

## **BASS UPDATE**

It is now 5 years since I joined the DSIFCA and I have been a member of the Bye Law committee for 41/2 years.

Just after I joined a state of emergency was declared by the European Fisheries Committee that the bass stock had reached unsustainable levels and measures needed to be taken to stop the decline and rebuild the stock level.

Immediate action was taken to stop the mid channel pair trawling activities that targetted the large aggregations of mature spawning bass and recreational sea anglers were given a daily catch limit .

A commitment to achieve a sustainable fishery by 2018/19 was made by the powers that be but no management plan was ever published.

Instead we have had a series of ad-hoc last minute decisions that in many cases actually increase the juvenile mortality rate and offer no protection for the mature spawning aggregations that are so critical to the stock recovery.

The situation today, after 5 years of continually dwindling stocks, is that as we sit here social media is rife with images of catches of bass being taken and dumped by trawlers on our patch every day !!!.

Skippers are publically complaining that they are throwing back thousands of pounds worth of bass [ few if any survive] whilst pursuing other species [squid ?] in areas traditionally known as annual bass aggregation areas.

Without spacial and timely management this will inevitably continue as it has done in the past . Reducing landings has no effect on fish mortality - a dead fish is gone - whether eaten or discarded.

The powers that be have completely failed over the last 5 years [and before] and do not seem to have the will or ability to make the strong decisions that are needed to achieve their stated aims.

I have just been given a recent written response from Mr Eustace in answer to a question from an MP regarding current bass discards where he acknowledges the question and says that a study will be commissioned during 2018 with a report in 2019 !!! - the issue / consequence is obvious and should be sorted now.

Two years ago ,having realised the ineffectiveness of the headline and subsequent measures introduced in the first 3 years, I gave my views to this meeting - nothing has changed.

These included the implementation of timely and special close seasons for the spawning / feeding aggregations , a change in mesh sizes / fishing methods to reflect the increased mls for bass and the provision of protection for juvenile bass to leave the bass nursery areas to reach the sea etc.

Equally, if not more important, is catch reporting and the buyers / sellers legislation that many believe encourages under reporting [estimated by EU who were instigating an inquiry as being as high as 40%] - How can the stock be managed when we have no idea of these figures ?. Neither do we know how many are taken recreationally - this should also be recorded.

I may know little about the commercial intricacies of the fishing industry but probably like most here I do recognise poor management.

After 5 years we have the inevitable - confusion and conflict with little result.

Europe ,DEFRA, MMO have not provided viable solutions and the Industry has shown little or no support for the process for obvious reasons.

The IFCA's are in some cases taking the blame for decisions made by others but we do have the authority to manage our own patch.

What should / can we do ?

JOHN MAY