

Agenda Item C2

Essex Officer Report

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report: April - June 2014

GENERAL SITUATION

April saw good numbers of large bass entering the district to the north providing vessels using drift gear with something to target after the lack of cod in the previous period. However, concerns were raised by some commercial vessels that prime breeding adults were removed from the fishery during a period of the year when fish would still be spawning.

There was little reward for the few able to catch sole in Essex waters during this period with low prices at market adding to the lack of fish seen in nets. Prices were reported to be low due to flooding of the markets from other European countries driving prices down. For many this was a second year running when fishing for sole was not profitable.

HARWICH & WALTON

Fishing effort at Harwich and Walton increased slightly from the previous quarter as a result of improving weather conditions. Trawlers switched to sole gear but had little to show from the short fishery which lasted no more than a few weeks from the end of April into the start of May. By-catches of thornback ray, the last of the codling and some dabs and plaice helped boost the low catches of sole seen.

For the crab and lobster fishermen from these ports, recovery and replacement of lost and damaged gear from the past winter continued throughout the start of the period. The lobster fishery reported small landings during April and May but improving in June to moderate catches with the prolonged warmer weather. Gill and trammel netters had a good run of larger bass at the start of the period and continued to target bass after attempts at bottom setting gear for sole resulted in poor catches.

Renewal of whelk permits were seen from vessels in Harwich and Walton permitting them to fish within the district, however, many pots were not set until later in the period.

BRIGHTLINGSEA, WIVENHOE, CLACTON

Vessels working out of Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton continued to drift and trawl for cod into mid-April. Gill, trammel and bottom drift netting produced some good catches, bass and thornback as well as cod choosing to work night tides due to the

increase clarity of the water during this period. Catch rates and activity levels later in the period dropped for netters due to increase levels of weed in the waters.

However good catches of thornback ray were still seen resulting in increased selectivity of fish retained due to continued low quota allowances for skates and rays.

The clearance of pacific oysters in Brightlingsea Harbour has continued throughout the period by a few of the West Mersea oyster vessels.

WEST MERSEA & TOLLESBURY

Although the herring fishery was extended into April this year, no vessels from West Mersea targeted it in this period. Efforts were instead placed at trying to catch sole, but like much of the Essex shore, catches were poor and effort was soon moved to other fisheries. Gill and trammel netters from West Mersea reported good catches of large bass during April as well as by catch of thornback and smoothhound later in the period.

The prohibition on the taking of native oysters under the shellfish beds byelaw was lifted during a two week period for a second year running however, few vessels became involved in the fishery due to limited areas where beds had appropriate shellfish classifications. Cultivation and harvesting of pacific oysters continued during the rest of this period at a high level as previously seen from this port.

MALDON & BRADWELL

Cultivation of pacific oysters was maintained at previously reported levels. The ban on the transportation of any pacific oysters from the designated red zone to the green zone given to the West Mersea area of the Blackwater persisted throughout this period to prevent transmission of the herpes virus between areas of the river.

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

The cultivation of native and pacific oysters continued at a low level on private grounds while dredging for clams in the Crouch and Roach rivers has continued during this period at lower levels than reported in 2013.

The cultivation of mussels laid on private beds has continued throughout this period, increasing the number of full time vessels working from these ports. Finfish fishing activity remained at a low level throughout the period.

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA & LEIGH-ON-SEA

Cockle vessels from Leigh continued to prepare for the opening of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order area. Other vessels from Southend, Leigh-On-Sea and Two Tree Island pursued the sole fishery with very poor landings being reported. Concerns were raised that catches of fish large enough to retain were lower than could be remembered by some fishermen.

Vessels involved in mixed fisheries in the Thames also reported poor catches of sole overall but with plenty of thornback rays throughout the period in the river although again, due limitations on quota, most of what was caught was discarded.

The cockle fishery inside the Regulating Order opened on 22nd June. Analysis of data from the spring survey conducted in early April meant that the TAC was set at 6160t for a second year running due to high mortality of cockles over the winter period. Vessels were designated 2 trips per week for the first 5 weeks, and 3 trips for the remaining 10 weeks of the season. Initial reports were that the yields were very good and that growth since the spring surveys was high compared to previous years. Cockle grounds outside of the Regulating Order remained closed during this period.

HOLEHAVEN & THURROCK

Similar low levels of activity were seen as previously reported for these ports with catches of sole being reported as very poor.

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