



## **Agenda Item C1**

### **Shore report, Kent**

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

#### **Quarterly report for the period September 2024 to November 2024**

##### **Overview:**

September marked the end of the TECFO fishery in the Thames Estuary and saw the end of 30 years of the TECFO. Six Kent cockle suction dredgers completed their 30 trips across the fishery. This period was busy for cockle fishing, as of September 1st, the four-week KEIFCA outside cockle permit fishery opened, where eight fishing vessels in Kent were issued permits and participated in the fishery. This includes the four TECFO suction dredgers, an additional suction dredge and an under 12m fishing vessel. All cockles caught by Kent fishing vessels across the TECFO and outside permit fishery were landed into Whitstable,

Four Kent fishing vessels participated in the KEIFCA Manila clam trial fishery which took place from the 2nd October to the 25th October in the Thames. Of the four participating Kent fishing vessels, three landed their full permitted catches of Manila clams into Kent ports. All three vessels were landed by officers during the trial, checking minimum sizes and catch quantities.

Weather conditions have made it difficult for the Kent fleet to keep up consistent fishing methods and there has been a clear switch this period between netting and whelking across the north Kent coast. Now the post-summer whelk fishery has started on the North Kent coast, there have been positive reports of good catches and also small whelks being returned to sea.

Seal predation has been a growing concern for local fishers, especially amongst the netting fleet. Fishers have become increasingly frustrated at seals targeting their nets, taking prime fish and leading to costly gear repairs and additional downtime. There have even been reports of seals following trawlers, swimming in and out of their trawls for a feed.

**Queenborough:** number of vessels fishing from Queenborough: 10

The two TECFO vessels had a steady end to the season, continuing to land their cockle catches into Whitstable. An additional vessel also took part in the outside permit fishery. One trawler in Queenborough has been active and has landed good varieties of species, including dover sole, plaice and flounders. One vessel has started whelking and is getting steady catches.

Three of the four vessels chosen for the KEIFCA Manila clam trial landed their full permitted catches into Queenborough this period.

**Faversham:** number of vessels fishing from Faversham: 3

Two of the active fishing vessels in Faversham and Oare Creek, owned and operated by one family, split their time between trawling the Thames and the English Channel. One vessel took part in the KEIFCA Manila clam trial fishery in October, while the other vessel has gone to Brixham for the winter months.

There is one new vessel out of Faversham, who intends to go shrimp trawling.

**Whitstable:** number of vessels fishing from Whitstable: 15

September saw the completion of the 2024 TECFO trips for four of the Whitstable cockle boats. These vessels also took part in the outside cockle permit fishery. An under 12m vessel in Whitstable was also granted a permit to fish the outside permit fishery this year and was able to get a couple of trips in and test their gear.

The two oyster boats turned to oyster dredging this September and catches have been steady.

The netters were steady at the beginning of this period, with vessels reporting catches of smooth-hound and bycatches of bass. Most of the netters, however, have switched over to whelking during this period. There are currently seven fishing vessels whelking out of Whitstable and they have been reporting good catches and have seen lots of smaller whelks in their pots which are being returned to sea. This is welcomed news after another nervous summer since the 2022 whelk die off.

**Herne Bay:** number of vessels fishing from Herne Bay: 2

One commercial fishing vessel has been crab and lobster fishing and took part in a landing for lobster and crab CEFAS stock assessment. Sightings of conger eels in crab and lobster pots seem to have decreased, which has been good news for crab and lobster fishers who were worried about increased predation by conger eels on lobsters in their pots.

**Ramsgate:** number of vessels fishing from Ramsgate: 11

The netters have been busy this period, when the weather has allowed. There have been sightings of sole from the usual sole targeted drift netting activity, but not to the usual quantities and sizes for this time of year. Water temperatures have kept pretty high, and some fishers believe the higher temperatures are shifting the fisheries- mackerel were still being sighted early into November. The netters have been landing their bycatch of bass, although they have still been struggling with seal predation. Vessels have continued crab and lobster fishing alongside their netting activity, but catches have slowed down.

Two vessels have been setting up for whelk fishing this period.

There are two new vessels in Ramsgate, one of which will be used to go whelk fishing inside and outside the KEIFCA district, and the other, an over 14m vessel, will be whelk fishing outside the KEIFCA district and landing their catches into Ramsgate.

**Broadstairs:** number of vessels fishing from Broadstairs: 1

There has been no fishing activity in Broadstairs.

**Margate:** number of vessels fishing from Margate: 3

One commercial vessel has reported a significant decline in sole on their usual fishing grounds. Reports of huge numbers of bass (both juvenile and adult) and small smooth-hound has been making netting difficult, especially when setting nets overnight. The skate catches have been poor. There have, however, been recent reports of herring turning up in good numbers outside the harbour, which the commercial vessels will target to sell at local fish shops, as well as straight off the harbour arm.

**Deal and Walmer:** number of vessels fishing from Deal and Walmer: 2

Bad weather has been difficult for the commercial fishing vessels. The end of this period, one of the fishing vessels has been able to go out and set some nets for a return of bass and dogfish which they advertise for sale from the boat. The herring have not started showing yet.

**Dover:** number of vessels fishing from Folkestone: 2

There is limited commercial fishing activity in Dover, with the majority of fishing owing to charter and recreational vessels.

**Folkestone and Hythe:** number of vessels fishing from Folkestone: 14

The Folkestone fleet have stopped whelking this period and have turned to alternate fishing methods, such as netting. The catches have been mainly smooth-hound and bycatches of bass. One vessel had an unusual report of catching 10 sponge crabs while netting, ranging from juveniles to adults, the same fisher reported to have only caught 1 in the last 30 years. The lobster and crab fishery slowed down after the summer, so most of the vessels have brought their pots in.

One vessel has been scalloping.

**Dungeness:** number of vessels fishing from Dungeness: 5

The fishing vessels in Dungeness have been focussing on a few fisheries in the last few months, including whelking, netting and also lobster potting. Lobster fishing has been good, with plenty for the Dungeness Fish Shop.

There have been mixed reports of the whelk fishing off Dungeness, with concerns the whelks may not be feeding as fishers are hauling pots with whelks in but untouched baits. With the Area B scallop season open from the 1st November, the whelkers have also had to make sure their gear is not near to where the scallopers are fishing.

There have also been reports of tuna sightings off Dungeness point.

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