

Sea Bass Q and A

Latest News

What is the Commission proposing in its latest proposal on sea bass?

On 20 May the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council regulation with monthly catch limits for sea bass covering commercial vessels for the remainder of 2015 as follows:

Gear type	Maximum catch of sea bass permitted per vessel per calendar month (in kg)
OTM or PTM, Mid water or pelagic trawls	1 500
OTB, all types of demersal trawls including Danish / Scottish seines	1 500
All GN, all drift net and fixed (trammel) net fisheries	1 000
All LL, all long lines or pole and line fisheries	1 000
purse seines	3 000

This proposal is addressed to the Council of Fisheries Ministers and will enable the ministers to decide about catch limits for particular fishing gears in order to protect sea bass.

The Commission also proposes 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?

The Commission has based itself on catch information given by France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands in order to design a balanced and fair proposal that allows commercial vessels to contribute to the recovery of sea bass according to their impact on the stock. According to catch data delivered by the three Member States, the monthly catch limits will have an average impact of decreasing sea bass catches for pelagic trawlers by approximately 60 %, for hooks and line fisheries by 7%, for demersal vessels by 28%. The "big" impact on sea bass comes from pelagic and demersal trawling and seines, so any meaningful recovery proposal has to contain significant reductions here. The proposal takes into

account that the artisanal hooks and line fisheries as well as the gill net fisheries depend on sea bass to a greater extent and do not have other alternatives to catch. This proposal is the third part of the package for 2015 to rebuild this stock so as to deliver an increased and stable income for all sectors involved in this important fishery.

When will this proposal take effect?

The proposal will now be discussed by the Council of Fisheries Ministers where all 28 Member States are represented and the Commission trusts that the Council will take a decision on the proposal before summer 2015.

Is this it for 2015 or is more to come on sea bass?

The Commission is currently working on another proposal to finalise the third part of the package for 2015 which concerns the minimum size at which sea bass can be landed. This proposal will be discussed with the 28 Member States in the coming weeks.

How is sea bass managed in the EU?

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 now agree that a common approach is needed.

How does this common approach look like?

The common approach for 2015 is a package of three measures so that all those who fish sea bass make a balanced contribution to saving this stock:

1st Commission emergency measures prohibiting pelagic trawling on spawning sea bass to alleviate the immediate threat to the stock from fishing during the reproduction season;¹

2nd Council regulation setting a bag limit of 3 fish per recreational angler, per day²

¹ [Commission Implementing Regulation \(EU\) 2015/111 of 26 January 2015 establishing measures to alleviate a serious threat to the conservation of the sea bass \(*Dicentrarchus labrax*\) stock in the Celtic Sea, Channel, Irish Sea and southern North Sea](#)

² [Council Regulation \(EU\) 2015/523 of 25th March 2015 amending Regulations \(EU\) No 43/2014 and \(EU\) 2015/104 as regards certain fishing opportunities](#)

3rd Commission proposes further measures for commercial fisheries.

Why are recreational anglers covered by the package of measures given that the commercial sector catches the lion share of sea bass?

According to scientific assessment recreational anglers catch 25% of sea bass³ 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 size⁴. On this basis the Council of Ministers, where all Member States are represented, adopted a three fish bag limit.

The commercial fishing industry catches 75% of sea bass and, while the pelagic industry has been prohibited to fish for sea bass from end January to 30 April 2015. The Commission is now proposing to cover other commercial activities to make sure that they too take a share in the burden and contribute to rebuilding this important stock.

What happens in the long term?

The Commission will include sea bass as one of several stocks to be managed sustainably under a multi annual management plan for North Western Waters. 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.

What will happen in January 2016 during the next spawning season of sea bass, will the Commission vow to protect it?

The third part of the package on sea bass should be adopted by the Council by summer 2015 and remain in place until 31 December 2015. The Commission will ensure that a new proposal for sustainable management measures will be put before the Council to cover 2016. These could be measures similar to what was adopted for 2015 and will in any case be based on the latest scientific advice from ICES to be made public in June 2015.

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

Halting the decline of sea bass and rebuilding this valuable stock is the number one guiding principle of the Commission. Thousands of jobs in the UK, France, Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe depend on commercial sea bass fishing and there are many small scale fishermen involved for whom sea bass is

³ 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>).

⁴ Request for Services - Sea bass. Commitment No.686192, Paper for STECF ; not yet published.

often their main source of income⁵. Recreational fishing (everything from angling equipment to boat rentals) plays an immensely 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 surveys⁶ 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 and the Commission will not shy away from taking any measure that is necessary to achieve this goal.

⁵ 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>).

⁶ 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](#)

Background

1. The sea bass fishery

- Sea bass is a high value fish in the North-East Atlantic and in the highest abundance from the southern North Sea, Irish Sea and west of Ireland down to the Iberian coast.
- Sea bass in this area has been declining rapidly since 2012 and will according to ICES approach its historically lowest level in 2016. The number of young fish adding to the stock (so-called recruitment) has been declining since the mid-2000s and has been very poor since 2008; this has been the longest period of low recruitment on record. Fishing pressure (so-called fishing mortality) has continuously risen since the early 1990ies and reached an all-time high in 2013. ICES advises a reduction in catches by 80% to stem the rapid decline in biomass.
- Sea bass is targeted by a number of fishing techniques. Pelagic (mid-water) trawlers, contribute more than 25% to the total fishing mortality. Pelagic trawling targets sea bass during the spawning season from December through April, when bass aggregate in spawning areas and are therefore available as a target. Lines and hooks, gill-nets and other gears, catch sea bass mainly in different areas and throughout the year.
- Ireland, France, the UK, the Netherlands and Belgium have a stake in the commercial fishery for sea bass.
- Ireland prohibited in early 1990ies the commercial landing and sale of sea bass and closed its sea bass fishery. France fishes 67% of the total commercial catches. All other countries have smaller-scale fisheries using different techniques. Some countries have a ban on pelagic pair trawling within their own 12 mile zones.⁷
- Sea bass is popular among recreational anglers. France has the largest recreational fishery for sea bass with 1,3 million anglers, followed by the UK with 800.000 anglers and the Netherlands. Recreational angling contributes approximately 25% to sea bass landings.

2. Economic value

- The commercial fishing fleet that catches sea bass comprises a wide diversity of vessel size, range and gears. A large fraction of the fleet is small vessels (below 12m) and they are mainly active in the 12 mile zone.
- The extent to which fishing vessels depend on sea bass varies greatly. Small vessels that fish sea bass with “artisanal” means (lines and hooks) can depend considerably more on bass than large vessels that use trawls and often operate in mixed fisheries. In France, more than 220 small vessels using lines, with more than 270 sailors, depend for more than 50% of their revenue on sea bass. 21 pelagic (mid-water) trawlers and around 100 sailors depend more than 50% on sea bass, although they exercise most of the fishing pressure (25% of the total fishing mortality). Of the demersal (bottom trawlers) 2 vessels with 6 sailors, depend more than 50% on sea bass.
- Recreational fishing represents an important economic activity. In France, more than 1.3 million people undertake more than 9 million fishing trips per year, and sea bass is the main species caught. The total yearly expenditure on angling equipment, baits and boats is estimated at around EUR 530 million. In the UK, it is estimated that in 2012, 800,000 sea anglers spent GBP 1.23 billion on the sport.

⁷ The South-west Territorial Waters (Prohibition of Pair Trawling) Order 2004 (United Kingdom)