

## **Agenda Item C2**

### **Shore Report - Essex**

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

#### **Quarterly report for the period February 2020 to September 2020**

### **Overview**

With poor weather, Brexit and a worldwide pandemic, this has been an unprecedented period for the fishing industry in general. This period didn't start well for the local Essex fleet as consistent poor weather meant most boats were tied up although time was utilised for maintenance and repairs. The few whelk boats in the district exploited any opportunity in the weather to lay and collect their pots. The introduction of the new Whelk Minimum Size Emergency Byelaw in February 2020 saw the KEIFCA and the whelk boats from both Kent and Essex working together to identify best working practices for the continued conservation and compliance within the fishery.

End of March 2020 saw the coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic hit the UK. The closure of restaurants and hotels, the main buyers of fish and seafood, together with the difficulties of maintaining social distancing among crews at sea have caused hundreds of fishing vessels to be tied up at ports around the UK. As the local Essex fleet looked to navigate these unsure waters most boats turned to selling their produce locally through social media giving them some income during this period. This in combination with initiatives from the KEIFCA, the 'Fish Local' project, has helped the general public and fish retailers to source fish and seafood from their local inshore fishing boats. Start of August restaurants re-opened with support from the governments 'Eat Out' scheme which saw the local fish stalls and delivery servicers set up by the inshore fleets see a decline in locally brought fish from the public.

1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 saw the opening of the bass fishery which appears to have been a welcomed supplement to all the authorised boats around the coast adding to the variety of fish they can sell to the public during this difficult time. Some oyster fishermen have also turned to longlining for bass during this period as the oyster markets have almost completely dried up due to COVID 19.

Skate, soles, dogfish, some cod, and bass have been the main species being caught around the coast, with small amounts of gurnard, turbot, brill and grey mullet also being landed.

Recreational fishing had been completely shut down during the COVID 19 lockdown, but as of 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020 under new government guidelines some recreational fishing was allowed to commence under strict health and safety protocols. Local piers also have opened for recreational fishing as normal, implementing the governments advice on social distancing and sanitisation.

Hand gathering for shellfish saw an increase around the Essex coast during this period, with IFCA, Environmental Health, Local Police, Marine Police units and GLAA combining forces to execute multi-agency operations to disrupt illegal shellfish harvesting. During July and August over 1000kg of illegally harvested shellfish was seized along with 71 various tools and equipment, with ongoing enquiries and investigations into around 42 shellfish pickers.

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June saw the start of the TECFO fishery with each vessel receiving authorisation for 48 trips until Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October. Poor weather hindered the start of the season, and with limited resources available due to COVID 19, damage rates were calculated over an extended period, but were completed by 3<sup>rd</sup> August.

### **Harwich & Walton**

This was a tough period for the Harwich and Walton boats with most tying up during the poor weather and early lockdown phase of COVID 19. As the weather improved some boats returned to fishing if they had routes to market, like local fish stalls etc, with some boats still managing to send catch to Belgium. Recent reports of shellfish harvesting on Harwich beaches have been investigated and continued Low water patrols will be monitored by IFCO's in conjunction with the local Police.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20

### **Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe, Clacton**

Fishing activities have been slow throughout this quarter but have picked up in the last month or so with boats establishing routes to market through public sales and locally set up fish retail shops/stalls. Consistent landings of skate and sole have been reported. Recent weeks has seen a bloom of pipe weed which has slowed the fishing effects and forcing most boats to fish at night when the water is slightly clearer.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 13

### **West Mersea & Tollesbury**

Tollesbury Marina remains quiet with commercial boats typically operating out of West Mersea instead. Fishing activities have been consistent during this period seeing the fleet continue to work during the COVID 19 lockdown supplying already established markets and stalls on Mersea and adapting and providing delivery services not just on Mersea but to far reaching areas of the county. The start of April saw steady reports of bass being caught by a handful of boats, with the Island's oysterman having to adapt to the changing markets due to COVID 19 with the closure of restaurants, this meant some oysterman crewing on trawlers or converting their boats for trawls and longlining for bass. A small amount of Oyster harvesting activity on the beaches was reported by locals, which saw IFCOs conducting early morning and evening low tide patrols, but no real large-scale activities were discovered. IFCOs will conduct ongoing monitoring of the situation.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20

### **Maldon & Bradwell**

Fishing effort from Maldon and Bradwell remains low with only three vessels operating from these ports. Boats from here have turned to selling catch locally through Facebook and providing delivery services. This appears to have given the boats a consistent income during this period. Skate, sole and bass have been stable catches for these boats.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 3

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

The Essex Estuary byelaw continues to prohibit trawling in these areas. This has meant the main efforts have focused on oyster and mussel dredging on private grounds in the Crouch and Roach, while the native oyster fishery in public grounds remains closed. White weeding has ceased during this period due to exports affected by COVID 19.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 4

### **Southend-On-Sea & Leigh-On-Sea**

Cockle boats from Leigh underwent their yearly maintenance and preparations for the coming season, whilst skippers also worked their other boats trawling and working private shellfish grounds. Some boats still managed to sell to Belgium with other boats selling to the public through Facebook. Whelking continued during this period, with reports of good catches but low market prices. 28<sup>th</sup> June saw the start of the TECFO season with business as normal for the fleet. Southend and Shoeburyness saw a large number of Asian shellfish pickers on the beaches during this period, which initiated a number of multi-agency operations to disrupt this behaviour. Ongoing patrols by IFCO's and Environmental Health will monitor the activity levels and trigger further joint operations if the behaviour persists.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 18

### **Holehaven & Thurrock**

Fishing efforts are low from these ports, with only a small number of vessels working on a mostly part time basis or being out of the water for maintenance during the period. Activity from these ports has continued to decline.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 3

Martin Ward,

Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer, Essex