

## **Agenda Item C2**

### **Essex Officer Report**

#### **Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority**

#### **Quarterly report: April - June 2015**

### **GENERAL SITUATION**

Bass were targeted throughout this period with a good number of large fish being taken and reaching respectable prices at market particularly in April and May. However, concerns were again raised by some commercial vessels that prime breeding adults were removed from the fishery during the spawning season.

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 frustration of sporadic catches. Prices were reported by fishermen to be low due to the flooding of the markets from other European countries, driving prices down. Codling continued to be seen at the start of this period in small numbers as a bycatch from June onwards.

### **HARWICH & WALTON**

Trawlers used sole gear during this period but reported catches varying from fair to poor with low prices being a constant. Bycatches of thornback ray were common during this period but very low quotas meant that most was not permitted to be landed. Gill and trammel netters had a good run of larger bass at the start of the period. Vessels returned to targeting bass in the second half of the period after attempts at switching to bottom set gear for sole resulted in poor catches.

The lobster fishery reported poor numbers seen with a short run of lobsters between 86-91mm carapace lengths in late June being the best in this period. Catches of crab were reported as poor throughout the period with many crabs being of low meat quality for the time of year. Landing of whelks from these ports continued at low levels, mostly for local direct sale to the public.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 12*

### **BRIGHTLINGSEA, WIVENHOE, CLACTON**

Vessels working out of Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton drifting for bass, landed good quantities of larger fish. However, the low quota for skates and rays meant that boats were not able to make the most of the large number of thornback rays present in the district throughout this period once more. Codling were still seen at times by these vessels with skippers suggesting that this coming winter could be a good year for medium sized cod. Pacific oysters continued to be periodically worked in Brightlingsea Harbour.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 8*

### **WEST MERSEA & TOLLESBURY**

Cultivation and harvesting of pacific oysters continued during this period at a high level as previously seen from this port. The prohibition on the taking of native oysters from public grounds stayed in force throughout this period with vessels only permitted to undertake harrowing on specific areas as part of the Essex NORI project which KEIFCA are involved with.

No vessels from West Mersea were noted to be targeting the Thames and Blackwater fishery this year due to increased effort on the bass fishery instead. Vessels drift fishing for bass landed very good catches of large fish at the beginning of the period followed by fair to good catches of medium bass for the rest of the period. Bycatches of thornback rays were similarly high to other ports in the area with most of the catches being discarded due to lack of quota.

Trawlers targeted soles with some intermittent success during the period, however low prices meant that most also changed gear regularly to target other quota species when quota was available.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20*

### **MALDON & BRADWELL**

Targeting of bass at the start of the period occurred from part-time vessels using drift gear with reports of good catches on occasion. The cultivation of pacific oysters was maintained at previously reported levels up river.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 3*

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

Native and pacific oysters continued to be cultivated on private grounds while dredging for clams in the Crouch continued during this period at similarly low levels as reported in 2014. Trawlers from Southend, fishing outside the rivers, landed into Rochford with fair quantities of sole, bass and thornback rays at times when quota allocations permitted this. However, finfish fishing activity remained at a low level within the rivers.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 6*

### **SOUTHEND-ON-SEA & LEIGH-ON-SEA**

Cockle vessels from Leigh continued to prepare for the opening of the Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order area during this period with the start of the fishery being on the 14<sup>th</sup> June. Vessels were landed weekly by shore staff to ensure they didn't land more than 13.6m<sup>3</sup> per trip. Initial yields were reported as being lower than previous seasons resulting in a two week suspension of the fishery.

Due to low prices and unreliability of catches some vessels chose to lay up in port rather than pursue the poor sole fishery this year. However, for those that did persist, poor to fair catches of soles with a mix of codling, thornback rays and some smooth hounds later in the period were landed into these ports. Catches of soles were noted by fishermen as being poor for another successive year during this period. Again, due to limitations on quota, most of the thornback rays caught were discarded.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 26*

### **HOLEHAVEN & THURROCK**

Fishing effort was low from these ports, with only a small number of vessels working on a mostly part time basis. Activity from these ports has continued to reduce.

*Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 5*

Alex Senechal  
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