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# NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS

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## **NFSA response to Sussex Sea Fishery Consultation Document on Elasmobranch management Plan. Dated 5 Sep2006.**

The NFSA is the largest representative organisation for Sea Anglers in England. Through a combination of direct individual membership, associated clubs and affiliated organisations it represents some 35,000 Anglers.

The NFSA would like to thank the Sussex Sea Fishery for taking a lead in evaluating the conservation options for elasmobranches in their region. Sea Anglers have been asking for a long time for a more enlightened approach to the management of some of the less well known fish stocks which for many act as key motivators to go sea fishing, in the process driving a significant commercial activity in its own right.

### Specific Responses.

To the questions following the paragraph covering Recreational Impact on Pages 4 & 7.

There is an active charter boat business in the area, the exact number of boats is not known but our members hold regular boat competitions and organise day trips from several harbours in the area.

There is also an active and growing fleet of small "own" boats that operate when time and weather permit. There are several NFSA clubs in the region that operate up to 30 boats through their membership. At certain times of the year, mostly Spring and Summer, Tope and in particular Smoothounds are one of the key incentives for these boats (Charter and Private). These fish are relatively large, fight well and return alive well. Very few are retained by anglers to eat. Rays generally are a popular target, some for their sheer size (Blondes) some for both sport and to eat (Thornbacks)

A regional survey conducted by the NFSA last year showed that Smoothounds and Thornback Rays are 2 of the top 10 species for both shore and boat Anglers, both in England generally and specifically in the South of England.

Until recently Tope and Smoothounds in the area were thought by anglers to be relatively free of commercial pressures. However, known examples of catches in recent years, particular by pair trawling, have dispelled this notion. Charter boat numbers in the area are in decline as general reductions in fish stocks reduce the quality of the experience. A further decline in the remaining stocks of fish of interest to anglers will further reduce the fleet. Given the changing nature of the target fish in the area during the year, elasmobranches underpin about 40% or more of their activity.

The priority species are Smoothounds, Thornback Rays, Tope and Blonde rays.

From an angling perspective, stopping the taking of large sharks in option 2 would, over time if stocks improved, have a positive impact as the fishing experience improves. Stopping the taking of sizeable rays in option 5 would have a mixed effect, as improved fish stocks benefit the angling experience, but the right to keep some sizeable fish to eat is also an important element of angling and rays are one of the popular “keep to eat” species. Rays, apart from really large ones, are not such an exciting fish to target for general sport, although points based species competitions raise their interest, particularly as they return well.

Views on options proposed.

The NFSA supports option 2 for the threatened species and option 4 for vulnerable skates and rays.

Any experienced angler or commercial fishermen will be able to distinguish the species of ray being handled. We would prefer to see an appropriate MLS set for individual species and a “return whole to port” strategy for all. The MLS should be such that all species have the opportunity to breed at least once. A single MLS set large enough to protect all rays would mean the smaller species effectively being “no take”. Given their small size this would not be a major issue for anglers, except where in roving small boat species competitions a single sizeable specimen is retained as proof of capture.

Richard Ferre. Chairman NFSA.

Any questions resulting from this consultation should be directed to Richard Ferre at the following email address [richard@rferre.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:richard@rferre.fsnet.co.uk)