduce the fishing mortality and secure a viable stock.

Welsh Government recognises the important role that stakeholders have to positively influence the future of this important stock. We will need you engage and act to shape the future of this fishery.

Regards,

Michael Jones

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