



Agenda Item: C2

Shore Report: Essex

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period: May 2024 to September 2024

Overview:

The end of May saw more favourable weather conditions (on average higher monthly temperatures) for commercial vessels, anglers, and charter vessels. Northern Essex yielded commercial catches of thornback ray, Dover sole, brown crab, and lobster with the occasional spider crab being landed. Other species caught in limited quantities included seabass, cuttlefish, smooth-hound, conger eel, plaice, and dabs. Recreational angling efforts (beaches and piers) were limited to catches of 'school' bass and the occasional thornback ray. However, larger sea bass, thornback ray, and smooth-hound were starting to be caught offshore by the Essex charter vessel fleet.

June saw decreased average levels of rainfall and increased air temperatures making conditions even more favourable for recreational and commercial fishing. Increased catch levels of sea bass could be observed on charter vessels throughout the district, with sizeable bass of up to 7lb being caught consistently. Fuel cost and relative catch quantity made it uneconomical for some of the commercial fleet to venture out. Several vessels focused on trawling closer inshore to maintain efficiency in line with yield levels. Overall catch levels are generally lower than previous seasons and many are concerned with the quantity of sizeable fish available.

August and September have seen fair weather, with intermittent rain showers and the occasional storm passing through the district. Storm Lilian brought unfavourable conditions toward the end of August, with strong winds limiting fishing activity. Recreational catches remain steady with sea bass, stingrays and plenty of large smooth-hounds caught on charter vessels and piers throughout Essex. Commercial catches of Dover sole are becoming more prevalent however, they are not at an economically stable level for those catching them.

Harwich & Walton

Commercial fishing activity for this area is centred around Harwich with only two vessels maintaining fishing activity in Walton throughout this quarter. Catches in

Walton varied, with sea bass, crustaceans (lobster/brown crabs) and thornback rays as the focal point. Dover sole was the main species fished in Harwich and catches were reported as low compared to previous seasons and years. Lobster and crab potters have struggled to maintain catch levels, with many complaining of mud and silt smothering pots and the bait contained within.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 15

Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton

Fishing activity in Brightlingsea is undertaken by charter vessels, as the weather has become more favourable during this quarter. Recreational anglers have taken to charter boats to catch sea bass, large smooth-hound, and the occasional stingray. Commercial vessels are focused on netting, trawling and potting in Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe and Clacton. Catches include low levels of lobster, sea bass, mullet, Dover sole and thornback ray for this period. Some vessels reported difficulty with seaweed clogging nets, decreasing catch levels and increasing the weight of hauled gear.

Number of active commercial vessels: 6

Number of active charter vessels: 5

West Mersea & Tollesbury

Fishing activity remained consistent for vessels in West Mersea. The oyster fishery now focuses on private grounds and has been active throughout this period. Many of the commercial vessels use trawls and fixed nets to maintain catch levels. Dover sole and small quantities of mixed plaice and dabs have been landed, with reasonable quantities of sea bass caught toward the first half of the quarter. In general, catch levels are reported as low and maintaining a cost-effective fishing regime is becoming increasingly difficult.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 19

Number of active charter vessels: 3

Maldon & Bradwell

Fishing activity is relatively low for Maldon and Bradwell with only a few vessels intermittently fishing. Vessels located in these areas are predominantly focused on trawling for catch and levels of catch are inconsistent.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 4

North Fambridge, Burnham-on-Crouch, Wallasea Island, Barling, Paglesham & Rochford

Fishing activity is undertaken by charter vessels operating from Wallasea Island. Charter vessels remain active and catch levels appear stable. Catches have been similar to other charter vessels throughout the district, large smooth-hounds are the primary target species, with the occasional sea bass and thornback ray. Some commercial vessels work on private oyster grounds throughout sections of the River Crouch and its attached tributaries. However, other commercial vessels and gear types remain relatively inactive.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 1

Number of active charter vessels: 3

Southend-on-Sea & Leigh-on-Sea

Throughout May and the beginning of June, the main focus for commercial boats in Leigh-on-Sea was the preparation of the cockle boats ahead of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO), which commenced mid-June. The last week of August saw the final checks of additional cockle boats ahead of the KEIFCA Permit fishery, which began in September. All cockles from these trips have been and are continuing to be landed in Leigh-on-Sea. Aside from the commercial vessels, there is only one known active charter vessel in the area, however, no catch details have been disclosed.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 15

Number of active charter vessels: 1

Holehaven & Thurrock

Only one commercial and charter vessel was active between May and July. The commercial catch was not disclosed; however, the charter vessel caught a mix of species, including large smooth-hound, stingray and sizable bass.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 1

Number of active charter vessels: 1

(Credit: IFCO Welsh for sections, Southend-on-Sea, Leigh-on-Sea, Holehaven and Thurrock)

Max Nolic,

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