

COMMENT

In our defence...

The letter sent to *Fishing News* ('Ganging up' on fishermen' – see page 5), and the subsequent massive support it received when posted on the *Fishing News*' facebook page, makes my Editor's Comment in this week's *Fishing News* an easy task. While the letter's author Mr Jackson touches on many important issues, it was the following statement that most caught my attention:

"Junk news, headline grabbing, and articles which are strictly non-factual, are extremely damaging to this industry and need to be counter acted by legal action, enforced retraction of the offending article, and damages."

I'm not going to list all the examples of green groups and individuals with friends in high places in the national media, but we've all seen these reports in newspapers and websites – with the daft story "ONLY 100 COD LEFT IN THE NORTH SEA!" probably winning first prize in the silly season of fictional articles.

But, unfortunately, many papers who carry such thrash about the fishing industry are respected producers of important news and being so, their printed matter is expected to be credible by an unsuspecting public largely uneducated in the realities of the fishing industry.

I give Mr Jackson's comment on this my full support and confirm that I have long held the belief that this industry should begin to think along the lines of how we should protect ourselves from these attacks.

On a rare occasion, such as the 'ONLY 100 COD...' story warranted, we see a 'top-down' reaction from industry (where our authorities and representatives come out fighting), rather than the usual 'bottom up' one (where a few fishermen complain on Facebook and no one listens).

But it is glaringly obvious that the fishing industry, fragmented as it is, must come together – not simply to respond to articles that attack the industry with fictional reports – but to be proactively exposing much of the research that these groups use in their armoury.

We must fight fire with fire and not just use watery responses to try to douse the flames of an industry being burnt to the ground by damaging attacks from those with green agendas.

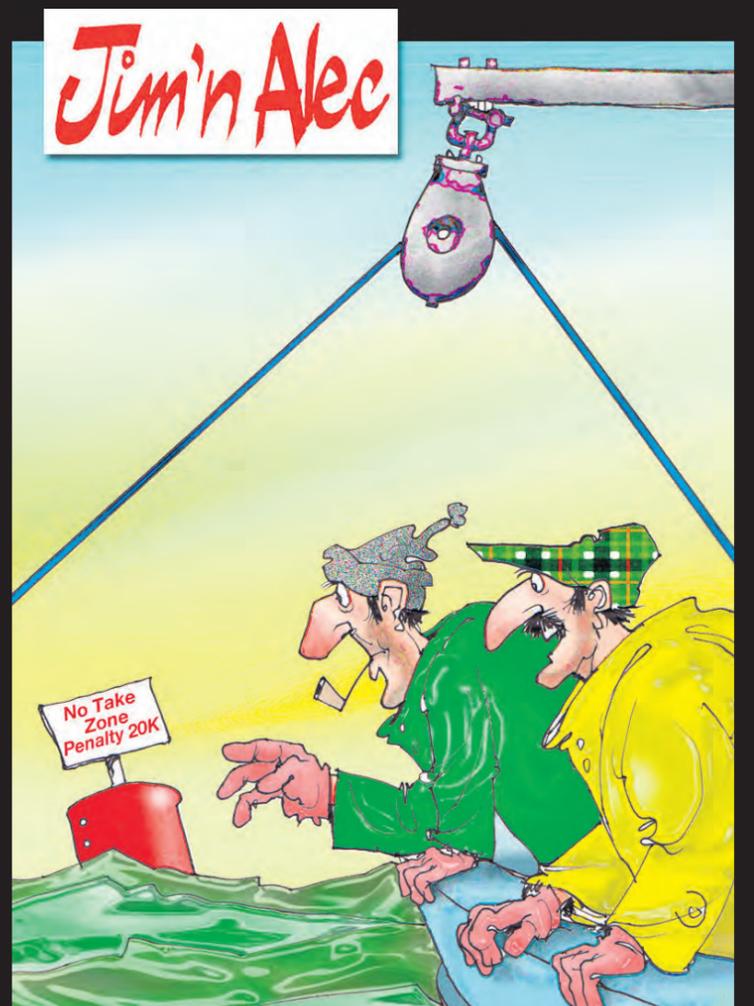
Lack of room in 'No Take' marine park?

An article on the website 'The Conversation' states "competitive lobsters fighting in UK's first marine park".

The article says that in 2010, a study of Lundy called for a review of marine reserves after it was found that shell disease in lobsters may be increasing inside the protected area.

When they returned to do a survey a year later and compared a fished area to the Lundy no take zone, it had more abundant and larger lobsters. However, the same survey showed that this abundance of lobsters was leading to injury as over crowding was causing aggressive behaviour.

* See also story below



"If anyone asks just say we were worried about the health implications of over-crowded lobsters!"

LETTERS

A letter to the EU Commissioner

Are the managers of our fisheries going to destroy our bass fishery?

Dear Commissioner Vella,

It took a certain type of thinking to create and implement the CFP and, when the perception of some stocks were getting low, it took the same type of thinking to try and fix the problem.

That thinking was cut mortality, so they introduced quotas, increased MLS, increased mesh sizes, introduced 'days at sea', but all this thinking was a waste of time because it just created another problem – discards – a waste of the resources and fishermen's income.

Time and again, fishery after fishery, the same thinking was applied with the same predictable result, and in this, fisheries managers and scientists never questioned their train of thought, let alone introduced an alternative way of managing fisheries.

The lesson to be learnt is that using the same thinking that creates a problem, doesn't necessarily mean that the same thinking can cure the problem. A change in thinking is required and the bass is the candidate for it.

Don't cut mortality – increase recruitment. All that's needed is stop pair and single vessels midwater trawling on aggregations of spawning bass in the breeding season. Recruitment would be enormous, and sustainability secured without discards, and no other measures necessary, it's that simple. Try it for one season and the recruitment increase should be there for all to see in scientific surveys later that year.

All trawlers affected by the ban should be compensated, including the UK trawlers that are already banned.

**Yours sincerely,
S. P. Gathergood,
A commercial fisherman.**

The downside of no-take zones (NTZs)

Research has shown that no-take zones (NTZs) can have a negative impact on some stocks as well as helping to build and conserve them, reports **Tim Oliver**.

A report in the ICES' *Journal of Marine Science* by scientists at Swansea University describes how lobster populations around Lundy, the UK's first NTZ, have grown to such an extent that they are more prone to diseases such as gaffkaemia.

The researchers compared catches both inside and outside the NTZ area and found a higher lobster density and larger

lobsters in the NTZ – unfished for eight years – compared with the fished refuge zone (RZ).

Shell disease was present in 24% of lobsters and the probability of shell disease occurrence increased notably for individuals over the minimum landing size (MLS) of 90mm carapace length.

Shell disease was also more prevalent in lobsters displaying injury, and in males. Injury was present in 33% of lobsters sampled and was higher in lobsters in the NTZ compared with the RZ, and in lobsters over the MLS.

"Overall, the study demonstrates both positive and potentially negative effects of NTZs, methods for effective non-lethal sampling of disease agents, and highlights the need for more comprehensive, long-term monitoring within highly protected MCZs, both before and after implementation," says the report.

The report points out that lobsters are 'solitary and aggressive' and that if population densities become too high they are likely to fight. This causes shell damage, leading to diseases.

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'Ganging up' on fishermen

Dear Editor,

The heading above is because fishermen are too busy working their nuts off trying to earn a living to have time to defend themselves.

Much damage is being caused to the fishing industry by conservationists who are self-proclaimed 'experts'. Some of these 'experts' are very good at manipulating the media who love them, and publish every dubious, or in some cases, completely false, stories given to the press.

I say 'false' because many of their assumptions and calls for fishing bans or stops, or catch restrictions are based on ICES advised quotas, which are often pure guesswork, conservationists treat that guesswork figure as gospel in their campaigns and castigate 'wicked commercial fishermen' when it is they (the conservationists) who should be prosecuted because their so-called evidence would not stand up in court.

Some time ago I purchased a copy of a well known national newspaper and was drawn to the headline "Stop Buying British Cod". This report was totally, factually inaccurate and featured a large unregistered Eastern Bloc or Taiwanese stern trawler fishing illegally. I rang the newspaper, incensed by their journalism, only to be told that their environmental correspondent was new and had only just started. Further calls drew a blank and there was of course no retraction, so that mud stuck. That article probably resonated with their readers, who did not know any better and, as a result, did not purchase cod caught by British fishermen on British markets.

Junk news, headline grabbing, articles which are strictly non-factual are extremely damaging to this industry and need to be countered by legal action, enforced retraction of the offending article, and damages.

The Marine Conservation Society, Greenpeace, the Blue Marine Foundation and others base all of their recommendations on hypothetical arithmetic - the same as ICES does on species quotas.

There is, as a result of this, huge unfair discrimination against British commercial fishermen who only have a very small percentage of what is left of the "imaginary pile" of paper fish on the EU table, within British limits. And, as these groups 'gang up' and prepare to bully the European Union, our share will disappear.

This is the scenario developing behind a suggestion that "sea bass must be kept for anglers, say experts" (*Sunday Times*' web version 30th November 2014). Bloody cheek!

Commercial registered vessel fishermen, operating as food suppliers, and being subjected to the relentless cutting of the previously mentioned 'guesswork' would not be controlled by Greenpeace, the Marine Conservation Society, certain national newspapers, other media groups or the Blue Marine Foundation, who appear to be currently representing specific interest groups (i.e. anglers) against what has now become, or

perhaps always were, the 'natural enemy', due to the commercial nature of fish catching, the commercial fisherman. Leisure fishermen are being pitched against commercial fishermen to reduce their existing quotas.

There has always been a strong agreement that vagaries of tide, wind, and frequent weather changes make stocks of fish virtually impossible to predict. Famine and feast have co-existed around the coastal fisheries of our islands since forever, often without any logical explanation. Put a ban, or huge restriction, on certain species and they will appear everywhere, and then they will have to be discarded!

Professor Callum Roberts, another "expert" from the Blue Foundation, states: "Switching the bass fishery to hook and line fishing only would make excellent economic sense. It would eliminate most of the environmental impacts associated with the commercial net and trawl fisheries, including prevention of damage to sensitive near shore bottom habitats and by-catches of dolphins and porpoises."

This professor of marine biology has obviously not heard of the sand and aggregate dredgers that remove millions of tonnes of fish habitats forever, from the seabed, annually. Nor has he heard of the effects of electric beam trawling upon estuarial Dover sole stocks, and the fracturing of other species' back bones as a by-catch, or by kill, from this electric beaming.

The group this professor represents are using selective methods to discriminate. Their argument is recreational angler specific, accompanied by 'loaded economics' that require scrutiny, in favour of the fishing industry.

How dare they try and interfere with an, albeit flawed, system that has seen almost all quotas cut to the bone year after year leaving commercial fishermen with almost nothing to work on.

British fishermen could feed the nation, or at least part thereof, a fact always historically overlooked by politicians until times of war, or perhaps when discussing leaving the European Union.

If the latter happens, UK territorial fishing limits need to be extended. If the public were accurately informed by an industry fightback, they might be less inclined to donate to the causes which have become out-of-control 'monsters', practising a type of anarchy by imposing their views upon a general public without consultation, disregarding criticism from scientists (on the causes of climate change), and being given an easy ride on law-breaking from the judiciary.

It's about time politicians did something for us for a change and not just empty promises - guarantees of legislation changes is what is needed.

**A personal view from
Mr M.W. Jackson Snr,
Ex-trawler skipper / ex-marine group leader**

Big landing from 14m boat



SMALL boat has a big day, possibly setting a local record for landings

AS recently reported in *Fishing News*, the morning auction of January 5th at Lowestoft handled some 9,000 kilos of fish, reports Mick Harrod.

However, the surprising thing was that around 8,000 kilos (8 tonnes) of this catch, which was mostly skate, had been landed by one single inshore vessel after just one day's fishing.

The boat, Radiance LT3, owned by Roger Klyne and skippered by Philip Smy had completed one day's fishing.

This was certainly an unusual event at Lowestoft and may even constitute a local record catch of skate by a 14m boat. Because of quotas, skate were "off the menu" for many inshore fishermen altogether until a few weeks ago.

Ministers asked about delay in MMO report

Last week Alison Seabeck, Labour MP for Plymouth Moor View, challenged the Leader of the House of Commons, William Hague MP, over why Ministers at the Department for Food and Rural Affairs continue to delay a report into the Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

The MP says that the MMO is failing local fishers in Plymouth and across the south west, by producing questionable data, which is potentially extremely inaccurate and poorly managed. Yet, despite an original publication date of early 2014, which was then delayed till then end of 2014, in 2015 there is still no report.

Speaking in Business Questions last Thursday, Ms Seabeck told Mr Hague that MP's from across the House of Commons are calling for an independent investigation, as clearly somebody is hiding something.

"I want to see the Fisheries Minister, George Eustice, come the House of Commons and explain why the triennial review for the Marine Management Organisation - which closed in October 2013, with publication due in early 2014, and since has been delayed till the end of 2014 - has still not been published?" Ms Seabeck said.

"This is the subject of a cross-party request for an investigation into the quality of data, and fishers in my constituency are being affected.

"Will the Leader of the House please explain what the Department for environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Government are hiding?"

In response Mr Hague told Ms Seabeck that he will pass her concerns on to the Department for Food and Rural Affairs, and she has since tabled further questions to find out what is happening to this review and when it is to be published.

North East Atlantic fish stocks improving

A presentation to industry representatives at a recent meeting of the Common Language Group meeting showed that the 2014 advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) on North East Atlantic (NEA) stocks is cause for optimism.

The Seafish presentation reports the following:

Taken as a whole there is a generally improving situation in the ICES assessed areas.

Fishing mortality levels have come down strongly, there are an increasing number of stocks now exploited at or below maximum sustainable yield (MSY), and spawning stock biomass is generally increasing.

There are 27 stocks in the North East Atlantic and surrounding waters which are now managed at MSY, compared with just five in 2009, and over the same period the number of stocks with MSY assessments has increased from 35 to 46. It is estimated that 55 per cent of stocks in the NEA and surrounding waters are now within safe biological limits, up from 31% in 2009

To help understand this advice Seafish has carried out a top-line analysis of the new advice issued in the autumn on Barents Sea capelin, blue whiting, Celtic Sea Nephrops, monkfish, North East Atlantic mackerel, Norwegian spring spawning herring, Norway pout, red gurnard and red mullet.

This also includes the updated advice for North Sea Dover sole, haddock, plaice and whiting.

This has been added to the stock analysis already completed in June and in total covers 117 stocks.

ICES publishes new scientific advice on stock status in June and October each year.

This advice is crucial in determining the Total Allowable Catches (TACs) annually agreed by the European Union, and also forms the basis for fish lists and scoring systems.

This advice is also ultimately used in recommendations on which fish to eat or avoid meaning it can have particular relevance for consumers.

There are two summaries, one covering the main commercial species and one specifically covering pelagic species.

These are regularly used by the entire fishing supply chain in the UK as well as environmental groups and Government departments with vested interests in securing long-term sustainable solutions to fishing

Both analysis summaries are available to view on the Seafish website under the titles:

* *Seafish Summary of ICES Advice June and October 2014*

* *Quick Summary of ICES Advice June and October 2014*

Pelagic Stocks