

CONSERVATION PROPOSALS AIMED AT THE PRESERVATION OF WET FISH STOCKS IN JERSEY WATERS.

THE AIMS:

- (1) To identify the resource.
- (2) To quantify its value to the island and its inhabitants.
- (3) To discuss ways of improving the management of the resource.
- (4) To discuss ways in which Jersey may benefit from research carried out in other jurisdictions.
- (5) To propose changes to the laws governing the capture and sale of wet fish.

THE RESOURCE.

Jersey's waters provide permanent and temporary homes for a wide variety of species that are fished for commercially and on a leisure basis. Of particular interest to both parties are the stocks of Bass, Black Bream, Sole, and Rays of several types. There are also good stocks of Conger, Tope, Turbot and Brill, that are also subject to pressure from both sectors to a lesser degree.

THE VALUE OF THE RESOURCE.

The Fisheries Section Annual Report 2002 states that 311,145 kgs of wet fish were landed commercially, with a value of £713,436. This represents a 16% decline in landings from the previous year (2001). These figures are compiled from the catch returns completed at the end of each year by skippers of commercially registered vessels. The figures from the leisure sector, which includes rod and line angling, netting, and long lining, are virtually impossible to accurately quantify given the absence of effective control and analysis of the effect they have on fish stocks.

The value of the resource also includes the return from support industries such as boat sales, marine engineering and electronics, chandlery, fishing tackle, fuel, and tourism.

The resource not only provides employment for many people directly, and indirectly, involved within the commercial and retail sectors, but also an incalculable value as a recreational activity to inhabitants and visitors alike.

IMPROVING THE MANAGEMENT OF THE RESOURCE.

Whilst the Fisheries Section have a reasonably effective system in place to police the commercial and leisure activities, they are often frustrated by the complexities of the laws surrounding the successful arrest and conviction of transgressors. The control of catches and landings from commercially registered skippers is relatively straightforward, but the activities of the part time 'J' registered skippers, and those fishing from non-registered craft, and indeed from shore marks, is virtually impossible to achieve under the present laws.

This situation means that accurate estimates of the total landings of fish each year by all parties, and the true value of sales, whether legal or illegal, are impossible to arrive at. Without an accurate picture of what is being landed each year, it is therefore, impossible to monitor numbers of individual species, and to determine whether they are growing in number, or are in decline. Effective legislation to control stocks also suffers from the 'knock-on' effect of the status quo, and thereby, the conservation and enhancement of stocks.

Almost without exception, the commercial effort is effectively governed by the very people who's living depends upon the resource and its future. Undoubtedly, more research and development into

the effects of the commercial effort upon stocks in Jersey waters would be a benefit to the industry as a whole. The return from the fishing effort is the prime consideration here, and limitations to this effort, combined with an economic strategy designed to maximise the fiscal return, whilst minimising the depletion of the resource, is naturally essential for the well being of the industry and the stocks of fish.

The finite value of wet fish as a resource is a simple equation involving (a) the cost of landing the fish, and (b) its fiscal worth to the marketplace. Commercial fishermen are only too aware of the importance of the outcome of this equation – profit, or loss. The part time, and leisure fishermen however, whose major source of income is normally derived from other full time occupations, share the benefits of the resource and its value, but contribute nothing to the island as a whole. Their activities, and illegal sales of the fruits of their efforts, seriously undermine the market price to which the livelihood of the commercial fisherman is determined. There can be no moral, legal, or logical reason to allow this situation to continue. Unlicensed activity, and the illegal sales of any species has a negative effect on market prices, and the inevitable outcome of more fish being landed to compensate for lower prices per pound/kilo.

This is surely the exact situation that any conservationist policy should seek to avoid.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LAWS GOVERNING CAPTURE AND SALES OF WETFISH.

Before listing the proposals for change in legislation, it is important to recognise that fishermen fall into three distinct groups:

- (a) The commercially licensed fisherman, solely employed within the industry.
- (b) The semi-professional, or part-time fisherman, who is rarely dependant upon fishing as his sole source of income.
- (c) The leisure fisherman.

At present, all three have a stake in the resource, and whilst strong claims can be forwarded by both (a) and (c), the unlicensed efforts of (b) whilst in many cases traditional, cannot be considered beneficial to the resource as a whole, and have a negative effect upon the activities of the other stakeholders. This is particularly true in the case of fishing for Bass.

BASS.

Of all the species that swim, or are fished for in our waters, the Bass is certainly the most emotive. A high percentage of the part-time, and leisure fishing effort is directed at this slow growing species. For the enthusiast, it is a fine sport-fish, and has great qualities as a quarry. For those part-timers who are more commercially minded, it has a relatively high market value, and is easily disposed of illegally through ‘back-door’ transactions.

Commercially, 21,362 kg of Bass was landed locally during 2002, with a market value of £85,448. In discussions with commercial Bass fishermen, it appears that the advent of farmed Bass has had a detrimental effect on the price per kilo of the fish that they catch and sell. Leaving aside the ‘pros and cons’ of the fish farming effort, it is clear that the revenue obtained from commercially caught Bass is relatively minor compared to the total wet fish landings of £713,436. The fish however, should be considered as, and marketed as, ‘prime product’, and have a tremendously important role in the part of marketing Jersey as the home of first rate fish and seafood.

In order to maintain the sustainability of the industry, it is proposed that each licensed commercial fisherman shall apply for an allotment of ‘tags’ at the start of each year, which will be affixed to each and every fish that he lands and sells to the marketplace. This will immediately differentiate between

legally caught and sold fish, and those caught and offered for sale by non-licensed fishermen. End users such as fishmongers, restaurateurs, and hoteliers, have often found it impossible to accurately identify whether fish supplied to them have been caught and offered for sale legally – in short, whether they have come from a ‘J’ registered craft or not. Fisheries inspectors have suffered similarly from the uncertainties of origin of fish, which they find in these outlets. Whilst the farmed fish could possibly complicate the issue, the uniformity of size and appearance, as well as the invoicing available for these fish, should make identification relatively easy. Essentially, if a Bass is not ‘tagged’ and has not been purchased from a fish farmer, then it should not be offered, or purchased within the law. It is vital that any new legislation identifies that these rules apply to fish LANDED in Jersey, whether they have been caught in Jersey territorial waters or not.

LEISURE ANGLING FOR BASS.

This activity is without doubt the No 1 choice of the boat and shore angler, and research into tackle sales throughout Jersey’s fishing tackle stores bear out this fact.

The massive growth world-wide of this branch of angling has put great strain upon stocks of fish such as Bass, and to cope with this increased effort, it is imperative that measures are taken to protect and conserve the resource. Just as it is indefensible for fish to be killed and sold illegally, there can be no justification for leisure anglers to absolve themselves from responsibility for the future of stocks.

It is proposed that individual ‘bag limits’ be introduced as law for non commercially licensed boat, and shore angling. An angler will be legally entitled to catch and kill no more than TWO Bass per session/day, and these are for personal use/consumption, and may not be offered for sale. Any other fish caught during the session/day must be carefully returned alive.

This proposal has been adopted by several other authorities throughout the world with definite success, and has been responsible for raising the awareness of the angling public to stock conservation.