



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION, DOCUMENT

# **Wales Sea Bass Advisory Group meeting: 11 March 2025**

Notes of the meeting held on 11 March 2025.

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# **Attendees**

## **Group**

Kevin Denman (KD)  
Mark Boulton (MB\*)  
Sion Williams (SW)  
Chris Davies (CD)  
Jim Evans (JE)  
Brett Garner (BG)  
Holly Kaiser (HK)  
David Curtis (DC)  
Simon Frobisher (SF)  
Sean Jukes (SJ)  
Richard Harrison (RH)  
Peter Elliott (PE)  
John O'Connor (JO)  
Mark Owen (MO)  
Kieran Hyder (KH)  
Nadine Atchison-Balmond (NA)

## **Welsh Government**

Michelle Billing (MB)  
Julian Bray (JB)  
Seb Evans (SE)  
Nathan Wyer (NW)  
Matthew Sayer (MS)  
Barrie John (BJ)  
Phil Wensley (PW).

## **Apologies**

Richard Strudwick (RS)

Andy Davies (AD)

Hannah Rudd (HR)

Colin Charman (CC)

## **Notes**

### **Welcome and introductions, purpose of meeting**

JB welcomed everyone to the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the group. He relayed apologies from Hannah Rudd (Mark Owen deputising), Colin Charman (Nadine Atchison-Balmond deputising), Richard Strudwick and Andy Davies.

He also welcomed Phil Wensley from Welsh Governments fisheries science team.

### **Review and sign-off notes and actions of previous meetings**

MB ran through the agenda and asked if there were any comments relating to the draft notes and actions from the previous meeting (8).

Several members asked for additional time to review the notes: agreed.

All comments must be submitted in writing by 5pm, Friday 14 March.

A member asked if there is a timetable for the study on alternative harvest objectives.

JB explained we are looking to procure support to complete the study as KH did not have the capacity: timetable to be confirmed.

Action 1: collate feedback on the draft notes and actions from meeting 8 once received.

## **Call for evidence: summary of responses**

SE presented a high-level summary of responses for the call for evidence on shore-based netting in Wales, which closed on February 28.

A detailed summary of responses, including next steps and recommendations is being prepared for the Deputy First Minister. Subject to approval, it will be shared with the group and published online.

PW gave an overview of the proposed shore-based netting scientific bycatch study.

A member flagged that he had met with the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP) the previous day regarding a study on bycatch which will be published soon. He suggested that it may be of help.

JB asked for the report to be circulated as soon as it was available.

A member raised concerns that the call for evidence does not help in providing numbers for illegal fishers.

A commercial shore-netter explained that shore-netting is very exposed and only viable in a few key locations, making illegal activity easy to detect and act on.

BJ provided the fisheries intel email address and asked for sightings of illegal shore-netting to be reported.

A member asked if there has been a specialised committee on fisheries discussion on shore-based netting.

MS said this had not yet taken place. He will report back as soon as it has.

## **Socio-economic study: outline of specification**

Initial scoping work has commenced with Seafish, covering 12 fisheries in the Welsh zone.

The study will contain four main elements:

1. Economic assessment
2. Social assessment
3. Identification of opportunities
4. Linkage of opportunities

There will be six phases to the proposed approach:

1. Review of existing literature and data preparation
2. Methodology development
3. Primary data gathering
4. Stakeholder engagement
5. Analysis of economic data
6. Reporting

Once the methodology is complete (approx. 2 months), an overview of the proposed approach will be presented to the group for input.

NW confirmed tourism will be included in the study.

Concerns were raised by members representing recreational anglers regarding Seafish's undertaking the recreational element of the research:

- ability of Seafish, as an industry-funded levy body, to carry out the recreational assessment without bias
- some may consider Seafish lack impartiality which could lead to distrust among recreational anglers in the results of the study
- lack of expertise and experience to engage with the recreational angling sector and gather the necessary socio-economic data
- Seafish's involvement in the recreational study may have a negative impact

on the results and overall validity of the assessments

Positives from the discussion highlighted the importance of co-existence of the sectors in the successful implementation of the bass Fishery Management Plan (FMP) and the value of the group for members to be able to communicate openly and honestly.

JB assured the group that when the scope of work is completed, Seafish's intentions and methodology for engaging with the recreational sector will be reviewed in detail before any decisions are made.

## **Recreational fisheries data: proposed actions to improve data collection on recreational removals**

In the previous meeting evidence gaps in the recreational fishery were identified and potential actions to address them were explored.

Three short-term actions were agreed:

1. Draft a statement regarding the importance and purpose of providing commercial fishing and recreational angling data and share for input.
2. Maximise promotion of the sea angling diaries with comms assistance from Fishing in Wales – they currently have 6000 contacts and 20k combined social network followers.
3. Establish the optimum participation figure for the sea angling diaries with KH and Cefas colleagues.

KH would like to see the sea angling diary run like the bass advisory group, so that it was owned by the angling community rather than being a Cefas product.

JB was happy to meet and discuss this matter further.

DC expressed interest in being involved.

In discussion it was noted:

- recreational anglers are hesitant to participate in or collaborate on data collection
- the proposed actions may not drive an increase in data collection and a more formal approach was needed, i.e. mandatory catch reporting
- the EU are currently developing a mandatory catch reporting system for recreational angling
- a review of recreational angling similar to the SBN review and incorporating a call for evidence might be a compromise
- secrecy around fishing marks leads to reluctance to provide data on locations and catches
- recreational anglers have low confidence in science, perceiving it to be too slow to make timely legislative decisions
- a suggestion to move away from the sea angling diary concept and establish a small group of bass fishing enthusiasts to provide data and help build relationships

Action: meet with KH to explore possibilities for anglers' participation in managing the sea angling diary.

## **Next steps; AOB; date of next meeting**

Strategic approach to Welsh fisheries and aquaculture statement: A member raised the lack of mention of recreational fishing in the statement sent a poor message to the sector. Can this be addressed?

JB explained the opportunity to change the statement has been missed but the member's comments had been forwarded to the team who drafted the statement.

JO can raise the issue at the next MAGWF meeting.

Successful prosecution of 5 Belgian trawler masters: actions of the enforcement team praised by the group. Request made to circulate the news bulletin to the group.

Question: has consideration been given to how bag limits can be varied?

MB to follow up.

JB thanked everyone for their input and for another good discussion.

Date of next meeting to be confirmed.

Action: circulate news bulletin ref successful prosecution of five Belgian trawlers.

## **Actions**

### **Outstanding actions from previous meetings**

#### **Meeting 5: 17 September 2024**

1. Desk-based study addressing potential evidence gaps to enable consideration of alternative management objectives. NW: completed 26 August 2025.

#### **Meeting 7: 5 December 2024**

1. Obtain advice on how recreational bag limits might be varied. MB: ongoing.
2. Speak to enforcement about the monitoring of recreational bass boats in South Wales. MB: ongoing.
3. Share outline of approach to socio-economic survey with the group before contract is let. MB: completed 6 June 2025.

#### **Meeting 8: 4 February 2025**

1. Prepare a statement on the role of recreational angling and importance of recreational data in delivery of the bass FMP. SE/HR: ongoing.
2. Explore potential use of ambassadors to promote the sea angling diaries.

MB: ongoing.

## **New actions from this meeting**

1. Collate feedback on the draft notes and actions from meeting 8 once received. SE: completed 6 June 2025.
2. Meet with KH to explore possibilities for anglers' participation in managing the Sea Angling Diary. MB/SE: ongoing.
3. Circulate news bulletin ref successful prosecution of five Belgian trawlers. SE: completed 6 June 2025.

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