

Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period January 2026 to May 2026

Overview

This year, the bass closed season ran from 1 February until the 31 March. During this time, all bass landings were prohibited for recreational and commercial fishers. On 1 April, fishers were once again able to land bass, with commercial catch limits increasing from 2025.

On 1 March, European lobster minimum conservation reference size (MCRS) increased from 87mm to 88mm. This is as a result of the crab and lobster FMP and will see the minimum size of European lobsters increase from 87mm to 90mm by January 2028. European lobster minimum size will increase to 89mm in January 2027 and then to 90mm in January 2028.

The Manila clam trial fishery began on 16 March and ran until 1 May. During the trial, officers worked alongside fishers to assess fleet-level effects on the biology and stocks of Manila clams in the Thames estuary, as well as considering economic viability and how the fishery would be managed. There were four vessels taking part in this year's trial, two of which are based in Kent.

In April, consistent Northeasterly winds reduced time at sea for most fishers in Kent. When weather windows presented themselves, fishers took the opportunity to haul pots and set nets.

Recent conflict in the middle east has resulted in fuel prices skyrocketing; some fishers have said fuel prices have doubled. This has impacted fishers with some choosing to fish closer to port, and at slower speeds, to lower their fuel usage.

Queenborough

A variety of fishing has occurred in Queenborough during this period. One boat in Queenborough usually dredges for oysters this time of year however prices have been low so instead they spent some time trawling for sprats.

Two other fishing vessels were preparing for and taking part in the Manila clam trial.

Number of fishing vessels in Queenborough: 7

Faversham

Faversham has been quiet this period; one boat is up sale whilst another is out of the water for maintenance.

Number of fishing vessels in Faversham: 4

Whitstable

In January and February, some boats had their yearly maintenance and spent time out of water. A handful of boats were oystering, but most were whelking although the catches were at their lowest. In March, the whelk catches picked up when the sea temperature rose, and fishers reported good catches.

Recently whelk catches have been better, and the fishers are pleased with the amounts being landed. Bait has become more expensive and harder to get hold of, but fishers have enough to keep them going for now.

Number of fishing vessels in Whitstable: 11

Herne Bay

There are two boats that have been fishing out of Herne Bay during this period, one boat has been whelking throughout January and February and is now starting to get ready to pot for crab and lobster. The other boat has also started potting and as more bass start to show it is certain the hook and line activity here will increase.

Number of fishing vessels in Herne Bay: 2

Ramsgate

The main fishery in Ramsgate this period has been whelking; catches were steady in January and February then improved in March and have been consistently good since.

Since March, boats have started to set lobster and crab pots, and some have caught berried hens which have been donated to the Whitstable Lobster Hatchery. Fishers have also been netting but the number of fish landed has been affected by hungry seals finding the nets.

Strong Northeasterly winds in April have made it difficult for fishers to get out and turn over their gear. Since then, fishers have reported below average whelk catches with some moving pots to deeper water in the hopes of better yields.

In other fisheries, hook and line boats have started to venture out more often now that bass are showing more reliably.

Number of fishing vessels in Ramsgate: 15

Broadstairs

The fishing vessel here has not been seen going to sea during this period.

Number of fishing vessels in Broadstairs: 1

Margate

One boat has been seen fishing out of Margate this period with varying success netting for fish.

Number of fishing vessels in Margate: 3

Deal and Walmer

The netting boat from Deal has started fishing again after a quiet winter period and has been selling their catch from their stall on Deal beach. Recently, catches have consisted of skate and spider crabs.

Number of fishing vessels in Deal and Walmer: 1

Dover

The fishing vessels here have not been seen going to sea during this period. One hook and line fisherman may start fishing now that mackerel have started to appear in the area. The water is clear for now, and mackerel have turned up earlier than usual.

Number of fishing vessels in Dover: 3

Folkestone

During the first months of the year, one boat in Folkestone was scalloping whilst the others were mainly whelking and not netting due to the bass closed period. Now that the bass ban has lifted, boats have been netting and trawling. As well as netting, boats have been potting for whelks, crabs, and lobsters. Fishers have mentioned that they have been returning plenty of berried lobsters which is a positive sign for the future.

Number of fishing vessels in Folkestone: 7

Hythe

One boat in Hythe has been occasionally netting with catches mostly consisting of smoothhounds and bass. However, as the sea gets warmer, spider crabs are becoming more of a nuisance, and fishers say moving gear further offshore may be the best option to avoid them. The other boat has been targeting cuttlefish and is now preparing to start whelk fishing.

Number of fishing vessels in Hythe: 2

Dungeness

Earlier in the year, one Dungeness boat stopped whelk fishing to have a go at scallop dredging. Catches have been good and there are signs that stocks are healthy; the fisher has no plans to return to whelk fishing.

Two other boats have continued whelking and another has been netting and potting for crab and lobster. In May, one notable catch was a common octopus.

Number of fishing vessels in Dungeness: 4

Adam Ayles, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer