

## The 'Golden Mile'

*An article written by the Sea Anglers' Conservation Network - August 2006.*

**Around our coast, near to shore, is an area that should be naturally rich in marine life, fuelling the food chain and biodiversity of areas much further out, and of special importance to Recreational Sea Anglers, especially those anglers confined to fishing from the shore and from small boats in sheltered waters.**

**It has become known as the 'Golden Mile'.**



[photo - a shoreline view - photo courtesy Leon Roskilly]

In the UK, Recreational Sea Angling mostly takes place close inshore, indeed the majority of anglers fish from beaches, piers etc and their fishing area is limited to the distance that they can cast.

Many anglers have bought their own boats, but again are usually limited by cost and operating difficulties to small vessels that can only operate in calm conditions and are often confined to close to shore locations and in sheltered estuaries.

So the area that most angling takes place is significantly restricted.

Even close inshore there are restrictions on access to certain areas; port installations and coastal developments deny access to anglers, and holiday beaches don't get fished until the bathers leave.

And not all areas are equally rich in fish, or at all times of the year, which is why you will see anglers crowded together on piers, or fishing close together on beaches, with miles of coastline that is hardly fished by anglers at all.

And yet Recreational Sea Angling is a high value activity, both economically and socially, open to all, and affecting the quality of life and sense of well-being of some 2 million people in England and Wales, bringing them in close contact with and interacting intimately with the marine environment, as well as providing business opportunities and livelihoods in the sectors that service the needs of Recreational Sea Anglers, and the holiday and leisure activities that RSA is an important part of.

It is because that first mile from the shoreline is so important to RSA activity, and because it is shallow warm water, nutrient rich, encompassing estuaries and bays, the nursery and spawning grounds of so many creatures, that it has become commonly referred to as 'The Golden Mile'. (Defined by some as the

area encompassed by the Water Framework Directive that extends out much further than 1 mile in some circumstances ie closing lines of estuaries and bays)

And yet, it is those properties that also attract the attention of unlicensed and illegal netting from part-timers, and is sometimes heavily fished by licensed netters.

A greater part of the attraction of Recreational Sea Angling is spending time interacting intimately with the natural marine environment, enjoying the day and its freedom from hassle and issues that make the blood boil.

At the end of an unproductive session, there is nothing worse than to see nets revealed by the falling tide, just beyond casting range, closing off the beach being fished to any reasonable sized fish that might otherwise have taken the angler's bait.

Or to have excitedly planned a trip for a week or two, settled down to fish, and then have a trawler come close in, often within casting range, and sweep the sea clean in front of you.

The principle of 'equal access' is often touted as an excuse for not taking action to protect the interests of one stakeholder over another, but what this often means is hundreds of anglers standing dumbfounded along a beach, as a single boat hauls in nets in front of them.

That one boat having spoiled the day for many people.

Not only that day, but in the days that follow as that length of coast recovers from the removal of most of the fish, only to be repeated over and over again.

And for a fraction of the economic benefit that comes from attracting so many Recreational sea Anglers to that locality.

What we would like to see is special protection given to the Golden Mile to produce a win-win-win situation.

**Win** - Improved angling, based on more and bigger fish within the Golden Mile which will please a huge number of people, and stimulate growth in coastal communities.

**Win** - Restrictions on more damaging forms of exploitation, and considerably greater extraction of huge numbers of fish within the Golden Mile would considerably increase the amount of close inshore sea-life, for the enjoyment not only of anglers but coastal wildlife, divers, and all those who come down to the sea's edge and enjoy the presence of the creatures there.

**Win** - Elimination of unlicensed and illegal fishing close to shore would increase the returns for licensed fishermen fishing further out, and the greater availability of close inshore growing and feeding areas would enhance the numbers and species of marine life to be found away from the shore.

But the characteristics of the Golden Mile vary considerably around our coast.

Sometimes it is the first mile of many miles of shallow water, uncovered at low water.

In other places you are immediately into very deep water, many fathoms deep, at the base of cliffs or steeply shelving ground.

In some places there is very little fish, in others there are seasonal congregations with thousands of fish crowded together.

Some areas will not see any significant angling activity for years, in other places children will crowd together competing for wrasse, or a winter beach at night will be lit from the glow of hundreds of anglers

lamps.

To put in a blanket ban everywhere and on all activities within an arbitrary one mile of the shore would be unnecessary and overly restrictive in some circumstances, at certain times of the year, on certain methods.

Rather we have in mind a principle similar to the ban on fixed nets under the Salmon & Freshwater Fisheries Act, whereby the placing of any fixed net is illegal unless the local Sea Fisheries Committee has made a byelaw enabling it to take place, in that area, at that time, using certain mesh sizes etc.

What we would envisage is that the 'Golden Mile' becomes an area tightly controlled by the district Sea Fisheries Committee (or by whichever authority acts as the SFC in that district) where by default all net fishing (including trawling) is banned, unless an 'enabling byelaw' is put in place.

Such 'enabling byelaws' would only be implemented after consultation with all stakeholders, and approved by the Secretary of State, to ensure that there were special reasons to enable netting within a given area, subject to necessary restrictions.

(Examples would be, an MSC certified drift-net fishery for herring, sustainable extraction of fish from an inshore area where there would be no significant impact on local angling activity etc)

Too much is made of the competition that has developed between the Recreational Sea Angling sector and the catching sector over diminishing shared resources.

It has to be borne in mind that RSA activity is mainly confined to a relatively small area of coastal waters (for shore anglers often just the first few yards from the shore) and mainly for species of no great importance to the catching sector.

By maximizing the potential of the area and species of most interest to the RSA sector, much of the tension caused by the perceived competition will be allayed, and it will become more possible for both sectors to concentrate upon working amicably together to solve the many common problems that beset both sectors regarding the need to maintain a healthy and productive marine environment.

**Another win.**