

Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*)

DESCRIPTION



The European bass is widely distributed across Europe's seas – from the southern North Sea to the Mediterranean. Bass are a slow-growing and late maturing species able of living for 20 years or more. Their reproduction success is highly susceptible to environmental conditions.

Adult bass migrate to feed and spawn in aggregations offshore. Eggs use oceanic currents to drift inshore where they hatch. Once hatched the juvenile bass aggregate in nursery areas around the coast.

At aged approximately six years bass begin to move out of nursery areas and disperse where they feed on small fish and Crustacea. Research indicates that adult bass return to the same coastal locations each year after spawning.

Bass is a highly prized recreational angling species valued at approximately £200m to the UK economy. Until the 1970s bass were almost exclusively targeted by anglers. Since then demand for bass has seen commercial targeting of bass increase to today where commercial landings across the EU account for the vast majority of bass fishing mortality.

CONSERVATION ACTION

In 2013 the EU decided that EU-wide management measures for bass were required. Over-fishing, increasing fishing effort, targeting of spawning and juvenile aggregations and successive years of recruitment failure lead to the stock reaching its lowest ever recorded level.

Over the course of 2015 a package of emergency conservation measures were introduced including a ban on mid-water trawling, a bag limit for recreational catches, a new minimum retention size of 42cm and monthly vessel limits for commercial fisheries. These were estimated to reduce catches by 36 per cent.

In June 2015 the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) advised EU catches of bass in 2016 should be reduced further to just 541t.

In December 2015 the EU Council of Ministers agreed a package of conservation measures for 2016 which is estimated to result in landings of bass in 2016 of 1,660t – over three times the amount advised by ICES.

Further measures will need to be agreed for 2017 before long term management plans are agreed. The UK government has committed to reviewing domestic bass management measures including a review of a network of 'bass nursery areas' and the development of a bass management plan.

CONTACT DETAILS

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