

Agenda Item: C5

Recreational Angling Report

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period: May 2026 to September 2026

Overview:

Recreational angling across Kent and Essex was fruitful throughout the summer, with catches varying by season and location. Dogfish dominated shore catches in May before bass, smooth hounds, and thornback rays became more common in June and July. Mackerel catches were generally sporadic but improved significantly in August. Charter and private boats reported good bass and smooth hound fishing, alongside occasional catches of tope, turbot, and black bream. South Kent anglers also recorded species such as gilt-head bream, dover sole and horse mackerel.

KEIFCA Progress

This summer, officers conducted Operation Summer Schooling with the aim of assessing angler's compliance with bass and mackerel regulations. Fishery officers patrolled beaches and piers and inspected vessels at sea and in port. A total of one hundred anglers have been inspected so far, and this operation will continue throughout summer.

An operation 'Midnight Sun' patrol was conducted during this reporting period, with IFCOs attending the pier during evening hours and liaising with pier staff and Essex Police to develop an effective strategy for identifying and addressing non-compliant fishing activity at night. Several anglers were inspected along the foreshore, with officers spreading awareness of minimum conservation reference sizes and relevant fisheries legislation to promote compliance. Due to operational priorities associated with the Thames cockle fisheries, and the significant commitment of staff and resources required to support these fisheries, Operation Midnight Sun has been temporarily paused.

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. These areas are separated by the 51-degree latitude line which crosses through St Mary's

Bay in Kent. 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 Shore Angling Summary

In May, dogfish were the main catch for shore anglers across Kent. Some managed to catch bass and less common species such as tub gurnard. The mackerel made an appearance briefly but did not hang around for long. In June and July, bass catches increased, and smooth hounds and thornbacks rays became the main species that anglers were targeting. Mackerel catches stayed low until August where they showed up in good numbers in shallow water. In South Kent, more species have been caught including gilt-head bream, dover sole, and horse mackerel.

Essex Angling Summary

Recreational angling activity across Essex increased during the quarter as improving weather conditions, warmer temperatures, and prolonged periods of settled weather provided greater opportunities for anglers both ashore and afloat. Shore-based fishing remained popular at established locations such as Walton Pier, Southend Pier, and along numerous beaches and estuarine marks throughout the district. Catches from these locations generally consisted of school bass, thornback ray, plaice, and Dover sole, although catch rates varied depending on local conditions and tidal state.

Offshore and charter-based angling produced the most notable catches during the period. Charter vessels operating from Brightlingsea, West Mersea, and Wallasea Island reported consistent success targeting large smooth-hound, sea bass, stingray, and thornback ray, with sea bass weighing up to 7 lb recorded on a regular basis during the summer months. Private vessel anglers, particularly those operating from Bradwell and within the Blackwater and Crouch estuaries, also enjoyed steady catches of smooth-hound and sea bass when weather conditions allowed. A particularly noteworthy report was the capture of two black bream near Walton Pier; a species rarely encountered in Essex waters and a potential indication of changing species distributions along the local coastline. Overall, recreational angling participation remained strong throughout the district, supported by favourable conditions and the availability of a diverse range of target species.

Inner Thames and River Medway

Further up the river, bass have been the main catch for anglers. Flatfish such as plaice and flounder have also been caught.

Boat Fishing

Charter boats and private angling boats have been out regularly when the weather has allowed particularly in the Thames Estuary. Boats working offshore have had good catches of bass, but mostly smooth hound were caught further inshore. Live bait fishing and squid baits have yielded good catches for many of the boats. Lure fishing remains popular for bass, with anglers noticing a pattern in the types and colours of lure that works for them this year. Sea temperatures have remained high throughout the summer months. Boats that have been fishing near birds feeding on bait have reported mostly undersized bass. Some charter boats have been seeing more horse mackerel than mackerel this year. Essex charter boats have been targeting bass and smooth hounds, but they have also caught some tope and the occasional sting ray.

One recreational boat from Dover succeeded in obtaining a bluefin tuna licence for the 2026 catch and release recreational fishery overseen by the MMO but has yet to catch any tuna so far. There were reports of one vessel landing turbot in the English Channel, and word spread quickly with others trying to catch one. Mackerel catches have been sporadic this year and there have been long periods with low catches. In August numbers picked up, and some good-sized mackerel were caught further offshore. A noticeable increase in greater weaver fish has been reported this year and there has been a mixed report on the number of pollock on the wrecks this year. Black bream has been landed again this summer as the fish hug Kent's distinct chalk reefs and structural features.

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