

## Sea Bass Q and A

### Latest News

#### What has the Fisheries Council adopted on 16 December 2015 on sea bass?

On 14/15 December the Council, where the Fisheries Ministers of all 28 MS are represented, discussed a Commission proposal for fishing opportunities for the Atlantic and the North Sea for 2016, which also covered measures for sea bass. The Commission had previously consulted the North Sea and the North Western Waters Advisory Committees and the Member States on the best possible measures to take for 2016. All information received was carefully evaluated in order to prepare the proposals for managing sea bass in 2016 thoroughly. On 16 December the Member States have adopted the following measures:

- In the first half of 2016: No fishing for sea bass by commercial vessels targeting sea bass, except for long lines, pole and lines and set nets who will have a closure of two months in February and March 2016; a small by catch allowance of 1% is envisaged for demersal trawlers and seiners per vessels per month to cover unavoidable by-catches. Recreational anglers may practise a catch and release fishery.
- In the second half of 2016: catch limits as shown in the table below for commercial vessels and a 1 fish bag limit for recreational anglers.

Gear type	Maximum catch of sea bass permitted per vessel per calendar month (in kg)
OTM or PTM, Mid water or pelagic trawls	1 000
OTB, all types of demersal trawls including Danish / Scottish seines	1 000
All GN, all drift net fisheries	1 000
All LL, all long lines or pole and line, set nets fisheries	1 300
purse seines	1 000

The Council also decided to close an area around Ireland for commercial fishing, namely the Celtic Sea, Irish Sea, south of Ireland and west of Ireland (ICES areas VIIa,b,c,g,j,k outside the UK 12 mile zone), thereby extending a national measure, that Ireland has had in place for Irish vessels only, to protect sea bass since 1990 to cover all EU vessels active in the area.

## **What effect will these monthly catch limits have on the different fleets?**

Based on catch information given by France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in 2015 and on the latest scientific advice from 30 June 2015 the measures will have an average impact of decreasing sea bass catches by 35% compared to 2015 landings. The decision of the Member States takes into account that artisanal hooks and line fisheries as well as gill net fisheries depend on sea bass to a greater extent and do not have other alternatives to catch.

## **When will this decision take effect?**

The decision takes effect from 1 January 2016.

## **How was sea bass managed in the EU in the past?**

For years France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium managed sea bass nationally. The national management measures varied from setting voluntary minimum landing sizes in France, over closed areas to protect nurseries in the UK, ban on recreational fishing for bass from 15th May to 15th June in Ireland, a maximum bag limit for recreational anglers in Ireland and the Netherlands to a full prohibition for commercial fishing in Ireland.

But scientists warned that these measures are not enough for a sustainable management. All countries agree that a common approach is needed.

In 2015 the measures taken on EU level included: 1) an emergency closure on pelagic trawling during the spawning season from 26 January to 30 April, 2) a 3 fish bag limit for recreational anglers, 3) monthly catch limits for commercial vessels and a closure around Ireland for commercial fishing and 4) an increase in the minimum size from 36 to 42 cm.

## **Why are recreational anglers covered by the latest Council decision given that the commercial sector catches the lion share of sea bass?**

According to scientific assessment recreational anglers catch 25% of sea bass<sup>1</sup> and therefore also have an impact on the stock. Scientists identified that we can reduce mortality with a daily bag limit and a greater minimum landing size<sup>2</sup>. On this basis the Council of Ministers, where all Member States are represented, adopted a 1 fish bag limit.

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<sup>1</sup> STECF 2014. Request for Services - Sea bass. Commitment No. SI2.680348. Paper for STECF July 2014 Sea bass fisheries in Europe and their management. Mike Armstrong (contract lead) and Mickael Drogou, Independent scientific experts, UK and France (background documents on: <https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/plen1402>).

<sup>2</sup> Request for Services - Sea bass. Commitment No.686192, Paper for STECF ; not yet published.

## **What happens in the long term?**

The Commission is examining whether to include sea bass as one of several stocks to be managed sustainably under a multi annual management plan (MAP) for the North Sea. This proposal for a Regulation by the European Parliament and Council will be put forward by the Commission in 2016 and will be based on the latest scientific advice. This MAP would give the framework to Member States to manage sea bass in a sustainable manner by prescribing the goals to be achieved such as Maximum Sustainable Yield. These goals will then have to be implemented by the Member States for example by agreeing on concrete technical measures for sea bass fisheries. This is the new process of regionalisation that was brought about in the reformed CFP.

In this regionalisation process the Member States will consult with all stakeholders in the Advisory Councils before deciding on such technical measures. This regionalisation process offers the possibility for Member States to take tailor-made decisions taking into account the various fishing segments active in the sea bass fishery. A decision on giving priority to particular métiers may also be taken by the Member States in the regionalisation process.

## **Is the Commission considering the potential economic impact of a further decline of seabass?**

Yes, absolutely. Halting the decline of sea bass and rebuilding this valuable stock is the number one aim of the Commission. Thousands of jobs in the UK, France, Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe depend on commercial and recreational sea bass fishing and there are many small scale fishermen involved for whom sea bass is often their main source of income<sup>3</sup>. Recreational fishing (everything from angling equipment to boat rentals) plays an important role as well. There are more than 1.3 million recreational anglers in France and another 800.000 in the UK generating a lot of added value; direct estimates of the contribution from recreational fishing only for sea bass are difficult to quantify as in general most recreational sea fishing is on a mixed species basis.

However estimates from discrete surveys<sup>4</sup> suggest that the downstream value added is considerable. The impact of this stock collapsing would be catastrophic for the livelihoods of so many fishermen and coastal communities. It is therefore vital to rebuild sea bass for the benefit of both commercial fishermen and recreational anglers.

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<sup>3</sup> Section 3.5 STECF 2014. Request for Services - Sea bass. Commitment No. SI2.680348. Paper for STECF July2014 Sea bass fisheries in Europe and their management. Mike Armstrong (contract lead) and Mickael Drogou, Independent scientific experts, UK and France (background documents on: <https://stecf.jrc.ec.europa.eu/plen1402>).

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong, M. A. Brown, J. Hargreaves, K. Hyder, S. Pilgrim-Morrison, M. Munday, S. Proctor, A. Roberts, K. Williamson "Sea Angling 2012 – a survey of recreational sea angling activity and economic value in England" Defra, 2013 <http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/seaangling/finalreport.htm>  
And  
Blue Marine Foundation: Defining the Economic and Environmental Values of sea bass- Link to publication [here](#)