



Sea Bass fishing opportunities for 2027

Response to the EU consultation

Bass Angling Conservation

Introduction

Bass Angling Conservation (“**BAC**”) is a fishing club whose members rely on Northern sea bass stock fishing opportunities.

We want fishery managers to target an abundant and resilient sea bass stock that supports a high-quality fishing experience for recreational fishers and small-scale sustainable commercial fishers and maximises social and economic benefits for coastal communities. This means fishing below the ICES FMSY and aiming for a stock level well above BMSY, rather than aiming for a stock level around BMSY.

The sea bass stock has recovered from a crash and the choice now is to: 1) build on the recovery and target an excellent bass fishery; or 2) fish at ICES FMSY and push the stock back to a low level, necessitating highly restrictive emergency measures once again.

The stock is not yet at a level we regard as abundant or sufficiently resilient. We believe fishing pressure should be at a relatively low level in order to restore the stock structure (i.e. age and size mix in the stock), to deliver both stock resilience and more large fish that are more highly valued by recreational fishers and by commercial small-scale hook and line fishers who receive a higher price per kg for large fish.

How much sea bass should be harvested in 2027?

Recent scientific work¹ indicates the ICES MSY Approach to estimating reference points (such as FMSY) is not precautionary. We are deeply concerned that the ICES MSY Approach is focused on a theoretical equilibrium stock level in the very long term and does not concern itself with what happens to the stock in the short and medium term (for example whether the stock falls below Btrigger or Blim).

In contrast, we are highly focused on achieving an excellent bass fishery in the short and medium term and want the stock to continue to grow to a state of abundance and high resilience.

¹ “The ICES MSY approach to reference point estimation is not precautionary” – Winker et Al 2025

Additionally, Ifremer recently modelled the bass fishery between 2026 and 2031 and estimated that, under an average recruitment assumption, fishing at ICES FMSY would cause the spawning stock biomass to fall below Blim.²

This modelling provides strong evidence that fishing pressure needs to be set considerably below ICES FMSY if the stock is to remain above Blim and recover towards a more abundant and resilient state.

It is unfortunate that this Ifremer work was not available to fishery managers in late 2025, when the ICES FMSY represented a 98% increase in fishing mortality. We urge fishery managers to heed the Ifremer warning and to reflect on the distinct possibility that fishing opportunities for 2026 may not be sustainable.

We have not yet seen the full results of the large increase in catch limits for 2026. We recommend extreme caution in setting catch limits for 2027 without this important information.

How should sea bass fishing opportunities be allocated in 2027?

There are two fundamental principles when considering how fishing opportunities are allocated:

1. allocations must take into account the sustainability of the fishing method
2. allocations must be fair.

We believe that sea bass fishing opportunities for 2027 should be at or below 2026 levels. However, if fishery managers decide to increase sea bass fishing opportunities for 2027, recreational fishing and commercial hook and liners should receive priority treatment since they are the most sustainable forms of sea bass fishing and deliver the greatest social and economic benefits.

For many years³, recreational fishers were discriminated against when sea bass fishing opportunities were increased for commercial métiers. We remind fishery managers of the Western Waters Multi-Annual Plan requirement that recreational fishing limits should be “non-discriminatory”.

Problems in the sea bass fishery

UK under 10 metre commercial fishing landing data

In response to the EU commencing infringement proceedings in 2017 concerning the inadequacy of UK under ten metre vessels landing data, the UK developed the U10 Catch App.

Unfortunately the U10 Catch App has been highly problematic and as a result has never been used to provide the official UK landing data for the U10 fleet.

² “Effets de l’augmentation des plafonds de captures sur les stocks de bar nord et sud” – Ifremer, December 2025.

³ 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025

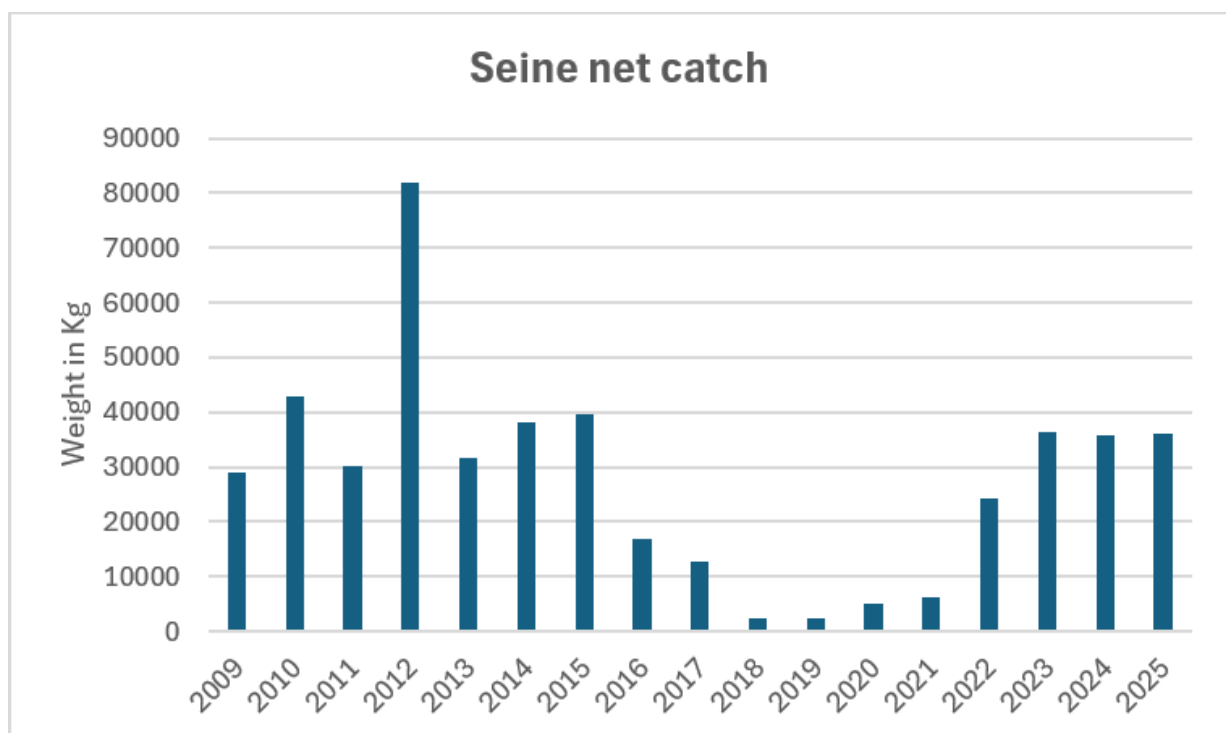
It is important the UK devotes the necessary resource to urgently address the problems and deliver a catch reporting app that is fit for purpose, will provide reliable landing data and will support effective enforcement of gear type catch limits ⁴

We urge the EU to encourage the UK to devote the necessary resources to provide high-quality landing data in 2027.

Bycatch

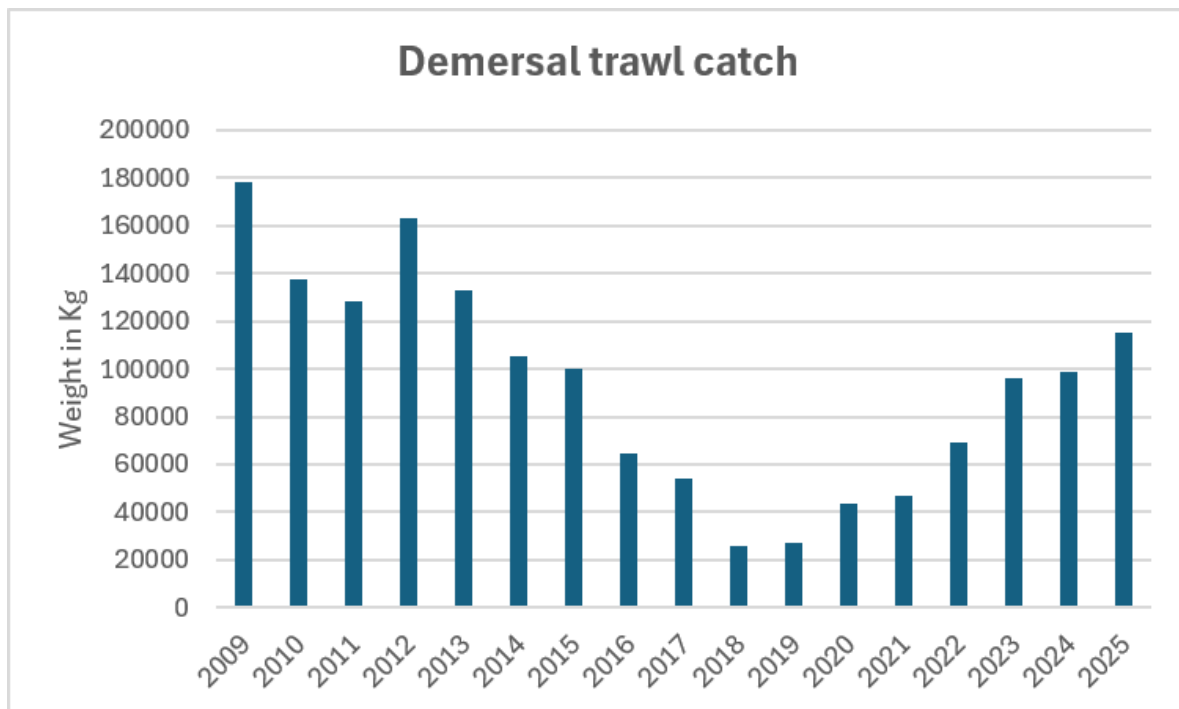
We question whether unavoidable bycatch limits for trawlers and seiners are now so high that they are permitting the targeting of bass, rather than reducing discards.

The UK landing data shows that in 2023 to 2025, seiner's landings of sea bass were broadly at the levels they were at before the restrictions were applied from 2015 - when seiners were allowed to target sea bass. Seiners are now restricted to landing unavoidable bycatch only, so we would expect their landings in recent years to be below the levels when they were permitted to target sea bass, but this does not seem to be the case.



⁴ Currently, gear type information is input by the Marine Management Organisation based on their knowledge of the relevant fishing vessel. This makes enforcement of gear type based catch limits extremely difficult.

UK trawler landings show a similar picture. 2025 trawler landings were above those in 2014 and 2015 and nearly at the levels of 2013 and earlier.



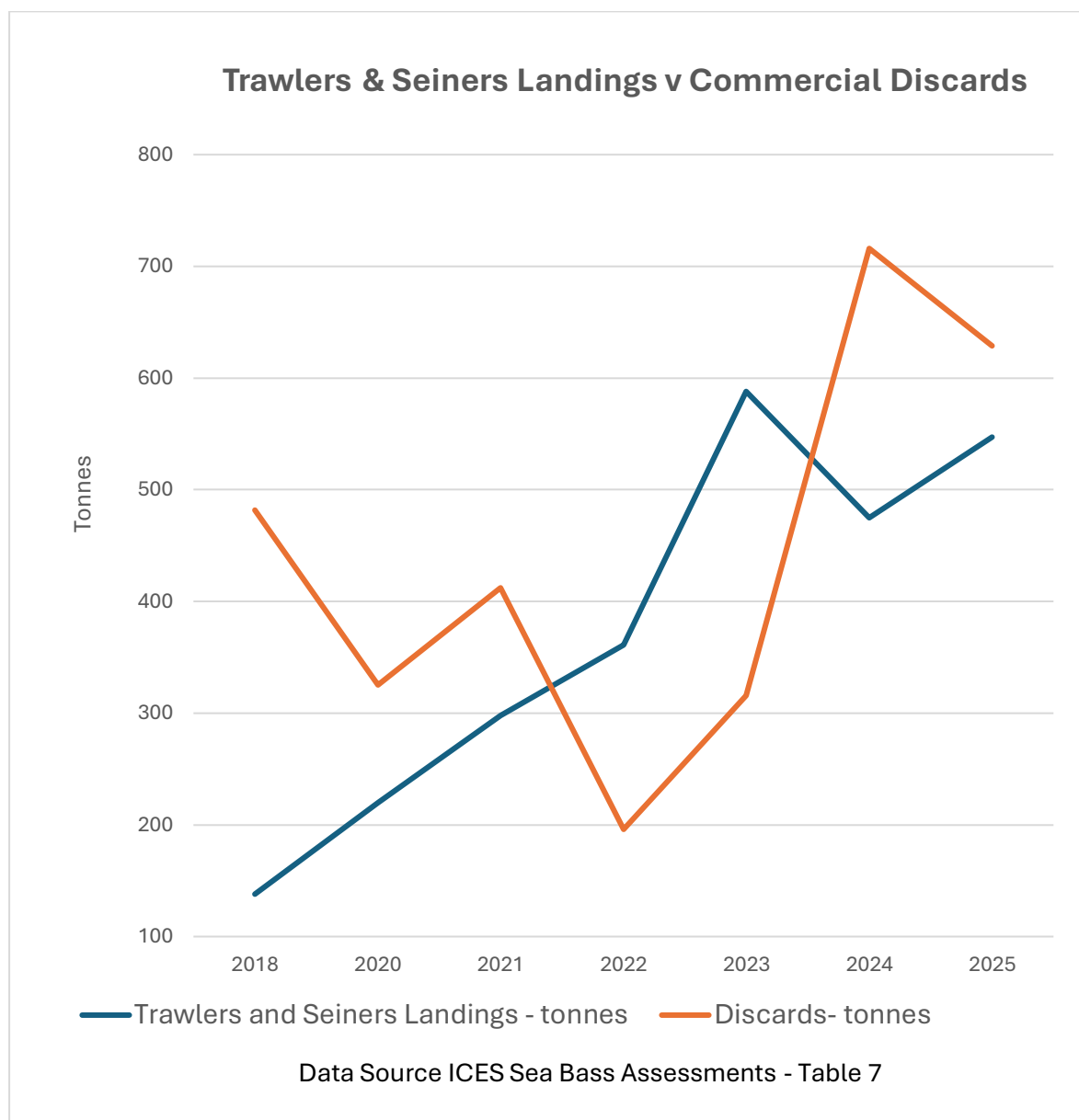
With the large increases in trawler and seiner catch limits for 2026, it may be that their 2026 landings will be on a par with landings before the restrictions.

Many thanks to the Bass Anglers Sportfishing Society for analysing the UK landing data and providing these charts.

Discards

Fishery managers have in recent years increased trawler and seiner catch limits, following the logic that allowing more bycatch to be landed should reduce discards.

But unfortunately this logic has not delivered the desired result - trawler and seiner landings have increased, while estimated discards have also increased.



Trawler and seiner sea bass landings are now back at pre-restriction levels and yet discards are now at the highest levels ever estimated by ICES.

We recommend exploring other methods of reducing discards, such as spatio-temporal measures, rather than increasing trawler and seiners catch limits further.

English shore netting review

In 2024, we raised concerns regarding the North Eastern IFCA shore netting fishery, where the landing data suggests either an unsustainably high level of sea bass bycatch or potential illegal targeting of sea bass⁵:

The catch reports for the fishery for 2021 to 2024 showed:

- Two of the five shore netters reported landing little or nothing but bass (see chart at Appendix).
- Four of the five shore netters had bass as an overall percentage of total catch of between 75% and 100%.
- 80% of all landings from the fishery were bass.

In response, the UK conducted a review of English shore netting and produced a draft report in May 2025. But in February 2026, Defra advised there were legal resource constraints and that the publication of the report would be delayed by 18 months.

We urge the EU to ask the UK to make additional resources available, so the report can be published in short order, allowing a decision to be taken soon on the future of this fishery.

Sea bass catch allocation tool

The Catch Allocation Tool has been under development since 2019.

In 2021, the Specialised Committee on Fisheries prioritised the improvement of the tool.

In 2022, COM told the NWWAC “We are currently engaging with the UK in the Specialised Committee on Fisheries (SCF) to agree on a terms of reference, requesting ICES to adapt and improve the tool, with the aim of having a well-functioning tool ready for the next round of consultations.”

But it is now the end of August 2026 and there is still no improved tool. We understand the tool will not be available for setting sea bass fishing opportunities for 2027. This represents a failure to deliver an improvement that was identified as a priority by the Specialised Committee on Fisheries in 2021.

We repeat our call for professional project management: a timetable for delivery and milestones by which to measure progress.

⁵ A Review of North-East IFCA District Shore Netting by Bass Angling Conservation July 2024

Appendix

NEIFCA Shore Netting Fishery

