

Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period February 2025 to June 2025

Overview

Overall the period from February to June saw a transition from limited Winter catches to more abundant and diverse fishing opportunities as conditions improved. Sea temperatures were initially lower than in the previous year but that has now since risen. Sea water visibility had been unseasonably clear to start the year but this changed when the 'May Water' came in. Spring was one of the sunniest on record however the wind in May in particular restricted many of the boats from going to sea as often as they hoped.

Reports down the South-West of the UK of the 'Octopus bloom' have caused some concern amongst the crab and lobster fishermen in Kent. One or two have been caught by fishermen. Spider crabs have been seen more as the years go by particularly off East Kent but continue to make their way North and into the Thames Estuary. The seabass season opened again on 1st April for the vessels with authorisation and the season started well for many of the fishermen, but it has slowed since.

Whelk fishing in the Thames Estuary and outer Thames estuary has been steady for most fishers. Brown crab are not always available from sellers for whelk bait so other species have been used as well as dogfish including herring and even lobster. Fishing vessels have been setting nets for their own bait due to the shortage. The price of whelks have been consistent at around £1.50 per kilo.

Queenborough

During February large amounts of herring were landed from one of the trawlers mainly to be sold as bait for anglers. One small vessel has been netting in the rivers

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 5

Faversham

Two trawlers returned from Brixham to fish locally for the Spring and Summer to target sole. Catches have been fairly slow and reports of large patches of mussels have meant they have had to modify their gear accordingly. Historically trawlers in the Thames Estuary have been triple rig fishing for dover sole but they are switching to single rig trawling recently. They have been targeting smoothhound mostly. A small netting boat has been out and one vessel has given shrimp fishing a go with beam trawls.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 4

Whitstable

The whelk fishermen of Whitstable have mostly reported fishing to be steadier than previous years but nothing special. The whelk spawning season over Winter appeared to be shorter than previous years as well, which typically slows catches down. Whelks are reported to being caught in places where they previously hadn't been caught and in places where there were reports of reduction in catches after 2022 which had had large periods of warm sea temperatures. The presence of Mayweed has been particularly bad this year but there seems to be noticeably more shore crabs and velvet swimmer crabs. Some lobsters have been caught and sold locally. The oystermen in Whitstable fished until April but the market was often poor for them during the Winter months.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 13

Herne Bay

The influx of weed has blanketed much of the rocky ground around Herne Bay during Spring so the lobster fishermen have found it hard going. Some berried lobsters were landed (with dispensation) for the new Whitstable lobster hatchery which will hopefully prove to be a successful project. Some netters from Herne Bay and Whitstable tried mullet fishing near to the harbour with great success but this was short lived.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 3

Ramsgate & Sandwich: Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate & Sandwich: 16

The weather has dictated when the boats have been able to get to sea, recently in particular. When the netters have got to sea they have targeted sole but bass have also been caught. On the good weather days the lobster fishing further offshore has been better than inshore which has been fairly poor. This has been suggested to be down to spider crabs and congers preying on the lobsters.

One vessel had started cuttle fishing using homemade pots during Spring and the period of clear water brought some success. The whelk fleet have had good catches for large parts of this period and many of the boats have been fishing both inside and outside the district using riddles with different bar spacings. A fifth whelk boat arrived in May to start fishing outside the district after a local netting boat starting whelking for the first time in January and enjoyed a successful start to the fishery.

Broadstairs: Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

There has been a small amount of rod and line activity reported in Broadstairs.

Margate: Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Two of the boats in Margate don't go to sea much these days but the other one has been netting and lobster fishing mostly around Margate sands

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 20

Deal and Walmer

The local boat still sells their catch fresh as soon as they land and uses Facebook to advertise this. Dogfish and some herring have been caught but the vessel has not been at sea much.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 2

Dover

There is a small amount of fishing activity at Dover and one commercial boat operates intermittently landing high quality rod-and-line caught bass and mackerel.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 3

Folkestone and Hythe

In Folkestone, the trawlers have been using large mesh cod ends to avoid filling up their trawls with dogfish. They have had some good hauls of thornback in February but not consistently. The whelkers have found fishing hard going so far this season. Reports of large quantities of small whelks have been received and many of the catch is returned to sea as it is not retained by the whelk riddle. Barnacles still cover many of the whelks but this isn't as bad as last year. Crab catches have been poor and there has been a sprinkling of lobsters caught. Spider crabs continue to cause havoc by getting tangled in nets the caught in pots. Lack of market for the spider crab and increased sea temperatures allow the crab to remain in shallower waters for longer periods than previously seen.

The spider crab issue is also prevalent in Hythe and two vessels have been whelk fishing locally including one recreational boat off the beach. Vessels target plaice in the nets but have to try and avoid the spider crab.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 11

Dungeness

Three out the four commercial boats in Dungeness have been working whelk pots. The whelk fishing has been fairly slow and there has been a significant amount of scallop fishing activity off Dungeness point. There has been some netting activity for turbot, skate, sole, plaice and bass.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

Robert Watson, Senior IFCO (Skipper)