

Solway Firth Partnership Conference February 2010

Pick 'n' Mix session 2

Recreational sea angling in the Solway

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This is an overview of the presentation and questions and answers in this session, and represent the views of the presenter and audience; the views expressed here are not necessarily those of Solway Firth Partnership. Whilst every effort has been made to produce an accurate transcript of events, the Partnership cannot be held responsible for any errors made in the production of this account.

In the Solway, many fish species are threatened – such as common skate, porbeagle – by issues such as current changes, climate change as well as over fishing. Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network (SSACN) is a charity established in 2006 concerned about dwindling fish stocks. SSACN have lobbied Government, run email campaigns and organised events at Holyrood. They received a visit at Drummore from the Fisheries Minister in 2009. SSACN is now also involved in research, with Sharktag events, looking at stock dynamics, and now has a dedicated officer looking at target fish stocks in Luce Bay and on the Scottish west coast employing techniques such as baited cameras. There is much information on haddock, cod etc but no inshore figures for fish such as pollock.

Recreational sea angling is selective; it is an environmentally friendly and low impact fishing activity. A 2009 Scottish Government study showed it is worth approximately £150 million pa, and around £25 million pa to Dumfries and Galloway from recreational angling in the Solway. The Solway has a great variety of species because of its geography, and 97% of recreational sea anglers are visitors.

In June 2009, SSACN's Sharktag tagged tope – a huge awareness raising exercise. Tope are protected in England and Wales but not Scotland. They come to Luce Bay to breed and numbers are drastically reduced because they are a by-catch of other fisheries when they return to the Bay of Biscay. Sharktag contributed £41k to the local economy last year [SSACN's figures].

The way forward for fish stock conservation is:

- Dedicated conservation areas – eg the Florida model
- Educational outreach
- Local/national support needed
- Involve stakeholders

Cuckoo wrasse populations are now threatened in Cornwall because of sushi bar demand; tope are being used for shark fin soup by other European countries.

Q: What is the purpose of tagging?

A: It is the only way to obtain data but there is a need to handle fish delicately and look after them properly. There are 3 types of tag:

Floy dart – plastic tube on the dorsal fin. Angler provides length and weight of fish which when recaptured can give migration and growth details.

Data storage tag – Common skate has a 33% recapture rate.

Satellite tag – very expensive (£3k each) but gives real time data.

Q: Has the £25million reported income from recreational sea angling been split up into accomodation/services/bait etc?

A: Yes – it's not in the report but information is on the government website.

Q: Does SSACN support bag limits?

A: It depends on the area and the species.

Q: If fish go to the Bay of Biscay is there the possibility of a great financial loss given that satellite tags are £3k?

A: Yes! But it is an acceptable loss.

Q: Is there any evidence that Luce Bay is a tope breeding ground?

A: Yes, because of the breeding patterns seen on females caught in the area.

Q: What has been the response from the [Scottish] Government?

A: The Marine Bill has a Marine Protected Area framework built in to it so organisations can ask for regions to be closed.

Q: Is pollock fished commercially?

A: No

Q: It has been observed that pollock are fished; how do SSACN police the level of fishing?

A: Pollock stocks are sustainable

Q: Sea bass poulations are increasing but stocks are being heavily exploited.

A: SSACN is a recreational organisation and and distinct from people who fish for sale.

Q: There are more bass in the Solway so is there a study of recreational vs commercial value?

A: No, there has to be a compromise. Stocks belong to everyone.

Q: What are your thoughts on gill nets, wastage and by-catch?

A: Inshore netting is more selective than trawling. By catch can be thrown back.

Q: That is wrong – eg porpoise and and sea birds can be caught in nets as well as sea bass. There is no regulation of the fishery.

A: We are trying to get 'commercial' and 'recreational' fishing identified and distinguished.

Q: Luce Bay – what about scallopers?

A: Stop it or look at zoning; there should be give and take.

Q: Galloway Static Gear Fishermen's Association (GSGFA) suggest that shouldn't everyone be working together?

A: Yes. SSACN would like to work with GSGFA

Q: There are 3 mile and 6 mile exclusion zones which restricts fishing in Wales and the Isle of Man. Is this fair?

A: Fisheries management is not good and we should all work together to seek improvements.