

Bass Management Group (BMG) Meeting

Online, Microsoft Teams

Monday 6 October 2025 - (10.00 am – 3.00 pm)

Attendees:

- Martin Underwood – Defra (Chair)
- Grant Horsburgh – Defra
- Peter Elliott – Defra
- Seb Evans – Welsh Government (WG)
- Matthew Dawkins – Welsh Government (WG)
- Chris Collins – Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Andy Newlands – Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Rob Pearson – Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (SIFCA)
- Gwladys Lambert – Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Simon Toms – Environment Agency (EA)
- Libby West – Natural England (NE)
- Lydia Tivenan – Natural England (NE)
- Neil Witney – Commercial Fisherman (CF)
- Richard Stride – South Coast Fisherman's Council (SCFC)
- David Curtis – Bass Angling Conservation (BAC)
- Hannah Rudd – Angling Trust (AT)
- Grant Jones – Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society (BASS)
- Mike Cohen – National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations (NFFO)

Apologies:

- Andrew Pascoe – Cornish Fish Producers Organisation (CFPO)
- Chloe Rogers - UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations
- Jean Duggan – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Kieran Hyder - Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Rob Thompson – Professional Boatman's Association (PBA)

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. FMP Updates
3. EU Negotiations
4. Shore-Based Netting review
5. Authorisation System review
6. AOB

1) **Welcome**

Welcome to members and thanks for continued support in the delivery of the Bass FMP.

Defra shared with the group the tightening fiscal environment for the Department. This will include future resource pressures which will affect delivery times for FMP actions.

Welcome to Matthew Dawkins (WG) and Lydia Tivenan (NE) who join the meeting in an observational capacity for their work roles.

2) **FMP updates**

Angling Trust - Recreational Handling Guidance

The Angling Trust gave an overview of their work to develop handling guidance to support a short-term measure within the FMP. Progress to date includes:

- Draft document of survey for recreational anglers circulated to steering group for comments.
- Survey is due to go live on Friday 10 October and will run for a 4 week period.
- Final product due to be delivered by the end of the financial year.
- Distribution channels for survey noted. AT to contact Defra and MMO if further support is needed.

MMO – Authorisation System Review

The MMO provided an update on the review:

- Review completed in July 2025.
- Report has been circulated to BMG members.
- Presentation later in today's meeting to cover the detailed proposals.

Defra – Shore-Based Netting review

- Finalised draft review document has been circulated to BMG members.
- BMG members invited to provide comments via email.
- The review is subject to Defra legal review prior to being sent to the minister for a final decision.

Defra – Management Measures task-and-finish group

Defra gave an update on progress for delivering FMP measures.

- Group focus on implementation of short-term measures of goals relating to discard, bycatch and gear.

- Group currently focused on developing comms for the commercial sector to encourage the reporting of discards to improve discard data which informs Cefas advice and the understanding of the position of the stock.
- Two meetings to date, meeting every 2/3 weeks.

3) **EU Negotiations**

Defra ran through ICES headline advice for 2026 with the group. Advice represents a significant uplift to either 5180 tonnes for the management area, or 6590 tonnes when including the Biscay stock. Defra has commissioned modelling advice on these data from Cefas to inform a UK position for the UK/EU negotiations process that is due to commence.

Defra is in discussions with Devolved Administrations and wider stakeholders to establish their priorities to inform negotiations.

Comments from group

- Concern that the ICES advice appears to aim to shrink the spawning stock biomass. The commercial and recreational members of this group are aligned: don't decrease the Spawning Stock Biomass, build it from here.
- SCFC advocates not to increase allowances without looking at opportunities for non-authorised vessels so that more can benefit from any increases.
- Cefas - There is currently no ICES agreed protocol, nor any guidance on potential considerations (e.g. when the value would be uncertain and not well defined as is the case for bass where there is no strong link between biomass and recruitment), in order to produce and publish an 'ICES vetted Bmsy value', for a stock that is assessed by ICES. Cefas has been consulting ICES on the matter as the seabass assessment and advice is an ICES product.
 - o BAC questions the validity of the ICES advice due to differing processes for calculating advice when compared to some other scientific bodies globally.
 - o BAC noted that if we don't know the BMSY figure, we cannot know what the stock position is in relation to BMSY.
 - o BASS - how can we get FMSY without knowing BMSY?
- BAC asked, "why are we using a commercial fishing target when recreational landings are half or more of the bass fishery?"
- BAC – Call for fairness in fishing opportunities. If commercial limits are increased, the recreational bag limit should also increase.
- The group agree that closed seasons should remain and are valuable for restoring bass stocks.

- BASS – surveyed members and results suggest a regional approach to closed seasons may be more appropriate than current system.
- SCFC – Small inshore operators experience difficulty in closed season, where they must refrain from fishing with nets. Would welcome any opportunity to allow “X” number of bass in this time to allow vessels to keep operating.
- Defra noted that closed season changes should be underpinned by scientific advice.

4) Shore-Based Netting review

Defra delivered a presentation on the shore-based netting review set out as part of Goal 8.1 in the Bass FMP. The review has been undertaken for England only, with Welsh Government conducting their own review for Wales.

Defra conducted informal consultations with relevant parties, including an in-person visit to the NEIFCA site where shore-based netting is permitted. Stakeholder views were collated and data on fishing activity analysed to formulate options for ministerial consideration.

Review has been shared with the BMG to enable members to provide comments, however, it remains subject to legal review prior to submission for ministerial determination. Subsequently, BMG members are not permitted to share the review more widely at this time.

Defra has confirmed that this review will be formally shared following decisions by ministers.

BASS – the NEIFCA data shows if you remove bass from the landings, the fishery is not viable economically. We need a decision that bass must not be targeted in nets.

BAC – the history is that this is a targeted bass fishery. If it didn't already exist, would you open this fishery now?

5) Bass Authorisation Review

MMO presented to BMG on the authorisation system review that was carried out between December 2024 and August 2025. The focus of the presentation was the recommendations that the task-and-finish group agreed for the BMG to review and approve prior to any further planning or implementation.

Actionable recommendations from the review are shown below. All recommendations, if approved by the BMG, would be subject to further research and planning prior to any implementation action taking place.

Final approval of any recommendations taken forwards remains subject to ministerial approval, therefore the group agreed to publish the review document as soon as

possible.

Fishing Opportunities

- The track record system for issuing bass authorisations should be amended.
- Allow the switch from fixed gillnet authorisations to hook and line.
- Close the Track Record application process.
- Move authorisations administration to an automated system.
- Allow limited increase in engine power and vessel size.
- New entrants would not be allowed to transfer when the vessel is sold.
- Catch App be amended to direct fishers to declare gear type prior to departure.
- Direct that gear type and bass catches weight be declared on landing.

Inshore drift netting scientific trial

- Consideration of the potential for a limited regional inshore drift netting scientific trial.

Discard

- Establish a demersal trawls and seines working group.
- Trial bycatch allowance for all non-authorized fixed gillnet fishers.

Accreditation

- Create a pool of authorisations for use in a young person's/new fisher's scheme.
- Develop a hook-to-plate accreditation for the bass fishery.

Comments from BMG on authorisation recommendations

- Discussion from the group that it may be difficult to issue new authorisations in a fair way to all those interested in obtaining a bass authorisation due to the movement of bass into new geographical areas and therefore differences in track records of catching bass.
- Many vessels currently do not reach their annual catch limit, therefore increasing number of authorisations may result in the need for lowered catch limits per vessel. Noted by group that this was raised in MMO engagement events and many stakeholders would be supportive of this.
- SCFC – Call to allow fishers without a bass authorisation using gill nets a small amount of bass bycatch in order to reduce discards, as they are

currently obligated to discard any bass bycatch.

- Drift netting trial
 - MMO – recommendation was included in the report as there was strong support from a small number of stakeholders in the SE via engagement events held as part of the review.
 - Any trial that may take place needs to prioritise transparency in its preliminary research, design and implementation.
 - Drift netting is highly efficient and poses a risk to bycatch of sensitive species, including salmonids and seabirds. Any trial that may take place will need to be designed and conducted to a high standard which would increase the cost.
 - NE noted that designing a trial would be very expensive and the costs and benefits would need to be considered.
 - BAC considers there to be other Bass FMP actions that should be resourced first, especially considering Alternative Harvest Strategies.
 - EA and AT both state that they believe this recommendation to go against existing legislation in the Fisheries Act and to be at odds with the FMP process and government direction.
 - If a trial was deemed viable, then opinion from the group was that a trial should begin with a desk-based research exercise in the first instance to assess validity of a physical trial taking place. Only then should a trial progress if deemed appropriate.
 - Consideration to be given to funding of this project, should it go ahead. Defra understand that any funding would need to be secured through a formal bidding process, and that the trial could potentially be conducted alongside trials in other policy areas such as Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM).

Defra to conduct prioritisation of recommendations from the authorisation review based on feedback from the group, as well as taking into account funding and resourcing implications of each option.

The group also discussed the issue of “dual hatting”, where a charter vessel operates as a commercial fishing vessel. Call from BASS to include this in list of issues to be looked at by the group. MMO have stated that this is an MCA regulatory issue and therefore MMO have no powers to change this.

6) AOB

Alternative Harvest Strategy

Call from BAC to start work on consideration for an alternative harvest strategy to Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). BAC states this should be addressed now.

BASS supports a large stock target and higher CPUE. Price elasticity also needs to be considered – do we want a value fishery or a volume fishery?

A commercial fishing member of the group agreed that a reduction in the price of bass could be a big issue.

Defra reiterated that they are working to timescales laid out in the FMP which has been fully consulted on, and are currently delivering the short-term measures, noted that exploring an alternative harvest strategy is a medium to long term measure, and would therefore be addressed once short-term measures have been completed.

Noted general support from the group for maintaining closed season in UK/EU negotiations and continuation of a precautionary approach.

Actions:

- **Defra** - Update group on timeline and the process for EU negotiations.
- **Defra** - Consider resource implications for Authorisation Review recommendations and request views on prioritisation of delivery from the group via email.
- **Defra** – Share updated short-term measures tracker with BMG members.
- **BASS** – Provide Defra with results of members survey on closed seasons.
- **Group** - Provide Defra with further thoughts for consideration in the shore-based netting review within 2 weeks from receiving minutes.
- **MMO** – Follow up with the MCA regarding dual-hatting and cross-warranting.
- **MMO and IFCA** - Follow up with each other on enforcement action that can be taken in relation to dual-hatting of vessels.