

Sea Bass  
URGENT ACTION NEEDED

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) supports the scientific recommendation of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) that an 80% reduction in fishing mortality is vital to ensuring the future of the seabass stock around the UK. Unless urgent action is taken to reduce fishing mortality by 80%, a complete moratorium on sea bass fishing may be required in the future to prevent the complete collapse of the stock.

**MCS is looking to Ministers, businesses, commercial fishers, anglers and consumers to take urgent action in order to reduce catches in line with scientific advice.**

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**Background**

The sea bass stock in the Irish Sea, Celtic Sea, English Channel and southern North Sea is hugely valuable for both the commercial and recreational sectors, but has in recent years come under significantly increased pressure - commercial landings have more than doubled since the early 1990's. Critically, research from the UK Centre for Environment, Fisheries & Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) has shown five successive years of very low numbers of young fish reaching maturity (poor recruitment), giving every indication that the stock is heading towards the lowest level of spawning biomass ever recorded, with a reduction of approximately 60% in the last five years alone<sup>12</sup>.

In June 2014, ICES recommended that total landings of sea bass from both commercial and recreational fisheries in eco-regions Celtic Sea, West of Scotland and the North Sea should be no more than 1,155t in 2015. To place this in context, ICES<sup>3</sup> currently estimates that the recreational catch alone stands at 1,500t, with commercial landings in the region of 4-6,000t. With the spawning stock biomass currently headed towards the lowest spawning stock biomass ever observed (5,250t), even those significant cuts proposed are only likely to slow the decline in the short term, rather than immediately increase the level of spawning biomass.

**What measures need to be taken?**

Urgent management measures need to be taken in order to achieve the recommended 80% reduction in catch. Coordinated efforts are needed from all Member States accessing the fishery, of which the UK and France are responsible for the majority of the commercial catch, with the UK, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium also having significant recreational catches, which comprise approximately 25% of the total catch.

**THIS IS WHAT YOU CAN DO**

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**BUSINESSES CAN**

- Switch to the best rated seabass sources on [www.fishonline.org](http://www.fishonline.org)

[UK farmed seabass](#)

Green rated

[Mediterranean Global GAP farmed seabass](#)

Yellow rated

[Med farmed seabass no certification](#)

Amber rated

[UK Handlined seabass](#)

Amber rated

- Say no thanks to

[Net caught seabass](#)

Red rated

[Trawl caught seabass](#)

Red rated

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nwwac.org/\\_fileupload/Bass/ICES\\_Advice\\_Bass\\_WoS\\_WoI\\_Bss-wosi\\_June2014.pdf](http://www.nwwac.org/_fileupload/Bass/ICES_Advice_Bass_WoS_WoI_Bss-wosi_June2014.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.nwwac.org/\\_fileupload/Seabass/LORDAN\\_ICES\\_Advice\\_Seabass\\_Stocks\\_InterACWK\\_1830914.pdf](http://www.nwwac.org/_fileupload/Seabass/LORDAN_ICES_Advice_Seabass_Stocks_InterACWK_1830914.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nwwac.org/\\_fileupload/Bass/ICES\\_Advice\\_Bass\\_CS\\_IS\\_NS\\_June2014.pdf](http://www.nwwac.org/_fileupload/Bass/ICES_Advice_Bass_CS_IS_NS_June2014.pdf)

- **Specify strong traceability requirements to ensure your sources supply the farmed and handlined seabass you ask for and has come from LEGAL sources (Note UK legislation allows vessels to sell directly to the public up to 25 kg per transaction. Retailers could specify that suppliers & sellers keep accurate records of all fish sold this way)**
- **Communicate to Ministers, the catching sector and your suppliers, the importance of seabass to your business and the urgent need for an 80% reduction in catches to avoid stock collapse.**

#### CONSUMERS CAN

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- **Ask for and only buy the best rated seabass sources on [www.fishonline.org](http://www.fishonline.org)**

<a href="#">UK farmed seabass</a>	Green rated
<a href="#">Mediterranean Global GAP farmed seabass</a>	Yellow rated
<a href="#">Med farmed seabass no certification</a>	Amber rated
<a href="#">UK Handlined seabass</a>	Amber rated

- **Say no thanks to**

<a href="#">Net caught seabass</a>	Red rated
<a href="#">Trawl caught seabass</a>	Red rated

#### RECREATIONAL ANGLERS CAN

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- **Voluntarily increase the size of fish retained and support proposals to increase the Minimum Landing Size (MLS) to at least 45cm to allow fish to spawn at least once** - the current MLS of 36cm means that the vast majority of fish are caught before they are able to spawn and contribute to the growth of the population. Anglers can voluntarily choose to only keep bass if they are longer than 45cm.
- **Only keep what you really need! And support proposals for a bag limit for recreational anglers.** The angling community has widely acknowledged the need for a bag limit, given the need to reduce catches across all sectors. Anglers can voluntarily choose to only keep a small number of fish or exercise the practice of catch and release already popular amongst many sport fishers.
- **Better monitor catches.** The angling community can widen and enhance existing voluntary catch reporting initiatives and can help report any incidences of bass being sold illegally to restaurants.

#### COMMERCIAL FISHERS CAN

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- **Support the immediate development a management plan designed to halt overfishing and reduce fishing mortality to its Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).**
- **Voluntarily avoid nursery areas (estuaries & river mouths) and areas where they are likely to encounter high proportions of juvenile and spawning bass.** Many spawning areas are currently open to all forms of fishing, including high-impact commercial methods such as pair trawling. Discarding of sea bass is highest in small-mesh trawl fisheries operating in nursery areas.

- **Voluntarily increase the size of landed fish to at least 45cm to allow fish to spawn at least once** - the current MLS of 36cm means that the vast majority of fish are caught before they are able to spawn and contribute to the growth of the population.
- **Voluntarily increase mesh sizes for trawl fisheries, and potentially in gill net fisheries, to facilitate an increase in the size of bass landed** - additionally, fishers can voluntarily use bycatch reduction devices, such as square mesh panels to reduce the catch of small bass.
- **Improve handling practices and techniques** to improve post capture survivability of bass.
- **Be diligent when recording catches** - accurate assessment of commercial catches is difficult because UK legislation allows vessels to sell directly to the public up to 25 kg per transaction. There is no provision for collecting data for the cumulative tonnage being sold in this way. Skippers can voluntarily keep these records so they can be considered for monitoring & stock assessments.
- **Develop codes of industry best practice** to support all of the above measures.

#### MINISTERS CAN

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- [Click here to see what Ministers can do](#)