



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF SEA ANGLERS

Founded 1904

CHAIRMAN: Mr R.W.Ferre

PRESIDENT: Mr R. W. Page

HEAD OFFICE: Hamlyn House, Mardle Way, Buckfastleigh, Devon, England, TQ11 ONS.
Tel +44 (0)1364 644643, Fax +44 (0)1364 644486, e-mail: ho@nfsa.org.uk

Response from the National Federation of Sea Anglers (NFSA) to the DEFRA consultation on proposals for managing the exploitation of Tope.

The NFSA is the lead body for Recreational Sea Angling (RSA) in England. It represents approximately 4000 direct members, 300 clubs with some 20,000 angling members. It has very democratic rules, with a regional structure, regular meetings at all levels and specialist groups to focus on Competition and Conservation.

Introduction.

Tope are one of the few fish that an angler in most parts of England can catch that grow to high double figure weights and they are found in most of England's inshore waters at one time or another during the course of a year. As such they are one of the species that drive the RSA experience. It is encouraging to see a consultation launched before the species has suffered a serious decline and as such DEFRA are to be commended for launching it.

Comments on specific proposals.

Option 1. In sympathy with your paper we do not believe Option 1, do nothing, is a viable option. Markets for fish products are increasingly international and it is only a matter of time before the far east desire for shark fins creates a commercial demand for a very fragile stock.

Option 2. Prohibit the fishing for Tope by all methods other than Rod and Line and prohibit the retention, transshipment and landing of tope. We absolutely support this option with one proviso, there should be some flexibility to allow the photographing and very occasional weighing of trophy fish. While there is 100% support within the angling community for the return of all fish, an integral part of the angling experience is a photograph of the event and where it is a truly exceptional fish an accurate assessment of weight. To ensure this is a rare situation and managed correctly when it occurs, we would propose a Code of Conduct that clearly explains out how Tope caught by anglers should be treated. The NFSA is currently discussing the possible content of such a code with other RSA organisations.

Option 3. Prohibit all fishing, retention on board, transshipment and landing of Tope. We oppose this option because it would stop angling for Tope with Rod and Line, even on 100% return basis with a high survival rate. Given the serious reduction in some of the traditional fish stocks that RSA target, it is the continued access to fish like tope that makes RSA a worthwhile activity to pursue. A total ban would inevitably have an impact on charter and private boat fishing.

Response to questions on impact where RSA is affected.

Looking at the data on Charter and Private boats, while the charter boat figure is believable the figure on Private Boats is almost certainly significantly low. We checked with just three of our larger clubs (2 in the Solent, one in Poole), they estimate they have about 250 fishing boats owned and used by their membership alone. We (the NFSA) intend to do some research on the number of boats within our own club membership. If this becomes available in the near future we will pass the data on to you.

We know of only one charter skipper who solely targets Tope (see norfolkfishingtrips.co.uk). But for some during certain times of the year it is one of the main drivers for anglers booking most charter boats. Stopping this activity would certainly cause drop off in demand. The quoted cost of £300 per day is at the bottom end of the range since the rise in fuel prices. Prices range from £300 for an inshore trip to £450 for a long range wrecking trip on a large boat and can be up to £750 a day for corporate days out. Charter boat licenses also vary, normally between 8 and 12 anglers dependent on the size of the boat. Most enlightened charter skippers are now moving to Catamarans that take up to 12 anglers with good facilities. In the process they are making large, long term investments in their business.

Expenditure.

The following paragraph comes from the current research going on within the Invest in Fish SW project.

'Trip expenditure'

Trip expenditure is that which occurs as a variable and excludes fixed costs. So an angler who has acquired his chest waders, rod & reel, boat, kayak etc. is not presumed to replace this equipment each trip! but he will pay out for travel, bait, parking, launch fee, charter boat fee etc as applicable. Nautilus data suggests shore anglers spend £12.48 variable expenses per day, private boat anglers £24.42 and charter boat anglers £56.70. Taking the number of each category into account results in an average of £24.84 per trip. There is then the question of what proportion of this expenditure actually takes place in the SW area. A considerable proportion of fixed expenditure, tackle, boats etc. will take place outside the SW (internet etc.) but a greater proportion of the variable trip expenditure will take place in the SW.

We are trying to gather similar data but do not have enough responses at this time to provide a trustworthy response. Anecdotal evidence on trips suggest that most regular boat anglers make 2 trips a year when Tope is the primary target and 2 or 3 when it is the secondary target. Given the impact of tides it is not unusual for conditions to allow only a proportion of the trip to target a certain species, therefore a charter skipper has a 2 or 3 step approach, normally moving the boat and changing tactics as circumstances dictate.

An example on the Solent area on a spring tide would be to move a fair way offshore for 1 hour either side of slack water to target tope, then move inshore as the tide picks up and tackle will not hold bottom to target Black Bream or Rays.

One additional factor that raises concerns at a general level is the increasing use of less valuable commercial species for pot bait. While recognising that there is a valid need for such a supply, we have concerns that species important to RSA such as Tope may be impacted by such practise. We would therefore like to see a clear statement, for the avoidance of doubt, that Tope cannot be used for this purpose.

Richard Ferre. Chairman NFSA.

