



Agenda Item C5
Recreational Angling Report
Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Quarterly report for the period November 2023 – January 2024

Overview

Although the UK narrowly avoided the strongest winds from storm Ciaran, the storm did still cause significant impacts to the coast. Those who braved the weather managed to get good catches on bigger fish brought closer to the shore. The cold snap in late November extended though the first week of December and slowed down the beach fishing a little but brought a good number of dabs for anglers to target. The mackerel seemed to move off in late October, and the whiting arrived in large numbers.

Back in March 2023 the bass closed season for both commercial and recreational fishing was aligned to 1st February – 31st March with the two fish per day bag limit continuing outside of the closed season for recreational fishers. This means that the recreational fishers have had a January extension to retain bass – some anglers have continued with their usual efforts, targeting bass before they move further offshore.

The 6 Frontrunner Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) were published in December, one being the bass FMP. Bass is an important target species for recreational fishers. The bass FMP is a joint plan between Defra and the Welsh Government and provides a roadmap for the long-term sustainable management of bass fisheries in English and Welsh waters over the next 6 years. This plan applies to all commercial and recreational removals of bass in English and Welsh waters. The published bass FMP can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bass-fisheries-management-plan-fmp>

KEIFCA Progress

With the release of the 2024 Bass Fishing Guidance, officers have visited various angling venues within the District to keep anglers updated on the regulations. Engagement with the recreational angling sector has remained a core priority during this quarter. Officers have continued to patrol popular beaches and piers in the District to carry out inspections and issue the KEIFCA Minimum Sizes ruler stickers and business cards to anglers and local tackle shops where required.

Officers have had no compliance issues relating to recreational angling inspections this quarter.

Kent Angling Summary

Cold weather and easterlies have made winter fishing slow this quarter, but dabs have been showing in good numbers and sizes, and some decent sized whiting have also been reported. A few small rays have started to show in Kent, with daylight catches of flatfish also making an appearance off the harbour arm in Ramsgate. The dogfish seem to be thinner on the ground this year.

Reports of cod have been far and few.

Part of Deal Pier lower deck has remained closed after storm Ciaran, but the pier remains a popular angling hotspot with catches of pouting, dogfish and conger eels reported to be putting up a good fight for anglers. The beaches from Deal to Walmer have been fishing well, with catches of smoothound into November, whiting, bass and rays.

Admiralty Pier has remained busy, with consistent catches of dogfish whiting, pouting, dabs and conger eels. Squid has also been reported from Shakespeare Beach on calm evenings. Samphire Hoe has produced catches of pollack and wrasse. The bass fishing has dropped off a bit, with the usual efforts sometimes rewarding 43-44cm fish. Most anglers along the beaches have been targeting rays and after a slow start they seem to be making an appearance. Dungeness has been relatively quiet, due to the bad weather and expensive bait but the beaches have been producing small whiting and dogfish.

Essex Angling Summary

The Essex rivers and piers have been producing good numbers of dabs, with the occasional flounder making an appearance. Small rays, dogfish and pin whiting have also been reported, with some good-sized fish amongst them. The cold weather has made the beaches very quiet, but anglers have seen catches of rays, dabs, whiting when they can get out.

Matches on the piers have produced mainly whiting and dabs again and catches of bass carried on through late November into early December, although most of these fish have been too small to take home.

Inner Thames and River Medway

The rivers have been producing whiting and dabs, similar to what is being caught around the coast. There have also been reports of a few school bass, flounder, pouting and the odd codling in the Medway.

Boat fishing

When the weather has allowed, the charter boats have been making trips to target the winter species, fishing mainly on conger eels, whiting, dabs and pouting but the drop in temperature has slowed the fishing down. Charter boats in both Kent and Essex reported that some decent sized bass were still being caught at the end of last year and boats are still making the effort to find them while the season is open. Settled weather has produced some nice rays, which have thankfully put a better bend in the rod.

When the dabs arrive, they attract boats to competitions that have become very popular amongst anglers in Kent.

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