

Agenda Item: C2

Shore Report: Essex

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period: November 2025 to January 2026

Overview:

Fishing activity has, as expected, decreased during this quarter across all ports in Essex due to poor weather conditions and catch rates. It is also common at this time of year for vessels to be hauled out for maintenance or refit and this has been observed throughout Essex. There has also been vessel movement across the district with boats changing ownership and in some cases ports; patterns suggest we will see more commercial activity in Harwich this coming year.

The Thames and Blackwater herring fishery opened as normal and will run until the end of January. The mild weather in the run up to Christmas led to water temperatures remaining high for this time of year and as a result herring landings were poor. This has caused a shift in fishing effort to sprat for the start of this year. Whelking activity within Essex has increased in comparison to last year as a result of new vessels working in the district.

Recreationally, there has still been a fair amount of fishing activity on piers, charter vessels and beaches given the time of year. There have been large quantities of whiting reported along with flounder, dab, dogfish, some sea bass and manila clams from Essex shores. Despite a reduction in activity, local charter vessels have had success catching large sea bass, starry smooth-hound, thornback ray, conger eel and cod in December.

Harwich & Walton

Activity at these two ports has reduced throughout this period, with many vessels now out and undergoing maintenance. Sole dropped off at the beginning of this period leaving the remaining working vessels landing whelks and lobsters. Those who have been catching lobster reported low catch rates, with a continuation of widespread complaints from fishers about pots silting up with mud and organic matter. This issue has been especially pronounced around Harwich, not influencing gear further offshore or south.

Recreational catches in this area have mostly been reduced to whiting, flounder and dab. There has been a decrease in fishing effort across piers in this area as a result of pier maintenance and icy conditions at the beginning of this year.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 3

Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton

Commercial fishing activity has almost come to a complete halt with only a small amount of thornback ray landed over Christmas. Many vessels are now undergoing maintenance in preparation for spring and summer.

The charter vessels are no longer in high demand, yet reports of large sea bass, thornback ray, conger eel and cod were shared before Christmas. Much like the commercial vessels, operators have used the quieter weeks to repair and refit the charter vessels in preparation for an increase in demand ahead of the warmer months.

Anglers on the piers and beaches have also seen a reduction in species with whiting being the most common alongside dabs, smooth-hound, dogfish and the very occasional thornback ray.

Number of active commercial vessels: 1

Number of active charter vessels: 2

West Mersea & Tollesbury

West Mersea has remained one of the more consistently active ports in the district throughout this period, despite many vessels slowing down for the winter. At the start of this period fishers operating from West Mersea were still primarily focused on higher-value species, with trawlers targeting Dover sole and netters concentrating on sea bass. We also saw the final landings of Manila clams into West Mersea as part of the trial fishery. Once numbers began to decrease for these species there was an increase in herring, some cod and a handful of thornback ray. Oysters are in high demand at this time of year ahead of the Christmas and New Year markets and remain a consistent commercial income for this port. Following the arrival of a new commercial vessel, whelks have also been landed frequently and in large quantities when compared to last year in West Mersea.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 6

Maldon & Bradwell

As is the trend this time of year, these ports have experienced low levels of commercial activity throughout this period, with only a singular vessel remaining active in Bradwell. The species being caught has mirrored that observed at other nearby ports with a small quantity of sea bass and herring landed. All other vessels remain out of action and are undergoing maintenance, inspections, or

seasonal downtime in preparation for the 2026 spring and summer fishing season.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 1

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

Only a few commercial vessels operate from these ports, some of which were partaking in the Manila clam trial fishery and landing into Wallasea Island. Shellfish landings came to a halt at the beginning of this period following the pause of this trial. As a result, charter vessels have been the main form of fishing activity, with those currently active based at Wallasea Island. Records have shown that large bass are what anglers have been catching along with only one starry smooth-hound also caught in this period.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 2

Number of active charter vessels: 2

Southend-on-Sea & Leigh-on-Sea

As is the case in Leigh-on-Sea, the cockle fishery is the main focus and following the end of the season many fishers are undertaking necessary maintenance and refit projects to their vessels in preparation for the 2026 season. Despite this, cockles have still been landed into Leigh-on-Sea from private beds during this period. Some vessels switched to pelagic trawls in this quarter to focus on herring and sprat. Reports show that herring was limited in December due to mild water temperatures. Fishers have since chosen to focus on sprat in the new year, with records showing a greater quantity is being landed in comparison to last year.

As has been the case throughout Essex, recreational activity has naturally decreased and the reduced opening hours of Southend Pier has also been a factor at play. Hand gathering for Manila clams and pacific oysters has continued from the warmer summer months into the winter, however, activity has slowed.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 3

Holehaven & Thurrock

Activity for these ports remains quiet, as is always the case. Vessels remain present but are idle and at moorings, with no record of commercial or recreational activity during this period.

Gabbie Welsh

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