

Recreational Sea Angling in Wales: Consultation Draft March 2006

1. Consultation process

1.1 Introduction

1. This document has been drafted by Roger Cook for consultation with recreational sea anglers (RSA). It is distributed by Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) Fisheries Policy Branch to the Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers (WFSA), the South West Wales Association of Sea Angling Clubs (SWWASAC); and is available to other angling interests *via* FisheriesMailbox@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK or by application to Miss Hannah Pinches 02920 825245.

1.2 Comments

Comments on the consultation should be sent by 25 April 2006 to Miss Hannah Pinches, Welsh Assembly Government, ECM Fisheries Branch, CP2, Cathays Park, Cardiff, CF10 3NQ or by email to FisheriesMailbox@Wales.GSI.Gov.UK. Responses will be co-ordinated and forwarded to Roger Cook, who will use all in preparing the final version. This will then be submitted for consideration as part of the developing Welsh Fisheries Strategy (WFS).

1.3 Origin

This draft document is based upon discussions with recreational sea anglers. It takes account of outcomes of the WAG 'Net Benefits' and 'Bradley Report' Stakeholder Consultation Groups (which also included commercial fishing and aquaculture stakeholders). There have also been discussions as part of the WFS steering group, and at a meeting arranged by WAG Fisheries Policy Branch in Newtown, Powys on 14 February 2006 of representatives of RSA, Inland Anglers, the Environment Agency Wales (EAW) and Fisheries, Ecology & Recreation Advisory Committee, Wales (FERAC), WFSA and SSWASAC (who were unable to attend).

1.4 Responses

The document seeks to identify main issues of concern to recreational sea anglers and to suggest actions that should be considered to address those issues. We would be pleased to have opinions on the issues and would particularly welcome specific information and examples relevant to these issues that may strengthen our arguments. Some issues are at present little more than "subject headings" and need either to be elaborated or deleted. Suggestions for other issues to be included and views on priorities for action will also be welcome. It would also be helpful if you would let us know if you are generally happy with the report and have no detailed comment.

2. Report structure

2.1 Topics

The report presents the main issues of concern to RSAs in Wales under four headings: Conservation, matters relating to conservation and improvement of stocks of particular interest to anglers; Management, issues relating to the formal arrangements for the management of fisheries; Organisation, topics relating to the way sea anglers organise themselves and promote their interests; and Development, opportunities in Wales for improving sea angling.

2.2 References

In addition to the discussions noted above (paragraph), the report has taken note of the following reports and documents.

- Net Benefits: Welsh Industry response to recommendations (2005, WAG)
- Securing the Benefits: joint UK response (2005, DARDNI, SE, WAG, DEFRA)
- A Strategy for the Recreational Fisheries of Wales (2003, WAG)
- Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review (2000, MAFF, NAW) and Responses from National Assembly for Wales.
- Welsh Industry response (2006) to Review of Marine Fisheries and Environmental Enforcement (2004, DEFRA)
- Environment Agency Wales Sustainable Fisheries Programme (2005)

2.3 Significance of sea angling to Wales

These reports are either available on the WAG website (<http://www.countryside.wales.gov.uk>) or details of them may be found there. This report does not repeat the key conclusions of these documents but does reinforce, in particular, the conclusions about the significant socio-economic value of angling as well as noting the political importance of the votes of angling communities and those employed in the associated and supporting tourist and retail infrastructure. This report also endorses the general approach in the Recreational Strategy because it is clear from that Action Plan and from WAG responses to that and to the Salmon and Freshwater Review, that angling opinions can bring about changes that make a difference to fisheries. It is expected that the approach in the Recreational Strategy will evolve and develop as part of the overarching Welsh Fisheries Strategy.

2. There are estimated to be between 100,000 and 250,00 Wales-based anglers fishing from the 750-mile long Welsh coast. In addition, recent Wales Tourist Board survey data emphasise the economic importance of sea angling visitors to Wales. A market research exercise commissioned by WTB surveyed a sample of the 35,000 potential visitors: half the enquiries resulted in fishing holidays, 48% involving sea angling with 69% and 31% fishing from shore and boats, respectively. Of the boat anglers, 51% fished from their own boats and 49% from charter boats. Most fishing holidays were in Gwynedd (23%), followed by Anglesey (16%)

with 8% in Ceredigion and 5% each in Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire (not totalling 100% because of fishing holidays in counties with no coast). 44% of day trips to Wales involve fishing and of these trips, 77% were for 3 or more days.

3. Sea fish targeted) were bass by (33% of anglers), mackerel (15%), dogfish (11%), mullet (8%), pollack (7%) and tope (5%).

4. Fishing visitors spent on average £86 on gear, tackle and bait per trip and £38 on permits and passes, an average fishing spend of £23 per person per day. To this can be added £47 per person per day for those staying in commercial accommodation and £24 for others.

5. Scaled up, this survey indicates that those requesting “Fishing Wales” made 58,700 fishing trips to Wales in the year, totalling nearly 1.1 million nights (41,000 used commercial accommodation for 800,000 nights). The value of these trips is calculated as £44 million and including specific fishing expenditure was £69m.

6. Although we need to know what proportion of expenditure was by sea anglers alone, it is clear from these data from one specific set of angling visitors as well as from UK national figures that sea angling makes a very substantial contribution to Wales economy. Moreover, it is dramatically obvious that there is considerable scope for further development of the sport – think of the impact of better availability of charter boats, for example, and the opportunity to promote shore angling in other coastal counties to the levels in Anglesey and Gwynedd. There are recommendations later in the report

7. RSA organisations to use this data for promotion via AMs, LAs to establish sound political basis for our interests. Need to identify those AMs who will be “champions” for our sport. Perhaps via the new Federation of Welsh Anglers so as to include other anglers and organisations. But need not delay and e.g. WFSA and SSWASAC could develop this themselves.

3. Conservation issues

3.1 Fish stocks improvement and conservation

1. Commercial fishing and over-exploitation of sea fish stocks is our major concern as it poses a direct threat to the sustainability of quality recreational sea angling in Wales. Without serious, immediate and effective measures, sea anglers consider that the decline in shore catches, in particular, will continue.

2. The arguments over bass and the recent consultation process and discussions also exemplify conflicts, approaches, and hopefully solutions that may be relevant to other RSA target

species. Although the outcome of the bass minimum landing size consultation is not yet known, it is clear that bass will not be designated as a species solely for RSA sector. Whatever the outcome of the UK consultation, RSA expect that in Wales there will be further protective measures for bass. There should be immediate progress towards restricting the commercial exploitation of bass, including those caught on rod and line. Recreational sea anglers do not sell fish and will welcome similar restrictions on all other sectors. A tagging scheme for bass would be welcomed and it is recommended that this be considered.

3. It is noted that the Inland Anglers recognised potential benefits to sea trout stocks from the proposals in the BASS report “Revised Management of the UK Bass Fishery” and it is recommended that WAG should keep this in mind during their consideration of what to do following the bass MLS consultation.

4. Other species that are increasingly taken by the commercial sector need protection if sea angling is to be sustainable. These target species include:

- tope, for which we support a no-take regime and fear the impact of commercial fisheries targeting the increasing stock;
- wrasse and inshore flatfish which are increasingly taken commercially and are being sold for pot bait;
- rays and skate, add details after consultation, including species and threats;
- sharks, add details after consultation, including species and threats;

3.2 Commercial catching

1. It is evident that in recent years, commercial netting has been taking place ever closer to the shore. In some areas, angling is actually impossible because of the density and length of nets inshore. Close inshore potting also leads to disputes. Consultees are invited to add their observations on specific instances with suggestions for action.

2. Other commercial practices include the ability of the industry to switch to “new species” and the increasing precision with which they can locate shoals of traditional species. Bass, is of course, a good example of the former where a traditional angling species has become of value to the commercial sector. These changes can have dramatic impacts on stocks before their impacts can be formally assessed.

3. These commercial practices have obvious implications, not just for sea and game fish stocks but also for the marine habitat including sea birds and marine mammals. WAG should adopt the logical courses of action and limit netting, including consideration of imposing limits (6 or 12 miles, or less?) on trawling, and on licensed netting and improved control of unlicensed inshore netting (see also Management section). It is necessary to introduce a precautionary principle requiring stock and environmental assessments before changes in practices, target areas or species are permitted.

3.3 Aquaculture

Full environmental impact assessments are required at the planning application stage and in monitoring operation of aquaculture enterprises. These assessments should include specific focus on angling fish stocks.

3.4 Aquatic environment

In inland waters contamination of fisheries water by sheep dips has a serious impact. What impacts are there of this but also of other industrial practices on sea water, that we think are affecting angling in Wales? We might include aggregate dredging; are there dumping problems as with sand from Bristol Channel and associated shifting dynamics affecting sand eels and therefore up the food web. Heavy metal pollution and impacts on nursery areas, migration routes of bass and mullet.

Any other issues apart from the potential for problems from aquaculture?

3.5 Angling methods and practices

1. As anglers become more and more aware of the needs for conservation-based angling, it is necessary for angling organisations, including media and tackle suppliers, to recognise the value of better methods of catching, recording and releasing fish. This requires anglers to evaluate hook and line design, sizes and materials in co-operation with others (?CEFAS scientists) to provide a sound basis for minimising damage to undersize and mature fish. Angling organisations should promote competitions based on catch and release: reliable information is needed on survival rates of catch and release, particularly in relation to size recording.

2. Angling litter, on shore and in the water, is environmentally harmful. Litter louts should be prosecuted under existing legislation but all involved in angling should promote cleaner practices, particularly in relation to line breaking strains in specific locations to avoid tackle loss in the water.

3.6 Bait supply and management

As for aquaculture, environmental impact assessments are needed for bait supply via culture or commercial exploitation of natural stocks.

3.7 Implications of Marine Protected Areas

Given our view that properly conducted sea angling is environmentally benign we would seek

to discourage any attempt to prohibit angler access to most / all marine protected areas. Certainly, we recommend that RSA representatives are included in discussions relating to designation and managements. Equally, as is clear from other recommendations in this report, we recognise the need for conservation and encourage a conservation approach by all anglers.

4. Management issues

This section includes issues and proposals relevant to the management of fish stocks: this should take into account the conservation approach with inherent preference for the “precautionary principal” as outlined in the paragraphs in the Conservation section.

4.1 RSA representation

1. It is essential to increase RSA stakeholder involvement at policy level and we welcome the extensive stakeholder discussions organised and invited by WAG. Angler associations should recognise the need to provide input to these and future discussion and seek to organise themselves so as to be ready to respond within appropriate timescales.

2. Topics requiring RSA stakeholder involvement and urgent action include specific new management and enforcement structures in Wales, including sea angling licensing, bag limits, tagging, first sellers legislation.

3. There should be more RSA involvement in Sea Fisheries Management: in the Welsh stakeholder responses to the Defra Review of Marine Fisheries and Environmental Enforcement (Bradley Report) two options for representation on a new body for Wales were suggested: RSA support the proposal for equal numbers of voting members representing commercial and angling sectors (it was suggested that there be 4 from each, with 2 members representing environment, aquaculture and shoreside sectors). This principal of parity for angling representation should be introduced to current sea fisheries management structures and to any future replacement.

4.2 Discards from commercial sector

1. The killing and discarding of undersize or undesirable species during commercial is unacceptable. An urgent priority should be to ensure that by catch is prevented, by prohibition of fishing unless technical measures of proven efficacy are available.

2. We are not convinced that mesh size selection is properly understood and it is recommended that within an integrated management structure resources are used to test the predictions of scientific hypotheses by detailed monitoring and data collection on evidence. Such a project should ideally include from the outset fisheries scientists and commercial netsmen to ensure that data collected is relevant to the real catching situations.

4.3 Management structures

1. The structures for managing fisheries appear to be ineffective in dealing in timely fashion with some serious issues affecting sea angling stocks. Notable examples include the problems with controlling Dee estuary netting for shrimps or fish. Coastal zone management needs more effective control in particular to ensure real protection of nursery areas and migration routes for RSA target species.

2. It is essential that in Wales changes are urgently introduced that resolve the problem of lack of clarity, responsibility and teeth among the organisations with responsibility for fisheries management. The WAG should introduce proposals that ensure effective estuary, coastal and inshore management of all fisheries activities and of activities affecting fisheries. RSAs have no preference for an organisation but cannot accept the continuing lack of clarity and communication between Environment Agency, Defra and Sea Fisheries Committees and EU authorities and legislation.

3. More supervision of catches from both commercial and recreational sectors is required, on and off shore, with attention being given to the monitoring of fishing, catches and selling of fish, the sale of fish being restricted to licensed fishermen. WAG should seek to ensure that appropriate resources are directed towards this.

4.4 Definition of “recreational sea angling”

This may require legal attention for proper management of some species – the bass is a prime example where commercial sectors argue that “black” fish from rod and line anglers undermine their marketing. Simply, recreational sea anglers do not and should not sell fish and all other fish sales should be licensed or prohibited.

4.5 Bag limits

It follows that sea anglers have no objection to the introduction of such conservation measures as bag limits and increased minimum landing sizes.

4.6 Sea angling licenses

There is fierce opposition among many independent anglers to the introduction of a rod licence scheme for sea angling. There may be some support but only if clear benefits to angling were immediately forthcoming on the introduction of the license. Such benefits would include effective measures to conserve and enhance stocks, improved sea angler representation in the management of fisheries and, possibly, increased support for the education of anglers and development of the sport.

5. Organisation of recreational sea anglers

5.1 Current organisational structures

1. The current organisation of sea angling in Wales reflects the communities of anglers and their diverse interests. There is a variety of good communication networks among the organisations and their members and this diversity represents a strength for angling in Wales.

2. Briefly, this report lists (and summarises where this has been easy) organisations in Wales. It would be helpful to have comments, additional brief details and contact addresses (preferably including web sites) of these organisations from the consultation and the final report may then use that information in an Annex. There are two Wales-based sea angling organisations:

3. Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers

WFSA has mainly club-based affiliations but also has individual members. Clubs and members are drawn from the whole of Wales and beyond. WFSA organises and manages Welsh angling teams for international competitions and has an active role in developing improved training certification. WFSA probably contacts more anglers in Wales than any other body and is therefore highly representative of sea angling interests.

4. South West Wales Association of Sea Angling Clubs

This Swansea-based association has club affiliates and organises SWWASAC angling competitions in its region.

5. In addition, there are some UK organisations whose activities are of relevance to sea angling interests and representation in Wales, including North West Association of Sea Anglers, with membership in North Wales (www.nwasac.com); Bass Anglers' Sportsfishing Society (www.ukbass.com); the National Federation of Sea Anglers (www.nfsa.org) and the Sea Anglers Conservation Network (www.anglers-net.co.uk).

6. A priority for angling associations is to participate in the development of angling education, seeking to include of holiday anglers, charter skippers, and tackle business interests.

5.2 Integration of angling

1. There is advantage to all anglers of common voices on many areas. The Environment Agency Wales (EAW), through its Sustainable Fisheries programme and other activities, seeks to act as a facilitator and provider for club based activities and is supporting angling integration. WAG too has been active in promoting conversations between angling interests and this report includes issues of common interest that have arisen from discussion of the Inland Anglers priority issues.

5.2 Federation of Welsh Anglers

1. The Federation of Welsh Anglers (FWA) was established in late 2005 in recognition of the need for angling unity within the Principality, to provide the necessary infra-structure, to be the source of contact and a powerful voice for the representation of angling in Wales. The Federation's motto is 'Mewn Undeb y Mae Nerth', translated into English as 'Strength in Unity' which is self-explanatory.

The FWA is supported financially by EAW and the Sports Council of Wales, with funds presently managed by WFSA.

2. One role of FWA is to create working 'partnerships' with government, government agencies and other organisations, 'partnerships' which are already proving beneficial to all concerned. FWA and its Angling Development Officer will be a key part of the development of several aspects of angling, including RSA priority issues.

6. Development

6.1 Interactions with fisheries science

1. The conservation of our fish stocks will be more likely to be successful if based upon sound knowledge of biology and ecology. Many of our species have not been priorities for fisheries science because this has tended to focus on commercial species. (The final version of this report will include reference to those species of interest to RSAs in Wales on which there is data available with scientists in CEFAS. CEFAS currently monitor stocks of some 18 fish species (40 sub-stocks) and 6 shellfish (15 sub-stocks).

2. Sea angling clubs probably have much useful information from match catch records over the years: such information could be very helpful in making realistic assessments of changes in stocks. It is recommended that WAG investigate how money could be provided for a science led project that could collect and analyse club match data in the context of assessing fish stock changes and predicting consequences of appropriate conservation measures for angling targets.

3. It is also clear that there is little information on the biology and ecology of sea trout (sewin) in Wales coastal waters. This is an interesting species in relation to angling integration and to the possible introduction of permits for sea angling and it is recommended that consideration be given to scientific research on populations of this species and on the potential and problems in its development as a sea angling target.

6.2 Development of improved / new fishing venues

1. There are significant opportunities to develop angling venues particular to provide access

for less able and junior anglers and for education and coaching. These include approaches to shore management, provision of access arrangements, avoiding losing access through commercial or private developments and flood management schemes. We should also seek ways to ensure that angling interests are taken into account in such schemes.

2. In addition, development through improved integration and promotion of charter boats and boat angling, slipway and launch accesses and fees (for example, through promotion to Local Authorities of the value of angling to their area).

3. More ambitiously, the provision of artificial reefs, and the potential opportunities for angling to be derived from wind turbine and tidal energy developments should be pursued.

4. One specific suggestion that has been made and which appears to provide great development potential, is to support and promote the development of sea angling in the Dee Estuary: this has the potential to provide good fishing with relatively safe and accessible conditions, near centres of population. As such it could be an exemplary venue for some of the promotion, marketing and educational goals identified elsewhere in this report. There may be other similar venues that could be identified by consultees.

6.3 Marketing and promotion of angling

1. A major role of the FWA is to promote and develop angling in Wales, calling for the close co-operation of our three National Governing Bodies for sea, game and coarse fishing, a major initiative re. coaching, and the goodwill and co-operation of the angling industry in general, e.g. tackle dealers, fishery owners, charter boat skippers/owners, etc. Sea anglers will support such initiatives and welcome the opportunity to have input into properly accredited coaching schemes. It is important to ensure that highly qualified anglers in Wales who already help coach are not disadvantaged by new schemes which should seek to provide opportunities for these experts to continue their valued contributions.

2. The FWA plans the introduction of a membership scheme for early 2007 incorporating all the angling industry (including tackle dealers, fishery owners, charter boat skippers/owners) and appealing to all who fish in the Principality, resulting not just in unity of purpose encompassing all concerned with angling in Wales, but with angling gaining greater status, more in keeping with its position as the greatest participation sport in the country and, in due course, importantly, the financial strength to promote development and tackle conservation issues and other threats to the sport, be they through government legislation, animal rights groups, etc.

3. Fundamental to the achievement of this aim is the Fishing Wales Programme, not only does the FWA have the active support of the Environment Agency and the Sports Council for

Wales but also, again if all goes well, will integrate with the Welsh Tourist Board's FISHING.VISITWALES website, having an active link off it. Between the two, there should be comprehensive coverage of everything to do with fishing in Wales and a massive promotion of the sport. RSAs recommend that such overarching web sites also include links to WFSA, SSWASAC and other organisations as via these anglers may contact clubs and local experts.

4. It is also recommended that sea angling organisations 'prepare the ground' for some of these expenditure dependent proposals by contacting MPs, AMs and Local Authority councillors to encourage them to act in the interests of the national and local economies through supporting the development of sea angling.

6.4 Charter boats

Not all charter boat skippers are engaged with commercial fishery organisations because they are not eligible for EU grants for safety equipment provided to commercial members of these bodies.

BALSAC may have charter affiliations.

Please add any local information on charter boats and we will include an amplified paragraph – recommending some closer relationship of charter boat organisation with angling interests.

7. Conclusions

To be completed after consultation and to identify priority recommendations.

8 Annexes

To list names / organisations responding to the consultation.

DISTRIBUTION:

Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers
 FSA Officers and 52 affiliated Clubs at addresses supplied
 South West Wales Association of Sea Angling Clubs
 John Edwards (SWWASAC@aol.com) for distribution to SWWASAC members
 Federation of Welsh Anglers
 Chris Bond (crbond@hotmail.co.uk)

Welsh Tope, Skate and Conger Club
 Pembrokeshire Anglers Association
 North West Association of Sea Anglers, Secretary Heather Lindfield
 (heatherlindfield99@hotmail.com)

Bass Anglers' Sportsfishing Society, Secretary Simon Everett, (simon@optical-art.co.uk)
National Federation of Sea Anglers, Development Officer David Rowe (dr@nfsa.org.uk)
Sea Anglers Conservation Network, Leon Roskilly (leonrosk@aol.com).

Andy Schofield, EAW

Graeme Harris, FERAC (vice Chair Inland Stakeholder Group)

Stephen Marsh-Smith, Wye Foundation (Chair Inland Stakeholder Group)