



Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the period November 2021 to January 2022

Overview

This Winter, the weather has stayed milder for longer than in previous years and as a result, some fisheries were exploited for longer periods than usual including crabs and lobsters.

The price of whelks has stayed the same for the whole of 2021 at around £1000 per tonne. Buyers have reported that quantities have slowed due to boats not willing to fish at that price. The increase in price and availability of whelk bait has also had an impact on this. Whelks had been going to Korea where covid restrictions have been strict, although buffet restaurants have now opened again in this country so there is some anticipation that demand will increase. Companies have also struggled to find acceptable ways to export whelks to the EU. Many of the North Kent boats fish for whelks over Winter but this year a number have started fishing later than in previous years.

Bass rules for 2022 were published in December 2021 with the same measures seen in 2021 for both commercial and recreational fishermen carried forward to this year.

Consignments of shellfish and finfish have been sent to the EU fairly regularly by Kent fish merchants buying off local boats, but increases in costs and decreasing returns have been making this more and more economically unviable.

Queenborough

The Queenborough fishing boats haven't been to sea as much recently. One vessel has been catching oysters and trawling for sole and skate, selling on a stall next to the fishing boats. The stall was very popular with the locals last year and will sell local fish more regularly again in the Spring. Another boat has been herring fishing and advertising their catches locally on Facebook. This is popular among anglers to use as bait. The cockle boats have been having maintenance work carried out on their vessels for the 2022 season.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 6

Faversham

In Faversham there has been very low activity for a while now. A whelk boat has been readied here for a while and will be moving to Whitstable in January 2022. The trawler that usually works here has been fishing off the Devon coast.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 2

Whitstable

The Whitstable whelk fishermen have reported a longer than usual spawning season of whelks of about 8 weeks. This has resulted in reduced catch quantities whilst this has been happening. There have been good signs for the future in this area off the North Kent Coast with extremely large amounts of very small whelks seen in and on the whelk pots. Many boats started whelk fishing again full time after seasons of netting and a small amount of trawling.

Boats have continued to catch and sell oysters although there was a period in which some buyers would not take the oysters. This was due to the classification of native oysters off Whitstable downgraded to class B in November 2021 due to high levels of E Coli. The ongoing issues with Southern Water have severely affected local oyster sales at Whitstable, which it is usually famous for.

A couple of vessels sold their catches locally, advertising on Facebook until late last year but have since stopped to continue whelk fishing full time over Winter. The lobster fishermen have continued voluntarily v-notching berried lobsters in an effort to protect the breeding stock for the future. They have informed IFCA officers that they have v-notched around 150 since they started doing it in June last year. The cockle fleet started maintenance on their vessels in preparation for the 2022 cockle season during this period.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 15

Herne Bay

The trailer launched vessel in Herne Bay continued to catch lobsters late in the season and also went netting occasionally.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 1

Thanet Ports

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

Some of the Ramsgate boats have resorted back to full time whelk fishing again after a longer than usual lobster potting and finfish netting season. One boat was selling locally on Facebook whereas most of the other netting boats have a good relationship with a local fishmonger. Boats with bass authorisation have had a good year with numbers improving. The netters have been targeting sole as usual.

One boat has been crab and lobster fishing over Winter after having decent hauls last year. Catches have slowed over Winter but that is expected with the time of year.

Broadstairs: Number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs

Margate: Number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

Not a lot of commercial activity occurs in Margate. The boats that have been going to sea have been herring and sprat fishing but the herring have all but stopped now. They continue to sell finfish and crab and lobsters locally, but catches have not been good at all. Reports of large numbers of small whiting have been seen in the nets. The boats with bass entitlement have had steady catches. A few cod and sole have been caught but there has been a massive decline in numbers compared to previous years at this time of year.

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 31

Deal and Walmer

There has mostly been just the one boat from Deal fishing off the beach nowadays. They have been out a few times over this period and continue to sell what they catch in nets and pots to nearby residents.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 3

Dover

One smaller vessel in Dover has been crab and lobster fishing but catches have been low over the Summer and Autumn months. The Charter boats have been going regularly still with some fairly mild weather days in November so far.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 2

Folkestone and Hythe

The Folkestone boats were still catching crab and lobsters well into December. There have not been many cod seen this year by the fishermen and small catches of soles, bass and skate have been made. One boat had a good season catching scallops.

The boats have been predominantly selling to the local fish shop with some fish sent abroad. They have reported receiving poor prices for what they have been selling though.

Hythe has seen a new vessel come to the beach which replaced a previous one. The boats have mostly been netting when they have been going to sea selling to a local fish merchant and straight off the beach. Bass, skate and soles were caught when the fishermen went to sea.

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

Vessels began whelk fishing once more after alternating between crab and lobster potting and netting into early Winter. Some of the boats has been drift netting for sole and other finfish and another trawling after some mild and good weather days recently.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 6

Robert Watson, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer