



Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period February 2024 to May 2024

Overview

The presence of the annual 'May water' in most parts of the Kent coast has affected many of the fisheries as the water has become more coloured. The Thames seems to get impacted the most.

Reports are that there are more skate than last year, but numbers still seem low. Whelk fishing is up from last year after the 2022 whelk die off. Cuttle fish numbers appear to be increasing; these have been caught in trawls and boats have been setting traps for them. After the bass closed season in February and March, catches are slowly picking up.

More boats are diversifying and attempting to exploit multiple fisheries. There has been significant interest in a clam fishery trial run, which Kent and Essex IFCA will run later this year. The cockle boats in Kent have been preparing their boats for the last season under the TECFO 1994 before it becomes the TECFO 2024 (T24) at the end of September.

March saw the MMO introduce a new byelaw to protected offshore MPAs. The Goodwin sands MCZ is both inside and outside the Kent and Essex IFCA district and the MMO have closed two boxes of the offshore area of the Goodwin sands MCZ to bottom towed fishing gear.

Queenborough

One trawler in Queenborough has tried a small amount of sole fishing and a few of the boats have been herring fishing. Many of the boats have undergone refit and maintenance works during this period and fishing activity has been low.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 5

Faversham

Most of the boats in Faversham or Oare creek are owned and operated by one family. Two of the trawlers returned from fishing in the English Channel to try sole fishing in the Thames Estuary and to have a refit on the boats. They have struggled to cover costs when fishing for sole due to high fuel prices among other expenses.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 4

Whitstable

This has been a challenging period for the fishermen in Whitstable. In recent years, the month of May has typically been a good month for whelk fishing but weather conditions and other environmental factors and made the whelk fishermen work hard for their catches. Landings have been better than last year but are not picking up as much as the fishermen would like. Good whelk prices have helped with smaller catches.

The three oyster boats finished the season at the end of April and there were reports of smaller orders from their usual buyers which didn't make it especially viable. There has been a small amount of rod and line fishing for bass when conditions have allowed now the permitted boats can target them again but as soon as the May water came in, it slowed the catches. Trawling has not been successful for the boats. The cockle boats are prepping for the TECFO season and one of the fishermen has been working with KEIFCA to exploit other shellfish fisheries.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 13

Herne Bay

The main commercial fishing vessel in Herne Bay is crab and lobster fishing and rod and line fishing for bass. This fisherman has continued to v-notch berried lobsters. There has been some effort to fish static nets but most of their catch was eaten by seals.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 2

Ramsgate:

Ramsgate netters have had a tough time with their catch being targeted by seals in their nets. Skate and sole had chunks taken out of them in the nets by the seals resulting in a lot of the catch becoming unsellable. The Ramsgate fishermen have reported some unusual catches recently including a common skate and also Tope caught in drift nets. February saw a good run of blonde rays come in close to shore and the netters exploited this opportunity. There appeared to be a large number of bass off the Thanet coast in March time which was during the closed season. They have since disappeared for some of the netters now they are permitted to land them.

There are three boats in Ramsgate whelk fishing and catches have been steady but have recently dropped off. A 13m scallop boat came to fish in the district for a couple of months off Dungeness and landed their catch into Ramsgate. They reported good catches but have since moved elsewhere. A trawler has also recently arrived in the harbour.

Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 13

Broadstairs:

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs.

Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

Margate:

The main fishing boat in Margate had average catches before the May water came in. Sole catches have been extremely poor.

Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Total number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 17

Deal and Walmer

The main boat in Deal hasn't been to sea much recently and they have landed mixed catches from their nets when they have gone. They had a poor year for crabs and lobsters last year so are reluctant to set their pots.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 2

Dover

The crab and lobster fishermen have started setting pots now but apart from that, there hasn't been a lot of fishing activity. One of the boats has since moved to Ramsgate. Many local boats use Dover as a port to be lifted out for refits and maintenance.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 2

Folkestone and Hythe

In Hythe there are two commercial vessels. With the usual abundance of spider crabs one of the boats has tried some cuttle potting.

Folkestone boats that have been crab and lobster fishing have reported very low edible crab catches, but the lobsters have been steady so far. Spider crab numbers seem to increase year on year and the whelk boats in Folkestone will often use the spider crabs as whelk bait. Whelks have been heavily covered in barnacles this season and this coincided with the presence of the May water as sunlight and water temperatures increased.

Trawl fishing has been tough going for the fishermen as there have been a lot of dogfish reported and one vessel tried a large mesh single trawl for thornback ray and blonde ray before switching to a multi rig trawl for sole. The scallop boat in Folkestone has been fishing regularly on long trips and landing decent catches.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

Many of the Rye boats have been scallop fishing and can often be seen dredging up and down off Dungeness point. The four main boats on the beach have been whelking, crab and lobster fishing and netting. The whelk boats have had a good season so far, but they have had to make sure their gear is not near

to where the scallopers are fishing. The netters have been landing turbot as well as plaice, thornback ray and some sole.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

Robert Watson, IFCO/ First Mate Patrol Vessel Kent