

IRISH CHARTER SKIPPERS ASSOCIATION

Report on meeting with Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar on Wednesday June 20th 2012

Attendance:

Johnny Woodlock, Sea Fishery Advisory Group
Ashley Hayden, Angling writer and lobbyist
John Quinlan, Irish Bass
Donal Kennedy, Chairman ICSEA



from left to right: Ashley Hayden, Johnny Woodlock, Minister Varadkar, Donal Kennedy and John Quinlan

Introduction:

Johnny Woodlock introduced the delegation and highlighted the agenda, **Recreational Sea Angling**. He highlighted the fact that an RSA is an angler who fishes for recreation and sport, many practice voluntary catch and release. He also highlighted that a relatively small investment in dedicated marketing could prove very rewarding for our national economy. Our bass stocks are the only fish species managed for RSA in Europe, both Irish Bass and the ICSEA are attempting to promote the highest professional standards for their members. He handed over to Ashley Hayden who identified possible items for consideration; a professional sea angling development officer be appointed asap within IFI. This appointment should go out for tender and not just be filled from within the public service. Sea angling interests should be represented at the table in Brussels. Minister Varadkar pointed out that the department is constrained by finance and did not see this to be viable at present. Next to speak was John Quinlan who highlighted the importance of bass stock management and the fact that many anglers worldwide come to Ireland and generate tourism revenue. Next to speak was myself and I chose to speak on a number of issues that were raised by our delegates, bearing in mind the time scale that I might be allowed. I identified a number of important points i.e. **RSA specific marketing schemes, reserved areas (the golden mile) bag limits for endangered species, artificial reefs reserved for RSA and diving and the elimination of unlicensed charter boats, MSO issues.**

I introduced myself to the Minister and gave a brief summary of the formation of the ICSEA and our aims and said that we are a professional body of charter skippers who provide a good safe service to RSA all around the country and generate much needed revenue for the coastal communities through sea angling charters. I said that there seemed to be very little appreciation of what RSA is all about and we need to emphasise that RSA is a unique means to improve tourism. The follow on from that is that the revenue it generates is huge, some years ago it was quoted that angling/tourism generates €110 million and by now it is much more. Tackle shops, hotels, guest houses and other businesses benefit from RSA. With regard to reserved areas (the golden mile) there is a need to keep trawlers out of nursery areas or bays. **Our fleet would take a year to catch what a trawler would catch in one day.** Under the heading **"Elimination of illegal unlicensed charter boats"** I stated to the Minister that it becomes a **safety issue** and I am sure that the Minister would agree with me should his department be promoting RSA/tourism he would want to have safety at the highest level. I asked the Minister to

bear in mind that any Organisation, Club, Hotel who promotes RSA and the use of charter boats are liable should there be an incident or an accident if people use unlicensed boats. I took the opportunity to expand on this statement by saying that our members are dedicated professional sea angling charter skippers who have spent a lot of time and money in keeping their boats up to the highest safety standards as required by the MSO to get a license to carry passengers for reward, but are constantly frustrated by the knowledge that there are unlicensed boats operating in their area without fear of being identified. We need the MSO to become more proactive in identifying illegal charter boats. They are authorised officers along with an Garda Síochána. I pointed out to the Minister that we do not intend to be the policemen with regard to this issue nor do we wish to put anybody out of business. We want to increase the safe use of charter boats by tourists. Charter skippers operate from close coastal communities and we need to be able to operate from these coastal harbours in harmony with other boat users. Our boats are not fireproof and 24/7 protection would be out of the question. I pointed out to the Minister that there is a strong seafaring bond between fishermen and this needs to be maintained should an incident occur and help is required from other boatmen. The Minister understood this point fully. With regard to the licensing of boats the MSO have on their database a list of licensed boats but this is not up to date. I emphasised the point that this list of licensed boats that the MSO have and any other body who also identify and promote sea angling charter/tourism need to make sure that the list is correct and up to date. A tourist seeing a boat on an official list will assume the boat is licensed. This leads to the point I made earlier that any body promoting sea angling charter could be liable in the event of an accident.

I pointed out to the Minister that I am fully aware of the constraints within the MSO with regard to manpower but I feel if the MSO were more proactive in checking for unlicensed boats it would promote a high safety standard. I asked the Minister would it be in his remit at the initial stage, to issue a communiqué, similar to the water safety authority, i.e. they emphasise the wearing of lifejackets while at sea. The department should send out a notice advising RSA, clubs, hotels and any organisation who wish to hire a charter boat for a day's fishing or other pursuits that these people should check if the boat is licensed to carry passengers for reward. It is in the interest of the department of tourism to ensure that charter boats catering for tourists have the highest safety standards. The Minister took note of this and said that he would look into it with a view to cost and timescale.

I briefly mentioned that there is another issue being loaded on our members RATES AND CHARGES ORDER 2012 which at the moment are to be imposed in the fishery harbour centres. We in the ICSA are against these charges and it could put many angling charter boats out of business. I also said that I was aware that this was not the Minister's brief, however, he should be aware of it and that I intend to take up the matter with Minister Coveney in the near future.

I said to the Minister that we are stakeholders with regard to RSA and should be involved in any discussions which may affect our future. I said we are willing to meet to discuss any issues with regard to RSA and are willing to help in any way.

I thanked him for allowing me the time to point out some very important issues that needed to be identified.

Donal Kennedy
Chairman ICSA