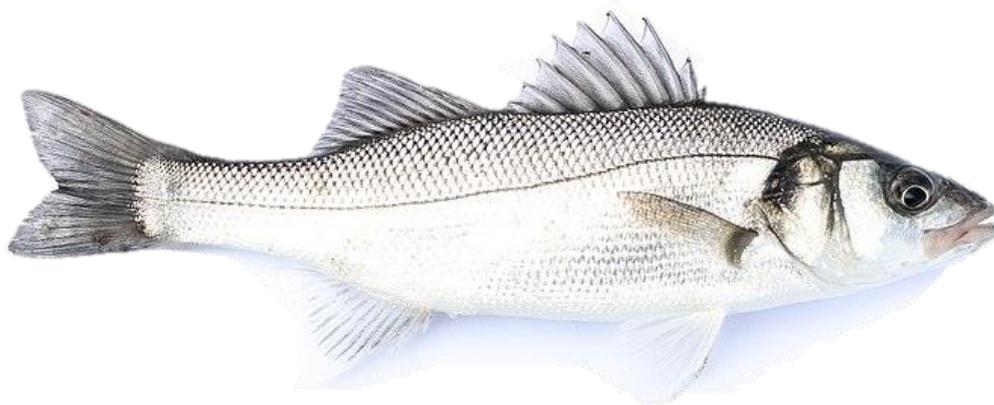


Fisheries Research & Management Plan

Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps for



European Sea Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) in the North of Devon & Severn IFCA's District



Inshore Fisheries and
Conservation Authority

**NORTH
DEVON
BIOSPHERE**



European Union
European Structural
and Investment Funds

Fisheries Research & Management Plans

As part of the [North Devon Marine Pioneer](#), the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&S IFCA) and the North Devon Biosphere have produced an initial series of innovative Fisheries Research & Management Plans (FRMPs) for five locally important species/ species groups in the north of D&S IFCA's District.

The FRMPs use existing information and stakeholder engagement to investigate whether a localised, ecosystem-based approach to management is possible and beneficial for each species. Each plan makes a series of research and management recommendations that need to be addressed to facilitate a transition to the most appropriate management approach for the fishery.

European Sea Bass

European sea bass is listed as a species of least concern on the IUCN Red List, though many populations have declined to historically low levels in recent decades. The main threats to sea bass are overexploitation from commercial and recreational fishing and ecological impacts of aquaculture farming (e.g., genetic pollution from escapees, issues with water quality, etc.).

Further information is needed on the movement, range, and distribution of sea bass in the Bristol Channel before local management methods can be trialled. It is likely that a local approach to management would be supported by fishers in the Channel as many feel that current EU regulations are not appropriate for the small-scale nature of their fisheries. These issues are explored in detail in the full FRMP.

Recommendations

Recommendations have been grouped into 'research' and 'management'. Many of the recommendations are interconnected and would need to be delivered as a whole for them to be effective. In general, it is likely that funding will need to be sought by relevant parties to enable the research. Specific details should be discussed early in project development.

The detail of each recommendation and the supporting evidence are available in the full FRMP. The research recommendations are also available on D&S IFCA's website and will be shared periodically with interested parties to encourage collaborative research between fishers, scientists and managers that is relevant to management and policy.

RESEARCH

Establish detailed knowledge of sea bass movements in and around Bristol Channel – *High Priority*

Understanding where sea bass populations spend their time throughout their life cycles is needed to determine the appropriate scale of management and prevent overexploitation. Sea bass show high site fidelity; however, they are a famously migratory species. If bass travel long distances outside the Bristol Channel, a sustainable localised management approach becomes much more challenging due to exposure to pressures elsewhere in their range.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA will support ongoing research projects gathering information on sea bass such as the Interreg FishINTEL project.
- Future monitoring or research should be designed in collaboration with Cefas and ICES to ensure the data is suitable for input to stock assessments.
- Findings can inform future Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), and contribute towards delivery of the ecosystem and scientific evidence objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

Investigate stock structure of sea bass in the Bristol Channel – *High Priority*

Research is needed to investigate whether distinct local populations of sea bass exist in the Bristol Channel. This information is needed to determine if local management of sea bass is possible and appropriate. Recent work carried out with the North Devon Marine Pioneer project has shown that there are distinct herring populations in the Bristol Channel. It is possible that there may be similar local populations of other fish species in the Bristol Channel and around the UK, including sea bass.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA and stakeholders/relevant research bodies to explore options for conducting this research in collaboration with local commercial and recreational fishers.
- Future monitoring or research should be designed in collaboration with Cefas and ICES to ensure the data are suitable for input to stock assessments.
- Findings can inform future Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs), and contribute to delivery of the ecosystem and scientific evidence objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

Involve fishers in the planning of future research – *High Priority*

Fishers' expertise and local knowledge has been invaluable in investigating local fisheries and arriving at the recommendations in this FRMP. Managers and researchers should work with fishers to co-plan and co-deliver future research.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA is well-placed to facilitate fisher/researcher collaboration and will investigate what is needed to make this standard practice (for example, collaborations will require standardised protocols and terms of reference, including for shared use of vessels and research equipment).

Investigate reported nursery grounds off Minehead – *Medium Priority*

The possibility of nursery habitat near Minehead needs to be investigated. Fishers have reported catching various species of juvenile fish in the area and have suggested that spawning and nursery grounds exist nearby. This raises immediate concerns regarding aggregate dredging and coastal development activities in the area. If found, this essential fish habitat must be mapped thoroughly and the implications of human activity on the habitat need to be incorporated into the management of fisheries and other activities.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA will explore collaborative research opportunities with relevant stakeholders to investigate the reported nursery areas near Minehead.
- D&S IFCA will support appropriate investigations of essential fish habitat in undersampled coastal and estuarine areas. This information would inform regional Marine Plans, marine licencing and permitting processes.
- Findings from this research could inform future FMPs and contribute towards delivery of the ecosystem and scientific evidence objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

MANAGEMENT

Improve integration between fisheries management and marine planning – *High Priority*

Fisheries and environmental management need to be better integrated and more appropriately considered within marine spatial planning, licencing, and permitting processes. This is particularly important in the Bristol Channel and Severn estuary due to high levels of commercial interest, for example in aggregate extraction and renewable energy development.

Next steps:

- Findings from the recommended research in this FRMP should be incorporated into regional Marine Plans through discussions with D&S IFCA and the MMO.
- This would aid delivery of the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan and Fisheries Act 2020 objectives, including utilising an ecosystem approach and prioritising sustainability.

Ensure proportionate management of recreational and commercial sea bass fisheries – *Medium Priority*

Sea bass is one of the most desired species for both commercial and recreational fishers and the implementation of strict management measures by the European Commission has led to tension between the two sectors. Future management, whether at a local or national scale, needs to affect commercial and recreational fishers proportionately.

Next steps:

- Findings from the research recommended in this FRMP, and research into fisheries impacts, should inform the approaches required to manage distinct fishing activities, inform bass FMPs, and contribute towards delivery of the ecosystem and scientific evidence objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020.

Improve landings data collection for recreational and commercial fishers – *Medium Priority*

As a result of legislation regarding the recording of commercial fish catch, not all sea bass landings in the north of D&S IFCA's District are being recorded. Reliable catch data are needed from both recreational and commercial fishers to assess the localised effects on sea bass populations. Progress has been made regarding the development of the <10 metre

vessel catch recording app, and there are similar options for recording catch for recreational fishers (e.g. Cefas Sea Angling Diary), however, more detail is needed, particularly in a local context to properly understand the impacts of fishing on bass populations.

Next steps:

- The IFCA's are well-placed to facilitate improvements in landings data. The need for additional data should be evaluated with the organisations that would use the information to make stock and distribution assessments (e.g. Cefas/ICES).
- If specific data needs are identified, for example, the mandatory recording of sea bass catch, a pilot study in collaboration with relevant organisations should be undertaken as part of D&S IFCA's Annual Plan.

Improve communication and engagement with fishers to establish stronger fisheries enforcement presence in the north of D&S IFCA's District – *Medium Priority*

To enable enforcement officers to better tackle non-compliance and illegal fishing in the north of D&S IFCA's District there needs to be comprehensive reporting of illegal activity from fishers in the area and improved communication between officers, fishers, and other local stakeholders.

Next steps:

- D&S IFCA will improve collaboration and engagement through activities such as virtual roadshows for ports, sectoral meetings and future FRMP interviews with commercial and recreational fishers. More information about planned activities is available in the D&S IFCA's Annual Plan and Communications Strategy, accessible via the D&S IFCA website.

Additional Information

You can download the full FRMP here –

<https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Environment-and-Research/Fisheries-Research-Management-Plans/FRMP-Documents>

If you would like to speak to someone about the information in this plan, please get in touch using the details below:

Martin Peverley

Fisheries Research & Management Plan Officer

E-mail: M.Peverley@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk

D&S IFCA is developing a second series of FRMPs for a range of species across the D&S IFCA's District. More information is available from the Fisheries Research and Management Plan Officer, or at <https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/Environment-and-Research/Fisheries-Research-Management-Plans>

Cover image - European Sea Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) (Sluijs, 2018, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Zeebaars_met_een_open_bek.jpg).