

6th Bass Management Group (BMG) – Meeting Minutes

Date: 5 May 2026

Time: 10:00–15:00

Attendees

- Phil McBryde (Defra) **Chair**
- Grant Horsburgh (Defra)
- Peter Elliott (Defra)
- Elinor Brett (Defra REM team)
- Seb Evans (Welsh Government)
- Chris Collins (MMO)
- Andrew Newlands (MMO)
- Nicholas French (MMO)
- Kieran Hyder (Cefas)
- Gareth Henson (Angling Trust)
- Grant Jones (Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society)
- David Curtis (Bass Angling Conservation)
- Mike Roach (NFFO)
- Lydia Tivenan (Natural England)
- Simon Toms (Environment Agency)
- Chloe Rogers (UKAFPO)
- Richard Stride (South Coast Fisherman's Council)
- Rob Pearson (AIFCA)
- Laurence Kell (SeaPlusPlus)
- Anna Sturrock (Essex University)
- Joseph Dawson (Essex University)
- Neil Witney (Commercial Fisherman)

Apologies

- Martin Underwood (Defra)
- Jean Duggan (RSPB)
- Mike Cohen (NFFO)
- Andrew Pascoe (CFPO)

Agenda

1. Welcome, introduction and updates
2. FMP updates
3. REM
4. Closed Season
5. Alternative Harvest Strategy

6. Medium/long-term measures
7. AOB

1. Welcome, introductions and updates

Welcome to members. The purpose of the BMG was restated: to work collaboratively to deliver the Bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) measures, with respect to different perspectives and a focus on shared objectives. Recognition that there will be individual areas of interest outside the FMP specifics but there are other fora available. In the BMG we expect members to show respect for alternative views, listen to others, recognise the bigger picture, not provide live updates on social media during meetings, and work together, which will include compromise. The medium/long term measures are more complex work areas, and not working collaboratively will slow down progress.

Terms of Reference circulated after the previous meeting were noted. No substantive comments had been received to date, and Defra confirmed it would continue to chair and provide the secretariat.

Actions from the previous meeting were reviewed.

OUTSTANDING ACTION: Share results from the recreational closed-season survey following the February 2026 event. **(BASS)**

2. FMP updates

2.1 Recreational handling guidance and data collection (Angling Trust)

The Angling Trust provided an update on this project. Publication of the completed guidance is expected in summer 2026, alongside supporting video material. Members welcomed the clarity of the guidance but raised concerns about reaching new and inexperienced anglers through non-traditional channels and providing stronger incentives for behaviour change.

Discussion highlighted the importance of collective responsibility across sectors in promoting best practice and improving post-release survival.

2.2 MMO Authorisation Review and Management Measures (task-and-finish group)

MMO updated progress following the Authorisation Review. Work has focused on further considering three priority recommendations:

- issuing unused authorisations;
- allowing switching from fixed nets to hook-and-line gear; and
- supporting young and new entrants.

The task-and-finish group has produced a report to inform implementation planning. MMO confirmed work is now moving into an early implementation-planning phase, with consultation expected as options are developed.

2.3 AIFCA led FMP short-term measures update

AIFCA have produced a draft spreadsheet collating and summarizing all relevant bass byelaws; minimum sizes, nursery areas and codes of practice have been developed and presented to members of the BMG. This is now being reviewed by IFCA districts and is subject to final IFCA sign-off before wider sharing. Members welcomed the move towards a single, accessible reference point for information.

Work has also started on commercial handling guidance which has been shared with commercial representatives of the BMG for comment. This will then be developed into material for the commercial sector.

2.4 Defra updates

- ICES allocation tool.
 - Tool is expected for use 2027 and a further joint letter to ICES from UK and EU has been sent requesting detail on project progress.
- UK–EU data sharing on bass catches
 - As committed to in the Written Record of last year's annual fishing opportunities negotiations, meetings with EU counterparts have taken place on facilitating data sharing. More details will be released in due course once formal analysis of the first quarter's data has completed.
- Shore-based netting review
 - Awaiting internal clearance. Defra highlighted that there are a large number of competing priorities across all FMP teams, and that legal resources are stretched.
- Discard Infographic
 - Now published and available to stakeholders from MMO website and Defra blog.
 - Defra continue to encourage BMG members to promote this where possible.

3. REM – opportunities and barriers

Defra Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) team delivered a presentation covering what REM can deliver, current programmes in the UK, and considerations for future application to bass management.

A discussion followed focusing on how REM could support Bass FMP objectives, and incentivising participation. The discussion noting constraints around funding and willingness to engage majored around evidence on discards, bycatch and spatial activity.

Members highlighted barriers including cost, data processing capacity, trust, and concerns about compliance use versus scientific applications. There was broad agreement that REM is one tool among several and should not be viewed as a standalone solution.

The distinction between large-scale mandatory REM programmes and targeted, time-limited trials was discussed, with interest in the latter as a more proportionate starting point.

4. Closed Season – evidence and implications

Presentation from researchers from the University of Essex on research into bass spawning timing using otolith analysis, maturity data and gonadosomatic indices.

Key messages included:

- Peak spawning for bass appears to occur later than the current February–March closure.
- Most spawning activity occurs in April, with regional variation.
- Multiple data sources broadly align on timing that current timing of closed season may not be appropriate.

Discussion explored implications for existing management measures. Members stressed the need to carefully consider biological evidence alongside enforceability, socio-economic impacts, and international consistency before drawing conclusions about potential policy change.

It was noted that further analysis and peer review are ongoing, and that no decisions are being taken at this stage.

When research is finalised, a summary will be shared with Defra and the BMG for consideration.

5. Alternative Harvest Strategy

SeaPlusPlus delivered a presentation of the report “*Review of Sea Bass Harvest Strategies and Alternatives*” as commissioned by BAC and supported by FaSS funding. The presentation explored limitations of a single-metric MSY approach and outlined how alternative harvest strategies and Management Strategy Evaluation could support broader FMP objectives.

Discussion highlighted:

- The need to work within existing ICES and UK–EU frameworks;
- Challenges around data availability; and
- The importance of avoiding unintended impacts such as increased discards.

Members agreed the work was useful context-setting but noted the complexity of translating alternative approaches into policy and impacts on existing agreements and relationships with institutions and coastal states.

This work will be considered by Defra within future FMP medium/long term programme.

6. Medium/long-term measures – prioritisation and sequencing

Defra provided a structured priority matrix of medium/long-term measures following from group discussion in previous meetings and the goals set out in the Bass FMP which aided group discussion.

Three priority areas for the next 12 months were identified:

- Authorisation System Review (delivery of priority measures);
- REM and evidence on discards/bycatch; and
- Closed season and spatial/temporal evidence.

Members also raised strong interest in compliance and enforcement issues, with suggestions for more focused collaborative work involving regulators and stakeholders.

The need for realism around delivery timelines, funding and capacity was emphasised.

7. AOB

BAC raised the question “What is the MSY target for Bass and what is the timeframe to achieve this?”.

As Cefas understands it, ICES will include an estimate MSY in this year’s advice or assessment (unclear which yet as assessments are still ongoing). ICES do not currently estimate time to MSY as standard practice.

8. Close

The Chair thanked members for their contributions and closed the meeting. Next meeting to take place in September 2026.

Actions

- **ACTION:** Share results from the recreational closed-season survey. (*BASS*)
Due: 1 July 2026
- **ACTION:** Provide Rob Pearson with comments on the draft IFCA bylaw summary spreadsheet. (*All members*)
Due: Within 2 weeks of circulation
- **ACTION:** Share an indicative timeline for priority medium- and long-term measures. (*Defra*)
Due: 1 July 2026