

Bass Management Group (BMG) Meeting
Online, Microsoft Teams
Thursday 22 May 2025 - (10.30 am – 3.00 pm)

Attendees:

- Martin Underwood - Defra Chair
- Phil McBryde - Defra
- Grant Horsburgh - Defra
- Peter Elliott - Defra
- Eleanor Pettitt-Fergusson - Defra
- Richard Stride - South Coast Fisherman's Council (SCFC)
- Chris Collins - Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Andrew Newlands - Marine Management Organisation (MMO)
- Hannah Rudd - Angling Trust (AT)
- Rob Pearson - Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (SIFCA)
- David Curtis - Bass Angling Conservation (BAC)
- Neil Witney - Commercial Fisherman (CF)
- Libby West - Natural England (NE)
- Mike Cohen - National Federation of Fisherman's Organisations (NFFO)
- Chloe Rogers - UK Association of Fish Producer Organisations (UKAFPO)
- Kieran Hyder - Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)
- Andrew Pascoe - Cornish Fish Producers Organisation (CFPO)
- Grant Jones – Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society (BASS)

Apologies:

- Seb Evans – Welsh Government (WG)
- Simon Toms – Environment Agency (EA)
- Jean Duggan – Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. FMP updates
3. IFCA/MMO enforcement presentations
4. Evidence discussion
5. "A bass rebuilding plan"
6. Short-term measures – delivery
7. Medium/long-term measures – discussion
8. Regulatory delivery
9. AOB

1) **Welcome**

- Thank you to members for circulating minutes to their members.
- Minutes are also now being published on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) web page.
- Welcome to Grant Jones who is taking over the representation of Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society on the group.
- Declaration of AOB:
 - BAC - Query regarding reliability of EU fleet data. Defra – BAC to submit any request formally in writing for Defra to respond.
 - BAC – Asked if any changes to legislation would be required to allow an increase in recreational bag limit. Defra – advised that no change in legislation had been identified so far but will check again.

2) **FMP updates**

MMO updates

- MMO update on Authorisation review.
 - Authorisation task-and-finish group meet every two weeks for two hours.
 - Nearing the end of the review and in the process of drafting final review document.
 - Task-and-finish group will continue to meet to finalise the review document before it is passed to the wider BMG.
 - No comments from group.
- MMO update on bass guidance (on Gov.UK).
 - MMO have engaged with stakeholders as part of the authorisation system review and gathered thoughts on how the guidance pages can be improved. Work is currently underway to apply changes.
 - No comments from group.
- MMO presented an update on an outstanding action to provide catch data in a transparent format as previously requested by the group. MMO presented a number of infographic tables. These have been shared with BMG members.

Comments:

- SCFC – Thanks to MMO for presenting this information in such a clear way. However, it was expected that tables such as this would be more routinely available in order to aid decision making.
- BAC – Request for more data relating to mesh sizes and catch composition to be incorporated into the infographics.
- BASS – Query over confidence levels of data, tolerance of known concerns of misreporting of gear type. More analysis needed in relation to landings when considering dual authorised vessels.

- MMO – Will look into what can be done longer term, within the scope of current available resources.

ACTION – Defra/MMO to share the infographic with the group.

Defra update on ICES allocation tool.

- Defra reminded the group of the commitment in the EU/UK annual negotiations Written Record for ICES to update its bass allocation tool. This is an ICES tool, and therefore we can only request that this is progressed in a timely manner.
- The tool is not currently fully functional and is subsequently not predicted to be ready for this year's negotiations due to ICES resource constraints.
- Defra due to meet with EU commission later today to finalise joint letter to ICES to seek progress on this matter.

Comments:

- BAC – Roadmap should be established for completion of tool, detailing delivery actions and an end date.
- Defra – The tool is an ICES project, and they are an independent organisation. As such we can kindly request progression but can't impose a timetable so we must be diplomatic.

AT recreational update

- The AT updated the group on work they are undertaking to support delivery of the short-term measures in the Bass FMP.
- They are leading on development of bass handling/best practice guidance, including signposting to the [Sea Angling Diary](#) as well as relevant regulations.
- Work is co-designed with the sector and other stakeholders. Includes member packs, tackle box stickers and short form videos.
- Building on previous experience from working on pollack guidance.
- Estimated delivery Summer 2025.
- No comments from the group.

Defra update on Shore-Based Netting review

- Stakeholder consultation discussions have now concluded, a record of which will be included in the final Review document once a decision has been made and published.
- Document now subject to internal Defra review before putting up for ministerial consideration.

- For transparency, Defra will be sharing an update on the range of options with the group. This will give the group the opportunity to comment on these options before the minister makes his final decision.

Action - Defra to share sea trout bycatch data with the AT in relation to the shore-based netting review.

Action - Defra to follow up with NEIFCA regarding the publication of the appropriate assessment in relation to the shore-based netting review.

3) IFCA/MMO enforcement presentations

- Presentation from IFCA and MMO detailing the working models of each organisation and how they work together, as well as with wider enforcement bodies, to enforce regulations.
- Work ties in directly with Goal 4 of the Bass FMP - Ensure full compliance with bass regulations.
- IFCA call for future work on a BMG led national promotional campaign for recreational anglers in future.

Comments

- The group discussed existing difficulties in enforcing regulations experienced by IFCA and MMO. Discussion on bycatch, highlighting absence of definition, leading to perceived illegal targeting. CFPO suggested removing bycatch wording and allow permitted fishery under catch allocations.
- SCFC – Misreporting (under dual authorisations) method of capture might be allowing bass to be reported under rod and line rather than actual net catches. This needs to be addressed.
- Cefas raised the need for joined up MCRS across all IFCAs to make this as accessible as possible for recreational anglers. Information on this can be hard to find and as such confusing, centrally located information would be helpful.
- MMO – Gear designation measures are currently being considered in the authorisations review which may help misreporting concerns for dual authorised vessels.

Action - IFCA/MMO to share presentations on enforcement and compliance presentations with BMG.

4) Evidence discussion

- Cefas presented their updated evidence document to the Group. This document detailed what evidence is currently available to address the

evidence gaps listed in the FMP. It included a prioritised assessment of what additional work might be needed, timing and resource considerations, and a recommendation as to what the key priorities are and how they should be sequenced by the group for delivery.

- Evidence table discussed at last meeting of the BMG. Cefas has reviewed this and presented back to the group.
- Cefas highlighted an opportunity for task-and-finish groups to be formed on the basis of evidence.
- Cefas noted previous discussions on work which should be prioritised:
 - Discards
 - Bycatch
 - Recreational data
 - Closed seasons
 - MCRS
- Advice given on other work areas that the BMG will benefit from waiting for the ICES benchmarking process to be complete before an understanding of the level of work required can be gained.

Comments

- BAC – Should prioritise socio-economic needs. Cefas – FMP programme is looking into this area via an integrated approach. Due to funding constraints, it would be best to postpone work on this to consider progress within the wider FMP programme.
- BAC – Improvement of recreational removals data should also be a priority. Cefas – ICES benchmarking is currently taking place and due soon. The group should wait until this is complete and the report issued to gain better understanding of current situation.
- Defra – Highlighted that bass is a data rich stock, and that other poor data species will draw more funding and it's imperative to work with wider FMP programme work where possible.

ACTION – Group to share this evidence document with their members.

5) “A bass rebuilding plan”

- Presentation by BAC detailing their thoughts on the rebuilding of the bass stock.
- Believes that ICES advice encourages the shrinking of the bass stock, and that this works against the goals of the Bass FMP.

Comments

- Cefas – ICES is independent and not influenced by fisheries managers, providing the best available advice. FMSY is used as fishing pressure can be influenced, whereas biomass cannot be. BAC – Biomass target could be set to direct work.

- SCFC – Disputes that ICES advice supports shrinking of stock. ICES usually very precautionary.
- CF – Anecdotal evidence of huge increases of bass.
- Cefas – Supports the call for more data on discards to better understand current situation of stock.
- Defra – Important to recognise that ICES provide advice across the breadth of species and the current approach is recognised by all users of ICES advice. The benchmarking process will provide more information on the stock and suggested the focus of the BMG should therefore be on progressing implementation and ensuring stakeholders feel the benefit of the FMPs.

BAC with support from the group asked that the following questions be asked of Defra scientists:

1. What is the target biomass level (bMSY)?
2. What is the timeframe to reach that level?

6) Short-term measures – delivery

- Defra opened this section with a recommendation to agree progression of the following priority areas, and their sequencing for delivery:
 - Discards
 - Bycatch
 - Recreational data
 - Closed seasons
 - MCRS
- Defra suggested that the focus on this agenda item should now determine the formation of task and finish groups. Defra appealed to members of the BMG to volunteer to sit on and chair task-and-finish groups to enable groups to operate more collaboratively and efficiently in view of limited resources across the group.
- BASS suggested that there needs to be more of a matrix applied to the prioritisation/weighting of the measures. Defra responded that Cefas had already done this and that to do so would risk further delaying delivery.
- A number of members highlighted the need for compliance and enforcement, as well as socio-economic impacts, to be considered throughout all groups.
- AT – recreational data discussions are occurring across many FMP working groups, and it may be best for this to be handled holistically across all FMPs, rather than a focus on one species. They called for bycatch to be the main priority.
- Defra encouraged the group to consider the priorities previously shared and noted the importance of the evidence to be able to progress actions and that any further delay in starting to establish these groups would mean a delay in implementing meaningful delivery for this FMP.

- Cefas – The evidence table that they had produced and shared could be used to aid prioritisation as it allows the group to look at work that's already done and build on it. All members of the BMG will have a different opinion on the priorities, therefore starting is the priority, with fruitful discussions held in these task and finish groups rather than seeking consensus in this meeting.
- Defra informed group that it will take the groups feedback away from the meeting and consider next steps on prioritisation. Reminder to the group that delivery is key now and that members of the BMG need to be prepared to volunteer for task-and-finish groups that will form and consider how they can further support the process.

Action - Defra to circulate list of medium/long term measures of the bass FMP to wider BMG group.

Outstanding Actions from previous meetings

- **EA** - Circulate European project reporting on bycatch in inshore coastal gillnets.