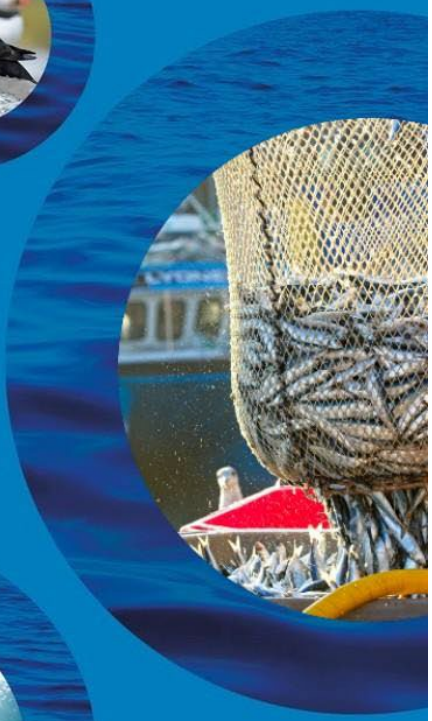
Marine Management Organisation













Bass fishing opportunities 2026

Application, eligibility and background information

...ambitious for our seas and coasts

Bass fishing opportunities 2026

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1. Introduction

Following the outcomes of the 2025 bass authorisation review, Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is introducing an application process to support the implementation of bass fishing opportunities recommendations through the reallocation of unused bass authorisations.

An unused authorisation is one that is no longer linked to a fishing vessel, for example because the vessel has been retired.

As part of this process, MMO invites **English licensed** (excluding crown dependencies) **commercial fishing vessels, administered by MMO** to apply for an authorisation to land bass **caught by hooks and lines gear**.

This application applies only to **8 metre and under monohull vessels without a current bass authorisation** and will be used to assess applicants against defined eligibility criteria.

The reallocation of unused bass authorisations will be limited to **hooks and lines gear type only** and introduced through a **phased rollout** of a proportion of the total available authorisations.

In the first phase, a total of **sixty-five authorisations** will be issued to successful applicants through a ballot process.

This will be followed by a period of review to assess outcomes, including fishing activity and sustainability indicators.

Subject to the findings of this review, and where it is demonstrated that fishing pressure remains within sustainable limits, a further phase of fishing opportunities may be considered.

Eligibility

We will check each application against the eligibility criteria listed in this document. This helps us make sure bass fishing opportunities are allocated fairly and openly. We will look at things such as the vessel's licence and its compliance history.

Applying **does not** guarantee that you will get a bass authorisation. We will use the information in your application to decide who can receive one. Successful applicants will receive a hooks and lines bass authorisation.

Trial approach

To support effective implementation, MMO will deliver this measure initially as a trial. This approach will allow key elements of the process to be tested, evaluated, and refined before transitioning to MMO operational management.

The trial will focus on assessing and, where necessary, improving the following aspects:

- Application process
- Eligibility criteria

- Selection methodology
- Review mechanisms
- Fishing behaviour
- Stock impacts

Insights gained during the trial phase will inform any necessary adjustments to ensure the measure is robust, transparent, and suitable for long-term implementation.

Should the trial identify unforeseen or adverse impacts, the MMO will review the viability of the measure and may decide not to proceed with future bass fishing opportunities implementation.

Applications

Further details on the application process, eligibility criteria and application questions are provided in this guidance.

2. Background

The bass fishery has several management measures aimed at protecting the stock, these were introduced in 2015 after warnings of stock decline due to multiple years of poor recruitment and high fishing pressure. These measures include:

- Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS).
- Domestic authorisations for commercial bass fishing.
- Seasonal closures for both commercial and recreational fishers.
- Landing and bycatch limits for all sectors.

In December 2023, the Bass Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) was published, setting out a long-term strategy for the sustainable management of the bass fishery. One of the actions under Goal 2 of the FMP is a review of the domestic bass authorisation system.

Any alternative system would seek to maintain access to the fishery, align with other FMP goals for example, reducing discarding, sensitive species bycatch and maximising benefits to local coastal communities.

The Bass Management Group (BMG) formed by Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) under FMP Goal 1 held its first meeting in November 2024 and MMO were tasked to lead on a review of the domestic bass authorisation system forming a subgroup consisting of members of the BMG and other stakeholders.

Over a seven-month period under the leadership of MMO, the subgroup conducted in-depth discussions to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the existing authorisation system and broader opportunities.

A series of engagement events designed to enhance the analysis phase of the review were delivered taking place at various coastal locations across the country, in total, 20 in person events were held, engaging with nearly 300 stakeholders.

The resulting report presents the findings of the review with recommendations aimed at enhancing sustainable fishing opportunities with an alternative method of managing bass authorisations and supporting the broader objectives of the bass FMP.

Analysis undertaken as part of the review showed a gradual reduction in the number of vessels authorised to land bass. This was partly due to a number of authorisations becoming detached from vessels and becoming unused. The review therefore recommended reinstating these authorisations to maintain the fleet at its highest historic track record capacity. Further details are available in the bass authorisation review report.

Defra has now tasked MMO with the implementation of the fishing opportunities recommendations identified though the review.

- Maintain access to those currently authorised to land bass under existing rules Bass industry guidance 2026.
- Reinstate unused authorisations through a phased implementation to the maximum historical track record capacity through hooks and lines gear type.
- Issue a proportion of the overall unused authorisations to 8 metre and under monohull UK licensed commercial fishing vessels.
- Maintain the bass fishing fleet at its maximum track record capacity, reissuing authorisations as they become available.

3. Selection framework

A transparent but anonymised process utilising a ballot will be used to allocate authorisations.

- Applicants will be assessed by the defined eligibility criteria and conditions detailed in this document. Only one application per vessel will be accepted.
- Applicants that successfully complete the application and meet the published criteria and conditions will be entered into the ballot.
- A MMO panel will supervise the ballot process and will verify applicants that meet the eligibility criteria.
- Successful applicants identified through the ballot will be informed at the completion of the process. Fishing must not begin before the date and time specified on a received authorisation.
- Successful applicants will be issued with a hooks and lines authorisation under the existing bass management measures Bass industry guidance 2026, subject to the additional specific conditions outlined in this document.

- Applicants that meet the eligibility criteria but are unsuccessful in the ballot will be retained as a reserve list for future allocation of unused authorisations as and when they become available.

- MMO will contact all applicants who meet the published eligibility criteria to inform them of the outcome of the ballot.

Due to the anticipated volume of applications, MMO will not be able to inform applicants that they have been entered into the ballot or their position on the waiting list. This helps ensure the process can be administered efficiently and consistently for all applicants.

4. Eligibility criteria and conditions

The following section outlines the specific criteria, conditions and the rationale that has been applied.

Applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. The applicant must be the owner of an English licensed (excluding crown dependencies) commercial fishing vessel administered by MMO.

The requirement that individuals applying for an unused bass authorisation must have a current licensed fishing vessel ensures that access to the bass fishery is granted only to active, legitimate operators.

- Supports effective fisheries management, as authorisations are linked to vessels that are already regulated, monitored, and compliant with licensing requirements.
- Promotes accountability and traceability, since licensed vessels are subject to reporting, inspection, and enforcement controls.

2. Vessel must be 8 metres and under in overall length and monohull.

The unused bass authorisations are being restricted to vessels 8 metres and under in overall length and monohull, this is to ensure that allocations remain compliant with legal requirements on fishing capacity and preventing unintended increase in overall fleet capacity.

- Ensures compliance with legal capacity limits supporting a cautious approach, avoiding any unintended increase in fishing pressure on the bass stock.
- Allows unused authorisations to be redistributed safely and fairly, while fully meeting the requirements set out in fisheries legislation.

3. The applicants fishing vessel must not already hold a bass authorisation.

This criterion is intended to ensure that fishing opportunities are distributed fairly and equitably.

By prioritising applicants who do not currently hold a bass authorisation, this approach:

- Promotes fairness by giving access to fishers who have previously not had the opportunity to participate in the bass fishery.
- Prevents concentration of fishing opportunity among a limited number of operators supporting a more balanced distribution of access across the fleet.
- Aligns with the objective of maximising the benefit to local coastal communities.

4. Applicants that own/part own multiple licensed fishing vessels cannot hold more than one bass authorisation.

Applicants who own or part own multiple licensed fishing vessels may only hold one bass authorisation. This requirement is intended to ensure that access to the bass fishery is distributed fairly and proportionately across the fleet.

- Promotes equitable access by preventing a small number of vessel owners from holding multiple authorisations.
- Avoids concentration of fishing opportunity, ensuring a wider range of fishers can benefit.
- Maximises the overall benefit of available authorisations, spreading opportunity rather than allowing it to accumulate with individual businesses.

5. The applicant must have no enforcement history over the stated time periods.

MMO reserve the right to refuse applications due to an applicant's history of compliance with regulatory requirements relating to fishing. This includes refusing to progress applications where a master and owner in the application has been found guilty of any fisheries offences which resulted in an Official Written Warning (OWW), Financial Administrative Penalties (FAPs) or finding of guilt by a court.

This criterion is in place to ensure that authorisations are granted to fishers who demonstrate a recent record of compliance with fisheries regulations. This provides a proportionate and time-bound criteria, ensuring that applicants are judged on their recent conduct.

Enforcement history relates to:

At the time of the application the owner and master of the fishing vessel has received an Official Written Warning (OWW), Financial Administrative Penalty (FAP), or has been found guilty by a court for offences committed during the stated reference periods

Reference periods:

- **The owner and master of the fishing vessel with an Official Written Warning (OWW) for an offence committed** during a **12-month** period applied immediately preceding the date on which the application research was conducted

- **The owner and master of the fishing vessel with a Financial Administrative Penalty (FAP) or has been found guilty by a court for an offence committed** during a **3-year** time period applied immediately preceding the date on which the application research was conducted

By applying this criterion:

- Encourages responsible and lawful fishing practices, reinforcing the importance of compliance within the fishery.
- Ensures that access to limited fishing opportunities is prioritised for those who meet regulatory standards.
- Maintains the integrity of the management system, by linking access to adherence to the rules designed to protect bass stocks.
- Reduces the risk of further non-compliance, supporting sustainable exploitation of the bass stock.

Additional conditions

1. The applicant will be unable to transfer the authorisation when a vessel is sold for the defined period.

Bass authorisations allocated under this measure **cannot** be transferred **when a vessel is sold** for a period of **3 years**.

A successful applicant however may transfer an authorisation between vessels in their ownership under the normal rules Bass industry guidance 2026.

If an authorisation is no longer required by the applicant during the designated time period, the authorisation will return to the MMO for reallocation.

This requirement is intended to ensure that authorisations are used for genuine fishing activity, rather than being obtained for any potential value that may be applied to a licensed fishing vessel with an authorisation attached.

Applying a temporary restriction on transfers when a vessel is sold:

- Prevents speculative applications, where an authorisation might be sought primarily to increase the potential sale value of a vessel.
- Ensures that authorisations are actively used, allowing fisheries managers to better understand and predict actual fishing effort and pressure on the bass stock.
- Protects the integrity of the allocation process, ensuring opportunities are granted to those intending to fish.

The 3-year period provides a proportionate safeguard, ensuring that the authorisation is meaningfully utilised, following which it can be transferred under normal rules, Bass Fishing Guidance.

2. The applicant will be expected to undertake participation in voluntary Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) trials.

Applicants must agree to potential participation in voluntary Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) trials as a condition of receiving an unused bass authorisation.

This requirement supports the ongoing implementation of the Bass FMP specifically Goal 3 considering how to incentivise participation in REM early adopter programmes, to improve data collection on discards while recognising that participation in any trial would remain voluntary.

By including this condition:

- Supports improved data collection, helping fisheries managers build a more accurate picture of fishing practices, discards and landings.
- Contributes to sustainable management of the bass stock, ensuring decisions are informed by reliable and up-to-date information.
- Encourages collaboration between industry and regulators, giving fishers an opportunity to help shape future management approaches.

Participation in REM trials would only take place where appropriate and agreed, and this condition does not impose an automatic requirement to install or operate REM.

3. Regular bass fishing activity must be demonstrated.

It must be demonstrated that there has been regular bass fishing activity, this will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Where an authorisation is unfished, MMO may consider recalling and reallocating it. This condition is intended to ensure that authorisations are used for genuine fishing activity, allowing fisheries managers to better understand and predict actual fishing effort and pressure on the bass stock.

4. The applicant must submit a complete application with all the required information before the submission deadline at midnight on Monday 21 December 2026. No late or incomplete applications will be accepted. It will be the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the completeness of their application.

Applicants must submit a complete application, including all required information, before the stated deadline. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted, and it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure their submission is complete.

This requirement is necessary to ensure that the allocation process is fair, transparent, and consistently applied to all applicants.

By applying this criterion:

- Ensures equal treatment, as all applicants are subject to the same deadline and information requirements.
- Supports a fair and efficient assessment process, allowing all applications to be evaluated on a consistent and comparable basis.
- Prevents delays and administrative burden, which could arise from chasing missing information or accepting late submissions.

- Maintains transparency and integrity, by avoiding any perception of preferential treatment or flexibility for individual applicants.

Placing responsibility on the applicant to ensure completeness also helps to ensure that decisions are based on accurate and sufficient information.

MMO has provided multiple application routes listed in section 6 of this document.

5. Complaints and appeals

The allocation of unused bass authorisations will be made through a ballot open to all applicants who meet the published eligibility criteria and conditions.

As all eligible applications are treated equally and selections are made at random, there is no discretionary assessment or scoring of applicants that could be reviewed through an appeals process.

For this reason**, there is no right of appeal against the outcome of the ballot**. However, if applicants believe that the process has not been administered or operated correctly, they may submit a complaint to the MMO through its standard complaints procedure.

6. Application

MMO invites **English licensed** (excluding crown dependencies) **8m and under monohull, commercial fishing vessels administered by MMO** to apply for an authorisation to land bass caught by **hooks and lines** gear.

This application will be used to assess applicants against the defined eligibility criteria.

Only one application per vessel will be accepted.

To be eligible to apply:

1. You must be the owner of an English licensed commercial fishing vessel administered by MMO.
2. Your vessel must be 8 metres and under in overall length and monohull.
3. Your fishing vessel must not already hold a bass authorisation.
4. Applicants that own/part own multiple licensed fishing vessels cannot hold more than one bass authorisation.

MMO will contact all applicants who meet the published eligibility criteria to inform them of the outcome of the selection process.

For successful applicants fishing must not begin before the date and time specified on the received authorisation.

Please submit your application by midnight on Monday 21 December 2026 using one of the following options;

1. **(Preferred).** Follow this link **Bass authorisations applications** to the online application, **or**

2. To **Email,** or to provide a **written** application:

   Contact bassapplications@marinemanagement.org.uk for an application form.

3. **Alternatively**, by phone if you require assistance with completion of the application. Contact MMO Regional Fisheries Group Manager for your area.

   South Regional Fisheries Group Manager
   Jonathan.brooks@marinemanagement.org.uk or 07876 398166

   North East Regional Fisheries Group Manager
   Caley.McIntosh@marinemanagement.org.uk or 07442 859771

   East Regional Fisheries Group Manager
   Caley.McIntosh@marinemanagement.org.uk or 07442 859771

   North West Regional Fisheries Group Manager
   Daniel.Wardle@marinemanagement.org.uk or 07342 705447

   South West Regional Fisheries Group Manager
   Daniel.Wardle@marinemanagement.org.uk or 07342 705447

4. **Additionally**, MMO will conduct engagement events around the coast to answer questions and provide support with the application process. Further details will be published here FMP blog from **Thursday 12 November.**

7. Application questions

1. Are you the owner of an English licensed (excluding crown dependencies) commercial fishing vessel administered by MMO?
2. Do you currently hold a bass authorisation (fixed gillnet/hooks and lines) on any vessel in your ownership?
3. Is your licensed fishing vessel 8 metres and under in overall size and monohull?
4. What is the RSS number of the vessel?
5. What is the PLN of the vessel?
6. What is your domestic fishing license number?
7. What is the name of the vessel?

8. What is your main port of landing?
9. Who is the owner of the licensed fishing vessel?
    - Name
    - Address
    - Email address
    - Phone number
10. Who is the Nominee? (A nominee is a person authorised by the vessel owner(s) to act on their behalf in matters relating to the vessel's fishing licence)
    - Name
    - Address
    - Email address
    - Phone number

8. Next steps

Applicants that meet all the eligibility criteria and conditions will be automatically entered into the ballot process.

Once the application window has closed, MMO will inform all applicants of the outcome of the ballot process, and for successful applicants timings for the activation of a bass authorisation.

9. Contact us

If you have any questions, please contact MMO at bassapplications@marinemanagement.org.uk

10. Personal data

Marine Management Organisation (MMO) – Fishing opportunities

Who we are

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is an executive non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). We are responsible for licensing, regulating, and planning marine activities in the seas around England. We are the data controller for the personal data collected in this application.

Purpose of the application process.

Following the outcomes of the 2025 Bass Authorisation Review, Marine Management Organisation (MMO) is introducing an application process to support the implementation of **bass fishing opportunities recommendations in through the reallocation of unused bass authorisations.**

As part of this process, MMO invites **English licensed commercial fishing vessels administered by MMO** to apply for an authorisation to **land bass caught by hooks and lines gear**.

What personal data we collect and how it is used

MMO may collect the following types of information:

• Business contact details (e.g., name, job type, business or organisation name)

• Commercial activity information (e.g., type of activity, scale of activity, geographic area of operation)

• Professional opinions and feedback.

• Any additional information you voluntarily provide

Your data will be used to:

• Analyse industry perspectives and trends

• Inform policy development and regulatory improvements

• Engage with stakeholders more effectively

• Produce anonymised reports and summaries for internal and public use

Your responses may be shared with other relevant government bodies, but only in anonymised or aggregated form unless you have explicitly consented otherwise.

Lawful basis for processing

We process your personal data under Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR – the processing is in order to deliver our public, regulatory and business services. MMO is a registered data controller under the information Commissioners Office (ICO), our registration number is Z2205091. For more information about the MMO, please check the MMO Home page.

The statutory duties of the MMO are specified in the Marine and Coastal Access Act of 2009, the Fisheries Act of 2020 and other associated legislation as referred to in those Acts.

Data retention

We will retain your personal data only as long as necessary to fulfil the purposes of the survey and in accordance with our data retention policy. Anonymised data may be retained for statistical and research purposes.

Your rights

Find out about your individual rights under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018).

Complaints

You have the right to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office at any time.

MMO's personal information charter

MMO's personal information charter explains more about your rights over your personal data.

Contact us

If you have any questions about this privacy notice or how your data is handled, please contact the MMO Data Protection Manager at:

Data Protection Manager,
Marine Management Organisation,
MMO Tyneside House,
Skinnerburn Road
Newcastle upon Tyne,
NE4 7YH
Email: dataprotection@marinemanagement.org.uk

The contact details for the data controller's Data Protection Officer (DPO) are:

DPO
Defra
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street London
SW1P 4DF
Email: DefraGroupDataProtectionOfficer@defra.gov.uk