

Recreational Angling Sector Working Group Meeting – 13/12/2022 – 19:00

Virtual Meeting – MS Teams

Attending: CH, MS, AG, CF, TG

Apologies: AD

Agenda

1. Introductions

Introductions were made for Members in attendance. The Chair introduced Colin Francis who has recently become a Member of the Southern IFCA Authority and was invited to attend the meeting due to his interest and knowledge of the RSA sector.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting (13th September 2022)

Agreed. Items covered in the minutes were discussed under other agenda items.

3. Southern IFCA Updates/Ongoing items

Net Fishing Byelaw: Southern IFCA have received a further round of feedback on this byelaw as part of the MMO QA process which has been addressed. The byelaw remains within the MMO QA process.

Pot Fishing Byelaw: The Authority agreed at their December meeting to send the Pot Fishing Byelaw to the MMO to enter the QA process. The byelaw has been received by the MMO and a first round of QA response is anticipated in December/January.

Shore Gathering Review: The Authority has agreed to progress the shore gathering review to stage 2 of the Byelaw Making Process and has agreed three Policy Objectives to frame the review. These Policy Objectives consider drivers for the review and the legislative umbrellas under which the review sits and are as follows;

- i) To ensure that the conservation objectives of Designated Sites in the District are furthered
- ii) To review existing shore gathering byelaws and other measures for the District using the best available evidence; and

- iii) To ensure that shore gathering activity in the District is carried out in a sustainable way

The next steps in this review are to gather information on the different activities covered under the review which include seaweed harvesting, bait & crab collection, shellfish gathering and shrimp netting (not all activities occur in all areas) and to complete assessments for activities in MPAs as required. A timeline for the review will be developed indicating opportunities for consultation and engagement with stakeholders.

It was raised that when a review of shore gathering was undertaken by another authority, consultation was had with the RSA and shore gathering communities for input but then this input was not reflected in the setting of initial management measures. This was particularly seen in inappropriate limits on the amount of crab and worm species that could be harvested. It was commented that there needs to be a good understanding of the differences between different species which are harvested to avoid similar issues such as the different ragworm species and that significant background research should be conducted to help inform this. DCO Birchenough informed Members that reviews of existing research and literature searches would be carried out as part of this process and the evidence base will be developed fully to be used to help inform management.

Black bream: There was no further update on black bream from the last meeting. Southern IFCA is currently awaiting receipt of a report on nesting sites in Dorset from NE.

Minimum Conservation Reference Size Review: The MCRS review is ongoing with a series of Authority Working Groups being held to review specific groups of species. A further data gathering exercise has also been carried out at the request of Authority Members to ensure that the most up to date data is being captured for consideration as part of the review process.

The issue of anglers using certain species for fishing bait and the need for those individuals used in this way to be smaller than current MCRS was raised. Members were keen that this remains on the agenda for the review and is discussed by Authority Members as part of the Working Group process. There is concern that there are anglers who will be unaware that they are breaking the rules by taking individuals below MCRS for use as bait. DCO Birchenough informed Members that this point will be raised with Members through the review process and that officers on the ground

have been providing information to the RSA sector on the need for fish taken for bait to comply with MCRS regulations.

Angling for Sustainability FISP Project: The Angling for Sustainability Elasmobranch and Black Bream FISP proposal has been successful in securing funding. The project will run between 1st January 2023 and 31st December 2024. The project aims to establish a network of acoustic receivers across the Dorset and Solent region, to tag and track 200 black bream and 100 elasmobranchs (undulate ray, tope and smooth-hound), to train skippers and fisheries managers on data collection and equipment maintenance, to collect an 18 month data set of black bream and elasmobranch movements and to host stakeholder workshops to disseminate the project results.

It was raised that there was concern over the mapping of movements of these species and how that data would be available after the project as it was felt that knowledge of exactly where these species are and where they move between would allow for more targeted fishing which could negatively impact the populations. DCO Birchenough stated that she would ask if a member of the project team could attend a future meeting of the RASG so that these concerns could be discussed directly and explored through discussion with the project team. It was agreed that this would be a sensible approach.

Action: DCO Birchenough to invite the Angling for Sustainability Project Team to attend a future RASG meeting.

UK Seafood Fund Infrastructure Scheme: The Government has opened a grant scheme with at least £65 million available through the Infrastructure Scheme which aims to fund projects that improve the UK seafood sector supply chain through investment in a number of defined areas including recreational sea fishing. Round 2 of this funding is open for applications until 3rd February 2023. Further rounds are indicated to open in 2023 with a further focus on recreational sea angling. More details about the fund can be found online at [Apply for the UK Seafood Fund: Infrastructure Scheme - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/apply-for-the-uk-seafood-fund-infrastructure-scheme).

4. Additional Requested Items

The topic of flounder was raised with concerns that populations are still at very low levels with no improvement seen over the past few years and that anglers and tackle shops along the coast feel that the situation is getting worse. It was queried whether any research could be done to understand what is causing the low population levels and whether there is any impact from the use of this species as pot bait. DCO Birchenough commented that at present there was no research planned in this area directly by Southern IFCA and that this was a problem which was being seen around the coast of England and would therefore most likely require a national approach both in terms of any research carried out or any management of this species in the future.

Action: DCO Birchenough to query whether there is any research being conducted into flounder populations by other authorities/research bodies.

5. Any Other Business

It was queried whether, now that recreational angling for bass is catch and release, whether the species should be photographed/weighed/measured if caught for the purposes of competitions. It was outlined that BASS and the Angling Trust have indicated that as long as the fish are released alive and best practice handling measures are adopted then their position is that bass can be photographed/weighed/measured.

Action: DCO Birchenough to raise the question with the Fisheries Protection Team.

Update: An email was sent to the Members of the RASG on 16th December with the following information in relation to this query:

The intention of the legislation is for the protection of bass therefore ensuring that the bass are returned to the sea alive is key. We do agree with the position taken by the Angling Trust and BASS, that if a bass is caught as part of a competition, provided that it is returned alive and all measures are taken to ensure minimal handling and disturbance to that fish, we would not consider the weighing/measuring of a fish before return an offence.

We would advise that fish should not be kept for any longer than necessary in the process of weighing/measuring and that this process and the subsequent release should be carried out in quick succession with good handling practice adopted. The

fish should also be released where it was caught with no retention or transportation for the purposes of weighing/measuring as this would be deemed to be retention under the legislation. We believe that many of these points are already included in good fish handling guides issued by Angling Trust and others.

Further information was provided on 20th December specific to Bass Nursery Area legislation as follows:

We would expect any catch of bass in a Bass Nursery Area to go back immediately during the time when the bass nursery area regulations are in place. The legislation is different for the two types of regulation (bass nursery area and wider recreational limit).

During the period when the bass nursery area regulations are in place (all year round in some areas) the targeting of bass and the use of sand eels as bait when fishing from a boat is an offence under the bass nursery area regulations, therefore we would not be expecting any competitions involving bass to go ahead within a bass nursery area during those times.