

25 June 2008

Submission from Mr Buesnel

Hi Mick.

As an introduction, I am Derek Leslie Buesnel aged 52 years. I have recreationally fished the area of the South East Coast of Jersey for bass for about 25 years.

I am a member of the Bass Anglers Sport Fishing Society (B.A.S.S.) which was founded in 1973 to promote a sporting approach to angling for bass, and to campaign for conservation measures to counteract the effects of over fishing. B.A.S.S. is committed to conservation and argues that the economic value of recreational bass fishing must be taken into account in the establishment of fisheries policy. I should add that the opinions expressed in this e. mail are my own and I am not representing B.A.S.S. in any way.

I have become increasingly concerned about the decline in the quality of the fishing in the area of the SE coast and wrote to the Fisheries Dept. and the then president of Agriculture and Fisheries about 5 or 6 years ago expressing my concerns, especially in relation to the amount of netting in the area. I received a 3 line reply from the president of Ag. & Fish and a assurance from Fisheries that bass stocks were healthy. I also wrote to the then president of Tourism to try and obtain support for some conservation measures to be introduced. Jersey could have some of the best bass fishing in Europe if it was managed correctly and this would have a huge benefit for tourism. However I never received a reply.

I have made three separate complaints regarding nets set in the Grouville Bay and Seymour Tower area. All these complaints were against professional fishermen. Two were several years ago and related to a net totalling over 300 metres in length set completely across a gulley to the east of Seymour Tower. The current law states that nets must be set 'between rocks no more than 120 metres apart'. These nets were clearly in breach of this regulation. Fisheries did attend and the fisherman argued that each stone he had placed at 3 or 4 metre lengths across the bottom of the net to hold it down was 'a rock'. No action was taken.

However, Fisheries obviously took legal advice on this and I was later informed that the definition of a rock for the purpose of this law was that it must be attached to the earth's core. So when the net appeared in the same location again I made another complaint. On this occasion I was told by Fisheries that this area had traditionally been netted and the law in relation to setting a net between rocks was to prevent nets being set on beaches and interfering with swimmers. No action was taking.

My third complaint was on 21st February this year. I was out in my boat in the area of Seymour Tower when I saw a boat, which I know fishes almost exclusively for bass, come out from Gorey Harbour. It went to the area of Grouville Bay near the oyster beds and stayed there. It remained there as the tide dropped but I was unable to see what the persons on board were doing as I was too far away. At low tide I came back into Grouville Bay and saw that the boat had dried out and those persons from the boat were walking along a net which was about 500 metres long. At this time the net must have been in about 0.5 metres of water. They were joined at this time by someone who was driving a tractor. It is illegal to set a net from a boat in water that is less than 1.3 metres in depth at any state of the tide. I reported the matter to Fisheries and statements were taken from me and my friend who was with me at the time. I was later contacted by a Fisheries officer and told that they had interviewed the fisherman involved who had told them that the net had been set by the person in the tractor and as he had been fishing in the area he had just gone to help him out and collect the catch. No action was taken.

The week before this incident I had heard, but cannot verify, that 1100 pound (weight) in bass had been netted in Grouville Bay.

You will notice all my complaints involve the SE coast as do all my concerns. This is a nursery area for bass and is also a Ramsar site. The States of Jersey's own website describes this area as "Jersey's last remaining wilderness and must be offered the utmost protection".

My main concern is that monofilament netting is causing serious damage to the bass stocks, in particular during a time when the bass are spawning during the winter months. There should be a close season for all bass fishing between 1st January to 31st March to allow spawning to take place. Also at present the minimum landing size (MLS) for bass is 36 cm. Fish of this size are immature and are not be able to spawn. The MLS needs to be increased to 46 cm in order for bass to spawn at least once before they are caught. Last year the UK government agreed to increase the MLS to 40 cm but then did a u turn under pressure from the commercial fishermen. I also strongly believe that a maximum landing size should be introduced as this would ensure that bigger stronger fish are released to spawn which would strengthen the fish stocks. These measures, along with the introduction on marine reserves (no take zones) are vital to the conservation of bass stocks and would benefit everyone, even the commercial fisherman who must put long term sustainability before short term profit.

The latest Jersey Fisheries report shows commercial catches of bass down to 18,000 tons in 2007 from nearly 31,000 in 2006.

I include the above just to give some idea of my thoughts and ideas in relation to conservation and preservation of existing fish stocks. I will now try and answer the questions in relation to the setting of nets.

1. It seems that a net can be set anywhere as long as Fisheries believe it is not interfering with swimmers. There is, as far as I'm aware, no restriction on the length of a net so having already seen one 500 metres long I'm sure that there are even longer ones.
2. From my experience nets are set by tractor where the net is stored in a large purpose built box on the back. Monofilament is light hence the huge increase in the length of nets being set. These are taken to areas which already have the stones in place for the net to be set.
3. Normally on the larger (spring tides).
4. It could be set for any number of days until the tides start getting smaller again making it impossible to reach. In practice it would likely be between 2 and 5 days.
5. It should be attended every time the tide is low enough to access it, so twice a day.
6. Depends where it's set but certainly the main intended catch would be bass. There is also a likelihood of Pollack, wrasse, ray, dogfish and anything that swims into.
7. I'm only aware of one person netting the Seymour area at present. There were two tractors with all the nets in parked at Seymour slip during the winter months but only one was being used. The other is rusting nicely on the slipway with the mono net sitting on the slip in a tangled mess.
8. I only fish the SE coast so only see the ones in Grouville Bay/Seymour area and I'm not there that often in the winter, only on the few nice days. There are a lot of bass that congregate in this area in the winter so I'm sure that it is being netting nearly every suitable tide, weather permitting.
9. The answer to both a) and b) would be the same - not at all. Most nets are down for roughly that amount of time anyway.
10. I don't see what this is supposed to achieve unless it is required to be moved off the beach completely. As I said most nets are down for between 2 to 5 days so requiring that it be moved after 4 days will still have little effect.

11. This is hardly likely to happen I would have thought. The nets I have seen which are 300 metres and 500 metres cannot be moved just anyway. They are put in areas that have already been prepared with large stones placed at about 3 metre intervals to hold the bottom and further stones placed at 6 to 8 metre intervals to tie the ropes to secure the top of the net as it rises with the tide.

12. Lost and abandoned nets will continue to fish until such time as they perish. I don't know how long this will take with mono but there is potential for a lot of damage to be done. I don't believe that lost nets are a huge problem and a probably set by people out to make money who don't really know what they are doing.

13. They can't. Mono nets are relatively cheap so if one is lost it can easily be replaced. Legislation won't work because it is impossible to police.

14. I would welcome licensing of the use nets, but I would want legislation to control the length of the net, where they can be set and restrictions on the time of year they can be set. (I know that there are already restrictions in place regarding the time of year but I would want a ban on netting and indeed all fishing for bass during the spawning season).

15. See above.

16. That is a problem because from my experience the law isn't being enforced now so to make further laws which aren't going to be enforced seems to be a bit of a catch 22. I think everyone who enjoys fishing or makes a living from the sea has to report those who are acting illegally and that action should be taken by those in authority.

Hope this is of assistance.

Regards

Derek