



Agenda Item: C2

Shore Report: Essex

Kent and Essex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority

Quarterly Report for the Period: September 2024 to November 2024

Overview:

This quarter has seen a shift in species dynamics across the district. Season-specific species such as herring, whiting, and codling have started to make an appearance both recreationally and commercially. Dover sole was seen at low levels, but consistently in commercial catches leading up to, and into the initial months of this quarter, with reports that inshore catch levels are stabilising. Thornback ray catches are sparsely distributed throughout the district with greater concentrations in the first month of this quarter. Mackerel is still being caught recreationally in the southern section of Essex, with consistent recreational catches seen as late as October. Some fishers are now preparing to focus their efforts on herring and sprat over the coming months.

Both Dover sole and sea bass commanded the greatest price per kilo for species present in the district during this period, with many commercial fishers targeting sole to maintain economic stability and benefiting from bass bycatch in line with the allocated quota. Smooth-hound has progressively decreased in this quarter when compared to the high number of commercial and recreational catches of the summer season. The cockle season ended in late September with the Leigh-on-sea fleet catching and landing the last of their quota. Notably, October saw increased levels of manilla clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*) being landed in the Kent and Essex district by selected vessels that took part in the trial fishery.

In summary, catch levels and general fishing efforts are low compared to this time last year, some vessels are not in use and others are attempting to target niche species (sole) to maintain economic viability. Weather conditions are impacting decision making and fair-weather days are few and far between as we move into the winter period.

Species Landed: Bass, brown crab, cockles, cod, Dover sole, flounder, herring, lobster, manilla clams, mullet, pacific oyster, plaice, pouting, smoothhound, spider-crab, thornback ray, whelks, whiting.

Harwich & Walton

Most of the fishing effort in Harwich and Walton has focused on fin fish. Vessels that usually target crab and lobster have had low levels of catch throughout this period despite a continuous level of effort from local fishers. Reports of disturbed pots due to mud and silt are echoed from the previous quarter.

Some are venturing further afield for a chance of increased catch levels offshore. Dover Sole and bass have been the most economically rewarding species caught during this period for these ports. In Walton, some vessels are undergoing maintenance during the winter period, and the remaining vessels utilise gill nets to catch a diverse array of species. Additionally, potting efforts have diminished in Walton.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 16

Brightlingsea, Wivenhoe & Clacton

Charter vessels were active during this period in Brightlingsea, with activity decreasing toward the latter half of this period due to inclement weather conditions. The charter vessel fleet will continue to work throughout this period and the next, with skippers and punters alike, selecting fair weather days to make the most of fishing opportunities in the Thames Estuary.

At the beginning of this quarter, some vessels ventured further south into other districts to take part in recreational bluefin tuna angling. Commercial fishing activity in Clacton and Brightlingsea is relatively low with only a few vessels venturing out, when possible. Additionally, the Wivenhoe fleet was inactive during this period.

Number of active commercial vessels: 6

Number of active charter vessels: 5

West Mersea & Tollesbury

West Mersea has the greatest diversity of catch present and remains one of the major ports for Essex. Catch includes bass, cod (small quantities), flounder, pacific oyster, smoothhound, sole, thornback ray, and whelks. Most vessels utilise otter trawls to catch fin fish with only a few using gill nets. Dover sole and bass commanded the highest value with many focusing efforts on sole during this quarter.

Charter vessel activity has decreased for these ports when compared to the summer season. Pacific oyster catches remain consistent in line with the private fishery.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 19

Number of active charter vessels: 3

Maldon & Bradwell

Only one commercial vessel was present in Maldon and is now working from Bradwell Marina. All vessels maintain sporadic activity, working around weather conditions. Some utilise trawls whilst others utilise nets to target fin fish. Recreational and charter activity remains low.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 5

North Fambridge, Burnham-on-Crouch, Wallasea Island, Barling, Paglesham & Rochford

Fishing activity is primarily undertaken by the charter vessels of Wallasea Island, with several boats catching sizeable bass, smoothhound, and the occasional thornback ray throughout this quarter. Commercial vessels have focused on netting in small quantities for fin fish and private grounds have been worked throughout the River Crouch and Roach for pacific oysters by batch dredgers.

Two vessels participated in the clam trial and fishing/landing efforts were made from Wallasea Island, diversifying the capabilities of vessels departing from this port. Commercial activity remains low for Burnham-on-Crouch, Paglesham, and Rochford. Several commercial vessels in Rochford remain on hard standing and are undergoing maintenance.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 2

Number of active charter vessels: 3

Southend-on-Sea & Leigh-on-Sea

Leigh-on-sea is predominantly focused on cockling and efforts were made to catch the final quantities of TECFO quota during September. Many of the boats will now undergo maintenance for next year's season. September saw the start of the cockle permit fishery with some of the participating boats catching and landing allocated quota into Leigh-on-sea. Some vessels will now setup for the seasonal pelagic fishery over the winter months, targeting herring and sprat.

One of the resident vessels from Leigh-on-sea also participated in the clam trial, catching and landing manilla clams into this port during October. Southend Pier has seen relatively high levels of recreational activity with mullet, bass, and mackerel being caught consistently.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 14

Number of active charter vessels: 1

Holehaven & Thurrock

Activity in Holehaven and Thurrock is consistently low when compared to other major ports, only one commercial vessel remains active, focusing efforts on netting for fin fish. Charter vessel activity is relatively low for these ports, with one vessel maintaining a presence throughout this quarter and catching sole and bass.

Number of active commercial vessels fishing from these ports: 1

Number of active charter vessels: 1

Max Nolic,

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