

Recreational angling could be the hook for a business boom in Torbay

Pubs, restaurants, hotel, guesthouses and many other Torbay businesses could boom by capitalising on recreational anglers visiting the area in future according to experts in the angling sector.

Recreational sea angling is estimated to be worth between £1.5-2.0 billion per year to the UK economy, and the rich waters off of Torbay hold many species that attract visiting sea anglers each year, including huge Atlantic bluefin tuna that have appeared in the waters off of Torbay each autumn for the last five years.

Anglers are unable to fish for bluefin until the government authorises a recreational fishery but representatives of the UK's estimated 800,000 recreational sea anglers have been working with DEFRA on a possible research focused catch, tag and release fishery to allow angling for bluefin in UK waters.

Such a fishery would attract anglers from all over the UK, and further afield, generating much needed revenue for hotels, bed and breakfast owners, restaurants and other businesses, much of it in September to November, outside of the regular tourist season.

The charter fishing fleet, taking anglers out to sea on fishing trips, has shrunk over recent decades but a real opportunity exists to rebuild the sector by attracting high spending angling tourists to take advantage of the world class tuna fishing opportunities.

Recreational Sea angling has now been recognised in the new post Brexit UK Fisheries Act as a legitimate stakeholder in fisheries and eligible for support to promote this valuable sector, something which will boost tourism in coastal communities such as Torbay.

Angling representatives met last week with Anthony Mangnall, MP for Totnes, and Susie Colley, Chair of the Torbay Chamber of Commerce, which helped to arrange the meeting, to explain how support for a recreational bluefin tuna fishery, and the sea angling sector in general, would reap benefits for many small businesses suffering the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

At the meeting Mr Mangnall expressed much interest in these opportunities and a very constructive discussion took place. He will liaise with Scott Mann (MP North Cornwall) and discuss presenting a question in the House of Commons to enable a debate regarding the need for DEFRA to authorise a research focused catch-tag-release recreational fishery in 2021. Also stated that he, as a recreational angler, would like to meet with Matt Forrester and anglers based in Brixham to discuss the implications of this project.

Angling representatives are calling on MPs, such as Mr Mangnall, to press the government to introduce a research-focused catch-tag-release fishery later this year which would help local businesses recovering from the after effects of the Covid-19 pandemic which has hit the tourism and hospitality sectors, like Torbay's, particularly hard.

Steve Murphy, founder of the campaign group, Bluefin Tuna UK, said; Atlantic bluefin tuna in our waters have been increasing in numbers and their geographical range for around seven years now. Long term climatic cycle changes, possibly exacerbated by man-made climate change, and underpinned by a dramatic recovery in the stock since 2010 in consequence of a 15-year recovery plan.

We have a valuable world class fishery on our doorstep and well managed recreational live release fisheries (with proven very low mortality rates) are the most effective way to utilise that opportunity -- good science, optimal economic benefits, and a world class, sustainable fishery. It needs to be delivered now.

Matt Forrester, a local charter skipper (silverhalocharters.co.uk), said; I've had a big demand from anglers to fish for this species, the bluefin tuna offer something really special and anglers will pay a premium for 'the fish of a life time'. This additional revenue is really important to skippers as overheads and running costs are very high and getting a higher value ticket, per day, is crucial. The revenue will spread far and wide across the area, but only if DEFRA move to adopt the fishery for this iconic sporting fish. Sadly, the charter fishing fleet, mirroring commercial fishing, has shrunk over recent decades but a real opportunity exists to rebuild this recreational sector. This chance is second to none, we can have a thriving live release bluefin and shark fishery right here on our doorstep, it will run really well alongside the existing and varied sea fishing we have on offer.

David Mitchell, Head of Sea Angling at the Angling Trust, the national representative body for all angling in England, said, "Angling could play a huge role in bringing Torbay back to life once the Covid-19 pandemic recedes. With the presence of giant bluefin tuna off the coast all sorts of local businesses could be capitalising on servicing anglers travelling from far and wide to fish for a species normally associated with expensive foreign fishing holidays. Now they can visit Torbay instead!".

Susie Colley, Chair of the Torbay chamber of commerce said; In these difficult and challenging times it was very reassuring to have spent an hour with such a positive young man who clearly understands that this project will turn Torquay into a vibrant and bustling town. Torquay Chamber of Commerce is indebted to not only Anthony but to the tenacity of Steven, David, Matt, and several others who can see a bright future for not only themselves, but for Torquay.

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