

Conservation of Grey Mullet

This presentation was originally prepared by NMC to present the case for mullet conservation to DEFRA at an angling stakeholders meeting. If you would like to modify it for use with local angling clubs etc, please contact DavRigden@aol.com for an editable version

Mullet...



Three Species...



- Thick Lipped Grey Mullet
- Thin Lipped Grey Mullet
- Golden Grey Mullet
- Different habitats and behaviour but superficially similar in appearance so probably not practical to differentiate in fishery management context

Recreational Mullet Fishery...

- 19000 anglers in South West rank mullet in their top five target species ([IIFSW2005](#))
- 57000 anglers in mainland UK based on NMC membership patterns
- Recreational Mullet Fishery extends beyond Scottish border on both coasts but is most significant in SE, S and SW England and parts of Wales
- Mullet 4th most important shore species in England ([NFSA survey 2005](#))
- Largely shore-based but a limited dinghy-based recreational fishery.

Easy Access ...



- Many mullet venues provide easy & relatively safe access such as piers & harbour walls
- Important for junior anglers, senior citizens and disabled anglers

Freshwater Links...

- Tackle, tactics and catch-and-release ethic in mullet angling much more akin to coarse angling than general RSA
- Mullet are an important “gateway” species for coarse anglers to try RSA
- Increasing interest in fly-fishing for mullet may attract game anglers to RSA



Sustainable Use...

- 86% of mullet returned alive in SW (liFSW2005)
- Probably 90%+ catch and release generally
- Accidental mortality rate very low
- Mullet “kill” in RSF estimated less than 30 tonnes per year



Best Value...

- Value of mullet in RSF between £21 per kg and £25.50 per kg
(derived from liFSW 2005 data & NMC survey 2004)
- Direct fishing costs 48% also transport, accommodation, food
- Average individual mullet valued at over £30 with potential for repeat capture
- Recreational mullet fishery valued at £4-5M



The Problem with Mullet is...

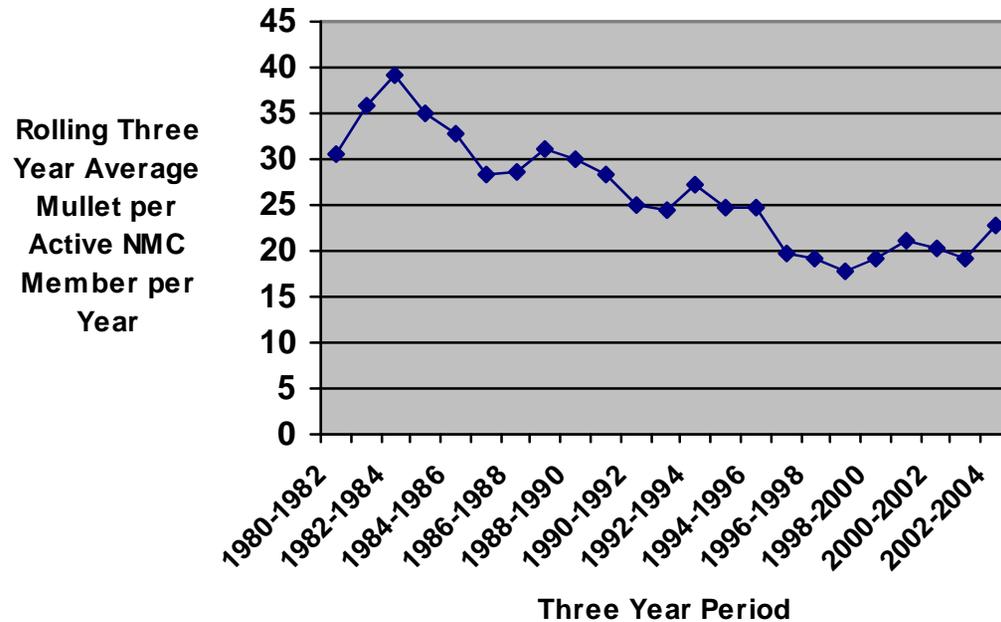


- Exceptionally slow growing
- Don't spawn till 40 - 47cm at 9 - 11 years
- A 5lb "specimen" in the RSF may be 20 years old
- An exceptional specimen of 8lb is likely to be over 25 years old

The Other Problems with Mullet Are...

- Spawn only every other year (thick lips)
- Vulnerable to netting when shoaled up for winter both inshore (including beach seines) and offshore as a by-catch in the bass pair-trawl fishery
- Vulnerable to gill-netting in preferred summer habitats such as small estuaries, tidal creeks & channels and shallow bays
- Some evidence that mullet return to the same area annually. When the stock of specimen fish is removed from an area it may not recover in the fishing lifetime of many anglers

We are worried because...



- Catches recorded by NMC members have declined by about a third over two decades
- Despite mitigating factors such as a longer season, better tackle and travelling to venues less affected by netting

Mullet in the Catching Sector

- Not a major commercial species
- Recorded commercial landings valued at £800k (2004) but potentially significant unrecorded landings by inshore commercial fishery and so-called hobby fishery.
- Typical Billingsgate price £1.70 per kg but often much less in local markets and sometimes only a few pence per kg for netsmen
- Anecdotal evidence of usage as pot-bait and of dumping of unwanted catches
- “Beer-money” rather than “livelihood”. Frequently used as an excuse to carry on fishing for more valuable target species such as bass e.g. in nursery areas.

Recreational Status

- Net Benefits Report (2004) ...

Fisheries departments should review the evidence supporting arguments for re-designating commercially caught species for wholly recreational sea angling, beginning with bass by the end of 2004.

- Labour Charter for Angling (2005)

We will improve the current framework for managing and protecting all our marine resources through a Marine Bill, which we hope to introduce some time in the next parliament

Key outcomes sought from a new Marine Bill are...
Management of fish stocks such as bass, wrasse and mullet specifically for angling

NMC members regard this as tantamount to a manifesto promise given its timing days before the 2005 General Election

NMC Proposes...

- Recreational-Only Status for Grey Mullet through a complete ban on commercial retention, transshipment, landing and sale
- A “Golden Mile” around all or much of the coastline free from all forms of netting likely to damage mullet & other species important to the Recreational Sea Fishery
- Concerted effort for EU action to close the damaging winter bass pair-trawl fishery

And in Return...

- RSA should be prepared to accept bag limits on anglers' catches of mullet
- NMC would be prepared to consider the case for mullet as a “catch and release” (only) species

Question...

Given the statements in Net Benefits and the Labour Charter, the low commercial value and high recreational value of mullet... if we don't get recreational-only status for mullet, what will we get it for?

More Details

- Read our position paper at www.thenationalmulletclub.org

