

Justification for taking account of Recreational Angling objectives in managing some species.

Extract from latest UK Government Fisheries White Paper:

"Recreational angling is a popular sport in England bringing both economic and social benefits to the UK. Defra will look at how to further integrate recreational angling into fishery management governance and decisions. This could include managing some stocks specifically for the recreational angling sector only."

Such suggestions are not new. Very similar sentiments appeared in a report to Government back in 2004 called 'Net Benefits' that was arguably the most comprehensive analysis of the entire marine fisheries sector ever carried out. It was researched and published by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit led by Professor John Beddington with a team largely comprised of associates of the London School of Economics and the 200+ page report included:

"The overarching aim of fisheries management should be to maximise the return to the UK of the sustainable use of fisheries resources and protection of the marine environment."

"Management to maximise opportunities for recreational anglers means reducing commercial fishing pressure to allow species such as bass, favoured by sea anglers, to grow to much larger sizes. Management for multiple uses is possible."

Extract from a banking/investment magazine article titled "Big bass, Big bucks" in USA, May 1999.

"According to the Division of Marine Fisheries, Massachusetts has the largest and most successful recreational striped bass fishery in the country. This enviable reputation is due in part to pressure by sportfishermen for a conservation approach to fisheries management. And it has paid off. "We are a waterfront State and the biggest State for striped bass" says Tony Tolentino, Chairman of the Marine Fisheries Commission which approves State fishing regulations. As a commissioner, Mr Tolentino has been involved in many difficult decisions affecting both recreational and commercial fishing sectors. Many of the arguments surrounding striped bass focus on its economic value to the recreational fishing industry."

In terms of the Cape economy, Mr Tolentino says that the impact of recreational fishing is "astronomical". He says blue fish and striped bass have by far the greatest overall economic value from recreational fishing, not the commercial sector. "There's no comparison" he says emphatically. Mr Tolentino says money spent by sport fishermen on the Cape would be sorely missed if we didn't take care of this recreational fishery and the people who come here to do it."

That view is shared by conservationists who have fought to limit the commercial harvest of striped bass. Dave Rimmer, executive director of the Coastal Conservation Association of Massachusetts (CCA-MA) says striped bass are far more valuable alive than dead. He added, "Anglers travel to the Cape from all over the world but the common goal they all share is to hook into a striped bass, the king of the surf in these parts."

Such sentiments, if uttered anywhere within the EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) jurisdiction appear to antagonise commercial fishing leaders just as a red flag is said to infuriate a bull.

But why does challenging conventional thinking in the sphere of UK/EU marine fisheries attract such condemnation from some quarters?

Marine fishery resources are Public resources – property of the Commons – societal goods. So why shouldn't the exploitation of marine fisheries be based on 'best value' criteria for the owners – society?

Haven't many farmers recognised that their capital, in the form of agricultural land, can on occasions provide a far superior return as golf courses, camping sites, 4X4 tracks or shooting estates than from food production?

No one is suggesting commercial fishing should end or be replaced with recreational angling, just that instead of managing the entire range of marine fishery resources exclusively for commercial exploitation, consider the evidence that some species may generate a higher return to UK plc if managed for recreational exploitation or indeed managed for both sectors. Management objectives for recreational exploitation can be quite different from those of commercial exploitation but patently it is possible to have sustainable and profitable recreational fisheries alongside valuable commercial fisheries. Despite the sentiments articulated in the above extract from a financial investment magazine in Massachusetts, the State enjoys a highly regulated and valuable commercial fishery for striped bass alongside its thriving recreational fishery.

Here are some English facts and figures.

Commercial fishing in England lands a total of £160 million [<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-sea-fisheries-annual-statistics-report-2016>] worth of fish comprising shellfish, demersal & pelagic species from cod to cockles. This first sale value is what fishermen earn to spend on boats (buying and maintenance), fuel, fishing gear, specialist clothing, chandlery, moorings, wages, insurance and most of the catch is exported.

Recreational sea anglers in England pump £831 million [<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140305101647/http://www.marinemanagement.org.uk/seaangling/finalreport.htm>] directly (excludes imports & taxes) into the economy that is spent on boats (buying and maintenance), fishing gear, chandlery, fuel, clothing/footwear, moorings, travel and accommodation, bait, charter fishing and guiding.

The particularly remarkable point to take into account is that recreational sea angling is reliant on only a relatively small proportion of species that only account for £32 million (20%) of the value of commercial landings. In other words, 80% of the value of commercial landings is from species of no direct interest to sea anglers so the requirement for a change in policy and strategy from that of management exclusively for commercial use to that of joint use is only relevant for those species that are targeted by both commercial and recreational fishers and that is just one fifth of commercial landings by value.

The time is long overdue for fisheries managers to be guided by the evidence rather than being fearful of change and intimidated by commercial fishing representation.

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