



## **Agenda Item: C2**

### **Shore Report: Essex**

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

#### **Quarterly Report for the Period: February 2026 to May 2026**

##### **Overview:**

Commercial fishing activity across the Essex inshore fleet experienced a sustained reduction between February and early April, shaped by a combination of economic pressures, regulatory measures, and challenging weather conditions. The period was defined by notably low fishing effort, with many vessels limiting their operations or remaining in harbour for extended periods. A significant factor influencing activity has been the sharp rise in marine fuel prices, which reached up to £1.50 per litre (diesel) for local fishers, approximately 50% higher than previously stable rates. This increase placed considerable financial strain on small inshore vessels, many of which operate on tight margins and rely on consistent catch rates to offset fuel expenditure. For some skippers, the elevated costs have rendered routine trips economically unviable, contributing to an overall downturn in effort during the early part of the quarter.

Weather conditions added further constraints. Met Office reporting for the February to May period indicated a sequence of unsettled patterns across the southeast coast, including intermittent strong north-easterly winds, frequent low-pressure systems, and periods of rough sea states. These conditions have regularly restricted access to inshore grounds and reduced safe operating windows. February and March have seen repeated wind events that have prevented vessels from departing or forced early returns. April brought gradual improvement but still featured occasional disruptive northerly airflow. By May, conditions had become more settled, with longer daylight hours, increased sunlight, and warmer temperatures supporting more consistent operations.

The seasonal closure of the bass fishery throughout February and March imposed an additional pause on activity. While essential for stock conservation, the closure contributed to a temporary hiatus for the commercial sector. The lull in activity did provide an opportunity for several vessels to undertake maintenance, refitting, and general upkeep, ensuring fleet readiness for the more active months ahead. A notable change occurred with the arrival of April, when the bass fishery reopened. This reopening was widely welcomed and coincided with improving weather conditions, prompting a gradual increase in fishing effort. By May, commercial fishing activity had strengthened appreciably. Although fuel prices remained a significant concern, the combination of improved weather, increased daylight, and greater species availability contributed to a steady recovery in operations across the Essex inshore fleet.

### **Harwich & Walton**

Activity across the North Essex fleet remained notably subdued during February and March, marking a clear lull in operations during the first two months of the quarter. This reduction in effort was driven by a combination of factors, including scheduled vessel maintenance, extended periods of unfavourable weather, and generally low catch availability across key inshore grounds.

Within the Harwich fleet, most activity centred on maintenance work and limited potting for lobster and crab. Several fishers chose to store their gear entirely, anticipating improved conditions and higher catch potential later in the season. Only a small number of vessels continued to trawl or set static nets throughout this period, and those that did reported modest catch volumes. Toward the end of the quarter, landings began to show a slight improvement, with species such as dogfish, bass, Dover sole, thornback ray, and mullet recorded. However, overall fishing effort and catch levels remained below seasonal expectations.

Number of active commercial vessels: 21

### **Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton**

Commercial vessel activity remained steady throughout the quarter, with several new vessels joining the district and others being sold or relocating to neighbouring areas. Landings from the commercial fleet primarily comprised thornback ray, mullet, and bass. Charter vessel activity was comparatively low during the first two months of the quarter, largely due to persistent adverse weather and less favourable sea conditions.

As conditions improved later in the period, an increasing number of charter vessels became active, preparing for the start of the main season and operating from the River Crouch, River Blackwater, River Colne, and Brightlingsea Creek. During the latter part of the quarter, several vessels reported recurring catches of sizeable bass, alongside thornback ray and smooth-hound, particularly through April and May. These landings indicate a gradual increase in activity and species availability as seasonal conditions improved.

Number of active commercial vessels: 12

Number of active charter vessels: 5

### **West Mersea & Tollesbury**

Commercial activity across the Essex rivers increased notably during April and May, with fixed gear deployed in several rivers as vessels sought to enhance fishing effort and improve catch volumes. Throughout the quarter, whelks were consistently landed into port, forming a steady and reliable component of commercial landings. Vessels operating from Mersea reported limited success during the early part of the quarter, citing low catch levels and challenging conditions. As the season progressed, several vessels shifted their focus toward the bass open season in April, targeting the species more actively as availability improved.

Across the fleet, multiple operators reiterated concerns regarding high fuel prices, highlighting the significant economic pressures these costs placed on day-to-day operations and fishing decisions. For the Mersea oyster fleet, activity remained stable, with dredging operations continuing as normal throughout

February, March, and April, reflecting a consistent pattern of effort within this sector.

Number of active commercial vessels: 23

Number of active charter vessels: 2

### **Maldon & Bradwell**

A small number of commercial vessels continue to operate from this port, with netting remaining the predominant fishing method. Landings consist mainly of the regular finfish species, though bass remains the primary target due to its higher economic value. Vessel movement has been notable throughout the period, with several boats arriving, departing, or being sold as operators adjust their activity.

Number of active commercial vessels: 6

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

Several commercial vessels and charter vessels operated from these ports during this period. Two vessels continued landing manila clams up to the end of the reporting window. Charter activity increased as weather conditions improved, while a small number of vessels focused on netting within the river or working private oyster grounds.

Number of active commercial vessels: 6

Number of active charter vessels: 6

### **Southend-on-Sea & Leigh-on-Sea**

During the TECFO closed season, fishing activity in Southend & Leigh decreases significantly due to the inaccessibility of the cockle grounds. This quarter is typically quiet, leading some vessels to switch to pelagic trawling, which ceased in Leigh-on-Sea at the beginning of February. As the quarter progressed into April and May, only 1–2 vessels continued limited trawling for general finfish species. Much of the fleet concentrated on vessel maintenance and preparing the cockle fleet for the anticipated 2026 season. An additional change to this port is that manila clams have been landed here toward the end of this quarter.

Number of active commercial vessels: 14

Number of active charter vessels: 1

### **Holehaven & Thurrock**

Activity in Holehaven Creek and Thurrock remained low, with minimal vessel movement at both the start and end of the quarter. Some charter vessels remained active throughout, targeting smooth-hound, bass, dogfish, and thornback ray. Commercial vessels primarily engaged in netting within the Thames, focusing on bass and mullet.

Number of active commercial vessels: 1

Number of active charter vessels: 2

**Max Nolic**

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