



## **Response to Defra Consultation on a recreational sea angling strategy for England**

This response to the Consultation on a Recreational Sea Angling Strategy for England has been compiled by the Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN).

SSACN leads a unified, coordinated and comprehensive approach to international, national and local conservation issues which may affect recreational sea angling in Scotland. We have responded to this Consultation as it could be used as a source document for any similar activity in Scotland.

Overall we feel the strategy offers many ideas but little substance in the way of concrete deliverables or potential timeframes within which any measure, method or tool would be introduced. It also lacks an holistic approach, with many issues discussed in isolation or out of context.

We believe this was particularly exemplified by the call for a licence (now withdrawn). Part of the justification for such a measure was that it would allow the development of additional facilities for sea anglers. In reality of course, those facilities would also be accessible to the general public and all those involved in any coastal and marine recreational sport or pastime, who would hold a licence.

The marine environment has, for various reasons, has been abused for generations. Sea anglers are an innocent party which has borne the results of that abuse. Poorly thought out proposals such as the introduction of licences shows a total lack of joined up thinking and understanding of the stock issues currently facing sea anglers.

Rather than introducing another 'stealth' tax, the Government should focus its efforts on working to reform the outdated policies of the EU CFP and resultant catching sector practices which continue to decimate stocks through excessive discards, the unchecked over-exploitation of non-quota species and the lack of protection for species of no commercial interest.

**Specifically**, regarding the four key objectives –

*To provide more and bigger fish within a healthy and sustainable ecosystem and environment* - this cannot be achieved without a significant restructuring of the current commercial fisheries management, policies and practices. The current levels of discarding mitigate against any real stock improvement (especially for those species who have no 'economic' value and thus no quota); the existing legal minimum landing sizes do not recognise the size species need to be in order to breed.

Additionally, it needs to be acknowledged and strongly stated, that Defra realises a totally different emphasis needs to be placed on recreational fisheries management, that is to say one which is geared to the regeneration and preservation of stocks, rather than one which is geared to ensuring a supply of harvestable product which meets certain marketing demands.

Regarding *Capitalise on the economic potential of sea angling* and *Maintain and increase participation* It has been suggested in a Scottish Parliamentary debate that perhaps a disproportionate economic value is placed on the catching sector and that the economic benefits of the sea angling industry are not considered in the same way.

It is unrealistic to expect that either of the objectives could be in anyway achieved without that balance being addressed and there being a substantial improvement in the quantity and availability of fish.

*Awareness and understanding* – It is extremely apparent that that there is much to be done in this area. Recreational sea angling is an activity that should be welcomed by all, it represents the ultimate in sustainable, environmentally sound fishing; causes no damage to the seabed and the number of fish that are taken bears no threat to the viability of stocks.

Without better definition of what would be delivered and substantial changes to current fisheries management, policies and practices, we believe the strategy offers little which will result in any substantial improvement in the recreational sea angling experience.

Regards

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