



Agenda item C2

Essex Report

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority Quarterly report for the period ending 30 Sep 2014

GENERAL SITUATION

The extended warm summer saw large amounts of algal growth being a problem for most commercial fishing methods at the start of this period and into early August with reports of cockle dredges getting clogged up continually during the first three weeks of the fishery. In addition drift gear was reported as not working efficiently because of crystal clear waters causing issues for many. The thornback ray quota remained at 100 kg from the previous year limiting landings until the end of the period. However, reports indicated that there were again good numbers of adults and juveniles seen in the district extending into the rivers. The commercial sole fishery was reported as being very poor this year with some fishermen in the Thames stating that it was the worst year they had experienced. After the large numbers of good sized bass being caught in the previous period, the fishery slowed down considerably this period with bass catches varying around the ports, some seeing fair numbers of medium sized bass while poor catches of all sizes were seen in other ports

HARWICH & WALTON

Due to the good weather conditions water temperatures in July increased considerably. As a result weed increased in quantity making netting increasingly difficult for boats fishing from these ports. Drift netting for bass saw fair landing in August and into September but not in the same quantity seen in the previous period. There was little commercial activity upriver in the Stour with no registered vessels being observed working around Mistly or Manningtree during this period. For vessels working a mixed fish fishery with drift gear, there were catches of the occasional John Dory in September as well as the usual whiting, mullet, thornback ray, rock eel, dabs, gurnard, and a small quantity of soles from bottom set gear. Trawling for sole was limited this year with catches proving to be poor as was seen the previous year in this period for vessels.

Catches of crab and lobster were fair for this period with increased activity levels from lobsters thought to be due to the increased water temperatures. By late August, most of the crabs caught were males with females having already moved further offshore.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 12

BRIGHTLINGSEA, WIVENHOE AND CLACTON

Six vessels worked regularly from these ports during this period with one vessel opting to use drift gear instead of trawling this year. Netters used a combination of gill, trammel, and drift nets for bass, mullet, sole and thornback ray to take their permitted quota amounts. Some potting for crab and lobsters for local stalls was also seen. Catch rates for bass had dropped at the end of the previous period but increased from fair to good through this period. However catches of larger bass were seen less frequently than in the previous year. A lack of quota for thornback ray was seen as unjustified by vessels who reported seeing good numbers of adults and juveniles which had to be returned as unwanted bycatch.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 10

WEST MERSEA

The Mersea netters had a mixed period with bass landings varying from fair to good and fishermen landing a good range of differently sized fish. Small bass were reported to be in lower numbers than seen in previous years. Trawlers from West Mersea targeting sole reported poor fishing, resulting in having to travel further offshore for some of the period. Catch rates were reported as being barely sufficient to cover fuel cost on occasion. A bycatch of thornback ray and bass was landed by some of the larger vessels working further offshore while landing reasonable quantities of sole and cod.

Closures for the taking of native oysters under the Shellfish beds byelaw remained in force following the temporary opening of the fishery in the previous quarter for a second year running. The Cefas controls on the movement of *C.gigas* oysters within parts of the Blackwater and Colne also continued from the previous year.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20

MALDON & BRADWELL

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 continued throughout this period to prevent transmission of the herpes virus between areas of the river. However, cultivation of pacific oysters was maintained at previously reported levels.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 2

NORTH FAMBRIDGE, BURNHAM-ON-CROUCH & BARLING

Dredging for clams in the Crouch and Roach rivers has continued during this period. Low fishing effort using gill, drift and trammel netting from these ports also continued with reports indicating that thornback rays had been caught up river. Bass catches were described as being low this year. Cultivation of oysters on private grounds continued in this period and in combination with the clam fishery accounted for much of the commercial activity in these ports.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 6

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA & LEIGH-ON-SEA

Vessels from these ports reported very poor fishing within the Thames estuary, particularly for sole, which is the main target species during this period. Concerns were again raised that this could be due to developments in the river and outer Estuary over the past few years.

The cockle fishery inside the Regulating Order continued throughout this period with nine vessels operating from Leigh-on-Sea. While there were reports that large amounts of weed growth on the Maplin Sands made fishing difficult during the first three weeks of the fishery, vessels reported that growth rates on the cockles caught were some of the best seen in recent years and that meat yield were resultantly very good. The fishery was extended at the end of the period to have an additional two trips per vessel at the start of October giving each vessel 47 trips in the 2014 fishing season. The autumn survey was conducted in September with a good spat fall being recorded along with good growth of the cockles left on the grounds.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 26

HOLEHAVEN & THURROCK

Vessel working from these ports continued targeting bass and sole although reported very poor returns in both cases with catches of sole being of particular concern.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 5

Alex Senechal

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