



## **Agenda Item C1**

### **Shore report, Kent**

#### **Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority**

#### **Quarterly report for the period November 2023 to January 2024**

##### Overview

Winter is typically quiet in terms of fishing activity in Kent, as sea days for the smaller inshore fleet are dictated a lot by the weather. The first five fisheries management plans were announced by the UK government in December which included the bass fisheries management plan. Bass regulations for 2024 remain the same as 2023 with a closed season implemented in February and March. Bass prices dropped considerably in December but have increased steadily as we approach the closed season in February and March. Whelk prices have recently increased significantly with some merchants paying £1.60 per kilo. Lobster prices have also been very good with some reports of over £40 per kilo stated.

Whelk fishermen have assisted KEIFCA in a sea water temperature study in various parts off the district. This was done on the back of the possible link between the warm sea temperatures in 2022 and whelk mortality event. This will be an ongoing study to better understand the correlation between sea temperatures and whelk survivability.

##### Queenborough

Queenborough boats have not been to sea much which is typical for this time of year. When they have been going, they have been trawling for herring and a small amount of sprats. One boat has been oyster fishing and another was trawling in the Thames Estuary but hasn't been since October.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 5

##### Faversham

Two of the trawlers usually moored in Oare creek have been fishing in other parts of the country but may return in Spring time. One of the boats has been sold in Faversham and the boat that has been to sea has tried some netting.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 3

## Whitstable

Some of the Whitstable fleet have moved between Ramsgate and Whitstable to exploit different fisheries. One of the whelk boats started whelk fishing in November and catches were better than this time last year. Whelk prices are currently very good for the fishermen. Two more whelk boats started fishing in December with another two planning to start fishing imminently when weather allows. Some whelk fishermen reported good quantities of juvenile whelks in an area off Herne bay which was one of the areas which had the whelk mortality event in 2022. They have also said that the whelks have been spawning from December and although this has slowed catches is always a good sign for the future.

One of the trawling vessels that previously worked out of Whitstable has since returned to Kent after fishing from Brixham in Devon. The Whitstable cockle fleet have been having their usual refit in Dover in preparation for the 2024 season which will be the last of current TECFO before it is reformed into the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order 2024 (T24).

The oystermen of Whitstable have been landing oysters before and after Christmas but orders being down particularly in the run up to Christmas. The crab and lobster potters and netters have focussed their attention on the whelk fishery for Winter now. It was reported that the council put up the fees in the harbour by 7%, which included the mooring fees and diesel. Contractors for the council have been working hard to repair the damages of the crab and winkle restaurant from the fire in 2022 with the plan for it to be finished by April.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 13

## Herne Bay

The most active commercial boat in Herne Bay has continued to do lobster potting inshore and catches have been good for the year. When weather allows, they have been angling for bass further offshore. They have caught huge amounts of smoothound when netting so have mostly focussed on lobster potting and bass fishing.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 2

## Thanet Ports

**Ramsgate:** Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 13

A new whelk fishing boat arrived in Ramsgate from Mersea, Essex during this period and since then, the boat has been fishing outside the 6 nautical mile limit on a regular basis in most weather conditions. Ramsgate netters fished South for a few days to exploit areas where they don't usually fish. On their usual grounds, bass have been landed as bycatch and sole catches have been average. Some spurdogs have also been landed along with smoothounds and dogfish and other mixed species. Spurdogs were removed from the prohibited list in 2023 and have since been given a 100cm maximum size limit.

Catches of cod have been poor but one fisherman landed a 3kg cod which unfortunately seems rare these days. A lobster fisherman has continued to v-

notch berried lobsters and return them to sea. Bass have been landed by way of rod and line as well.

**Broadstairs:** Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs.

**Margate:** Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

The most active Margate fishing boat had its 5-year MCA inspection and only returned to action in November where he was targeting smoothound and skate.

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 17

#### Deal and Walmer

The popular local fishing boat off Deal beach was able to choose the fair-weather days and good tides to target herring and sprats. They started landing herring at the start of November and some sprats were also landed nearer the end of year.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 2

#### Dover

Two of the commercial boats have been out of the water for refits this Winter. Fishing activity has been low as the boats seem to fish more in the Summer season. Many boats in the district come to Dover for refit work.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 4

#### Folkestone and Hythe

Weather has not allowed many of the boats to get to sea. For around 3 weeks in December and January, most of the commercial boats did not go to sea. Netters with bass entitlement have reported large numbers of bass around and had to make sure that they didn't go over their bass entitlement quota for the year. The only scallop boat in Kent has been scalloping since November after they had a refit over Summer. Trawl fishing has not been worthwhile for one of the fishermen who has landed handfuls of fish when going to sea.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

#### Dungeness

The netters have found it hard going over Winter. Bad weather, low catches and poor prices have made it frustrating for the fishermen. Some tope have been seen but the 45kg landing limit is easily reached. The skate fishing has been very poor. One boat has been whelk fishing consistently and catches have been steady. There hasn't been any trawling this period. Bass have been landed as bycatch and will be landed until the closed season in February and March.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

**Robert Watson, IFCO/ First Mate Patrol Vessel Kent**