



Agenda Item C5

Recreational Angling Report

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period January 2026 – May 2026

Overview

Early in the year, North Kent saw plenty of dabs alongside constant whiting. February's bass ban quietened fishing, though smoothhounds and thornback rays appeared in the South. March brought the first returning bass, followed by more frequent catches in April, including larger fish in North East Kent and a notable common stingray. Dogfish became common in the South.

Recently, lugworm, once dug, have struggled to survive, while peeler crab remains popular. Upriver, whiting, flounder, and now bass have kept anglers catching. North Kent boats moved from conger and skate to smoothhounds and bass. Southern boats shifted from rays and pollock to mackerel, bass, and smoothhounds, though algal blooms are disrupting mackerel fishing.

KEIFCA Progress

During this period, officers have been inspecting shore anglers as well as conducting landing inspections on recreational boats to enforce byelaws and national legislation. Whilst on patrol, officers have been receiving intelligence, and subsequent patrols are planned to respond to this intelligence which have led to some offences being found. However, most anglers are aware of the rules and the reasoning behind them. Anglers that are unfamiliar with byelaws and national legislation are educated using minimum size stickers and directed to our website for more information.

This year, the bass closed season ran from 1 February until 31 March. During this time, all bass landings were prohibited for recreational and commercial fishers. On 1 April, fishers were once again able to land bass, with the bag limit increasing to 3 bass per person, per day. To spread awareness of the bass closed season and bag limit increase, officers displayed educational posters at fishing hotspots, piers, and marinas. Charter boats have also been given posters to display.

In the Kent & Essex district, mackerel (*Scomber scombrus*) has two minimum sizes; 30cm in ICES sub-area IVc, and 20cm in ICES sub-area VIIId. To help fishers understand this difference, IFCOs have displayed posters with maps which show

the areas and their respective mackerel sizes. These maps can be found on our website under: Regulations, Minimum Sizes.

Kent Angling Summary

At the start of the year, dabs were being caught frequently in North Kent, anglers had been catching endless whiting and were pleased to catch something different. In February the bass ban began, and fishing was quiet, although smoothhounds and thornback rays were starting to show in the South from beaches. March was much the same, but saw the return of bass, with some larger individuals caught and released after a quick photograph. In April, catches of bass started to become more frequent as the bass ban was lifted, with some of the larger fish being caught from Northeast Kent. One notable catch has been a common stingray from a beach in North Kent. In the South, dogfish have been caught by most anglers' officers talk to but are not the target species.

Recently, bait shops and anglers have mentioned to officers that lugworm survivability has been poor; sometimes dying within an hour. Apart from this, peeler crab has been a popular bait for anglers.

Essex Angling Summary

Anglers have been fishing both the piers and beaches across the Essex coastline catching whiting throughout this period. February was quiet, with the majority of the angling activity found on North Essex piers. Reports and inspections found whiting to be the most prolific with dab and the occasional thornback ray also being caught in February. March was much the same with an increase in reports of smoothhound, dogfish and the occasional plaice. Despite the bass closed season, anglers from the beaches and piers were starting to feedback that they were seeing and catching healthy looking school bass in late March. Whilst these school bass were caught and released due to the closed season, these reports created anticipation for 1 April. April saw an increase in school bass numbers as well as dogfish, smoothhound and whiting still present in and around the North Essex piers. A notable species reported to have been caught in North Essex was a turbot off Clacton pier.

Inner Thames and River Medway

Further up the river, whiting and flounder have been caught and prevented anglers from blanking. More recently, bass have been caught of all sizes.

Boat fishing

Early in the year, boats in the South were catching rays, pollock, and the occasional cod. Now the water has warmed up they are seeing mackerel, bass, and smoothhounds. Since late April, the mackerel fishing has been affected by the algal bloom, and one charter boat is fishing further west to find clearer water. One recreational boat in the South has applied for a catch and release blue fin tuna license. North Kent boats had good catches of conger eels and skate towards the start of the year and are now targeting smoothhounds and bass.

Vessels in Essex have increased in activity across this period. At the beginning of this period charter vessels were catching large smoothhounds and the occasional thornback ray. Since the bass open season on the 1st of April larger seabass have been caught across all charter vessels in Essex fishing off the coast and in the rivers.

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