



Agenda Item C1
Shore report, Kent
Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Quarterly report for the period November 2024 to January 2025

Overview

After several weeks of inclement weather, including strong easterly winds that affected water clarity, calmer conditions have returned. The colder temperatures towards the end of November through December triggered a spawning period for whelks in the Thames Estuary. This spawning usually coincides with a slower period of whelk fishing, but the fishers have noticed that catches have remained steady throughout. There have been consistent positive reports of catches and on the health of the Thames whelk population, with fishers around Kent commenting that they are also returning a lot of small whelks back. There were also reports of large numbers of whelk egg casings washed up on east Kent beaches between Christmas and New Year; this was noticed by fishers and could have coincided with the strong winds around that time.

The publication of the 2025 bass regulations meant that from the 1st of January 2025 commercial fishers with authorisations were granted an increase in their maximum catch limits for hook and lines and fixed gillnets. The maximum catch limits increased to 6.8 tonnes per year for hook and line authorisations, an increase of 600kg, and the limit for by-catch of bass from fixed gillnets increased to 1.8 tonnes per year, a 200kg increase from 2024. This has been a welcomed addition for many fishers.

There have been some unusual cetacean sightings in the district lately, with humpback whales spotted off the coasts of Dungeness and Deal.

Queenborough

The fishing in Queenborough has been relatively slow. One vessel initially began whelk operations before pausing for the rest of this period. There has been some oyster fishing, both native and pacific as well as a couple of vessels targeting

herring mostly for anglers. Some of the fishers have expressed an interest in exploring other fishing opportunities outside the Thames Estuary.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 10

Faversham

Three of the active fishing vessels in Faversham and Oare Creek are owned and operated by one family, where two of the trawlers split their time between fishing the Thames Estuary and English Channel. One vessel has expressed an interest in shrimp trawling in the district.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 4

Whitstable

The whelk season is well underway in Whitstable. There were reports of whelks spawning at the beginning of this period, but fishers found the fishing steady through this, which is an encouraging start from the last few years. There are currently seven vessels whelking out of Whitstable. The inshore whelk fishery has been good.

One of the cockle vessels has been outside the 6NM collecting shellfish samples. The oyster boats are keeping busy getting a few orders.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 14

Herne Bay

It has been a slow period fishing in Herne Bay, with most crab and lobster pots being brought in until the weather improves and warms. One vessel has been authorised dispensation for the Whitstable Lobster Hatchery, which will go ahead from March.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 2

Ramsgate

Some of the vessels have commenced their whelk operations this period, with a few vessels still setting up to start whelking imminently. A few of the Ramsgate fleet have been netting, and there was a period where smoothhound had been particularly abundant, with quite a lot of small bass about. The lobster fishery carried later into the season than usual. Some fishers have used this time to carry out maintenance on their vessels. The combination of these activities

reflects a period of adaptability, as fishers adjust to the fluctuating conditions and continue to find ways to sustain their livelihoods.

Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 13

Broadstairs

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs.

Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

Margate

There have been several good sole catches off Margate recently. As is typical this time of year, bass numbers appear to diminish just prior to the closed season, and there have also been reports indicating a notable decline in skate this period. One vessel had a few trips targeting herring, selling the catch directly from the quay.

Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Deal and Walmer

A fishing vessel in Deal has been herring fishing since mid-November when the weather and tides have allowed. This vessel has continued to sell their catches from their boat.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 2

Dover

The weather has meant the fishing in Dover has been quiet.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 3

Folkestone and Hythe

The Folkestone fishing fleet stopped whelking over the winter and a few vessels have started netting, with one trawler making a few trips over the last period. One vessel has been scalloping.

The vessels in Hythe have started netting, but the abundance of fish in the bay has been poor. Bass numbers have significantly decreased in the bay, and while smoothhound are still present, their market value remains low. The easterly winds coloured the water, but it has been clearing up recently.

Number of fishing vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

The four active commercial fishing vessels have been whelking this period, with a few lobster trips at the beginning of the winter. The scallopers have been starting to fish in the area off Dungeness, which makes the fishers quite wary of vessels towing over their gear. Catches of whelks have been steady, with fishers reporting a noticeable amount of small whelks going back as well.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

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