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1. Introduction

The Sea Bass (*Dicentrarchus labrax*) industry guidance, issued by the Welsh Government (WG), outlines the rules, regulations and restrictions for both commercial and recreational bass fishing in UK waters. These measures are designed to support the sustainable management of European sea bass stocks, ensuring long-term viability of the species and the fisheries that depend on them.

The guidance is up to date and has incorporated all amendments to legislation as of **February 2026** and includes:

- Authorisation processes for commercial fishing vessels.
- Transfer of authorisations.
- Landings limits now set through the fishing vessel licence.
- Gear-specific rules for commercial fishers, including restrictions on ring nets and fixed gillnets bycatch.
- Seasonal catch-and-release periods and daily retention limits for recreational anglers.
- A minimum conservation reference size of 42 cm for all retained bass.

These controls aim to balance fishing opportunities with conservation needs, reflecting scientific advice and international agreements between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU).

1.1 Relevant legislation

The main regulations in respect of bass fishing in the UK are detailed within:

- Council Regulation (EU) 2020/123
- Fishing Vessel Licence conditions

2. Commercial bass fishing

The catch, retention, transhipment and landing of bass is subject to restrictions. Those restrictions relate to:

- when and where you can catch bass.
- how you can fish (gear type) and whether you have an authorisation to do so.
- how much can be retained.
- minimum mesh sizes that can be used to catch bass.
- **For further information both on recreational and commercial bass fishing please see Article 10** Council Regulation (EU) 2020/123

2.1 Authorisations

If you want to catch and retain bass, you must have a written authorisation from the Welsh Government* to do so. Commercial fishermen will be authorised to catch and retain bass with certain gears within specified limits. Authorisations are issued to vessels with a track record of landing bass during the reference period of 1 July 2015 to 30 September 2016 subject to any successful transfer requests.

Following an amendment to the regulation on 31 December 2021 all commercial fishing vessels are now authorised to land bass bycatch by demersal trawls and seines, and no written authorisation is required.

For clarification, ring nets are not included in the trawls and seines category. Bass landings are prohibited by vessels using ring nets.

Once you have been issued an authorisation you will be authorised to catch and retain bass with the gear types listed on your authorisation, subject to the specific limitations for each gear.

**For the purposes of this guidance, the relevant fisheries administrations are: Marine Management Organisation (MMO) in England, Marine Directorate in Scotland, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland, and the Welsh Government in Wales.*

2.2 When and where you can catch bass

You must not catch, retain, tranship or land bass caught from a vessel or the shore from the following **prohibited** areas at any point:

Sea area	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) division – prohibited areas
South West Approaches	ICES 7b, 7c, 7j and 7k
Irish or Celtic Sea	Outside the 12 nautical mile limit of UK waters in ICES 7g and 7a

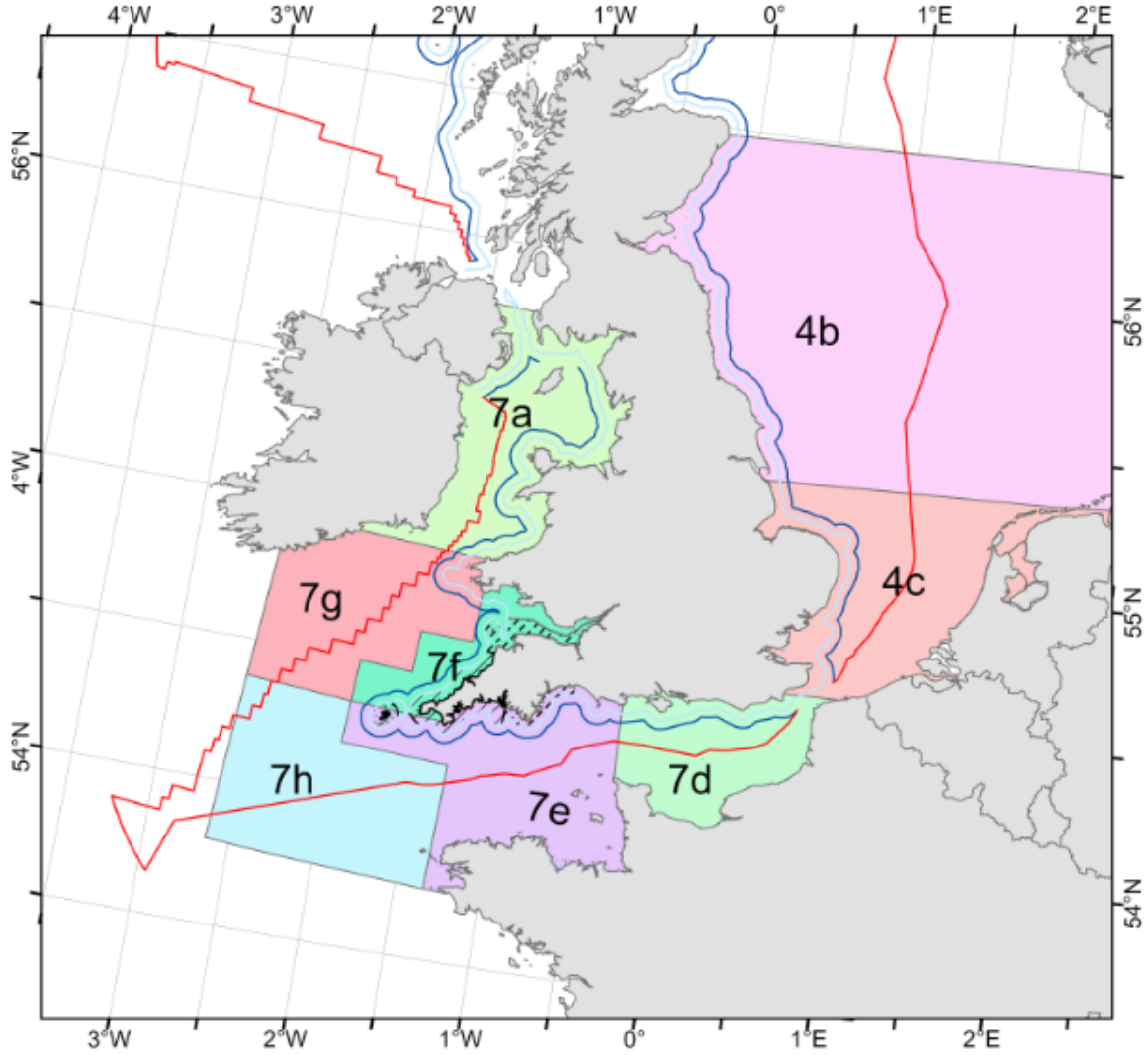
During January and from 1 April until 31 December the catch, retention, transhipment and landing of bass in the **restricted** areas below, is only permitted if you have an authorisation from the Welsh Government to do so. Fishing for bass in any restricted area is prohibited during February and March.

Sea area	International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) division – restricted areas
North Sea	4b, 4c
Channel	7d, 7e
Celtic Sea	7f, 7g*
Irish Sea	7a*
South West Approaches	7h

(*Inside UK 12nm limit only)

Marine Management Organisation

Bass Restricted Areas



UK Exclusive Economic Zone	ICES Areas
UK 12 Nautical Mile Limit 2024 UKHO	ICES Areas
UK 6 Nautical Mile Limit 2024 UKHO	ICES Areas
Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	ICES Areas
Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	ICES Areas
Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority	ICES Areas
World Country Boundaries CB	ICES Areas

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(7g and 7a Inside UK 12nm limit only)

2.3 Fishing gears for retaining bass

You cannot catch, retain, tranship or land bass if you have not been issued with an authorisation from the Welsh Government.

Subject to having an authorisation issued by the Welsh Government you are permitted to catch and retain bass with the following gears:

- Fixed gillnets (bycatch).
- Hooks and lines.

All commercial fishing vessels are authorised to land bass caught by demersal trawls and seines, and no written authorisation is required.

For clarification, catching bass using hooks and line is the only authorised targeted fishery. When fishing with fixed gillnets, bass can only be fished and landed as bycatch.

You are not allowed to catch and retain bass with any other gears, including pelagic trawls, ring nets and nets that drift with the current or are capable of doing so.

Specific fishing restrictions for bass can be found in the Fishing Vessel Licence conditions.

2.3.1 Fixed gillnets

Fixed gillnets are considered by the Welsh Government as falling within the definition of 'static nets' in Article 6, Regulation 2019/1241 as being "any type of gillnet, entangling net or trammel net that is anchored to the seabed for fish to swim into and become entangled or enmeshed in the netting".

Fixed nets are defined as being fixed to the bottom of the sea in a permanent position by any method such as weights, anchors or stakes and it must be set so as not to be able to drift or move with any current.

Where a net is out of the water (i.e. on a fishing vessel) it must be immediately capable of being fixed to the bottom of the sea by any method such as weights, anchors or stakes either attached to the net or capable of being attached immediately prior to the net being deployed. In the absence of adequate means of fixing the net to the bottom of the sea being present the net will not be considered to be a fixed net.

For the avoidance of doubt, anchors, weights or other items attached to the net which do not fix it to the bottom of the sea or prevent it from drifting (regardless of the state of the current), will not be considered sufficient to consider the net as a fixed net.

For those with an authorisation to land bass as bycatch using fixed gillnet a 100mm minimum mesh size is in place under Part B, Regulation 2019/1241.

2.3.2 Use of multiple gears

It is a requirement of the Fishing Vessel Licence that UK fishing vessels may only carry one authorised fishing gear on a fishing trip when retaining bass on board. This applies to hooks and line, fixed gillnets, and demersal trawls and seines.

2.4 How much can be retained?

Authorised vessels can only retain and land bass subject to the limits below. Landing limits are not transferable between vessels.

	Demersal Trawls and Seines	**Hooks and Lines**	**Fixed Gillnets Nets**	**All other gears (including drift nets)**
Fishery Restrictions	Closed February and March	Closed February and March	Closed February and March	All bass catches prohibited
Maximum catch limit	Maximum 20% by weight of all marine organisms PER TRIP. **Unavoidable by-catch** 10 tonnes per vessel per year	8 tonnes per year	**By-catch** of 5.4 tonnes per year	All bass catches prohibited

For clarification a year means a calendar year

2.5 Additional closed areas

There are also restrictions on fishing for bass in bass nursery areas at certain times of year, these restrictions apply to both commercial and recreational fishers.

The Bass (Specified Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1990 prohibits Fishing for bass (Dicentrarchus labrax), or fishing for any species of sea-fish using sand-eels (Ammodytidae) by any fishing boat within any part of the areas described in the order and during the period specified.

2.6 Discards

The landing obligation does not apply to sea bass. Therefore, any sea bass caught using an unauthorised gear, or any catches exceeding the permitted limit when using an authorised gear, or are below MCRS, must be discarded.

During February and March, all bass fishing is prohibited, and bass caught during this period must be returned to the sea immediately. Fishers should take all reasonable measures to avoid and minimise bass discards.

Over 10m Vessels

If more than 50kg of bass is discarded during a trip, you must record the estimated weight of those discards in your fishing logbook or catch record. For example, if you discard 30kg on the first day and 25kg the second day (55kg in total), you must record those discards.

For further information Article 14(4), Regulation1224/2009, Landing obligation general requirements 2025 and Landing obligation | GOV.WALES **Under 10m vessels**

Fishing vessels 10 metre and under in overall length shall record in their electronic catch record all estimated discards of sea bass in volume.

For further information Understanding your fishing vessel licence | GOV.WALES

2.7 Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS)

The MCRS ('minimum size') for bass is 42cm.

You must not retain on board any specimens below the MCRS but must return them immediately to the sea. Any specimens below the MCRS found stored, transported or offered for sale may be seized by officers to allow investigation into the source.

3. Vessel Replacement and transfer of authorisation

3.1 Transfers between two vessels in your ownership

If you are replacing a vessel that has a bass authorisation, a transfer of authorisation will be considered providing the replacement vessel is no larger in engine size and tonnage.

However, vessels with a single hull of 8 metre or under in overall length are exempt from the increase in engine size and tonnage rules.

It is the responsibility of any vessel owner to seek relevant approvals from Welsh Government prior to making a commitment to purchase a new fishing vessel, where they are wanting to transfer any existing authorisation.

For clarification a replacement vessel is a fishing vessel new to you (new build or newly purchased) to which you wish to transfer your existing bass authorisation from a vessel already issued with a bass authorisation in your name.

No transfer of a bass authorisation will be processed until the new vessel has been registered and licensed.

Owners intending to sell vessels being replaced should also make the purchaser aware that the vessel being sold will lose its authorisation to catch bass once the transfer is completed (written evidence from the purchaser to confirm their understanding may be required). Welsh Government recommend that purchasers confirm that the vessel has any authorisations you require before finalising your purchase.

3.2 Transfer of a bass authorisation when a vessel is sold

Bass authorisations do not transfer with the licence. Authorisations will transfer to a new owner of the vessel when the ownership of the vessel is transferred. The current catch uptake by that vessel will also be transferred – i.e. the catch limits will not be reset. For example, if a vessel has used all of its hooks & line annual catch limit then the new owner of the vessel will not be permitted to catch and retain further bass using hooks and lines during that year.

4. Commercial shore fishing for bass

Commercial fisheries from the shore are strictly prohibited unless explicitly authorised by a relevant Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (IFCA) in England or the Welsh Government in Wales. Authorisations may be permitted in four districts up to the following limits:

- 26 nets in relation to the IFC authority for the North West
- 5 nets in relation to the IFC authority for the North East, and
- 1 net in relation to the IFC authority for Devon and Severn, and
- 50 nets in the Welsh zone.

No other commercial bass fishing from shore is permitted

5. Chartered angling vessels

Vessel operators wishing to undertake charter activity should familiarise themselves with MMO published guidance on commercial and recreational fishing (Commercial and recreational fishing).

When undertaking commercial activity, as referenced in that guidance, from a vessel holding a UK fishing vessel licence, all relevant regulations and requirements for commercial fishing activities should be adhered to, including fishing vessel licence conditions and any bass authorisation issued by the relevant fisheries administration.

Unlicensed vessels or licensed vessels undertaking recreational activity (as referenced within the guidance above) must adhere to recreational catch limits as detailed in section 6.1.

Please note, there may be regulations from other organisations which are relevant to your fishing activities. See section 7 for more details.

6. Recreational bass fishing

All the rules detailed below apply if you are fishing from a boat or from the shore.

6.1 Catch Limit

Recreational fisheries, including from shore, in ICES divisions 4b, 4c, 6a, 7a and 7d to 7j are limited to catch-and-release using rod and handline only during 1 February to 31 March.

Outside of this period, recreational fishers are limited to three fish per day bag limits as agreed in annual negotiations with the EU and amended by The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2026.

6.2 Additional closed areas

As well as the 1 February to 31 March catch and release period, there may be additional catch and release periods within bass nursery areas. Please see The Bass (Specified Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing) Order 1990 for information on bass nursery areas.

6.3 Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS)

The minimum size of European seabass is 42 cm. All specimens below this size must be released.

6.4 Fishing gear types

No bass can be taken by fixed nets

7. Other relevant organisations

- Depending on your fishing activity, you may need to consult other relevant organisations to ensure you are compliant with their requirements: Your local Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) in England will be able to inform you of any local IFCA restrictions.

- Maritime Coastguard Agency Fishing, MCA guidance Recreational and commercial fishing vessel regulations, codes of practice, safety, equipment and training.

8. Further Guidance

8.1 MMO and Welsh Government guidance

Guidance on the landing obligation

Commercial and recreational fishing

Landing obligation general requirements 2025

Fishing Vessel Licence Schedules

8.2 Amendments to primary legislation

Council Regulation (EU) 2020/123

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2021

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2021

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2022

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2023

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2024

The Sea Fisheries (Amendment) Regulations 2026

All references to European Union (EU) law in this guidance are references to EU regulations as retained in UK law.

9. Contact

For further guidance email milfordhavenfisheriesoffice@gov.wales or contact Welsh Government Milford Haven Fisheries Office on 03000 253500.