

George Eustice MP
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Dear Mr Eustice

Bass Fishing Opportunities 2019

The UK, under your lead, has been at the forefront of EU measures to protect and restore bass stocks since 2015. At last, we are finally beginning to see the shoots of recovery and it is credit to the position the UK took that the profile of the bass fishery has changed so dramatically and that the bass stock is beginning to increase. However, it is still below safe biological limits and it is imperative that these early signs of recovery are built on to ensure long term recovery is achieved.

We welcome the Commission's recent proposals for a seven month one-fish-per-day bag limit for recreational catches. However, as per our position paper submitted to you some weeks ago, we are working with our colleagues around the EU to ensure a fair share of recreational bass fishing opportunities in 2019 based on a historic track record of catches.

Cefas is still working on the impact of various bag limit options presented to them. However, initial calculations would indicate that the bag limit can be increased, allowing recreational fishing to re-establish fishing opportunities equivalent to 10 per cent of the Spawning Stock Biomass without compromising the scientifically-advised catch limits (this would equate to 934 tonnes in 2019).

Ten per cent of the SSB represents the consistent recreational fishing catch level over the last 30 years before the EU management measures were introduced.

We are very grateful for the efforts you went to last December to ensure that the science around recreational catches was revisited. Your position was vindicated when the bag limit was re-established in October this year. However, the angling public suffered a terrible injustice this year through no fault of their own and we believe that our position to re-establish a take of 10 per cent of the SSB for recreational catches, based on historic track record, is fair, balanced and achievable.

Having recently visited the MMO in Newcastle, it is evident that the EU measures limiting fixed netters to 'unavoidable' bycatches over the last two years have been utterly unenforceable by the UK and UK fixed netters have been treating their allowance as a targeting allowance. It is therefore critical that the Commission's sensible proposals for a percentage of daily catch for fixed netters in 2019 be implemented. The percentage must be low enough to eliminate targeted fishing while allowing very limited landings of genuine unavoidable bycatches from mixed fisheries

Given that the stock is still below safe levels, it is crucial that calls from the industry during the course of the AgriFish negotiations to increase bycatch allowances for trawls and seines are resisted. Proposals put forward by the industry could increase bycatch allowances by as much as 380 per cent.

We urge you to take a strong position in Brussels which continues to see the stock recover, puts forward enforceable measures to control fishing mortality from fixed netting, and allows recreational fishers to re-establish their profile in the fishery based on a consistent, and wholly sustainable, track record of removals.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mark Lloyd". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Mark Lloyd
Chief Executive