

Shore Report - Essex

Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period June to August 2017

Overview

The spring quarter started slowly for fishing opportunities, with skate making up the majority of early catches as soles were late to arrive. By mid-May commercial vessels were quickly using up their skate quota, but supplemented this with fair catches of smooth-hound. Sole were heavily targeted by trawlers and netters despite being relatively scarce at the beginning of this quarter. Catches generally increased as temperatures rose in conjunction with a reasonable quota of 2.5 ton for the under 10m fleet. Furthermore, good numbers of juvenile sole were reported which bodes well for next year's stock. Most vessels within the district had secured permission from the MMO to land bass bycatch using either trawl (3% bycatch up to 400 kg/month), fixed nets (250 kg bycatch/month), or longlines (10 ton/year). Bass started to show in early April and by mid-May larger fish were being landed. By August, catches of large fish had reduced, however there were still considerable numbers of small school bass inshore.

In terms of shellfish, potters had steady catches of crab and lobsters as the seawater temperatures rose, however landings began to reduce gradually during August. Thames cockle fishery vessels have been conducting 2 trips per week since the beginning of July, with each boat landing the allocated 12 tons per trip. Meanwhile whelk fishing in Essex waters slowed down during the warmer months.

Recreational anglers and charter boats maintained good catches of skate, whiting, and smooth hounds throughout the period. Although there were fair numbers of sizeable bass in May, regulations meant that recreational fishermen could not retain any until July, when an allowance of one bass per day came into effect.

Harwich & Walton

Fair weather has allowed a good period of fishing, with vessels reporting good catches of thornback ray. With rays in abundance and quota remaining relatively constant, most vessels have reached their limits early each month. Trawling efforts turned to sole, with some bass bycatch, and catches were reported as low to fair. There has also been a moderate effort on lobsters and crabs, with decent returns for the majority of the period.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 16

Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe, Clacton

Thornbacks were again seen in abundance but with limited quota only selected fish were retained, although quota did gradually increase during the period. Reports of cod have remained poor during this period, however sole and smooth-hound catches were fair for some trawlers. Pacific oysters continue to be regularly worked in Brightlingsea Harbour. Wivenhoe has seen a slight revival of commercial fishing, with a new trawler arriving and some previously inactive vessels starting to fish again.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 14

West Mersea & Tollesbury

Hand gathering and dredging for wild pacific rock oysters continued while the native oyster fishery remains closed. There were very low numbers of cod, and therefore trawlers and netters targeted mainly sole as the quota increased throughout the period. The low quota allowance for thornback rays was the limiting factor on catches from this fisheries during the period, with populations being reported as abundant. Most vessels had received permission to land bass in one form or another, and hence there was a reasonable netting effort in late spring for bass and mullet, which subsequently reduced during the warmer months as these boats targeted sole.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 23

Maldon & Bradwell

Fishing effort from these ports was mostly on private grounds. Vessels harvesting pacific oysters continued to work at levels seen during the same period in 2016 with restrictions on the movement of native oysters still in effect. Very low levels of bait potting and drift netting for mullet and sole occurred, however in the summer nets often became excessively weeded which limited catches.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 4

North Fambridge, Burnham-On-Crouch, Barling, Paglesham & Rochford

Fishing activity has remained low from these ports as reported in previous years. Dredging for clams in the Crouch and Roach rivers has continued throughout this period at low to fair levels of intensity. Activity was mostly centred on private grounds for native and pacific oyster production as well as very low levels of bait potting, netting and shrimping.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 5

Southend-On-Sea & Leigh-On-Sea

The Thames Estuary Cockle Fishery Order (TECFO) fishery was pushed back to open on 10th July this year due to low meat yields during initial surveys. The TECFO vessels were allocated 2 landings per week, due to a lesser biomass of mature cockles compared with previous years. Some areas however had very high abundance of spat, which bodes well for the fishery in coming years. Vessels were landed weekly throughout this period with the per trip quota remaining at 13.6m³. Area 8 proved to be a popular area to fish, with many vessels repetitively working there at the start of the season. The TECFO area is due to close on 29th September in accordance with the Authority's management. The sole fishery seems to have remained limited this year, with a handful trawlers operating in the area and those that left port operating further

afield from the area. Few vessels pursued cod as catches in the area were extremely low. Low quota for thornback rays was again used entirely by most boats.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 25

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 continues to reduce.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 2

Hayden Hurst,

Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer, Essex