

Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period May 2026 to August 2026

Overview

The beginning of this reporting period was largely focused on conducting biosecurity inspections and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) checks on the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery (TECFO) fleet based in Kent, in preparation for the fishery opening. The TECFO is now well underway, with all six Kent-licensed cockle vessels completing full fishing trips in accordance with this year's management measures.

In early June, the KEIFCA Area B scallop fishery closed following a busy and productive scallop season off the south Kent coast. As expected, the closure has resulted in a noticeable reduction in scallop fishing activity across the area. The scallop fishery in ICES Area VIIId was also closed for vessels over 10m from the 1st July. This has increased scallop fishing in adjacent fishing ground off Folkestone in Area IVc.

Across the district, fishing activity has remained relatively steady throughout the reporting period. Several key commercial species, including bass, sole and mackerel, have been present in good numbers and have provided valuable opportunities for local vessels. On the north Kent coast, significant seaweed blooms have once again presented challenges for the commercial potting fleet, with many crab and lobster fishermen having to temporarily remove their gear from the water. Exceptionally high sea temperatures have also impacted the whelk fishery, with feeding activity in shallower waters largely ceasing and catches declining accordingly.

As shellfish fisheries have slowed, some vessels have diversified into trawling operations, reporting productive fishing days with encouraging catches of sole and bass. In addition, several vessels have benefited from increased local demand over the summer period through direct and local sales.

Queenborough

With the opening of the Thames Estuary Fishery at the end of June, two of the cockle vessels out of Queenborough have been busy. Following several busy weeks of biosecurity inspections and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) checks,

the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery commenced with a two-week period of low-density trips in Areas 5 and 6. The season is now well underway, with the Queenborough cockle vessels undertaking full fishing trips in line with this year's management. These vessels are landing their cockles into Whitstable. One vessel has left Queenborough. Activity within the local netting fleet has remained steady, with one vessel reporting good catches of mullet over the reporting period. Two vessels in Queenborough will be starting to get their boat and gear ready for the upcoming cockle permit fishery in September.

Number of fishing vessels in Queenborough: 7

Faversham

A local vessel owner in Faversham is currently preparing to apply for a cockle permit ahead of the season. Fishing activity in the port has been relatively quiet during the reporting period, with some vessel operators temporarily unable to fish and several vessels undergoing routine maintenance and refit work.

A new small fishing vessel is expected to join the local fleet in the near future.

Number of fishing vessels in Faversham: 4

Whitstable

Following several busy weeks of biosecurity inspections and Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) checks, the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery commenced at the end of June, resulting in a busy period for the Whitstable cockle fleet. During the opening phase of the fishery, the four cockle vessels completed two weeks of low-density fishing trips within Areas 5 and 6. Since then, the fleet has been undertaking full fishing trips in line with this year's management measures.

At the beginning of the reporting period, the whelk fishery continued to keep much of the Whitstable fleet active, while catches of lobster and crab remained strong. However, sea temperatures in the bay rose rapidly, reaching 23°C. Following an initially productive period, catches of lobster and crab declined, and several vessels decided to take their pots ashore temporarily due to the sea temperatures and significant increase in seaweed making their operations difficult. High sea temperatures also led to a reduction in whelk feeding activity, resulting in lower catch rates than usual for the season. Consequently, some vessels diversified into trawling operations, with several Whitstable boats reporting encouraging catches of sole and bass. One vessel has been making the most of the first sale fish stall throughout the summer.

Number of fishing vessels in Whitstable: 11

Herne Bay

Fishing activity during June was primarily focused on mackerel, with some vessels also targeting bass. A new vessel has recently arrived in the harbour, offering improved fuel efficiency. Meanwhile, one vessel is currently undergoing refit and maintenance work.

Lobster fishing has continued, with one fisher reporting relatively low numbers of v-notched and berried lobsters observed during fishing operations.

Number of fishing vessels in Herne Bay: 4

Ramsgate

The main fisheries in Ramsgate this period has been whelks and bass. The sole fishing has been encouraging, with soles fetching a good market price. The rod and line vessels have been actively targeting bass, with reports indicating good numbers of both sizeable and smaller fish present in local waters. Seal interactions continue to be a challenge for fishermen in the area, impacting fishing operations across a number of fisheries. Some lobster fishing activity has taken place during the period, although catches have generally been slow, with relatively low numbers being reported. Netting activity has also continued within the Thames Estuary.

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 vessel operated out of Margate during this reporting period, completing several successful netting trips for bass and good catches of sole. Although mackerel have been fetching very good prices, catches have remained low despite the water clarity. The abundance of small bass has also made netting for mackerel particularly difficult. Lobster catches within the bay have been poor, potentially due to the unusually high water temperatures. Between fishing trips, this vessel has been making gear for the upcoming cockle permit fishery.

Number of fishing vessels in Margate: 3

Deal and Walmer

The fishing vessel out of Deal has been out catching dogfish and spider crabs for their beach fish stall.

Number of fishing vessels in Deal and Walmer: 1

Dover

One Dover-based fishing vessel has been actively targeting lobster during the reporting period. Fishermen have also reported notable numbers of spider crabs around offshore wreck marks. Bass fishing has generally been more productive than mackerel fishing in recent weeks, with vessels reporting stronger catches of bass across local grounds.

Number of fishing vessels in Dover: 3

Folkestone

One vessel has stopped whelking during the reporting period. Some vessels have started potting for lobsters and have reported a lot of small and berried lobsters around. An increase in scallop fishing activity has been observed off Folkestone during the reporting period, which may be linked to the closure of ICES Area VIIId to scallop fishing, resulting in vessels concentrating effort in adjacent grounds.

Number of fishing vessels in Folkestone: 7

Hythe

One fishing vessel has stopped selling fish through first sale channels due to water quality concerns. A vessel also undertook some exploratory cuttlefish fishing during the reporting period.

Number of fishing vessels in Hythe: 2

Dungeness

Crab and lobster catches in Dungeness showed signs of improvement during the reporting period, providing some encouragement for the local shellfish fleet. In contrast, netting activity remained relatively poor, with reports of low catch rates for key target species, including sole.

Whelking activity continued throughout this period, although catch rates were generally reported to be below expectations, with some vessels averaging around 13 bags per trip. Rising operating costs remain a concern for fishermen, particularly in relation to fuel prices, which increased significantly over recent years and continue to impact profitability. In response to these economic pressures, some operators reported reducing crew numbers and adapting their fishing practices to remain viable.

The closure of the Area B scallop fishery at the beginning of June has benefited the local whelk fleet by increasing access to fishing grounds and reducing the risk of pots being damaged by scallop dredging activity. Some fishermen have relocated crab and lobster pots to take advantage of these opportunities.

Large numbers of juvenile spider crabs were reported entering whelk pots, while octopus were encountered more frequently as bycatch in some areas. Several vessels also experimented with alternative fisheries, including cuttlefish potting, although results were reported to be limited.

Number of fishing vessels in Dungeness: 4

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