



Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network



Annual Review 2008 – 2009





SSACN Annual Review – 2008/09

Despite all the economic turmoil this last year has been one of continual development for SSACN with substantial achievements being made on all fronts.

We'd particularly like to highlight the release of the government funded report into the 'Economic Impact of Recreational Sea Angling in Scotland' which confirmed our figures that sea anglers contribute a minimum of £150 million/yr to the Scottish economy and support some 4000 full time jobs.

Another first for SSACN in the past year was Sharktag – not only was it the biggest event of its kind ever held in Scottish waters but anglers came from all over the UK and it even made it into the BBC News programmes as live outside broadcasts starting at 6.30 am !

Another major challenge has been our involvement with the Marine (Scotland) Bill, we not only provided a written response but also gave evidence in person to the Rural Affairs and Environment Committee.

To recognise everyone who has given their support would take up too much space, but in closing we are proud to announce the award an Honorary Life Membership to Jamie Soons in recognition of his contributions to SSACN.

In the next two pages we will highlight some of the main events of the past year all of which are covered in greater depth at either of www.ssacn.org or www.tagsharks.com .

All the best for 2009/10

The Trustees of SSACN





A Scottish Shark Tagging Programme has been a SSACN goal for several years. Our vision has always been to provide an interactive means of logging and communicating the data gathered by anglers tagging various shark species.

Now thanks to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Argyll and the Islands LEADER Programme who have put together a funding package to employ a 'Shark Project Officer' and help support some of our ongoing costs, we are another step closer to achieving that goal.

During the development of a project to learn more about the Common Skate (and deliver some of the objectives in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan for the species) SNH discovered common aims with our tagging programmes aimed at providing more information on shark, skate and ray species in order to justify marine protected areas particularly for species targeted by anglers.

Through discussion we identified a primary and common aim to encourage more anglers to tag fish and to continue doing so long term.

The new Scottish database for all species of shark, skate and ray will utilise the most up to date technologies to collect, store and disseminate the data.

To provide focal points for tagging we shall continue to run our annual Tagathon and Sharkatag events.

Sharkatag2009

The inaugural Sharkatag was a very special event.

The venue was the western end of the Solway in South West Scotland and over 200 anglers of all capabilities from all over the UK descended on the Solway to combine their love of fishing with a serious effort to gather data.

Operating out of three centres, Drummole, Sandhead and Whithorn, the anglers fished from the shore, in kayaks and in boats, tagging and releasing species



like tope, spurdog, smoothhound and ray. Though everyone enjoyed Sharkatag and the 220 fish tagged represent a goodly number, other than a few solitary females in the 50-60 pound range being taken, there was actually cause for concern as :

- the whole region seemed to be void of the expected male breeding stock
- the majority of the fish caught being mostly immature females, typically under twenty pounds
- Luce Bay was especially poor for the time of year.

These factors combined with the lack of rays tagged, only three throughout Sharkatag, shows how urgently plans are needed to help protect and regenerate the stocks. Twenty years ago virtually every boat would have recorded many mature tope and rays.

The event was followed UK wide on the BBC national news programmes and featured on STV's 'The Hour'. It also received tremendous coverage in national newspapers and the angling press as well as worldwide coverage on many internet web sites and internet blogs.

Tagathon2009

For the second year in succession Tagathon took place on a cold, wet and windy weekend.

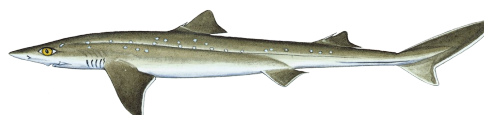


This year we were absolutely astounded, over 100 anglers turned out to take part in the event, it shows a level of commitment to the conservation aspects of our sport that is unparalleled.

Perhaps most pleasing, is not only was there was a high percentage of those that took part last year, but this year there were many new individual anglers, more angling clubs and organisations, as well as students and scientists from SAMS (the Scottish Association for Marine Science) and SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage).

Thanks to the phenomenal efforts of anglers fishing from boats, kayaks and the shore, over 65 spurdog, common skate and thornback ray were tagged, a good increase on last year's 24.

A number of data storage tags were also deployed in order to gain some more comprehensive data of the spurdog's preferred habitat by recording depth and temperature.



Economic Study

The long awaited Government sponsored study into the value of sea angling finally reported – sea angling is worth over £140 million/year and 3500+ jobs to the Scottish economy – more than salmon, trout and coarse angling combined.

The report was released at a meeting in Drummore where Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead met with



members of SSACN, local politicians and business leaders after which we received the following :

Ian,

I thoroughly enjoyed my recent visit to Luce Bay and many thanks indeed for organising the meeting with sea anglers and local business interests and, of course, for taking me out fishing in one of your boats.

As well as being very enjoyable, I hope you agree with me that it was a productive afternoon. Certainly, I found it very interesting to hear people's views at the meeting and to see at first hand the evident importance of sea angling to the Mull of Galloway's communities.

I was delighted both to launch the Sea Angling Study Report and to confirm the Scottish Government's commitment to exploring the best way forward for the sport. I know that you and SSACN colleagues will be a key part of that incipient RSA Strategy Group, as you were for the Study's Steering Group, and I look forward to hearing about the Group's work and the ongoing success of sea angling in Scotland.

All in all we were very encouraged by the minister's statement and attitude, the development of the strategy is now in the hands of civil servants and is slowly getting under-way.

Looking Forward

The next year looks like it will be even more demanding in all sectors than this year has been.

Thanks to SNH and the Argyll and the Islands LEADER Programme we shall be able to recruit a Shark Officer to further develop data gathering and presentation as well as help raise the awareness of Scottish sharks, skates and rays utilising a variety of media, workshops, school visits, presentations etc.

SSACN will be taking part in a Scottish Industry Science Partnership programme to develop and test stock survey techniques for near shore areas which are practicable, effective and efficient as established survey methods are generally not suitable.

These areas provide critical habitat for a range of fish stocks and understanding their sustainability requires information on their distribution, abundance and patterns of movement, information which is crucial to the design of marine protected areas (MPAs).

Within the Marine Bill there is provision for Demonstration & Research MPAs; our tagging programmes and the principles we have identified for Angling Regeneration Centres should act as a suitable platform for a number of these.

Naturally we shall be continuing the very successful tagging events and the target for the next year is to double the participation levels.

The next year is also looking to be a 'bumper' year for legislation, which will to some extent or another affect sea angling.

We will obviously hope to maintain the level of cross party support we have enjoyed to date for our work and continue to ensure sea angling conservation has a high visibility in the political process.

We shall of course be contributing wherever possible, focussing on the conservation and regeneration of the marine environment and only supporting initiatives providing their remit is clearly articulated, transparent and based on sound research.

We shall also be directly involved in the newly created Marine Strategy Forum whose objective is to bring together key stakeholders to work jointly and bring a balanced and integrated approach to the management of our marine and coastal environment.

And finally, our Members, we look forward to your continued support and valued input.