

Agenda Item C2
Essex Officers' Report
Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Quarterly report: Period ending 31 March 2014

GENERAL SITUATION

The region saw a very mild period compared to 2013 resulting in generally lower numbers of large cod seen in Essex. However, large shoals of Herring were seen throughout February and March as was last reported during the same period in 2012. Reports relating to the quantity of herring in the region included some boats using large drift nets targeting cod having to take several days to clear gear which had filled with large numbers of big herring after being set for only a short period. The mild conditions saw the sole season start by mid to late February however, due to the markets being flooded with sole from other European countries, prices were low and interest in the fishery soon dwindled as did the quantity of sole seen in the rivers.

HARWICH & WALTON

The damage caused to potting gear due to stormy weather conditions at the end of 2013 left many of the potters in Harwich and Walton spending much of this period searching for lost gear and having to replace it when those that were found were damaged beyond repair. This has led to reduced fishing effort and subsequently smaller catches landed during this period.

Trammel and gillnetters drifting for cod reported fair to poor catches of cod throughout the period with occasional good days around the Wallet. Late February and March saw significant numbers of herring in the area but no market for catches to go to, leaving boats with unwanted catch. Some boats switched gear type to targeted the sole fishery for a short period but reported low numbers and poor prices a second year running while others made the most of a few as part of mixed catches.

Vessels operating out of Walton continued to work a mixed fishery with catches mainly sold direct to the public.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 12

BRIGHTLINGSEA, WIVENHOE, CLACTON

Vessels working out of Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton targeted the cod fishery when weather conditions allowed using drift nets and trawls to land fair amounts of medium sized cod at times in the latter part of the period. Large numbers of Thornback Rays were caught in drift nets from late February onwards however, limited quotas for another successive year meant that much of what was caught had to be returned.

Large catches of herring were also seen in cod drift gear in March. Small quantities of herring were retained for direct sale to the public as prices and demand at market did not warrant transport costs. By the end of the period, small quantities of large bass were also caught on occasion by vessels out of these ports using drift gear near the Gunfleet wind farm and to the south.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 10

WEST MERSEA & TOLLESBURY

Similar quantities of herring were seen by vessels from these ports as those in Brightlingsea, Clacton and Wivenhoe with only small quantities retained for local direct sale to the public. Vessels which have targeted the fishery in previous years opted to continue using larger drift gear and target cod and Thornback Ray during this period.

The prohibition on the movement of Pacific oysters within parts of the Blackwater continued as did the prohibition on the taking of native oysters under the shellfish beds byelaw currently in force. Harvesting of Pacific oysters continued nonetheless on private grounds with good stock levels and fair marketing opportunities being reported.

Trawlers targeting cod and later sole reported mixed success during this period with some vessels opting to fish further afield north of the Gunfleet and outside the six once the short lived fishery for sole was finished in the Blackwater.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20

MALDON & BRADWELL

Fishing effort from these ports has continued at a low level. Gill and trammel netting continued at only a very low level producing small mixed catches. The ban on the movement of any pacific oysters from the designated zones in the Blackwater was continued through this period.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 2

NORTH FAMBRIDGE, BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH, BARLING, PAGLESHAM & ROCHFORD

Fishing activity from these ports remained at a low level. The growing on of mussel spat on private grounds continued throughout this period engaging a number vessels. Dredging for clams in the Crouch and Roach rivers has continued throughout this period at low to fair levels of intensity.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 6

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA & LEIGH-ON-SEA

The Authority's management of the cockle fishery resulted in the fishery remaining closed throughout this quarter. During this period most of the fleet of cockle harvesting vessels underwent routine maintenance in preparation for the new season. Several of the vessels were engaged in other fisheries during this period including mussel dredging and trawling for sole for a short period. Some vessels fished outside the district to make up for poorer catches seen closer inshore.

Pair trawling for herrings was limited during this quarter as skippers reported a lack of demand for herring at market. The lack of effort targeted at the herring fishery throughout this period meant that the Blackwater herring fishery was not closed by the MMO/CEFAS and subsequently KEIFCA at the end of March as in previous years but was instead extended into April.

The sole fishery in the Thames started earlier this year but only lasted a short period with poor catches reported and poor prices at market.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 26

HOLEHAVEN & THURROCK

Fishing effort remained fairly low from these ports, with a small number of vessels trawling for cod and later sole in the inner estuary. Activity from these ports has continued to reduce.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 5

Alex Senechal
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