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EAA Press Release

Commission Proposals for 2017 Sea Bass Fishing Opportunities

Members of the European Anglers Alliance (EAA) are pleased with the progressive approach to managing sea bass shown by the Commission in its proposals for 2017 fishing opportunities published last week. The proposals mean no fixed or drift netting of bass will be permitted in northern European waters in 2017. EAA believes this approach sets the framework for the long term management of European sea bass. The measures will reduce fishing mortality for sea bass while allowing limited fishing opportunities for the most sustainable fishing methods.

Artisanal (commercial) hook & line fishers will be limited to 10 tonnes per vessel per year (compared with 1.3 tonnes per month in ten months of 2016) while recreational landings will be limited to 10 bass per month (compared to 1 fish per day from July-December 2016).

A closed season will apply in February and March in order to protect spawning aggregations of bass – a measure needed because the spawning stock biomass has reached critically low levels. Catch and release angling will be allowed in these months.

The Commission has maintained a 1 per cent bycatch allowance for demersal trawls and seines but included a cap of up to 1 tonne per month in addition for 2017.

A 10 fish a month bag limit for recreational fishing is proposed. EAA believes 10 fish a month is the absolute minimum that is acceptable. Members of EAA were very unhappy about the cut in the daily bag limit in 2016 from three bass a day to one. A one fish bag limit is an unnecessarily harsh measure for in particular anglers fishing from private boats and charter boats. Therefore, EAA has urged for a monthly bag limit to be introduced. It is intended to a) provide members of the public fishing recreationally with more flexibility on when and how many fish can be retained without increasing overall fishing mortality; and b) help the charter fishing industry who have incurred significant losses as a result of the one fish a day bag limit in 2016. An estimated 20 per cent in revenue is projected to be lost by the UK charter fishing sector alone due to anglers cancelling fishing trips aboard charter vessels due to the ban on retaining bass from January-June and one-fish a day bag limit from July-December 2016. These measures have also severely impacted other businesses dependent in part, or in whole, on providing products and services to the recreational angling sector.



Charter boats



Closed tackle shop

However, EAA believes that a daily bag limit system for recreational catches should be maintained to work in parallel with a monthly bag limit in order to provide more flexibility for members of the public fishing for publicly-owned sea bass. EAA is currently discussing with experts how the monthly bag limit system could be applied. EAA urges the Commission and Member States representatives to consult the experts in this field before making a decision on the monthly bag limit. EAA recognises the need for monitoring and recording for the effective control of a monthly bag limit system. This can be achieved in various ways such as through the use of tags (as with Bluefin tuna), or (electronic) log-books. The Commission's proposal has no mention of the possible control options available. There is no need for a harmonised control scheme. Relevant member states (FR, UK, NL, BE, IE) can decide what system suits them best.

EAA is disappointed that the Commission's proposals did not include extending the measures to the southern stock which may now see increased fishing pressure due to displacement of those fishing with trawls and nets from the northern to the southern Regions where the Commission's proposed measures would not apply. In order to prevent a repeat of the northern bass stock decline EAA believes the precautionary approach should be applied in the absence of more evidence about the status of southern

bass stocks. This should include raising the minimum conservation reference size to 42cm; a measure which was applied to northern bass [in 2015](#).

EAA is pleased that the Commission has seen fit to not increase the bycatch allowance for demersal trawl and seine fisheries which would have done nothing to reduce fishing mortality. EAA believes that further effort must be directed at increasing selectivity and avoidance measures for these fisheries. Hook and line fishing is highly selective with high rates of survival of fish returned to sea. Management can therefore be fine-tuned with measures to further increase the spawning stock such as the introduction of a higher minimum conservation reference size and a maximum size which would protect the fecund 'super-spawners'.

EAA supports the closure of all fishing to protect spawning aggregations of bass on the condition that the measure applies equally to all stakeholders. However, last year saw the Commission's proposal for a six-month moratorium for all forms of fishing watered down with exemptions granted for hook & line and fixed nets. It will be unacceptable for the European Council to increase fishing mortality in 2017 by granting similar exemptions.

David Mitchell, Chairman of the EAA Sea Sub-Group, said: "The Commission's proposals for bass should be welcomed by the hundreds of thousands of anglers who represent those members of society who fish recreationally for publicly-owned sea bass and will get a fairer deal with the monthly bag limit EAA has been arguing in favour of for some time now. There's no room for nets in the fishery in 2017 given the contribution they have made driving the stock to its lowest recorded level.

The Council of Ministers must now back the Commission's proposals and avoid a repeat of last year's disastrous negotiations which failed to reduce fishing mortality sufficiently as well as being roundly unpopular with both commercial and recreational fishers".

Jan Kappel, EAA Secretary General, said: "A slow growing, late maturing, fish like bass is unfit for that kind of free large scale commercial fishing, which took off in the 1970s and was allowed to continue until the stock was severely depleted. Ireland banned commercial fishing for bass in 1990 due to depletion of the stock. This was a stark warning to other countries but was ignored. We are confident that the management measures for last year, this year and 2017, and the long term management plan to come, will turn the tide - but don't throw the baby out with the bath water, please! Our sector was hit very hard this year, and needs 'more air' next year."

ENDS

● **EAA recently launched a new film in the European Parliament setting out a vision for the long term management of sea bass. Watch it [HERE](#)**



Notes to editors:

EAA website: www.eaa-europe.org

EAA bass dossier: www.eaa-europe.org/topics/sea-bass

ICES bass advice: www.ices.dk/sites/pub/Publication%20Reports/Advice/2016/2016/bss-47.pdf

The Commission's proposal: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A698%3AFIN>

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The European Anglers Alliance, EAA is a pan-European NGO for recreational angling, which promotes and defends European recreational anglers' interests at the European level and beyond.

There are about 3 million affiliated members to EAA's 18 member organisations and associates from 17 European nations.

EAA is a member of or observer to a number of committees and councils involved with EU's fisheries and environment policy shaping and implementation.

EAA is co-operating with angling organisations and other relevant organisations in Europe and globally.