



Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period June 2022 to November 2022

Overview

One thing which has been discussed widely this period has been the temperature of the water especially in the Thames Estuary. A long, warm summer this year, with air temperatures at 20 degrees until the end of October, brought up the sea temperatures to unusually high levels and caused concern among fishermen as to how this would impact the local fisheries.

The prices of sole have been very good, but the catches have been inconsistent over the season and sole have been caught in areas and tides where they aren't usually caught. A surprise to many of the fishermen is that some codling have been caught early in the season by the netters and the anglers.

The cockle fishery yielded 35 trips which was slightly less than the original 38 trips first proposed at the commencement of the season. There were several additional surveys carried out through the season to monitor stock levels and alter the trips accordingly. This was a challenging year all round due to stock levels and fishermen were forced to fish cockle beds that they wouldn't tend to go to.

The numbers of bass appear to be improving for the fishermen and the ones who can land them have enjoyed a very good season. The fishermen who cannot retain them have had to tactically place their nets to avoid them. The bass are still being caught in good numbers into November, but stronger winds are limiting the number of trips that the boats can do. Expenses for the fishermen have continued to be high due to prices of fuel and bait.

North Kent whelk boats would usually be fishing full time for whelks but there have been very small catches so far.

Queenborough

There are two trawlers in Queenborough these days that mostly have been targeting sole but also landing other species such as smoothhound, thornback ray, plaice, gurnard, bass and lobster. Sole have reduced significantly since the summer. One of the boats switches between trawling and oyster fishing when they get orders. Local catches were sold on a stall next to the boats over

summer which proved popular. Two of the TECFO cockle boats berth in Queenborough but landed their catches in Whitstable. One fishing boat owner has swapped his boat out for a smaller netting boat and there has been a small amount of netting during this period from the other vessels.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 6

Faversham

One vessel based in Oare creek ventured down to Brixham to fish for sole over summer. One smaller netting boat has been out occasionally in the river and selling catches in their local shop. Several vessels have carried out maintenance and refits during this period in Faversham and one skipper who usually trawls during this period, worked on a cockle boat out of Whitstable.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 2

Whitstable

The cockle season was a challenging one for the fishermen with stock levels not the same as recent years. All six of the Kent cockle fleet landed in Whitstable again this season but had to cover extensive ground to get a full load for each trip. On numerous occasions this year, boats would land without a full load of cockles.

In early summer, boats were landing very good catches of whelks and they were noticing large numbers of juvenile whelks in their pots. Fishing slowed a lot over summer and has been very slow ever since. Many of the whelk boats have continued to go netting and crab and lobster fishing to wait until sea temperatures decline and whelk catches improve. The boats that have started whelk fishing have reported incredibly low catches in September especially in the shallow waters and they have mostly been fishing in deeper waters to start with, but there has been little profit so far.

One of Whitstable's most popular oyster festivals returned this year after a three year absence under a new name. This usually attracts large numbers of tourists looking to buy oysters. Sales and orders for the oysters have been down though due to ongoing media attention on the sewage pollution issue. There was also a significant tragedy in July with the harbour fish market taking significant damage from a fire meaning it has not been able to re-open. Some of the local boats had been selling their catches to the market in the past.

There have been four trawlers targeting sole over summer and many of the boats have been netting and also crab and lobster fishing. Some of the boats have continued to sell some of their catches at the harbour. The netters have been surprised to catch some codling not far from Whitstable.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 15

Herne Bay

Two trailer launch boats have been working out of Herne Bay this period. There was an additional boat moored in the harbour which moved back to Ramsgate after the whelk season.

Herne Bay draws a number of recreational boats particularly over the summer and the new gate which was installed last year has controlled the activity. A number of these boats were setting crab and lobster pots as well as rod and line fishing for bass. The commercial boats had a good lobster season and have continued to put v-notches in the tails of the breeding females and returning them to sea.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 2

Thanet Ports

The warmer waters have impacted the whelk boats that fish outside the district and they have switched to netting for the summer this year. Last year they carried on whelk fishing in the summer months but the low catches have forced them to switch to netting for sole. Only one boat has started whelk fishing again during October but catches have been slow to start with. This boat is not working as many whelk pots as they did earlier in the summer but will use more when the fishing improves. The other whelk boats may start later than they anticipate possibly in early 2023.

The netters have enjoyed good weather conditions to fish for sole and other fish and have been going out regularly over the summer, although this has slowed since the winds have increased recently. The bass season has been long and productive for many of the boats. There are a couple of hook and line fishing vessels in Ramsgate and Sandwich now and they have had good catches of bass in various areas over Summer.

The crab and lobster boats have had a good season, although some of the boats have mentioned that the foreign fly seining fishing boats outside of the district started fishing a lot earlier than previous years, which could potentially impact fishing inshore.

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

There has been very little fishing activity in Broadstairs

Broadstairs: Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

Margate: Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Cod catches haven't been so good yet for one of the boats. Smoothound fishing has been very good and there have been sporadic catches of sole. The other boats have not been to sea much during the summer. They either set crab pots or small nets.

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 31

Deal and Walmer

Boats on Deal fished for crab and lobster up until about September time where they brought their pots in. The boats continue to use gill nets and trammel nets to catch a variety of finfish species. They make use of their local stall on the beach which attracts a large queue of customers when they land their catches.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 3

Dover

The Varne is not as productive as it used to be in previous years possibly due to the fact it can be exploited by foreign vessels. With only a couple of active registered boats in the harbour, fishing activity has been low. The boats have been netting and potting and going rod and line fishing.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 3

Folkestone and Hythe

Folkestone boats have mostly been setting pots for lobsters and crabs as well as whelk fishing. The whelk season was a bit shorter than in previous years which could be due to the high water temperature; the local sea temperature was reported to be 18°C in August and the whelk fishermen saw large numbers of small whelks in their pots. There have been good lobster catches throughout the entire summer and it was only at the start of October that catches slowed. Edible crab landings were high for a short period during the warm weather. One boat has been scallop fishing most of the Summer and they have had significant catches.

There were good catches of sole by the netting and trawling boats. Some of the trips have yielded between 100-150kg. One species that hasn't been as abundant this year is thornback ray and other skate species. Seals are becoming more of an issue for the netters as they take chunks out of prime bass and sole meaning that large numbers of the catch won't be able to be sold. Some boats have reported 80% of their catches have been lost to seals in certain areas. Cod haven't been seen much over the Summer.

Hythe has been quiet in terms of fishing activity. With only two registered fishing boats on the beach now, these boats don't tend to go to sea that often. When they do, they have mostly been setting nets. Although spider crabs have continued to make fishing difficult as they get easily tangled in gear. One recreational boat off the beach set some whelk pots over the Summer and reported some good quality whelks for the small number of pots they are permitted to have.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

A fish stall at Dungeness had a major refurbishment just before Summer and has attracted a lot of business since. The local boats still supply the shop with fresh finfish and crab and lobsters.

One of the boats was fishing inside and out of the district for whelks but alternated between netting and crab and lobster potting due to the tides. Another boat brought all their whelk post ashore in August after a disappointing season. A saving grace for the fishermen has been the prices of sole, so it has been worth their while netting and trawling even with the high fuel costs. The Dungeness boats haven't had a good a season catching lobsters as opposed to other ports in Kent. Bass have been seen in high numbers once more.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

Robert Watson, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer