

Bass Management Group (BMG) Meeting

2 Marsham Street, London

Monday 10 February 2025 - (10.30 am – 3.00 pm)

Attendees:

- Martin Underwood - Defra Chair
- Grant Horsburgh - Defra
- Peter Elliott - Defra
- Richard Stride - South Coast Fisherman's Council
- Chris Collins - Marine Management Organisation
- Andrew Newlands - Marine Management Organisation
- Hannah Rudd - Angling Trust
- Rob Pearson - Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
- David Curtis - Bass Angling Conservation
- Neil Witney - Commercial Fisherman
- Martin Peverly - Natural England
- Mike Cohen - National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations
- Sean Jukes - Bass Anglers' Sportfishing Society

Online:

- Kieran Hyder - Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
- Jean Duggan - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Andrew Pascoe - Cornish Fish Producers Organisation
- Rob Thompson - Professional Boatman's Association
- Simon Toms - Environment Agency
- Chloe Rogers - UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations
- Nathan Wyer - Welsh Government

Apologies:

- Phil McBryde - Defra

Agenda:

1. Welcome, introduction and updates
2. FMP updates
3. Evidence discussion
4. Agree next steps for short term measures delivery
5. Close

Notes and Actions

1. Welcome, introduction and updates

- Defra covered outstanding actions listed on the action log.
- Group agreement on BMG Terms of Reference document. Further comments to be provided by Bass Angling Conservation following this meeting.
- Defra advised the group that a GOV.UK web page for the group's meeting minutes and Terms of Reference document is currently being considered and could potentially be used to support transparency of the work of the BMG and enable all stakeholders to stay updated.
- Defra provided an overview of the outcome of the annual UK & EU Fisheries Negotiations 2024. Bass Angling Conservation raised concerns about the agreed commercial bass catch limits and questioned the ICES stock assessment advice.
- A commercial fisherman stated that in raising the percentage catch limits from 5% to 10% this had positively impacted the levels of discarding that are occurring.
- Since the previous meeting in November 2024 the MMO led authorisation system review has commenced and held three meetings. Details of which have been shared by the MMO with the attendees for sharing with their respective stakeholder groups.

2. FMP updates

Short term measures

- Defra provided a progress update on delivery of the short-term measures listed in the Fisheries Management Plan (FMP), confirming that a progress tracker had been developed and would be updated for the group to review at future meetings.
- The group discussed the process of prioritising short-term measures:
 - o Bass Angling Conservation proposed that the group should establish a criteria against which measures should be assessed. Namely:
 - Increase stock size
 - Increase economic benefits
 - Ensure fairness

It was agreed to consider these criteria in the round.

- o General consensus that “quick wins” were an attractive option, but that the group would need to make the difficult decisions when prioritising

- work and not opt purely for easy measures. It was noted that it was important to maintain a certain level of delivery.
- Understanding from the group that the process will be iterative, and some areas will have to be acknowledged as lower priority due to capacity and any funding constraints.
- Issues of collective resource constraints noted by the group.

Shore based netting review

- Defra delivered a presentation detailing progress on the Shore Based Intertidal Netting review that is underway. (Attached at ANNEX 1) No questions or comments were received from the group.

Authorisation System Review

- MMO delivered a presentation on progress with the Authorisation System review that is currently underway. (Attached at ANNEX 2)
- Questions and comments received from the group included:
 - Comments by Bass Angling Conservation:
 - Request for data on number of bass authorisations by vessel type. – MMO responded that they were waiting for 2024 data to become available and would share once received.
 - Holders of multiple authorisations should be reviewed. How many people hold multiple authorisations? – MMO responded that this will be included in the “gear review” section of the authorisation review.
 - What will happen with the output of the authorisation review? – MMO responded that output from the review will be compiled and brought to the BMG for consideration.
 - Bass Angling Conservation said they do not have confidence in the current process and are unclear how the review will move from suggestions to a recommendation at the end of the process.
 - Defra stated that the authorisation review is in its initial phase, and that the process MMO are currently undertaking is a SWOT (strength, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis, allowing all attendees to share their ideas and concerns in an open forum.
 - The group acknowledged that this was an essential way of working collaboratively, as some members will have more understanding of specific areas than others, and it allowed for shared understanding of often technical issues.

- The group acknowledged that, all information will be collated and reviewed before the group propose recommendations for the BMG to consider. Recognising final decisions are made by Defra.
- Defra and MMO data on authorisations will be made available before the next meeting of the BMG.
- MMO plan to conclude the review following the next meeting of the BMG and agreed to continue to share progress with the wider group between BMG meetings.

3. Evidence discussion

Defra led the discussion on the published FMP evidence gaps to assess if there was a sufficient baseline of information to allow the group to proceed with implementation of the respective short-term measures set out in the FMP.

Defra tabled an evidence template to inform this discussion and said it would share an updated version with the group following this meeting for group comments.
(Attach final Evidence Template Annex 3)

Discussion within the group touched on the following themes:

- Science and evidence should not be seen as separate from other subjects within the BMG but instead seen in the context of how to deliver priorities.
- Utilisation of available resources.
- Pace at which areas of work can be delivered.
- There are key uncertainties in current data that affect the decisions we are trying to make. Spans socioeconomic benefits as well as better scientific understanding.

MMO Catch App

- Catch App does not allow for rod and line fishermen to input discards. Must instead rely on own recall.
- The app does not distinguish between releases and mortality.
- Commercial stakeholders suggested that there is a misconception amongst fishers that if they fill out discards data on the app, then they will be subject to heightened checks by MMO enforcement officers. This should be a point to follow up on regarding distrust in the processes when data is submitted.

Cefas led Presentation and discussion on evidence

The following table captures comments made by the group on the current status of evidence gaps identified in the FMP, whether more is needed/should be commissioned, and next steps.

The RAG (Red, Amber, Green) status indicates where there is sufficient evidence to proceed (Green) where more work/thought is needed (Amber), and where there is insufficient evidence or resource to proceed (Red).

FMP Goal Reference	Discussion points	RAG rating
3.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suggestion to start with this measure. - Work with sector and MMO to understand discard rates. - Low effort on resource. - Most effective implementation would be general targeting of all people/sectors. - Sector should lead on messaging due to established trust. - Emphasis on not being penalised for providing data. - Note the gaps in recreational data. 	Green
3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gear trials can be expensive. - Conversations to be had with experienced skippers and see their thoughts on addressing goal. This may lead to gear trials alongside skippers. - Defra to speak with MMO and Seafish regarding analysis of held data to assess patterns of catches. 	Amber
3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General data is good – consensus on confidence levels is needed. - Missing data on barotrauma. - Survival studies are difficult, expensive and a large undertaking. - Would be disproportionate time and effort when considering the outcome of such studies. - Smaller, targeted studies may be considered to focus on barrow trauma, in the form of questionnaires. 	Amber
5.1 5.2 5.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seafish have previously provided data on the economic importance of bass. - Beneficial to commission a review. - Defra and Fishing Into The Future study is underway – this may suffice. 	Red
6.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direction from Cefas that this point can be left – encompassed by work in FMP goal reference 3.1 	Amber
6.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engagement can be improved by better communication from all stakeholders. 	Green

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defra may consider blog post to increase awareness of value to FMP programme recreational anglers hold. - Promotion of the Sea Angling Diary and other platforms. 	
6.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local studies within UK may help, however are time and financially draining. - Consensus from the group that this should be delayed for one year as will be more beneficial at a local management level rather than national. 	Amber
6.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Linked with FMP goal references 5.1 and 5.3 – social and economic gaps. - Important and relevant but not yet needing action. - Consensus from the group to delay for one year. 	Amber
6.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Follow steer from Cefas to wait until benchmarking process is complete before addressing this point. 	Amber
6.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long timeframe – at least 5 years of data before being useful. - High financial cost. - Not best use of current resources. 	Red
7.1 7.2 7.3 7.4 7.5 7.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Bournemouth report may cover many areas of this gap. - Discussion on possibility of aligning short and medium actions with evidence gaps to streamline delivery. - Will be beneficial for regional management later on; however, measures such as changes to closed seasons may cause issues with enforcement. 	Amber
8.1 8.2 8.3 8.4 8.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cefas have provided initial review – Annex 9 of bass FMP. - Data should also be provided by fishermen, even if anecdotal in order to provide balance to discussions and quantify the size of the issue. 	Amber
9.1 9.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defra to understand progress on the Marine Climate Change Impact Partnership adaption project on fish, fisheries and aquaculture. 	Amber

Discussion on ICES advice

- South Coast Fisherman's Council raised an issue that current ICES advice will see the stock fall by 7.7%. Cefas offered explanation of ICES advice, stating that this is not for the BMG to deal with. Cefas have requested ICES provide a statement on this decision already. The Benchmarking process will be completed in coming months, and following user testing it will then be used for future ICES advice from 2026 onwards.
- Bass Angling Conservation suggestion that the BMG would be the group that could flag to ICES that this advice may not be the correct advice to follow.

- To be considered as item for a future meeting agenda and that Bass Angling Conservation would need to bring a paper to for the BMG to consider.

4. Agree next steps for short term measures delivery

Areas identified as priority for consideration by the BMG, were:

- Discards
- Improving recreational data collection.
- Bycatch
- Closed Seasons
- Gear Types

Medium to Long term measure

- MCRS - The Group having previously suggested that an increased MCRS of 45cm could be a quick win, discussed the merits of delivering this (medium to long term measure) now. It was suggested that before further work was done that Cefas should consider and prepare a report on the implications for any increase in MCRS.

5. Close

Meeting minutes and associated documents will be sent out to BMG members following this meeting. Members are reminded to distribute these minutes to stakeholders and invite feedback.

Date of Next Meeting

A date for the next meeting is expected to be in late Spring. The exact date will be arranged by Defra secretariat in due course.

Actions

- Environment Agency – Simon Toms – Circulate European project reporting on bycatch in inshore coastal gillnets.
- MMO/Defra – Provide figures from landings (hook and line and gillnets) at next meeting.
- Cefas – Kieran Hyder - Follow up with MMO and Seafish regarding interrogation of data for patterns of catches of bass. In relation to 3.2.
- Cefas – Kieran Hyder - Make all references to Bass FMP evidence gaps available.
- Cefas – Kieran Hyder - Consider if there is benefit to spawning stock biomass if the MCRS is increased to 45cm.

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- Defra – NQS team - Follow up with Natural England and EA regarding bycatch of sensitive species and salmonids.