

## **5<sup>th</sup> Bass Management Group (BMG) — Meeting minutes**

**Date: 5 February 2026**

**Time: 10:00–13:40**

### **Attendees**

- Phil McBryde (Defra) **Chair**
- Grant Horsburgh (Defra)
- Gavin Black (Natural England)
- Chris Collins (Marine Management Organisation)
- Andrew Newlands (Marine Management Organisation)
- Mat Mander (Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority)
- Andrew Pascoe (Cornish Fish Producers Organisation)
- Grant Jones (Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society)
- David Curtis (Bass Angling Conservation)
- Mike Cohen (National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations)
- Jean Duggan (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds)
- Chloe Rogers (UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations)
- Neil Witney (Commercial Fisherman)

### **Apologies**

- Martin Underwood (Defra)
- Peter Elliott (Defra)
- Rob Pearson (Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority)
- Lydia Tivenan (Natural England)
- Simon Toms (Environment Agency)
- Kieran Hyder (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science)
- Richard Stride (South Coast Fisherman's Council)
- Seb Evans (Welsh Government)

### **Agenda**

1. Welcome, introductions and updates
2. FMP updates
3. EU negotiations
4. Evidence and priorities (medium/long-term)
5. Evidence and priorities (continued)
6. AOB

#### **1. Welcome, introductions and updates**

Welcome to members to the first Bass Management Group meeting of 2026. Defra note the group has now been operating for a full year and thanks stakeholders for their continued support and efforts in bringing stakeholders together to support delivery of the Bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP).

Defra will circulate the Terms of Reference and minutes of the meeting and seek views on whether updates are needed, including future arrangements for chairing and secretariat functions.

### **Actions from the previous meeting**

Defra reviewed the action log. Key points raised:

- Work on authorisation review prioritisation has been shaped in part by general Ministerial interest in opportunities for inshore/young fishermen.
- The short-term measures tracker will be circulated to provide an audit trail on all completed items.
- BASS to provide Defra with results of member surveys on closed season survey after the recreational event on 16 February.
- The shore-based netting review remains in internal QA process.
- Meetings between Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) on cross-warranting are scheduled; MMO and Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) still need to meet on enforcement linked to dual-hatting.

## **2. FMP updates**

### **2.1 Recreational handling guidance and data collection**

The recreational handling survey work by the Angling Trust continues. Poor weather and the closed season have slowed down delivery of some video work. The project is expected to complete early in the new financial year.

Defra encouraged members to continue promoting the survey where appropriate. Work on developing best-practice guidance for the commercial sector will draw on existing IFCA material and will be led by the AIFCA rep on the group.

### **2.2 Authorisation Review and Management Measures (Task and Finish group)**

The MMO outlined progress the Management Measures Group has made on scoping work for three prioritised recommendations from the authorisation review:

1. Potentially issuing unused authorisations.
2. Switching from fixed gillnet to hook-and-line (to reduce sensitive species bycatch).
3. Young/new entrant's scheme.

The group's aim is to develop suitable options in order to deliver these recommendations.

Discussions with the Cornish Young Fishermen's Network will help to support development work in this area. The MMO aims to have delivered its report to Defra by end of March 2026.

### **2.3 Bylaw collation**

The AIFCA member on the group is working to bring together relevant IFCA bylaws affecting bass to support consistent management across IFCA districts. This stands as a short-term measure of the Bass FMP.

### **2.4 Shore-based netting review**

The review remains in internal QA. Legislative capacity across Defra is currently constrained due to wider government programmes. Defra will provide members with an update when this changes.

### **2.5 FMP short-term measures**

Most short-term measures have been delivered. Defra will provide the group with an updated spreadsheet detailing short-term measure progress. Remaining items include:

- Reviewing signage of bass regulations at angling sites. Defra will follow up with members regarding this goal.
- Completing evidence gathering on closed season impacts. Defra is working with Cefas to monitor ongoing projects in England, Wales, and EU.
- Continuing support of the Celtic Sea REM programme.
- Consideration of additional national and regional protections for migratory fish following from the shallow inshore netting review as part of the authorisation review. This can be brigaded with work on sensitive species bycatch, including links to national seabird mitigation bycatch project.

### **2.6 MMO commercial data (U10 catch app and RBS)**

The MMO provided an update on system and reporting issues raised by the recreational sector. The MMO reported that meetings with Maritime Coastguard Agency are scheduled on cross-warranting. Further engagement between MMO and IFCA's on dual-hatting will be arranged.

## **3. EU negotiations**

Defra provided an overview of the 2026 annual UK–EU negotiations, setting out the context in which decisions were taken.

### **Key points**

- Bass is one of more than 70+ stocks considered annually.
- ICES advice for 2026 showed improved stock status with a higher permissible level of removals.
- The UK and EU agreed to roll forward the closed season and MCRS as in place from 2025.

- EU wished to fish full ICES advice, allow other gears to be used and to remove the bycatch provision. Defra negotiated gear-specific catch limit increases, blocked allowing other gears and removing the bycatch provision, and kept uplift below maximum advice, providing additional headroom to protect the stock.
- The UK secured a higher hook-and-line limit than first proposed and an increase in the recreational bag limit from 2 to 3 fish per angler per day.
- Defra will use legislation (a Statutory Instrument - SI) to increase the recreational bag limit before the end of March. SI laid in parliament on 6 February 2026.
- To sustainably manage the negotiated catch limit increases, there will be quarterly UK–EU data exchanges of catch data for 2026 to monitor uptake and effort.

### **Group discussion**

Members raised points on:

- Risks associated with rising catch limits for bycatch gears when the hook and line (targeted) fishery is subject to the lowest increase in uplift. Risk of incentivising illegal targeting of bass.
- The balance between recreational and commercial economic value.
- Long-term management models, including the implications of lifting the bycatch moratorium.
- Target for the bass fishery appears to remain maximum removal of fish rather than maximising economic benefit, as ICES advice suggests.
- Acknowledgement from the group that the outcome for bass was within sustainable ICES advice and strikes a balance across both recreational and commercial sector. The outcome must also be viewed in terms of wider fisheries negotiations across multiple stocks, with general support from the group for Defra and the result from the negotiations.

Defra emphasised that outcomes of the negotiations strike a balance between the UK and EU desired outcomes. Defra welcomes further socio-economic evidence from all stakeholders to better inform future negotiations.

### **4. Evidence and priorities (medium/long-term)**

Defra introduced a draft priority matrix to structure a group discussion in relation to medium- and long-term FMP delivery. The group reviewed each theme and provided views and scoring on deliverability, evidence needs and stakeholder interest.

Defra noted the above mentioned legal constraint within the department and stated to members that this will affect implementation work in future where changes in legislation are needed.

#### **4.1 Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM)**

Members identified REM as a high-priority area due to its role in improving discard and bycatch data, supporting compliance and strengthening scientific evidence.

Members noted challenges for small vessels, the importance of scientific netting and gear trials, funding considerations, the need for better discard reporting and the importance of reporting findings to industry to build trust.

#### **4.2 Discards and bycatch**

The group discussed mechanisms to improve reporting and potential approaches to manage occasional “big hits” of bass. Members highlighted practical enforcement challenges and the need for improved and robust data.

#### **4.3 Compliance evidence**

There was strong stakeholder interest in understanding compliance levels across sectors. Views were raised on future research and the development of easier-to-enforce measures.

#### **4.4 Closed seasons and spatial management**

Defra reported that Cefas were currently developing work in this area across England with Essex University as well as in partnership with the EU. Welsh Govt have a separate project underway with Bangor University. Members recognised the ongoing evidence projects. There was interest in exploring whether defined spatial protections might outperform a universal closed season, while maintaining practicality and enforceability.

#### **4.5 Management model (catch limits / quota considerations)**

Views varied. Some saw value in exploring a future catch-limit or quota-based approach, while others raised risks including loss of flexibility and potential stock impacts. Any change would require legal, scientific and international considerations.

#### **4.6 Minimum conservation reference size (MCRS)**

Members expressed mixed views. Potential benefits include protecting spawning biomass; risks include increased discarding. The group agreed further evidence is needed.

#### **4.7 Bass nursery areas**

Members highlighted the need to revisit the earlier Cefas Bass Nursery Area review and understand its recommendations.

#### **4.8 Small, non-powered vessels (NPVs)**

Members agreed this is a significant and growing issue. Defra's Control & Enforcement team has developed options for Ministers and hoped to provide an update shortly. The group requested continued updates as they became available.

#### **4.9 Socio-economic evidence**

Defra will look at commissioning a literature review on current and any new material developed since the FMP was first published and consider the need for new research. Members will contribute published and grey literature, particularly on recreational and tourism impacts. Funding for this area of work is limited so the sector should consider funding support in conjunction with govt resources.

#### **4.10 Alternative Harvest Strategies**

Members discussed the BAC stakeholder-funded project due to complete by the end of March 2026, examining alternatives to MSY and lessons from global mixed-use fisheries. Defra noted group considerations highlighting potential legislative and international implications for progressing this work.

### **5. Any other business**

Members discussed governance, cross-government coordination and opportunities to improve how different economic, social and environmental benefits are balanced.

### **6. Close**

Defra thanked members for their engagement. Written comments on the priority matrix and on the minutes are invited by email.

### **Actions**

- **ACTION:** Circulate updated short-term measures tracker to all members.  
**Owner:** Defra Secretariat.
- **ACTION:** MMO and MCA to meet on cross-warranting, with MMO and IFCA's to arrange follow-up on dual-hatting enforcement.  
**Owner:** MMO.
- **ACTION:** Email members to gather ideas for improving regulation signage at angling locations.  
**Owner:** Defra.
- **ACTION:** Members to promote the recreational handling survey; Defra to progress commercial handling guidance alongside IFCA.  
**Owner:** All members / Defra.
- **ACTION:** Update BMG on the NPV management options once Ministers provide direction.  
**Owner:** Defra/MMO.

- **ACTION:** BMG to review the Alternative Harvest Strategies project report on receipt (expected end of March 2026) and discuss next steps.  
**Owner:** Bass Angling Conservation to share report with BMG members when available.