

Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period November 2025 to January 2026

Overview

This period is typically a quieter time of year for fishing activity in Kent. Many vessels have been out of the water for refits and annual maintenance, while increasingly frequent strong winds further limit opportunities to fish. The mild weather before December helped with finfish and lobster catches for some of the fishers as the sea temperatures took a while to drop. Many of the Whitstable and Ramsgate whelk fleet began fishing before Christmas. December and January had significantly colder weather and with that brought some strong winds including storm Goretti, causing coastal damage to many parts of Kent. The sudden large drop in sea temperature had an impact on many of the fisheries especially whelks, resulting in smaller catches. In January, fin-fishing has slowed significantly, with the lack of skate around a cause for concern for many. Some fishers are exploring new avenues and trying new fisheries with initial success.

The 2025 Manila clam trial fishery opened at the start of November, with limited fishing activity due to poor weather, declining stock, and weak market conditions. Despite this, early trips provided useful REM data and stock feedback. Following discussions with trialists, there was collective agreement to pause the trial and for KEIFCA to review options and return with a proposed way forward, potentially focusing on a more viable Spring fishery.

Queenborough

Fishing activity in Queenborough from November to January was very limited, with only small amounts of herring, sprat, and oyster fishing

taking place, one vessel temporarily relocating for the clam trial, and another being sold.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 5

Faversham

There has been little fishing activity at Faversham. Some of the trawlers have undertaken refits to be ready for spring sole fishing. One vessel is up for sale.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 4

Whitstable

Most of the Whitstable fleet are currently engaged in whelk fishing, with the remainder focused on oystering. Whelk catches were strong prior to Christmas; however the cold snap in January which coincided with spawning, lead to a recent decline in catch quantities. Fishers remain hopeful that rising water temperatures will improve catches. Whelk prices are currently at around £1.50 per kilo, broadly in line with this time last year. Lobsters were reported to be smaller than average in 2025, and many fishers have taken their lobster pots ashore - the netters stopped fishing in November and will start again in springtime. They are hoping for a better year in terms of finfish after 2025 was below expectations for many.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 14

Herne Bay

Since the bass have moved offshore, the trailer-launched commercial boats have not been as active as they were throughout summer and autumn - fishers have brought in their lobster pots for the winter. One boat now moored in Herne Bay has turned their hand to whelking and has been having steady catches of whelks.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 3

Ramsgate

Netting was productive right into December with mostly catches of bass and smoothhound, but now most of the whelk fishing boats have started

potting again. There are still some sole being caught with the fishers hopeful of a decent spring run this year.

A spell of negative temperatures caused sea water to turn to slush near to shore. Because of these cold temperatures, whelk pots set close in did not produce much in the way of catch. Pots were also incredibly muddy after the rough weather. The whelkers working offshore haven't been as affected by the cold weather as they fish in deeper water and catches have remained good after a strong year last year.

The lack of thornback ray has caused concern amongst the netters and there are significantly more reports of seals eating a large portion of the fish caught in gill nets before the fishers can get there. Fishers have claimed that thornback ray have moved South in the English Channel now. One unusual recent catch was a haddock much to the fisherman's surprise.

Number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 14

Broadstairs

The lone rod and line fishing vessel here has not been to sea during this period.

Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

Margate

One boat has been netting sporadically over this period. The bass have moved on, and catches have included herring, whiting, dabs, and a few sole. Strong North Easterly winds on Christmas eve caused many starfish and various shellfish species to become separated from the chalk reef and wash up on the beaches in Thanet.

Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Deal and Walmer

One boat has been netting from Deal and has been landing sprats and herring to sell locally from their popular fish stall on Deal beach.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 1

Dover

Commercial fishing activity in Dover has been limited, largely due to adverse weather conditions, and the port is primarily used by unregistered recreational vessels. When commercial vessels have been

able to operate, they have mainly targeted bass using hook-and-line gear. Herring and sprat activity has been minimal, and recent storms and strong winds have resulted in a range of shellfish species being washed up along Dover beaches, including queen scallops, clams, and spiny cockles.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 3

Folkestone and Hythe

In Folkestone, netting was successful in December when the weather allowed. Boats were still having catches of bass and smoothhound up until Christmas. The potters have mostly brought their whelk and crab and lobster pots in. One boat has been regularly scallop fishing off Dungeness.

Fishing activity in Hythe has been relatively quiet in recent months, however one boat has been out occasionally, supplying fresh fish to a fishmonger in Hythe. Recent catches have included sprats and plaice. There has however been reports of a poor whelk season, as the boats struggle to find sizable whelks.

Number of vessels fishing in Folkestone: 7

Number of vessels fishing in Hythe: 2

Dungeness

Fishing activity in Dungeness has been varied recently; boats have been netting, potting, and dredging. Some boats were netting in November and had catches of bass, smoothhound and whiting, but this year finfish catches have slowed, and of thornback ray have not made an appearance yet. Tuna sightings have continued and there are more signs of squid and cuttle fish than previous years.

Whelk catches are typically low in December and January, but they have been particularly poor this winter. In response, one whelk fisher has capitalised on Dungeness's proximity to productive scallop grounds and has reported good returns so far. These grounds have been worked hard by the scallopers since November.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 4

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