



## **Agenda Item – C2**

### **Shore Report - Essex**

#### **Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority**

#### **Report for the period November 2023 – January 2024**

### **Overview**

Fishing activity has been particularly quiet during this period. Poor catch rates and high fuel costs led to limited activity in the early part, followed by a prolonged period of adverse weather conditions combined with the closure of markets for the Christmas period. It is also common practice at this time of year for many of the vessels to be hauled out for maintenance and refit while fishing is poor.

The Thames and Blackwater herring fishery opened as normal and will run until the end of January. In the run up to Christmas catches were good across the Northern part of the district with vessels landing good quantities in Leigh on Sea and Mersea, however effort since January has been mainly centred in the Thames. Whelking activity within Essex has all but stopped in this part of the district with the main vessels either relocating to the south of the district or finishing up altogether.

Anglers reported catches of skate, flounder, whiting and even bass up until November, but perhaps more importantly for this sector an early run of codling. Christmas and New Year period was quiet with a few named storms passing through and restricting effort. Activity within the charter vessel fleet has been minimal, with many taking the opportunity to take holidays while demand is low.

### **North Essex**

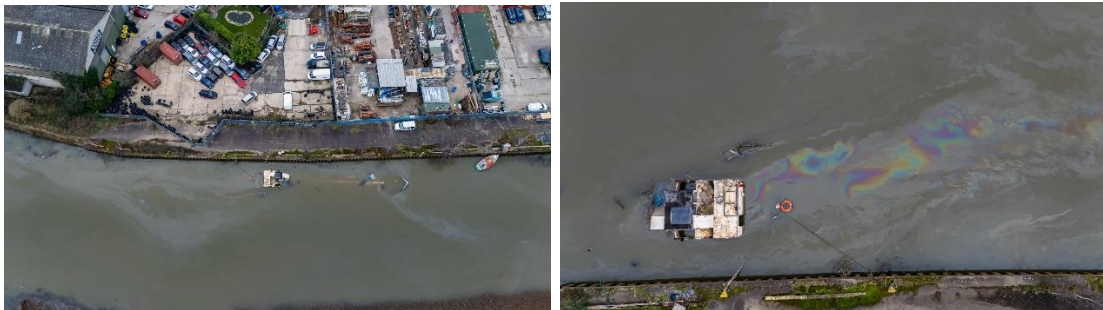
The north of the district has seen little effort during this period. Many of the vessels in Harwich and Walton only fish from spring to autumn and are hauled out for the winter period. The potting vessels also are not particularly active taking only an occasional trip to turn over the gear. Trawlers reported poor catches when they did venture out, and an issue raised by the entire fleet is the adverse impact on the ground and on the fisheries by the maintenance dredging programme. Further concerns were also raised over the potential routing of the

export cables from the Five Estuaries windfarm and the impact this would have on fishing grounds.

## **Essex Rivers**

As in the north of the district effort was low during this period. Commercial vessels operating from Brightlingsea saw little or no activity, with Wivenhoe vessels conducting a few trips and reporting poor catches. Mersea trawlers reported poor catches in the early part of this quarter and have not been very active in the New Year, though landings of herring and sprat were good before Christmas. A number of trawlers have been placed on the market and if sold may not be replaced, further reducing the fleet in Mersea. The oyster fleet continued to operate as normal, with both dredging and hand gathering activities taking place. The Bradwell and Maldon vessels were not very active during this period, but should resume fishing later in the New Year. Wivenhoe, Mersea and Bradwell fishers have echoed the concerns of the Harwich fleet with regards the potential route of the Five Estuaries export cable. Activity on the Crouch was also limited, with a few recreational netters targeting herring, and some recreational angling from the riverbank. The Bradwell based charter vessels were still catching bass up until November, and after the poor weather in December are gearing up for cod fishing trips in January.

One item of concern in this part of the district was the sinking of a houseboat on Hythe Quay in Colchester with some fuel and oil being seen on the river.



Officers visited the scene and contacted the relevant agencies to encourage prompt action to ensure any potential adverse impacts are minimised.

## **South Essex**

Southend and Leigh are traditionally quiet after the closure of the TECFO cockle fishery, with a few crews switching to trawlers after a short break. This year was no different and trawling activity resumed as normal, though catches were not going to break any records. The arrival of the sprat and herring changed things with good landings into Leigh on Sea through December and into January. Local vessels were joined by a locally owned vessel which has been working from the port of Newhaven, but has now returned to Leigh. The only thing of note to

report from Southend was a large amount of sprat which washed ashore under Southend Pier in early January, however close examination led officers to conclude it was more than likely part of the catch lost from one of the vessels operating in the area.

The fishing effort remains extremely low and in decline from Holehaven and Thurrock with vessels operate mainly on a part time basis and are regularly hauled out for maintenance or storage.

**Colm O'Laoi**

**Patrol Vessel Skipper & IFC Officer**