



Agenda Item C1

Shore report, Kent

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly report for the period February 2020 to August 2020

Overview

2020 has unfortunately been a bad year for many of the fishermen in Kent due to many factors which were against them. Market closures, low fish prices, weed, bait cost and lack of high value species made things challenging for everyone.

A saving grace for many of the proactive fishermen was to sell their catch locally during lockdown and afterwards through the FishLocal campaign which gained local and national media coverage. The Government set aside £10 million worth of grants through the fisheries support scheme, to help many of the boats stay afloat due to lack of market opportunities.

Whelk prices took a massive hit half way through the year where prices got as low as 80p/kg, as opposed to £1.40/kg in previous years. Whelk stocks were extremely good in North Kent over Winter and Spring, with the usual blip during spawning periods.

The TECFO cockle boats were allocated 48 trips each for the season and yield in some areas of the Thames Estuary has been the best reported to date. An area on the North Margate sands opened up to the boats in August due to classification by the food standards agency. Cockles landed from the Kent boats have been cooked in both Boston and Swansea this year which is due to the effects of Covid-19 on the cooking plants.

Queenborough

Fishing effort has been steady in Queenborough. Local fish demand has been high by the Isle of Sheppey residents. A new refrigeration and skinning unit has been set up by the fishermen to prepare fish to go to abroad and to Billingsgate.

The largest fishing vessel in the Kent and Essex district in terms of length has recently been up for sale and there has been a number of other boats which have been and gone from here. Netting, trawling and potting has occurred here during Summer as well as cockle dredging from the two cockle boats. A scallop and trawling boat has also recently arrived in Queenborough.

Number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 9

Faversham

The two vessels working out of Faversham have been keeping busy trawling, netting and oyster dredging mostly to sell catch locally but also to London and elsewhere. Their business became busy over lockdown with orders from the residents.

Number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 2

Whitstable

The fishermen at Whitstable were incredibly proactive when it came to selling the fish they caught directly to the public. This slowed as the markets began to open up again. One boat even based themselves out of North Shields to catch fish not usually seen off the Kent coast such as Langoustines and delivered their catches to customers in Kent.

Oyster fishermen struggled in some months to sell their catches. Most of the fishermen in the harbour carried out maintenance of their boats over Summer, so fishing effort decreased during this time. The whelk stocks were really good off Whitstable in Spring however the price decrease and abundance of weed has made it hard going for the fishermen since.

The four cockle boats have been the busiest of the fishing boats in the harbour over Summer. Whelk fishing is one of the main forms of fishing in the harbour now but netting, trawling, oyster dredging and lobster potting also occur here.

Number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 15

Herne Bay

There was low commercial fishing activity from Herne bay this year. One trailer based boat did some netting and potting from here during early Spring, but not as much since. Recreational boat activity was high during lockdown and the trailer car park almost always full, mostly with jet-ski users.

Number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 1

Thanet Ports (Ramsgate/Broadstairs/Margate)

Five new boats arrived in Ramsgate during Summer including two trawlers. Trawling has not been seen in Ramsgate for several years previously. Fishing activity has been slow especially since March. At the start of the year dogfish and thornback ray were seen in large numbers but this has changed in August with hardly any about in the areas fishermen previously were catching them. Some of the boats have been selling their catch locally but most of the others sell to local fishmongers.

Three of the Ramsgate boats have worked consistently outside the 6nm limit catching whelks in large quantities. The price drop of whelks did not deter the boats too much. The crab and lobster fishing has been bad compared to previous years with the influx of spider crabs and large amounts of weed coating the pots.

The Charter angling boats have been the some of the busiest boats in the harbour. Most of the boats have been doing two trips a day.

Broadstairs has been quiet over the Summer in terms of fishing activity but extremely busy with tourists. This deters the fishermen from using Broadstairs over Summer. One boat in Margate has been fishing for sole, smoothhound, thornback ray and bass as well landing a few lobsters. All of their catch is sold locally. The other boats have not been fishing much at all.

Number of vessels fishing from Thanet Ports: 31

Deal and Walmer

Deal boat numbers have been declining but the boats near the pier continue to sell their catch straight off the beach. They have been netting and potting mostly for herring, sprats and thornback ray.

Number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 4

Dover

Fishing activity is low in Dover with the boats that go doing netting and lobster potting nearby. The Charter angling boats have been very busy over the Summer when the weather has been good.

Number of vessels fishing from Dover: 2

Folkestone and Hythe

In Folkestone, the whelk boats have been to sea 1-2 times per week when the whelk season started. They have also been lobster potting but bait for the pots has been hard to get hold of and expensive. Fishing effort has been slower than usual this year. Cross channel swims started happening again later in the Summer and some of the fishing boats acted as pilot boats for the swimmers again.

Hythe boats have been exploiting the mixed fisheries nearby catching many different species and selling most of them locally. Two of the boats now catch whelks from Hythe and there is also one part time netter on the beach

Number of vessels fishing from Folkestone and Hythe: 14

Dungeness

The local fish shops in Dungeness benefitted massively during lockdown. Dungeness was busier than ever after it opened up again to the public and demand for local fish was high. Lobsters were especially in high demand. Whelk fishing has continued where the boats mostly catch the whelks outside the 6nm limit. The whelks have slowed since the waters have warmed up. Boats were netting more in the early months of the year but reverted to whelk and lobster fishing after. Spider crabs have been a real problem down here.

Number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 6

Robert Watson, Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer