

By: KEIFCA Chief Fishery Officer

To: Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority  
– 29 January 2021

Subject: **Whelk Permit Byelaw Update**

Classification Unrestricted

**Summary:**

This paper will provide Members with an overview of whelk fisheries markets and analysis of whelk landings data over the year 2020.

**Recommendations:**

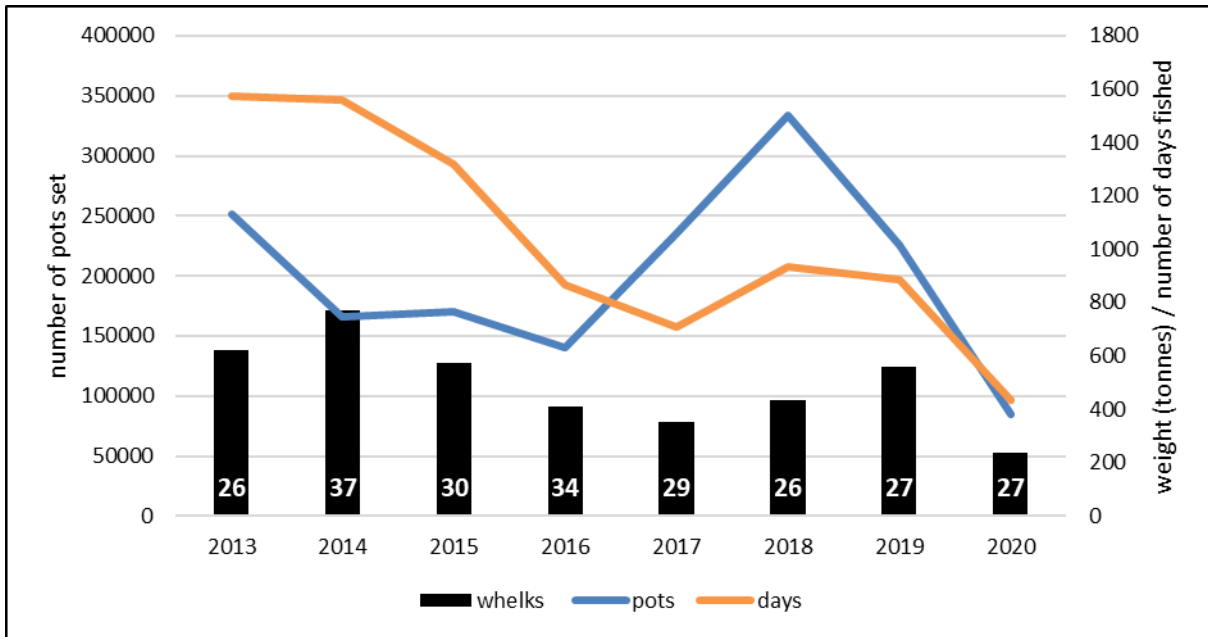
1. Members are asked to **AGREE** that the pot limit, the riddle size and the number & size of escape holes remain set at:  
  
Pots – 300 for category 1 permits and 10 for category 2 permits  
Riddle – 25mm spacing between bars  
Escape holes – 10 @ 25mm per pot

**Background – The market for whelks**

Approximately 80-90% of the whelks landed in the Kent & Essex IFCA district are exported to South Korea. In spring of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic forced restaurants in South Korea to close. Consequently, demand slowed and prices dropped from around £1,600 per tonne at the start of the year to £1,000 per tonne by the summer. Towards the end of 2020 prices had risen to around £1,200 per tonne. The decrease in demand, reduction in market value and COVID-19 restrictions all contributed to negatively impact this key fishery. It is currently too early to see what impact the new UK-EU trade deal will have on the market and demand for whelks.

**Review of 2020 landings data**

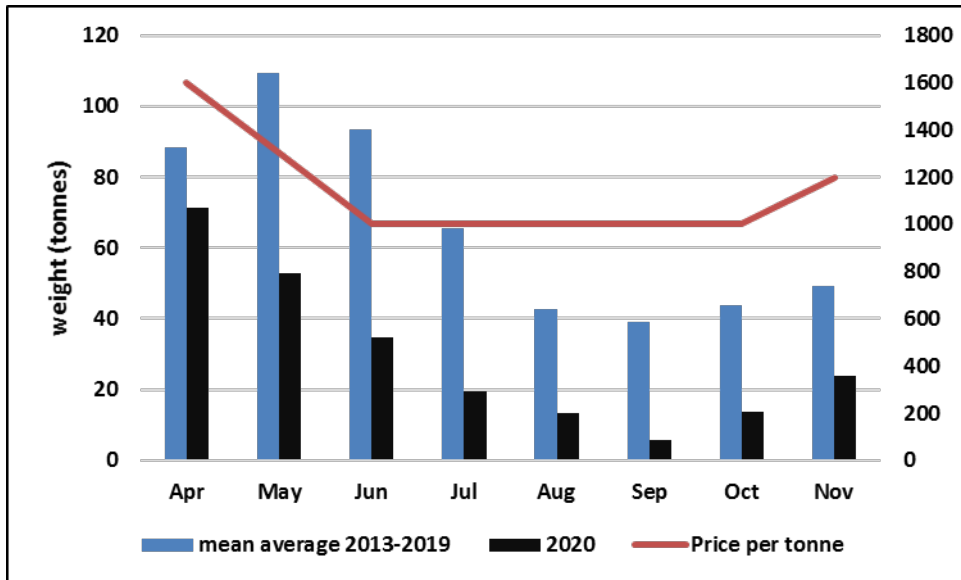
The knock-on effects of lockdown and other COVID-19 restrictions on the whelk fleet can be clearly seen in Fig. 1, which shows vast reductions in landings and fishing effort (the number of pots set and days fished), with all elements lower in 2020 than in any other year since our records began for this fishery in 2013.



**Fig. 1: total weight (tonnes) of whelks landed, the total number of pots set and the total number of days fished during the period April-November in each year from 2013-2020. The white number inside each black bar is the number of commercial (Category One) permits issued for that year**

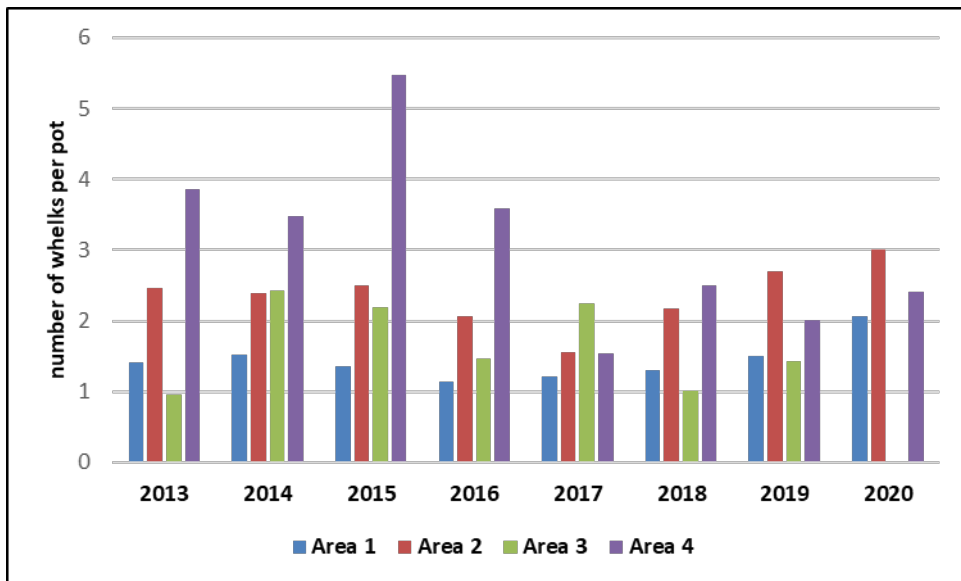
Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has caused numerous issues for many people and the usual timely submission of monthly catch return paperwork has not been managed by all of our permit holders. The majority of returns have been received and therefore the analysis of 2020 whelk landings is generally indicative of fishing activity in the district. Officers have liaised with permit holders to request all outstanding paperwork be submitted in order for landings records to be updated. At the time of writing this report, three fishermen from Area 2 and one from Area 3 had outstanding catch return forms.

Fig. 2 below shows the comparison of April-November 2020 monthly landings with the monthly mean average of April-November landings in previous years from 2013-2019. With the exception of April 2020 whelk landings were, at best, almost half of those from previous years and just 15% of previous years' average landings were recorded in September. This correlates with the low prices over the summer months. Current feedback from officers and stakeholders suggests that whilst landings were below average for November and December the fishery was generally more like the normal fishery we would expect at this time of year.



**Fig. 2: mean average weight (tonnes) of whelks landed each month April–November 2013-2019 compared to the total weight (tonnes) of whelks landed each month April–November 2020.**

A key metric to consider in addition to the total weight of landings, is the catch per unit of effort (CPUE) i.e. how many whelks are caught per pot per fishing trip. As can be seen from figure 3 below, CPUE for this fishery for 2020 has remained the same or higher than in the last 3-4 years, suggesting that catches are still good, and it is the market rather than the limitation in stock that is resulting in much lower landings.



**Fig. 3: mean annual CPUE levels for the 4 whelk fishing areas in the KEIFCA district 2013-2020.**

Despite the reduction in fishing effort and landings this year, the seasonal and spatial variations in whelk landings are still evident. In general terms seasonal variances can be seen during the summer months when the increase in sea temperature causes whelks to move to deeper, cooler waters and around Nov-Jan when poor weather prohibits or reduces fishing activity. Spatial differences are provided from catch return data as well as Fishery Officer knowledge of fishing activity from shore patrols and port visits.

Spatial variations are shown in Fig. 4, seasonal differences in Fig. 5 and both the seasonal and spatial variations can be seen in Fig. 6:

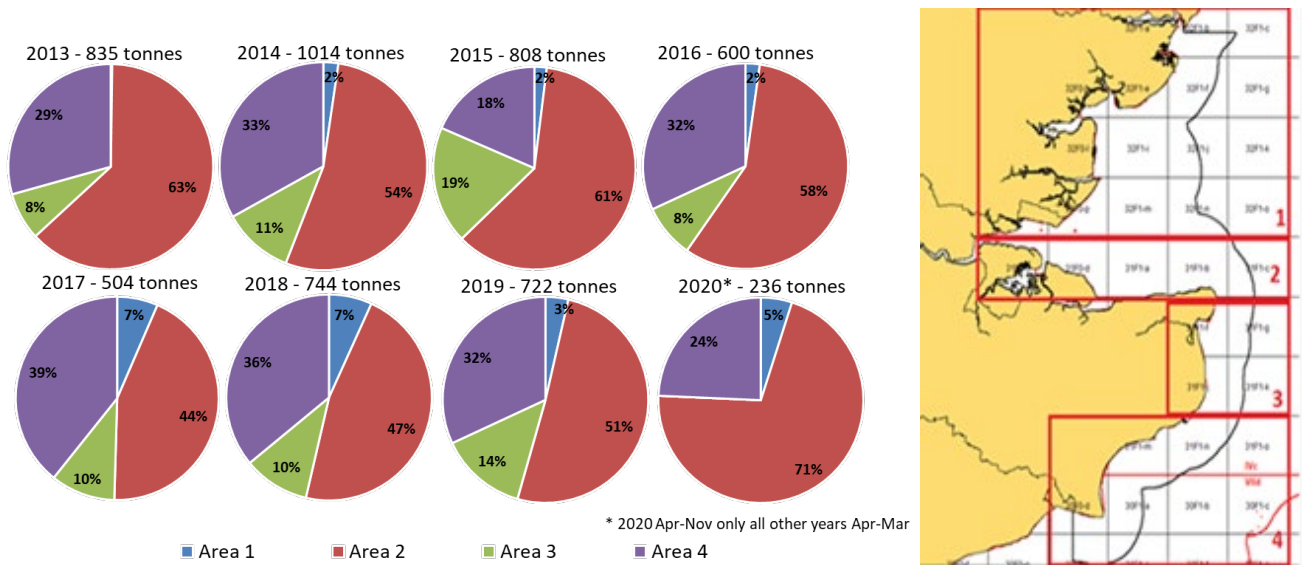


Fig. 4: percentage distribution of whelks landed in the 4 KEIFCA whelk fishing areas 2013-2020

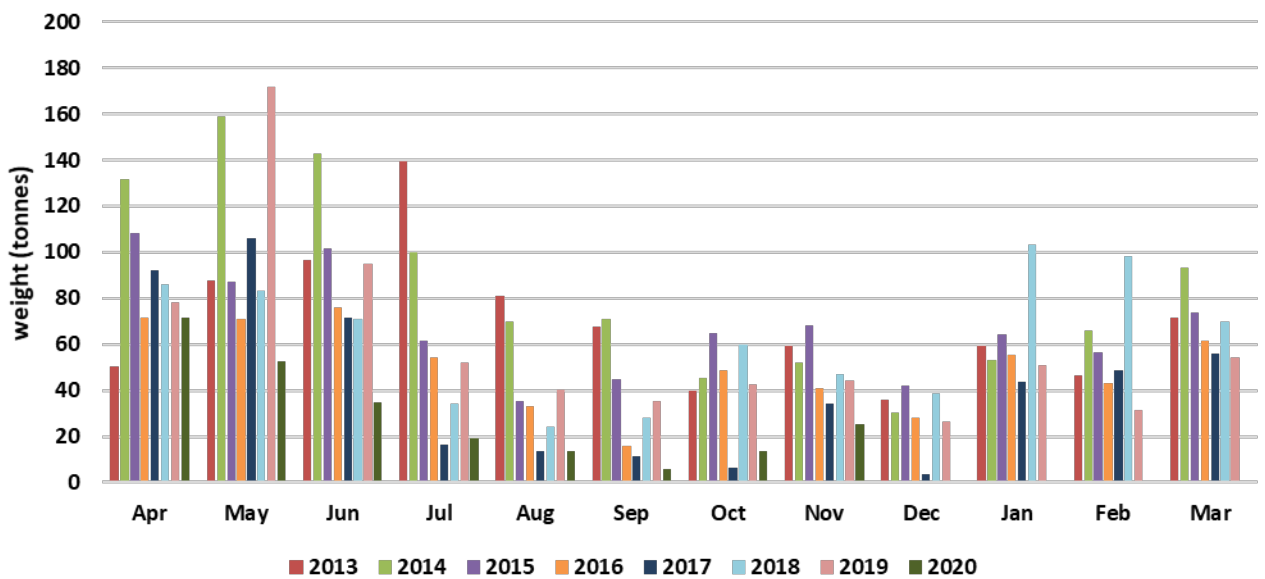
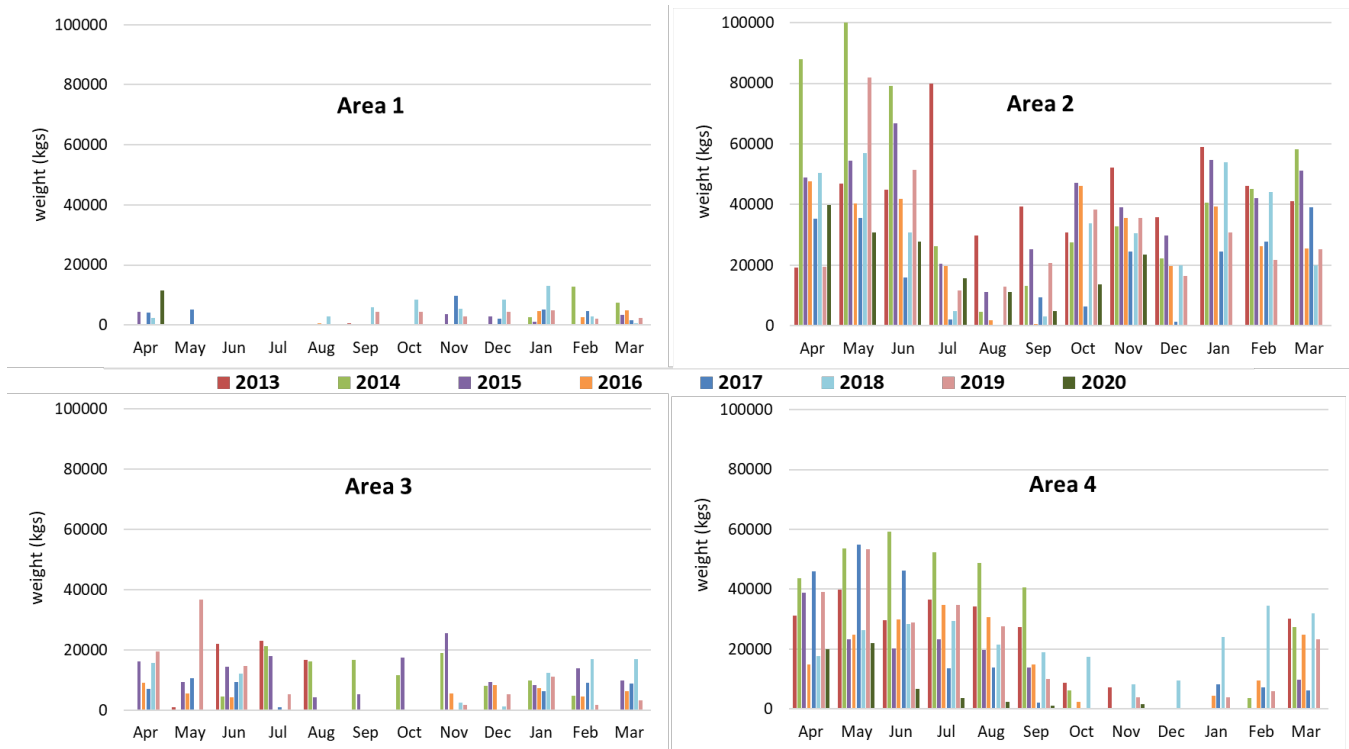


Fig. 5: total weight (tonnes) of whelks landed in the KEIFCA district each month from 2013-2020



**Fig. 6: total weight (kgs) of whelks landed in the 4 KEIFCA areas each month from 2013-2020**

## Management recommendations

A lot of work has been carried out over 2020 reviewing and implementing whelk management measures. In November 2020 the Authority agreed to make the Whelk Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw 2020. Until the new byelaw is signed by the Secretary of State the current byelaw is still in force, which will mean that 21/22 permits will still be issued in April if the byelaw is not signed before then.

### *Current technical management measures*

- Pots – 300 for category 1 permits and 10 for category 2 permits
- Riddle – 25mm spacing between bars
- Escape holes – 10 @ 25mm per pot

As the Authority has already agreed to keeping the current technical management measures in the new Whelk Fishery Flexible Permit Byelaw 2020 it is recommended that the current measures are maintained in the 21/22 permit.

### **Recommendations:**

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