



Bass Angling Conservation - Supplement to Defra's minutes of the Bass Management group meeting on 5 May 2026

Defra did not offer members of the Bass Management Group the opportunity to review the draft meeting minutes or propose changes, so BAC is issuing its own supplement to the BMG minutes. This supplementary note is based on BAC's notes of the meeting – it has not been confirmed by Defra or other members of the BMG.

Terms of Reference

Bass Angling Conservation undertook to review the ToR and provide comments. (BAC has subsequently noted the ToR are very unclear on what can and can't be shared with stakeholders and has proposed changes to clarify what information can be shared, with the default being information can be shared unless it has been specifically flagged as not to be shared).

BMSY and Timeframe for achieving BMSY

BAC noted that in May 2025, the Bass Management Group asked Cefas to answer these questions. (BAC note: BMSY is the biomass tonnage level that the MSY says will result in the "long term" if bass is fished at a level designed to deliver the maximum tonnage killed over time (again, in the "long term". BAC understands "long term" for the scientists means 150 to 200 years)).

Although Cefas advised that ICES was expected to include an estimate of BMSY in the annual assessment to be issued at the end of June, the question regarding the timeframe for achieving BMSY remains unanswered. BAC's understanding is the timeframe is 150 to 200 years, which seems to be of no practical benefit.

Bass Nursery Areas

BAC asked if further work had been done on Bass Nursery Areas since the Cefas 2018 review (published in 2021 by Defra) “Presence of European sea bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) and other species in proposed bass nursery areas”. Cefas undertook to look at the paper again and consider the next steps. (BAC note: the review considered 39 potential new designation areas, changes to the extent of 5 existing areas and the removal of 4 existing areas).

Disenfranchisement of the Bass Management Group?

In response to Defra advising that, because of a Ministerial request, the MMO has been asked to start implementing recommendations from the Authorisation Review, BAC flagged that this was not in compliance with the BMG Terms of Reference since the BMG has not reached any conclusions on the next steps for recommendations in the Authorisation Review. The ToR state: “The BMG will be responsible for reviewing and, if appropriate, approving all task and finish group products and recommendations.”.

BAC also noted that this was contrary to explicit assurances as to how the output of the Authorisation Review Task & Finish Subgroup would be used – the Review states: “All proposals remain subject to formal decision-making processes led by Defra and the BMG. This may involve further consultation, evidence gathering, and assessment of broader implications, including operational impacts for the Marine Management Organisation (MMO)”.

Catch Allocation Tool

BAC asked if a timetable for the completion of the tool was available and asked for the Terms of Reference for this work.

Evaluating the Peak Spawning Period/Closed Season – evidence and implications

BAC flagged again that the current work is focused only on biology. It is also necessary to consider:

- what fishing activity is targeting the aggregations of bass (pre and during spawning) that we are trying to protect. We should not jump to the conclusion that the closed period should match the peak spawning time.
- enforcement and compliance: the February/March closed period for the whole of the Northern Stock has high levels of compliance because UK landed bass cannot be sold anywhere in the UK during the closure. Different closed periods around the UK would be difficult to enforce.

It is expected the biological work will be completed by the end of August.

Wales is also doing work on the closed season.

Alternative Harvest Strategy

Sea++ observed that it might be possible to reduce FMSY (the fishing pressure that aims at maximising tonnage of bass killed by 20% without reducing catch much.

Sea++ advised that a lack of socio-economic data should not stop us from investigating alternative harvest strategies and the work would be able to show the benefits for management of filling in the gaps.

Sea++ explained that a larger bass population would mean more large bass.

BAC pointed out the Bass FMP has a goal of maximising social and economic benefits for coastal communities. It is impossible to achieve this goal by targeting killing the maximum tonnage of bass over time, as is currently done, so this must change to deliver on the Bass FMP.

Defra highlighted difficulties involved in moving away from the current target of killing the maximum tonnage of bass over time:

- Hugely political, since a shared stock with other countries. MSY is the basis on which fishing opportunities negotiations are conducted.
- Needs to be consistent with the ICES advice.
- Implications beyond bass.

There was no discussion or conclusion on how this work should be progressed.

BAC note: BAC is now working to see if the next step of the work on can be carried out with assistance from the Fisheries and Seafood Scheme. This would leave 25% of the costs to be raised elsewhere.