

December 7th, 2018

Southern IFCA

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**Public Consultation**

**Net Fishing Management for Estuaries, Harbours and Piers in Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight**

**Introduction**

The Institute of Fisheries Management (IFM) is an international organisation of people sharing a common interest in the modern management of recreational and commercial fisheries. Created in 1969 in the UK, the IFM is dedicated to the advancement of sustainable fisheries management in all its forms. It is a non-profit making organisation controlled by the membership and governed by an elected council. Members are drawn from professional fisheries managers, regulatory and research bodies, fishing and angling organisations, water companies, fish farms and private individuals whose interests in fisheries are represented at many levels within government and conservation bodies.

The Institute, in partnership with a number of other UK institutes and societies concerned with the environment, is a Constituent Bodies of the Society for the Environment. The Society has a Royal Charter and is empowered to award the qualification of Chartered Environmentalist.

**Initial Comments**

We welcome this consultation and fully endorse the overall approach taken. We understand that this acts as a pre-consultation to gather views on draft proposals and that further consultations are to follow. We note that this consultation deals with the near shore area specifically. We presume that further consultations on netting regulations for other parts of the district are to follow in due course. Please accept that our comments then are based on these assumptions.

The documents provide a detailed description of the background. The management proposals are set out with a clear description of the scientific evidence gathered by the Authority in conjunction with others and demonstrate how this has been used to develop the proposals. In principle we consider this to be excellent management practice, but we have some concerns about gaps in the data. We are responding in the form of a letter with accompanying material, since we are providing more generic comment without specific local knowledge.

**Sustainable Fisheries Management in Estuaries**

Estuaries and other transitional waters represent some of the most productive yet fragile marine habitats. They act as critically important marine nursery grounds as well as vital corridors for migratory species. We use this background to promote more sustainable fisheries management in estuaries. Please accept our Position Statement attached as part of our response to this consultation. We are pleased to be able to note that other IFCAs in southern England have found that our Statement has been influential in their own local consultations.

**Current Management**

The past history of fisheries management in the intertidal zone and in estuaries has been overly complex and often incomplete. We support the need for rationalizing, improving and simplifying the processes involved**.**

**The Proposals**

The four principal interests described in this review are migratory salmonids, grey mullets, ring net fishers and recreational sea anglers. Significant information on generic and local salmonid behaviour patterns as well as juvenile marine fish from small fish survey programmes, has been produced and used to inform the proposals. However, no socio-economic evidence has been provided on the scale of the ring netting (principally for grey mullets) or sea angling. In our experience the commercial market for grey mullets is seasonal and low value. We would recommend the establishment of some socio-economic data to inform management decisions and produce the balanced management approach required under S. 153 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act, 2009 (M&CCA). Socio-economic data would also inform management where zonal controls are under consideration. If no relevant socio-economic data can be established, then under M&CCA, the regulator is obliged to take a precautionary approach to management. We would recommend monitoring of any new management measures adopted. These may require amendment in the light of experiences gained. We note than there are recreational users of the ring net. We would recommend that any such use is brought into regulation alongside the commercial effort. We would also endorse the marking of all nets

**Definition of Ring Net Use**

We note the statement about the use of the 500g weight used in the deployment of the net. In our experience, if this weight were to remain static for any length of time, then the whole apparatus might be construed as a fixed engine in law, and hence subject to existing fixed engine controls. We would strongly recommend consultation with the Environment Agency on this specific point before proceeding further with ring netting proposals.

We accept that this method of fishing as described is likely to have a reduced risk of salmonid interception. However, the actual risk will also be dictated by location and timing. We recommend that both seasonal and spatial controls are considered in the deployment of this fishing method, particularly around the mouths of estuaries or in channels known to be frequented by migratory salmonids.

No description of mesh size is provided. If the mesh size is legal under current regulations, impacts on nursery stocks are not likely. Undersized illegal mesh could have major impacts on these stocks.

Given that the method of fishing is mobile, active and rapid, widespread use of ring nets would imply a significant enforcement effort to achieve a high level of compliance, particularly in fisheries where grey mullets, bass and migratory salmonids are freely mixed. We would recommend that a pragmatic view of the difficulty of enforcement should figure in considerations on when and where ring netting can be permitted.

**Grey Mullet Minimum Size Increase**

We support the intention to address this issue. All three species which inhabit UK waters are relatively slow growing. There is increasing evidence of site fidelity of larger specimens. Catch and release recreational angling provides a very worthwhile use of this resource in socio-economic terms. Raising the size limit significantly would boost overall stocks while providing better sport for the angling community. Our recommendation would be to adopt Option 3 with an MLS of 42cm, as a minimum option. We believe that alignment with the MLS for bass is an important consideration. We note that the ring net fishers operating at present are largely targeting grey mullet. From a pragmatic viewpoint, given the nature of mixed inshore stocks, alignment at 42cm should be conducive to more sustainable overall stock management and aid more efficient regulation and enforcement. From a stock conservation viewpoint, we would support Option 5 if there was sufficient body of support for this option.

**Net Management Areas**

**Piers**

We would agree with the logic set out in this section and with the proposal to create 100m net exclusion areas to be applied to popular pier fishing locations in the district to protect, promote and stimulate recreational angling. As noted, this option will provide some additional incidental benefits in terms of nursery zone protection.

**Harbours and Estuaries**

Turning now to the harbours and estuaries, we have some concerns, partly in the light of what we describe above:-

*Area 1 Chichester Harbour -* Noted.

*Areas 2 & 3 Langstone Harbour -* Given the evidence provided in Appendix III about Langstone Harbour, and the potential recovery of trout to the Hermitage Stream, we would recommend that all netting including ring netting is excluded from Area 2. Evidence is provided about extensive sea trout movements across the remainder of the Harbour. Monitoring of the proposed measures will be important to ascertain whether any further restrictions are required, particularly in the narrow confines of the creeks and smaller channels. It might be more prudent to remove the ring netting from all of these smaller creeks and channels at this point.

*Area 4 Fareham Creek and River Wallington -* We would recommend that all netting operations, including ring netting, are excluded from the area on the evidence provided, in order to protect and promote the sea trout population and its recovery.

*Area 5 All other areas of Portsmouth Harbour* – We would repeat the comments made above for Langstone Harbour, Once again, monitoring will be important going forward.

*Area 7 River Meon -* We believe that seasonal restrictions should be applied to ring netting in the narrow confines of the river and mouth.

*Area 8 Rivers Test, Itchen & Hamble -* Given the importance of these three rivers to salmonids, we would strongly recommend that all netting is permanently removed from these areas. At the very least, ring netting should be subject to seasonal closures.

*Area 9 Southampton Water –* We agree with these measures as set out. Given the difficulty of establishing compliance with headroom in intertidal zones, we would recommend an inclusion specifying that compliance with headroom should be achieved at any state of the tide.

*Area 10 Lymington River-* We would recommend the complete exclusion of all netting in the river, given the established importance for sea trout.

*Area 11 Keyhaven -* We would recommend the complete exclusion of all netting in the river, given the local importance for sea trout.

*Area 13 Bembridge Harbour and River Yar (Eastern) -* Given the evidence provided about the status of sea trout, we would recommend a total exclusion of all netting in this area.

*Area 15 Wooton Creek -* While we agree with this proposal, the logic of providing preferential access to anglers may also apply in the narrow sections of some areas where we recommend no netting at all.

*Area 16 River Medina -* On the evidence supplied we cannot see any immediate threat to migratory salmonids from the proposals as set out. Management in this area should be kept under review in view of the EA aspirations under WFD.

*Area 17 Newtown Creek and associated rivers -* The management by the National Trust makes good sense in these narrow and confined waters. We would suggest that a similar argument may well apply in the inner reaches of a number of the creeks and rivers covered in this consultation.

*Area 18 Yarmouth Harbour Entrance and River Yar – We a*gree with proposal, but this logic can be applied elsewhere.

*Area 19 Christchurch Harbour and associated rivers -* This section does not appear to make sense. The proposal in Area 19 is for year-round closure to all nets, except ring nets. Under current management, three quarters of Christchurch Harbour is under private ownership and no netting is permitted in this area. We would certainly recommend that no netting should be allowed in the narrow confines of the inner section of the harbour at the foot of both the Avon and Stour river mouths in order to protect migratory salmonids.

*Area 20 Christchurch Harbour entrance “Christchurch Box”. -* This reflects the existing practice for fixed nets. We would strongly recommend that the seasonal closure applies also to ring nets in order to protect migratory salmonids. This is particularly important in area around the narrow entrance to the harbour. This is supported by the evidence provided of illegal fishing for migratory salmonids in the lower reaches of the harbour and in the “box”.

*Area 22 Holes Bay, Wareham Channel, Lycvhett Bay, Wych Lake, Middlebere Lake and associated rivers & Area 23 Poole Harbour (all other areas) -* We would recommend that the seasonal netting constraints should also apply to ring nets. This is particularly important in the narrow confines approaching the river estuaries at the western end of the harbour. This is supported by the evidence provided about migratory salmonid behaviour within the Harbour.

*Area 26 The Fleet -* We agree with these proposals.

*Area 27 Lyme Regis to Burton Mere 1nm from the shore -* We would support this proposal but would recommend that seasonal closures are applied to the ring net fishery around the mouths of any rivers discharging in the area, given the evidence provided about migratory salmonids.

We hope you have found our comments helpful. We look forward to further engagement in this workstream the future.

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