



Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period February 2022 to May 2022

Overview

Fish prices have been steadily increasing this year as fish merchants have been targeting the UK market more as opposed to the European market as prices have been poor. Whelk prices have remained between 95p and £1 but fuel prices and other costs have risen to unprecedented levels recently. There are only a couple of main buyers of whelks in Kent which has kept prices down.

Bass have been landed again by commercial fishermen following the February and March closed season. Bass numbers seem to be on the rise after measures were imposed in recent years to protect the stocks. Sole catches are steady but one species that hasn't been caught in numbers seen in previous years is skate.

Lobster fishermen on the North Kent coast have been voluntarily v-notching 'berried hens' in order to protect the fishery. They started doing it in 2021 and have continued into this year as well. V-notched lobsters are prohibited to be landed so it is an important step the fishermen are taking to preserve the breeding female population.

Spring has brought the North Easterly winds once again but last year the winds were a lot stronger apart from the storms at the start of this year which ruined the fishing for a while. Boats were able to get to sea for more days this year with better weather.

Queenborough

Local fish are being caught and sold straight off the quayside once more this season from one of the trawling vessels. This opened again in April and they have been landing skate, sole, gurnard, dogfish and other mixed fish, prepping their catches to be sold at a stall right next to their boat. A local skipper has been working elsewhere for this period and a vessel has been sold and replaced with another vessel. The cockle vessels have been working hard to prepare for the upcoming TECFO cockle season.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 6

Faversham

Some new vessels have arrived in Faversham recently both in Oare creek and in Faversham itself. The local fishermen have been occasionally trawling for sole and mostly netting with a smaller vessel to sell their catch locally.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 2

Whitstable

Significant red diesel price increases have been a hot topic in the harbour over the past few months. Prices have been close to £1.50 which is a huge increase from last year.

Whelk fishermen have been busy through this period and selling to two companies with prices ranging from 95p to £1. Whelk fishing has been very good for the fishermen and some fishermen have held off netting and lobster potting because of it.

For the oyster fishermen, orders have been steady but with fuel increases, it is becoming challenging to keep it viable as oyster dredging uses more fuel than other fishing methods. The fishermen and local oyster companies are fighting to weather the storm from the ongoing Southern Water sewage issues.

One boat has been working hard to try and establish a razor clam fishery. They have been landing razor clams and obtaining samples for the food standards agency. The cockle boats have been preparing for the upcoming cockle season which typically starts in June. A few of the boats have picked up their local fish sales again as fresh finfish and crab and lobster prove to be very popular with the Whitstable locals.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 15

Herne Bay

One boat moved from Ramsgate to Herne Bay to predominantly go whelk fishing and netting. Although limited by the tide, they have better access to their usual fishing grounds by being in Herne Bay rather than Ramsgate. A trailer launched commercial vessel did a small amount of sole fishing over the Winter months and has reported good catches of lobsters to start the season which is a positive sign after a poor year last year. Vessels have been voluntarily v-notching female breeding lobsters in the area.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 3

Thanet Ports

Ramsgate: Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 13 (plus 9 Charter boats)

Ramsgate boats have been mixing their fishing methods from potting and netting. The whelk fishermen have had a good season as some of the boats will continue into Summer and then switch to netting. Most of the whelk boats fish both inside and out of the district as they are in a good location for access to vast whelk fishing grounds off the Northeast coast of Thanet.

Many of the netting boats proudly sell their catch locally and they have been targeting smoothounds, sole, skate with a bycatch of bass. Some of the potters have started crab and lobster fishing but others have held off because the whelk fishing has been so good. There have been some cuttlefish landings recently, but the season is short and there is a need for clearer water which hasn't happened as much close to Ramsgate yet.

Broadstairs: Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs

Margate: Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

One vessel has started fishing again after a long period off. The North-easterly winds brought up a massive amount of kelp weed which covered their fishing gear initially. This has since disappeared but the 'may weed' has only just turned up which has come later than previous years. Fishing wise, smoothound fishing has been very good and there have been a few catches of skate, sole, bass and cod.

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 31

Deal and Walmer

There are a very small number of boats left in Deal nowadays and most of the activity come from a small netting boat that sells their catch at a stall next to their boat. The boat hasn't been to sea as much recently but when they have gone, they have been catching skate and dogfish.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 3

Dover

One smaller vessel in Dover has been crab and lobster fishing and skate netting landing small amounts. Fishing boats from Dover and other ports on the South coast and also France took part in a joint protest recently in the English Channel against destructive fishing practices like fly-seining and super trawlers. Some mackerel have been caught recently which is hopefully a good sign for the Summer coming.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 2

Folkestone and Hythe

Folkestone boats started whelk fishing again in the Spring. One boat had an issue with selling their catch initially but has since found a new buyer. One boat has been scallop fishing regularly and it has proved to be a very good season for scallop fishing off the South East coast. Other than that, the boats have been mixing their fishing between netting and potting with one boat also trawling for soles. They are hoping for a few more cod catches this year.

Hythe vessels have been mostly netting recently. They have landed good quantities of skate and a small number of soles, plaice and mixed fish. Spider crabs have become a real issue for the netters over the past few years off Hythe as they get tangled and ruin nets. Their numbers have been increasing year on

year and are around from early Spring now when the netters want to set their nets.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

A fish shop popular with the locals has had significant refurbishments recently as they prepare for a busy Summer season once more. Most of the fish sold at the fish shops has been bought in from markets but prices have been high. Boats have started whelk fishing again as well as netting, trawling and crab and lobster fishing. Whelk catches haven't been consistent, and the fishermen find that it depends if the whelks are feeding to whether they get good catches. Spider crabs are also a concern off Dungeness.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

Robert Watson, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer