

Shore Report - Essex

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority
Quarterly report for the period November 2020 to January 2021

Overview

In previous years, this quarter has proven to be a struggle for fishermen and this year has been no different, with version 3 COVID lockdown, Brexit, poor weather, and a lack of prime fish on the ground, the local industry has felt the pressures. As the industry navigate the post Brexit difficulties, they now have an uncertain time ahead regarding exports and foreign trade, and with V3 COVID lockdown denying the routes to market through restaurants etc, fishermen have a limited marketplace, with already established fish stalls and delivery services the only viable options. Skate catches have remained reasonable in parts of the district, small amounts of cod have shown with whiting having a huge presence around the coast. Herring are abundant in many areas however they are rarely targeted due to the lack of demand. Sprats were targeted by several fishermen after the Christmas and New Year period, with quota set at 30 tonnes per week. Whelk fishermen were enjoying consistent catches leading up to the festive period, but with poor weather and now a lack of bait and buyers due to exports to Ireland and abroad has put a halt to this fishery within Essex.

Harwich & Walton

Fishing effort has slowed during this quarter and catches have been poor. Lobster potting has now finished for the season with most gear being stowed away until lobsters start crawling again in spring. There are abundant herring and some sprat in the area however very few trawlers and netters have turned their attention to these species due to its poor market value. Many boats have been out the water over Christmas and new year for maintenance.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 20

Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe, Clacton

Fishing activities have been slow throughout this quarter, with only a couple of boats known to have been fishing during this period. Catches have been poor, with local fish stalls buying in fish from Billingsgate to supply demand for their regular customers.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 16

West Mersea & Tollesbury

Tollesbury marina remains quiet with commercial boats typically operating out of West Mersea instead. Fishing activities have been slow in West Mersea with reports of fair

catches of skate, and some boats turning their attentions to sprats. Herring are plentiful however the market value has meant they are only targeted by a handful of netters. Boats with already established fish stalls saw a steady trade during the festive period and continue to operate delivery services throughout the V3 COVID lockdown. The Oyster market has completely dried up with restaurant closures and export problems due to Brexit. Some trawlers have ventured south towards Rye area to obtain a variety of fish for the stalls, with good catches of smooth hounds, gurnards, whiting, skate, and soles.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 28

Maldon & Bradwell

Fishing efforts from Maldon and Bradwell remains low, but with consistent catches of skate and some sprats, boats have been able to continue supply to local customers through their Facebook presence.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 4

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

Extremely low activity within the rivers over this period, with some herring and sprat netting efforts, but again with V3 COVID lockdown and export problems due to Brexit, the oyster and shellfish boats from this area have been forced to tie up.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 14

Southend-On-Sea & Leigh-On-Sea

After the close of the TEFCO and outside permit fishery the cockle fleet have been focusing on maintenance to their boats, with some skippers turning their attentions to whelks and sprats, but in general activity has been low. Poor weather over the festive period put a halt to whelking, also with problems obtaining bait for their pots meant for a slow start to the year. Local fish stalls saw good trade over this period, with huge support from the public for locally sourced fish.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 18

Holehaven & Thurrock

Fishing effort remains extremely low and in decline from Holehaven and Thurrock. Vessels operate only on a part time basis.

Number of vessels fishing from these ports: 6

Martin Ward,

Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Officer, Essex