

1.0 Introduction

The Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey is an annual assessment conducted by the Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (Southern IFCA) to monitor the health and sustainability of commercially viable shellfish beds within Poole Harbour, UK. Since 2015, the survey has provided data on key bivalve species, including the common cockle (*Cerastoderma edule*) and Manila clam (*Ruditapes philippinarum*), to inform fisheries management and conservation efforts.

The Poole Harbour clam and cockle fishery operates under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw which permits the use of pump-scoop dredges (Figure 1) to manage the fishery sustainably and to avoid an adverse effect on Marine Protected Areas within Poole Harbour. The fishing season runs from 25th May to 23rd December annually with 45 permits issued each year. The byelaw regulates a number of elements of the fishing operation including gear type/construction, spatial and temporal restrictions, and catch reporting.

Fishers must submit a monthly catch return indicating, for each day fished, the hours fished, the quantities of species caught and the buyer(s). Fishers must also indicate fishing location data from 11 shellfish catch zones (zones). In 2018, the fishery achieved certification under the Marine Stewardship Council's Sustainability Standard, with re-certification under MSC in 2023. The survey data also contributes to an annual audit for this certification.

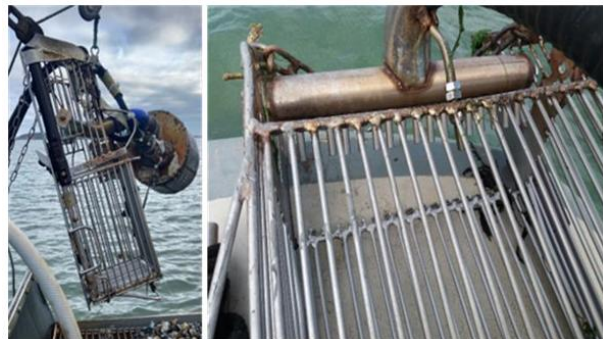


Figure 1. An example of the pump-scoop dredge used within the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit

1.2 Monitoring and Control Plan

A Monitoring and Control Plan (M&CP)¹ was developed as part of the 2024 Southern IFCA Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Review, to support management of the Poole Harbour dredge fishery for Manila clam under the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Byelaw and associated permits. The M&CP provides a comprehensive framework for monitoring the fishery and incorporating feedback into management decisions. Management of the permitted Manila clam fishery is guided by the M&CP through defined trigger thresholds, using the most up-to-date data from the latest fishing season and survey results collected under the On-Site Monitoring Programme.

1.3 Method

The 2026 survey took place between the 17th and the 22nd April 2026 and comprised of data collection using local permit holder fishing vessel "David's Dream". A total of 26 of the 27 planned sites were sampled across the 11 zones within the harbour. Site 2 was not surveyed due to tidal constraints (Figure 2). A pump-scoop dredge was used in accordance with standard fishing practices and relevant management measures. The dredge is inherently size-selective, reducing the amount of post-capture measuring required to ensure compliance with Minimum Conservation

¹[Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery Monitoring and Control Plan](#)

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

Reference Size (MCRS). Although, as the sampling methodology is consistent each year, accurate comparisons can be made.

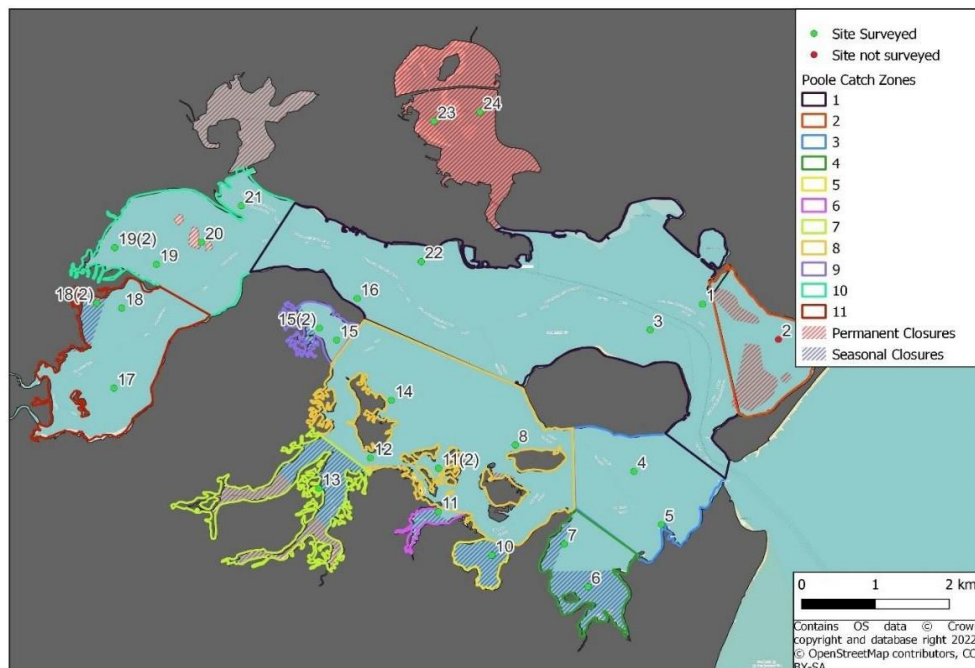


Figure 2. A map of the surveyed sites across the 11 Poole Catch Zones. Survey sites are marked with a green icon, whereas sites not surveyed are marked with red. Permanent fishing closures are highlighted in red hash and seasonal closures (opening times 1st July-31st October annually) are highlighted in blue hash.

The following methodology was followed:

- Three dredge tows were conducted within approximately 20m of a predetermined central point of 27 sites. This central point is consistent across all survey years.
- After 2 minutes the dredge was brought inboard, and all bivalves retained and labelled to the corresponding site number and dredge tow.
- Each species was identified, and the first 50 individuals of each species were measured across their widest axis to the nearest millimetre.
- The first 50 Manila clams were assigned a condition index category ranging from 1 to 5 (Table 1)
- Manila clams and common cockles were separated into above and below their relative MCRS (35mm and 23.8mm respectively) and weighed.
- Following measurement, all samples were returned to shellfish production areas of the same classification.

Table 1. The Manila clam condition index scale.

Condition Index	1	2	3	4	5
Features	No visible damage	Edge of shell shipped	Hinge broken/ shell cracked	Shell punctured	Shell crushed/ dead
Example					

2.0 Results

Data analysis focuses on the primary commercial species within the harbour, Manila clam and common cockle. Other species found during the survey are harvested at a smaller scale and include American Hard-Shell clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), the Native clam (*Ruditapes decussatus*), the Pacific oyster (*Magallana gigas*), the spiny cockle (*Acanthocardia aculeata*) and the blue mussel (*Mytilus edulis*).

Length frequency data was analysed by site and zone, whereas Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) data was calculated as kilograms per meter dredge per hour (kg/m/hr) for each of the 11 zones and Holes Bay. CPUE is separated into: CPUE_{total}: total catch per unit effort, CPUE_{over}: catch per unit effort for individuals over MCRS and CPUE_{under}: catch per unit effort for individuals under MCRS.

Data was analysed using a combination of Excel and Rstudio.

Summary infographics of the two main harvested species can be found below, which summarise the CPUE_{total} outputs and length-frequency distributions across the fishery during the pre-season sampling. The CPUE for each zone is compared with the previous survey conducted in 2025. Length-frequency data for the 2026 survey are presented as pie charts, illustrating the proportion of clams and cockles sampled that were above and below the MCRS.

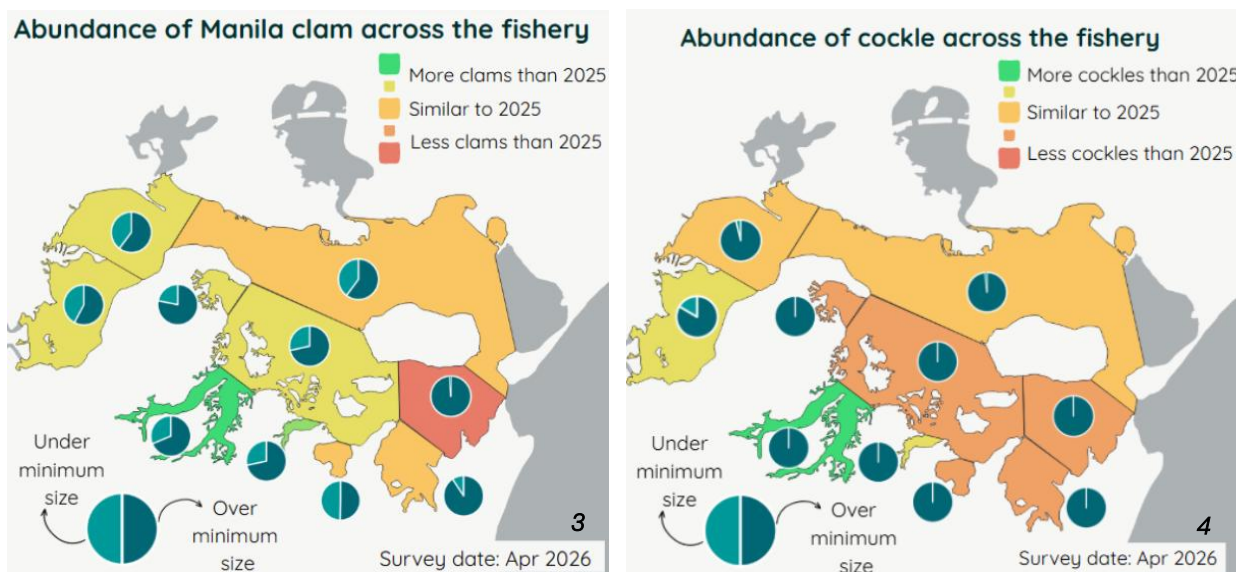


Figure 3 and Figure 4. A summarised infographic of CPUE and length distribution outputs of Manila clam and common cockle sampled in the 2026 Poole Bivalve Survey, compared to outputs from the 2025 sampling.

2.1 Manila clam Condition Index

This was the first year that Manila clam shells were evaluated using a five-point health condition index, with a score of 1 indicating a completely intact shell and a score of 5 indicating a crushed shell/ dead clam.

Out of 2,118 Manila clams measured, 95% were classified as Condition Index 1, while only 0.19% were classified as Condition Index 5 (Table 2). This distribution indicates that the clam population is relatively healthy and experiences minimal disturbance from the pump scoop dredging process during harvesting.

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

Table 2. The statistics of Manila clam health condition index classification from the Poole Bivalve Survey 2026.

INDEX RATING	1	2	3	4	5
SUM	2012	68	14	19	4
%	95	3.21	0.66	0.42	0.19

2.2 Length Frequency Distribution Data

Statistical analysis of length data between sites in the 2026 dataset and comparisons of length data for the last three years showed statistical differences ($p < 0.01$ for both Manila clam and common cockle), however this is expected due to the range of sizes observed across the 81 dredges within the 27 sites of the Harbour in each survey.

2.2.1 Manila Clam

- The average size of Manila clam in 2026 varied from 46.77mm at site 8 ($n=22$) to 34.67mm at site 19 ($n=150$) (Figure 5).
- All sites had an average length above the MCERS (35mm) apart from sites 19 (34.67mm, $n=150$) and 17 (34.77mm, $n=117$).

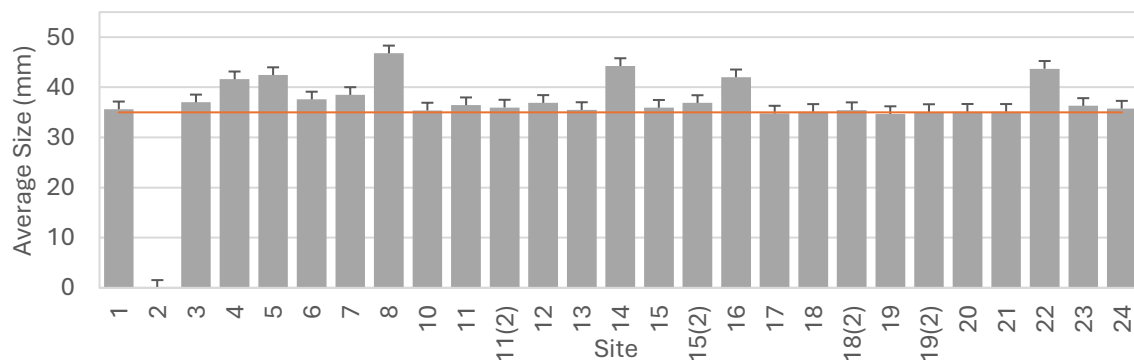


Figure 5. Average length of Manila clam across sites in the Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey 2026 around the MCERS value. Error bars have been added around the Standard Error. The Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCERS) of 35 mm is indicated by a red line.

- The average size of Manila clam across the Harbour was 36.2mm in 2026 ($n=2118$). This is slightly lower than in 2025 (37.55mm, $n=2494$) and 2024 (37.34mm, $n=2436$), though the average size remains above MCERS cross all 3 years (Figure 6).
- Statistical analysis showed differences between all 3 years (p values < 0.01).
- In zone 3, the length-frequency distribution of Manila clams in 2026 differed significantly from both 2024 and 2025 ($p < 0.05$), with the 2026 distribution shifted towards larger clam sizes. Mean shell length increased from 38.0 mm in 2024 and 25.9 mm in 2025 to 41.9 mm in 2026.
- In Zones 5 and 9, the length-frequency distributions of Manila clams in 2026 differed significantly from both 2024 and 2025 ($p < 0.05$), with the 2026 distributions indicating smaller modal clam sizes. In Zone 5, mean shell length decreased from 38.4 mm in 2024 and 38.8 mm in 2025 to 35.4 mm in 2026. Similarly, in Zone 9, mean shell length decreased from 39.3 mm in 2024 and 39.4 mm in 2025 to 36.2 mm in 2026.

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

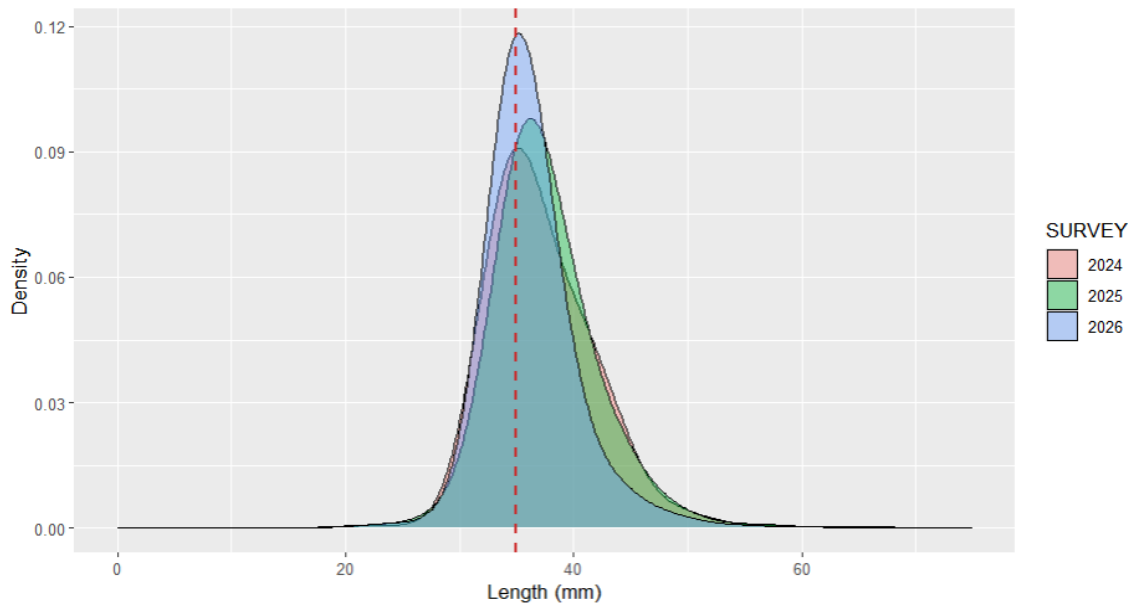


Figure 6. The length distribution of the Manila clam sample populations from 2024 (peach), 2025 (green), and 2026 (blue) is shown for comparison. The Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 35 mm is indicated by a red dashed line.

- For the remaining zones, the 2026 dataset was not statistically significantly different to previous years ($p > 0.05$).

2.2.2 Common cockle

- In the 2026 survey, the average size of cockle varied from 34.34mm mm at site 8 (n=89) to 24.92mm at site 18(2) (n=142).
- All sites had an average length above the MCRS length (23.8mm) (Figure 7).

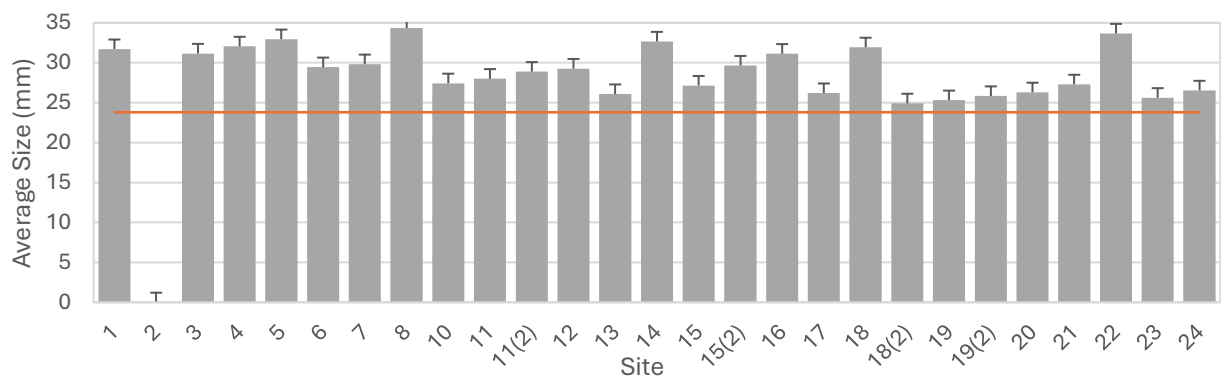


Figure 7. Average length of common cockle across sites in the Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey 2026 around the MCRS value. Error bars have been added around the Standard Error. The Minimum Conservation Reference Size (MCRS) of 23.8mm is indicated by a red line.

- The average size of common cockle across the Harbour was 29.23mm in 2026 (n=1832). This remains relatively consistent with the average sizes seen across the previous two years (2025: 29.76mm (n= 2128), 24: 29.73 (n=1987).
- The average size has remained above MCRS for the last 3 years (Figure 8).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

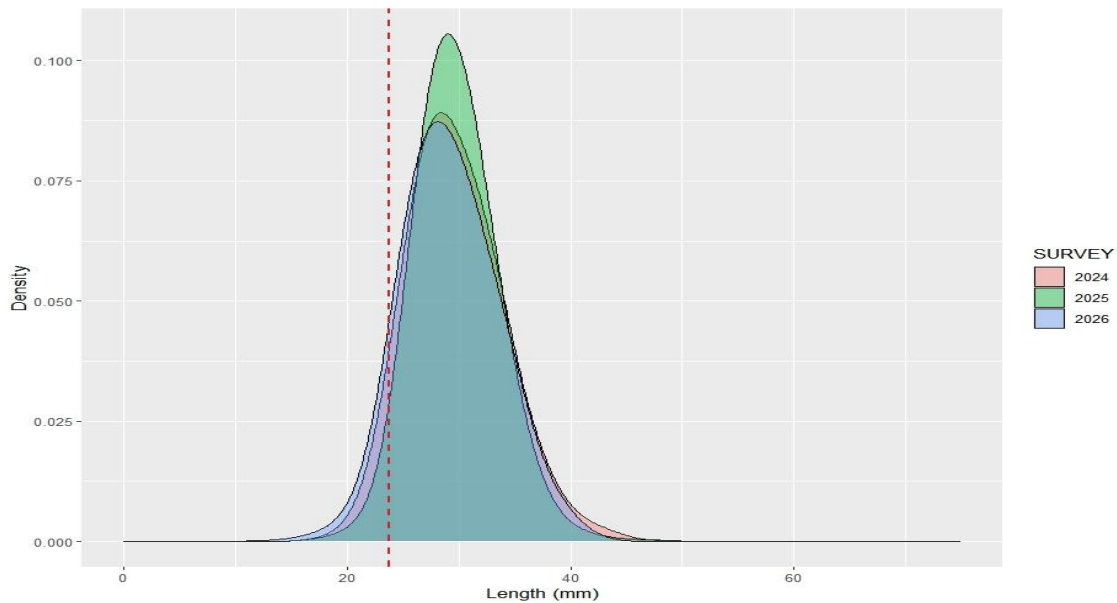


Figure 8. The length distribution profile of the common cockle sample population from 2024 (peach), 2025 (green) and 2026 (blue). The Minimum Conservation References Size (MCRS) of 23.8mm is indicated by a red dashed line.

At the zonal level, zones 7 and 10 exhibited statistically significant differences in length distributions in 2026 compared with both 2024 and 2025 ($p < 0.05$), with the 2026 distributions indicating smaller modal cockle sizes. In zone 7, the mean cockle length decreased to 26.1 mm in 2026, compared with 29.4 mm in 2025 and 29.6 mm in 2024. Similarly, in zone 10, the mean length was 26.3 mm in 2026, compared with 27.3 mm in 2025 and 28.2 mm in 2024.

2.3 Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE)

The 2026 dataset has been analysed for any statistical differences between zones and the previous two survey years, 2025 and 2024. Statistical analyses were performed using a non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test with subsequent Dunn's test.

2.3.1 Manila Clam

- In the 2026 survey, the average CPUE_{total} across the harbour including Holes Bay was 43.98 kg/m/hr. The average CPUE_{over} was 29.52 kg/m/hr and the average CPUE_{under} was 14.16 kg/m/hr.
- Zones 6 and 7 showed the highest average CPUE_{total} (96kg/m/hr and 84 kg/m/hr, respectively) (Figure 9).
- Likewise, zones 6 and 7 showed the highest average CPUE_{over} (68.79kg/m/hr and 57.72kg/m/hr).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

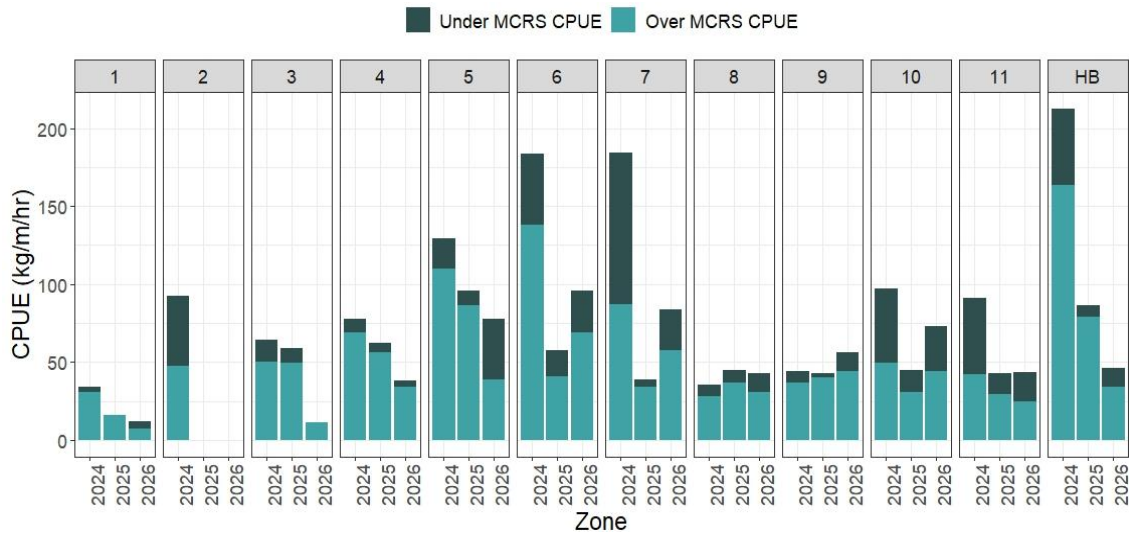


Figure 9. Average CPUE of Manila clam in each zone surveyed 2024-2026. Bars represent average CPUE_{total} per zone, divided into CPUE_{over}, light blue, and CPUE_{under}, darkblue.

- All zones showed a greater average CPUE_{over} in comparison to CPUE_{under} and Zone 5 showed the greatest average CPUE_{under} of 38.41kg/m/hr.
- Statistical analysis showed some statistical variances between catch zones for CPUE_{total}, CPUE_{over} and CPUE_{under} within the 2026 dataset (all p values <0.05).
- Post-hoc Dunns testing with holm adjustment revealed that zone 1 displayed significantly less CPUE across CPUE_{total}, CPUE_{over} and CPUE_{under} (CPUE_{total} =10.77kg/m/hr, CPUE_{over} = 7.05 kg/m/hr, CPUE_{under} = 4.67 kg/m/hr) compared to zone 10 (CPUE_{total} =67.89 kg/m/ hr, CPUE_{over} =43.92 kg/m/hr, CPUE_{under} 18.26 kg/m/hr).
- Zone 6 displayed a significantly greater CPUE_{over} (68.79kg/n/hr) compared to zone 1 (7.05kg/m/hr) (p<0.05) and zone 3 displayed a significantly lower CPUE_{under} (0.12kg/m/hr) compared to zones 5, 10 and 11 (38.41kg/m/hr, 28.94kg/m/hr and 18.26kg/m/hr, respectively).
- The CPUE_{total} of Manila clam across the harbour in 2026 was significantly lower than that seen in 2024 (p<0.05), although statistically similar to that seen in 2025 (p>0.05).
- At a zonal level, initial Kruskal-Wallis testing suggested statistical differences in CPUE_{total} and CPUE_{over} in zone 1 between years, but post-hoc testing with holm adjustment revealed no significant difference between years (Figure 10).
- While there were no statistically significant differences between years, Figure 10 suggests a declining trend in CPUE_{total} in zones 1,3,4, 5 and Holes Bay. However, this trend did not reach statistical significance, although the p-value in Holes Bay was close to the conventional significance threshold (p = 0.0516) (Figure 10).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

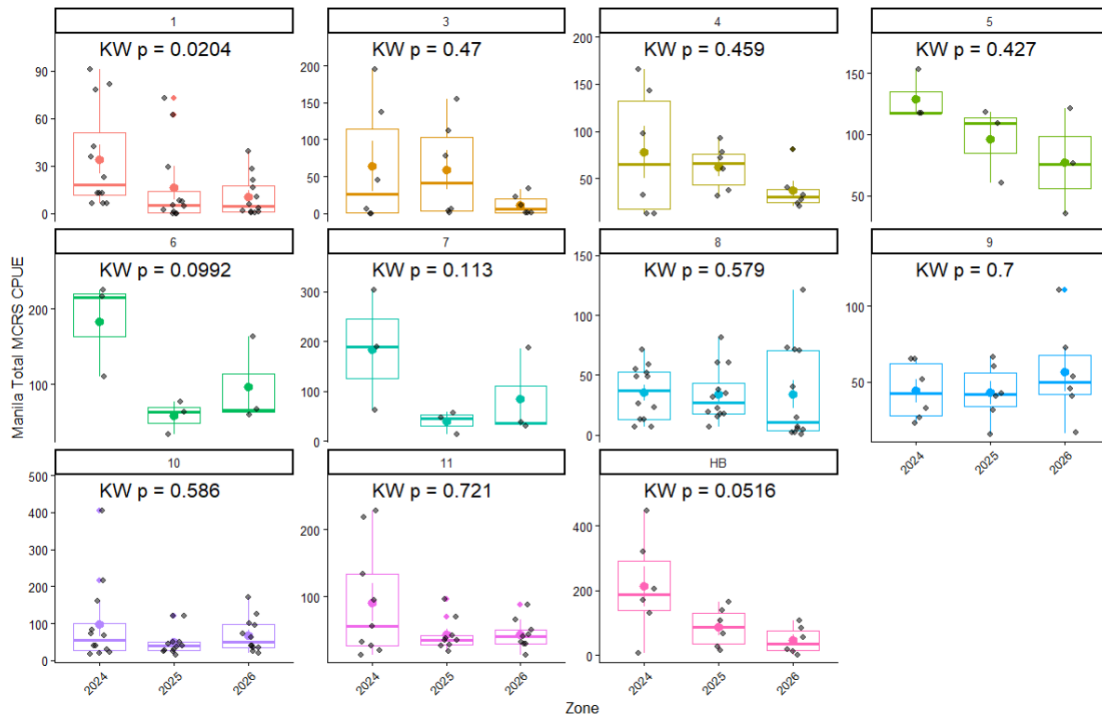


Figure 10. Box plots showing the Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) of Manila clams across zones from 2024–2026. Zones are distinguished by colour, with annual mean CPUE indicated by a point corresponding to the colour of each zone. The median CPUE is shown by the horizontal line within each box, while individual observations are represented by grey points. Error bars indicate the mean $\pm$ standard error.

2.3.2 Common cockle

- In the 2026 survey, the average CPUE_{total} of common cockle across the harbour including Holes Bay was 44.98 kg/m/hr. The average CPUE_{over} was 43.39 kg/m/hr and the average CPUE_{under} was 1.4 kg/m/hr.
- Statistical analysis indicated that CPUE_{total} was significantly lower in 2026 than in the previous two survey years ($p < 0.05$), declining from 53.37 kg/m/hr in 2024 and 93.18 kg/m/hr in 2025 to 44.98 kg/m/hr in 2026. This reduction likely reflects, at least in part, the unusually high cockle abundance recorded in zones 1 and 3 in the 2024 and 2025 surveys.
- In zone 1, CPUE_{total} in 2025 was 252.7 kg/m/hr, 155.69% above the mean of 98.83 kg/m/hr recorded across the last five surveys (2022–2026). In zone 3, average CPUE_{total} reached 346.12 kg/m/hr in 2024 and 399.44 kg/m/hr in 2025, representing increases of 72.6% and 99.1%, respectively, above the five-survey mean of 200.58 kg/m/hr. In 2026, average CPUE_{total} in these zones declined to 154.5 kg/m/hr in zone 1 and 138.121 kg/m/hr in zone 3, values more consistent with longer-term averages.
- In the 2026 survey, zone 1 showed the highest average CPUE_{total}, followed by zone 3 (154 kg/m/hr and 138 kg/m/hr, respectively). These two zones also displayed the highest CPUE_{over} (147.4 kg/m/hr and 138 kg/m/hr respectively) (Figure 11).
- All zones had a greater average CPUE_{over} compared to CPUE_{under}.
- There were no statistically significant differences in CPUE_{total}, CPUE_{over} and CPUE_{under} between zones for 2026 (all p values > 0.05).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

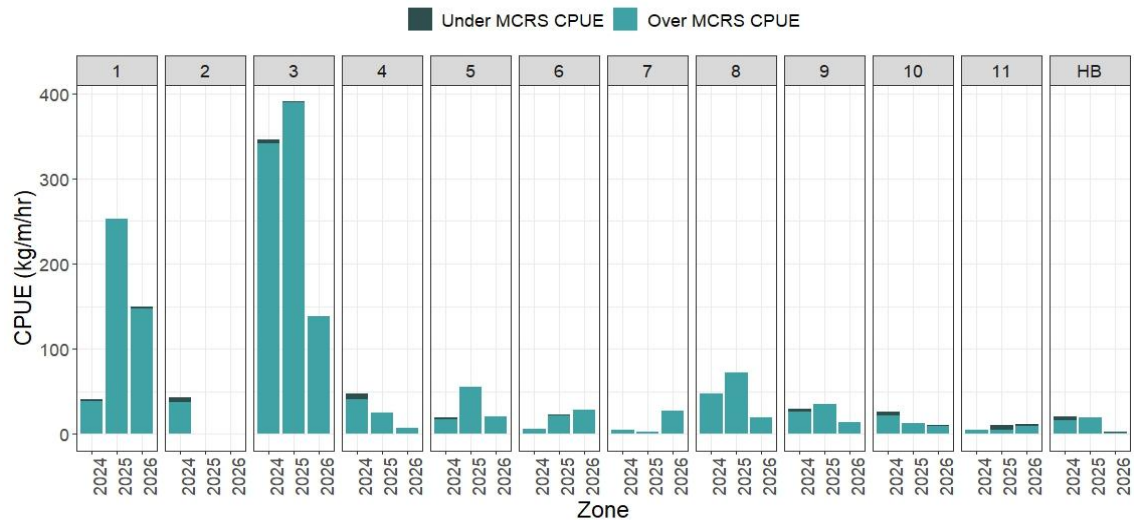


Figure 11. Average CPUE of common cockle in each zone surveyed 2024-2026. Bars represent average $CPUE_{total}$ per zone, divided into $CPUE_{over}$, light blue, and $CPUE_{under}$, dark blue.

- At a zonal level, initial Kruskal-Wallis testing suggested statistical differences in $CPUE_{total}$ between years in zones 4, 8, 9, 10 and HB, though post-hoc testing revealed no statistical differences between specific years ($p > 0.05$).
- Similar results were found for $CPUE_{over}$ in zones 4, 8 and HB, and $CPUE_{under}$ in zones 1 and 3 (Figure 12).

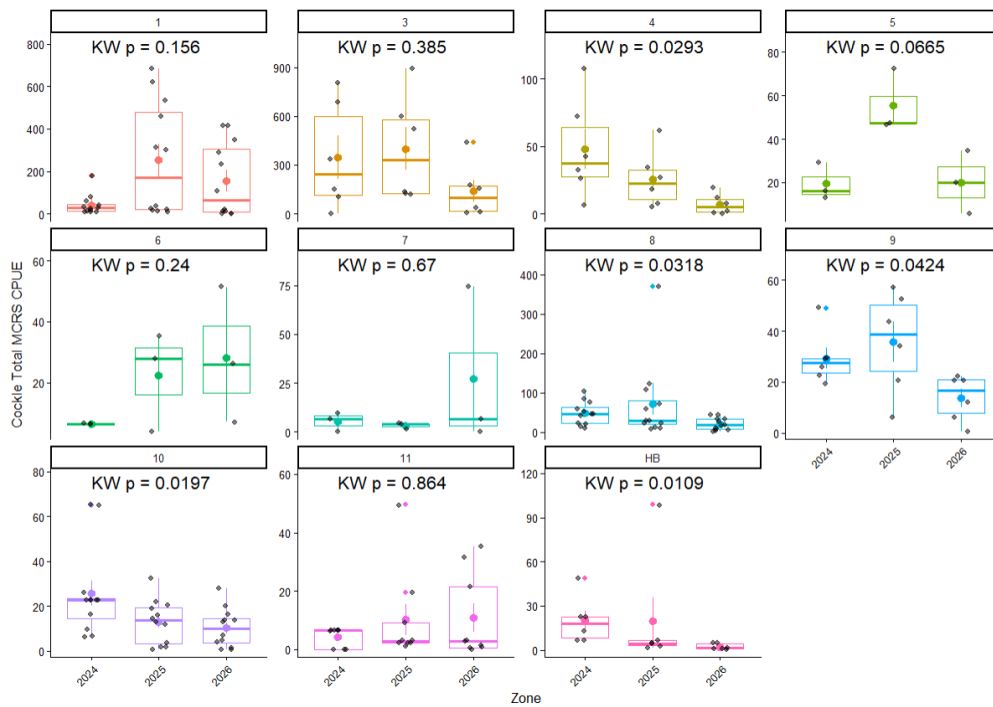


Figure 12. Box plots showing the Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) of common cockle across zones from 2024–2026. Zones are distinguished by colour, with annual mean CPUE indicated by a point corresponding to the colour of each zone. The median CPUE is shown by the horizontal line within each box, while individual observations are represented by grey points. Error bars indicate the mean $\pm$ standard error.

2.4 Seasonal Catch Data

- Quantities of Manila clam and common cockle caught each month by the fishery for the 2023, 2024 and 2025 fishing seasons are shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14, respectively.
- The fishing season runs from 25th May to 23rd December annually and therefore it should be noted that catch weight (kg) for May represents only a 5-day fishing period and December, a 23-day fishing period.

2.4.1 Manila Clam

- Previously, total landings of Manila clam showed a decline from 474.7 tonnes in the 2023/24 fishing season to 240.4 tonnes in the 2024/25 season. However, in the 2025/26 season, total landings of Manila clam increased to 286.0 tonnes.
- Statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in the total landings of Manila clam between the 2023, 2024 and 2025 seasons ($p>0.05$).
- Seasonal trends followed previous years', which showed an increase in landings in the mid-summer months followed by a slow decline towards the end of the fishing season in December.
- In 2025, all months, except May, displayed an increase in landings compared to the previous fishing season and Manila clam landings peaked in June at 55 tonnes.
- There were no statistical differences between landings each month within the last 3 years ($p>0.05$).

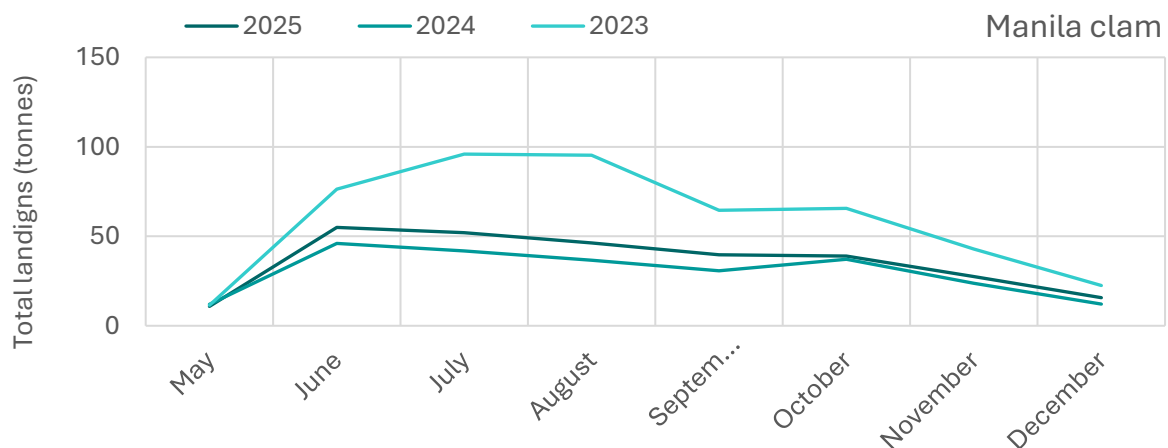


Figure 13. The monthly total catch (tonnes) of Manila clam submitted in catch returns from permit holders in the Poole Harbour Dredge Fishery for the 2023, 2024 and 2025 fishing seasons.

2.4.2 Common cockle

- The total weight of landed common cockle has consistently increased over the last 3 fishing seasons; 44.6 tonnes in 2023, to 91 tonnes in 2024 and 137.6 tonnes in 2025.
- Statistical analysis showed that there was no significant difference in the total landings of common cockle between 2023-25 ($p>0.05$).
- Seasonal trends typically follow an increase in landings in the mid-summer months. In 2025 there was a peak in landings in July at 79.5 tonnes, though this did not show any statistical difference between other months ($p>0.05$).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

- There was no statistical difference in landings of common cockle for each month between 2023-25 ($p>0.05$).

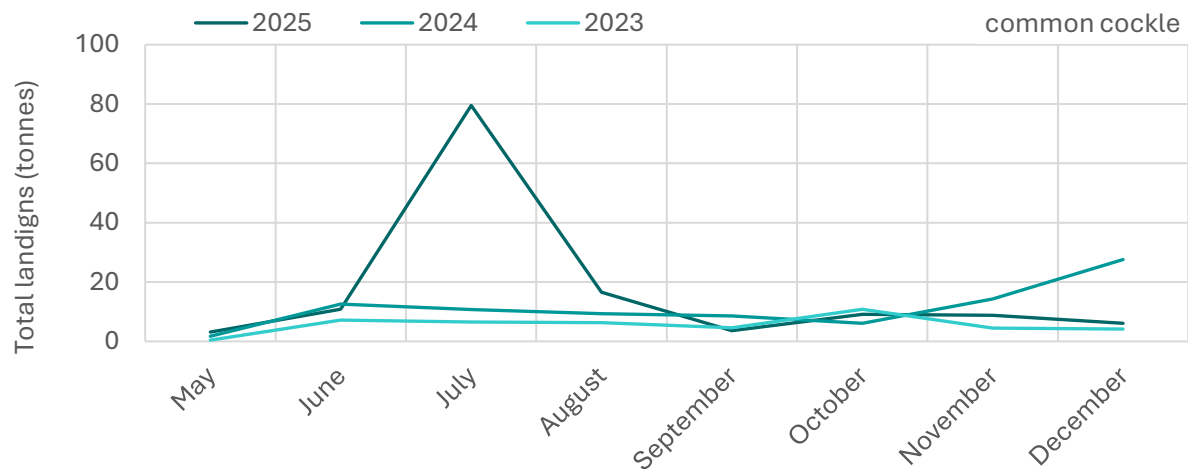


Figure 14. The monthly total catch (tonnes) of common cockle submitted in catch returns from permit holders of the Poole Harbour Dredge Fishery for the 2023, 2024 and 2025 seasons.

2.5 Zonal Catch Data

Since 2019, fishers have been required to report which fishing zones have been fished each day. This provides zonal application to catch data that can then be related to the catch zone analysis of the survey CPUE data where required. Note that there is no catch data for Holes Bay as this is a prohibited area year-round for the dredge fishery.

2.5.1 Manila clam

- Zones 8, 10 and 11 have consistently been favourable fishing grounds for Manila clam in previous years.
- In the 2025 fishing season, on average, significantly more Manila clams were harvested from zones 8 and 10 compared to other zones, at 147.3 tonnes and 66.3 tonnes respectively (all p values $p<0.05$).
- Compared to the previous two fishing seasons, Kruskal-Wallis testing identified statistical differences in zone 11 between years, though post-hoc Dunns test with holm adjustment revealed no statistical differences between 2026 and the previous 2 years ($p>0.05$) (Figure 15).

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

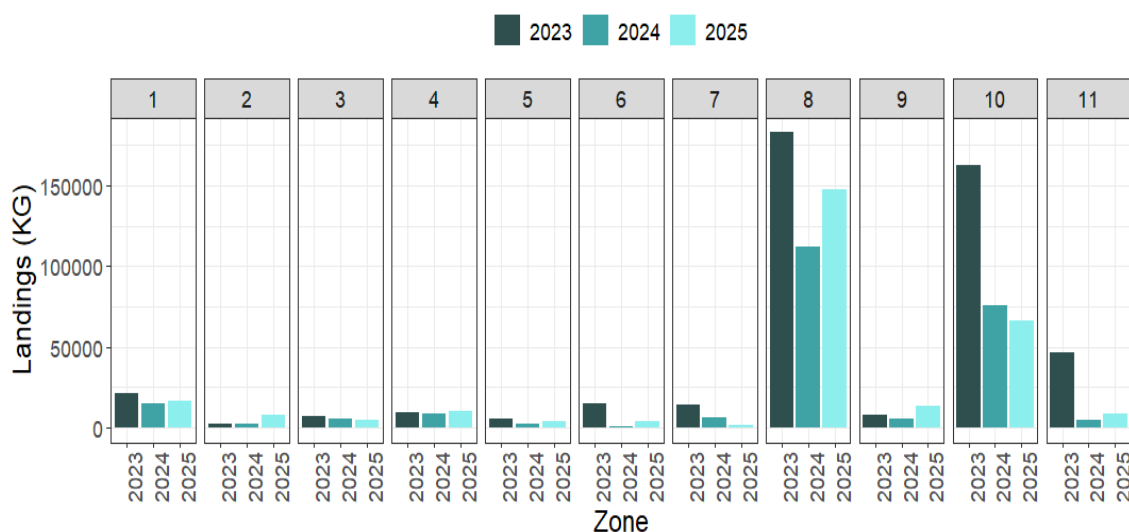


Figure 15. Landings of Manila clam between 2023-2025. Information was gathered by submitted catch returns from permit holders of the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery. Zonal distribution of catch has been categorised by year.

2.5.2 Common cockle

- Zones 1, 2, 3 and 8 were the favourable fishing grounds for common cockle within the 2025 fishing season (53.1t, 15.5t, 24.2t and 42.3t respectively) (Figure 16). These zones showed significantly higher landings than all other zones ($p < 0.05$) and were statistically similar to each other ($p > 0.05$).
- Zone 1 and zone 8 have shown consecutive increases in landings in the last 3 years though post-hoc Dunns testing indicated that 2025 was statistically similar to that seen in 2023 and 2024 ($p > 0.05$).

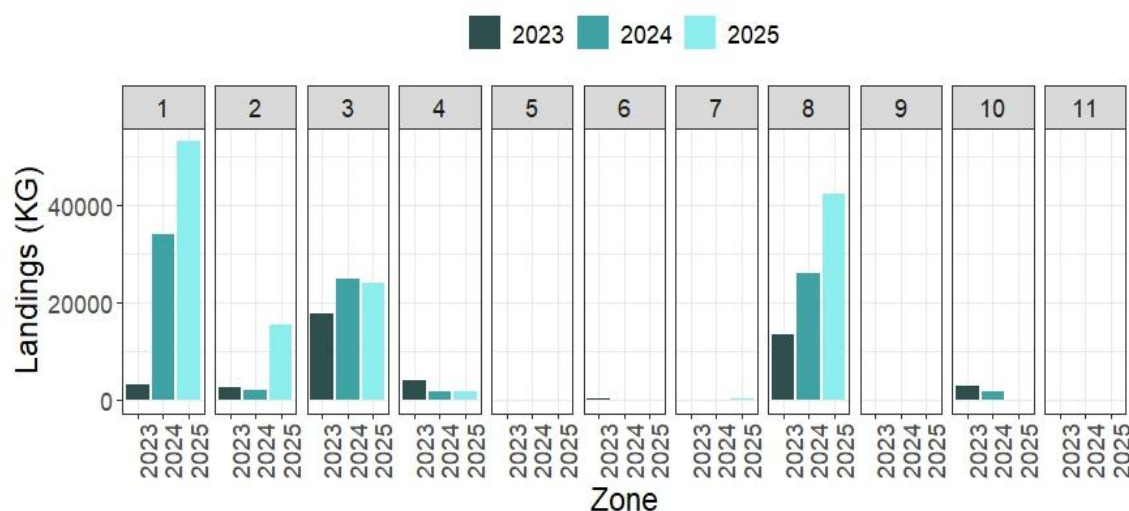


Figure 16. Landings of common cockle between 2023-2025. Information was gathered by submitted catch returns from permit holders in the Poole Harbour Dredge Permit Fishery. Zonal distribution of catch has been categorised by year.

3.0 Monitoring and Control Plan

The Monitoring and Control Plan (M&CP) On-Site Monitoring Programme is linked to Control Mechanisms activated by Threshold Trigger levels (TTLs) for two Monitoring Variables: Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey Data (CPUE TTL) and Landings Data (LPUE TTL) from monthly catch returns submitted by Permit Holders. The M&CP is linked to Manila clam data only at this time.

3.1 Monitoring Variable: Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey

- The annual average Manila clam CPUE value calculated under the M+CP methods for the 2026 survey was 43.79 kg/m of dredge/hr (excluding unfishable zones, Holes Bay), which is above the CPUE TTL of 34.60 kg/m of dredge/hr (by 9.19 kg/m of dredge/hr) (Figure 17).
- Therefore, **the CPUE TTL was not reached**.
- The annual average CPUE value is below the current lowest rolling 5-year average by 9.3 kg/m of dredge/hr.
- Statistical analysis showed there were no significant differences in CPUE between the survey data in 2026 year compared to any other year surveyed across the full timeseries dataset (2016-2026) (Figure 18).

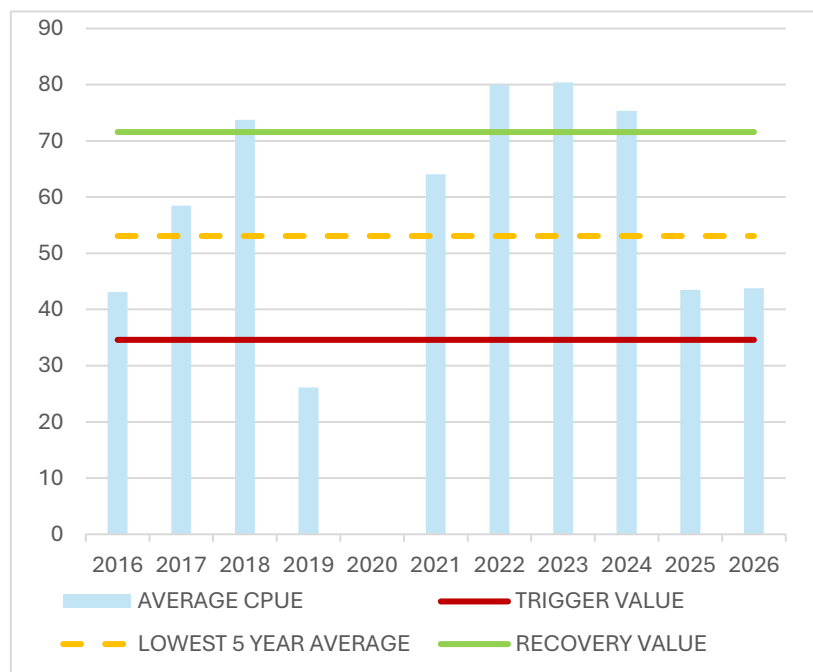


Figure 17. Graph shows the average CPUE (kg/m of dredge/hr) (n=27 sites) from 2016- 2026 surveys (blue bars), CPUE TTL (red), CPUE Recovery Threshold (RT) (green) and lowest 5-year rolling average used to calculate the TTL and RT values (orange).). Note there is no survey data for 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

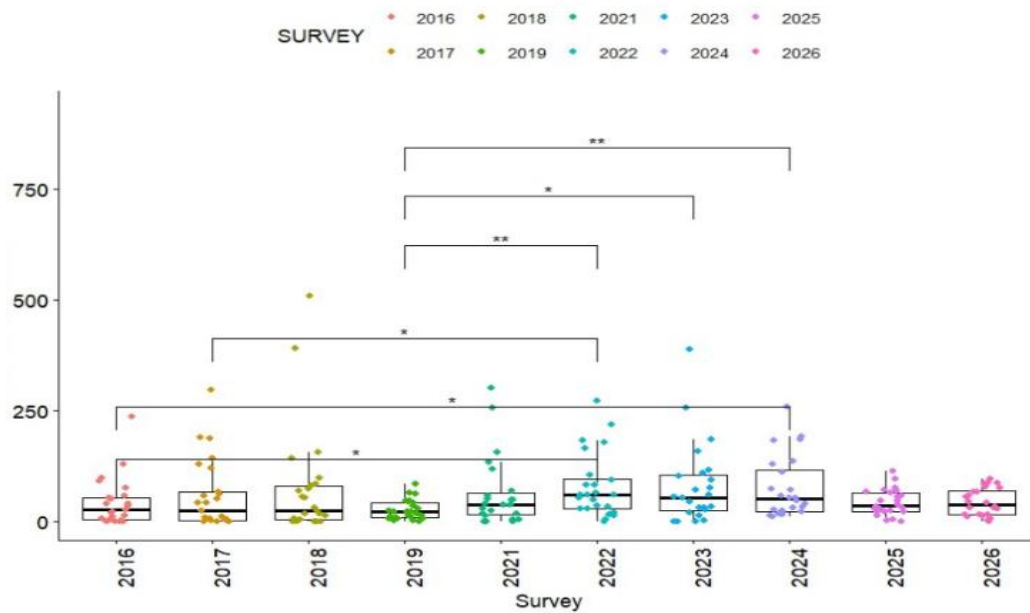


Figure 18. Box and whisker plots of the Poole Harbour Bivalve Survey CPUE data for the years 2016 to 2026, statistical differences ($p < 0.05$) between years are shown by the brackets above using a Dunn's Test with a 'holm' adjustment. "*" reflects a p value of < 0.05 , while "**" reflects a p value < 0.01 . Note there is no survey data for 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

3.2 Monitoring Variable: Catch (Landings) Data

3.2.1 Annual average Landings Per Unit Effort

- The annual average Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) value for the 2025/26 season was 83.5kg/day, above the LPUE TTL of 78.25kg/day by 5.25 kg/day (Figure 19).
- Therefore, the LPUE TTL was not reached.

Poole Bivalve Survey 2026

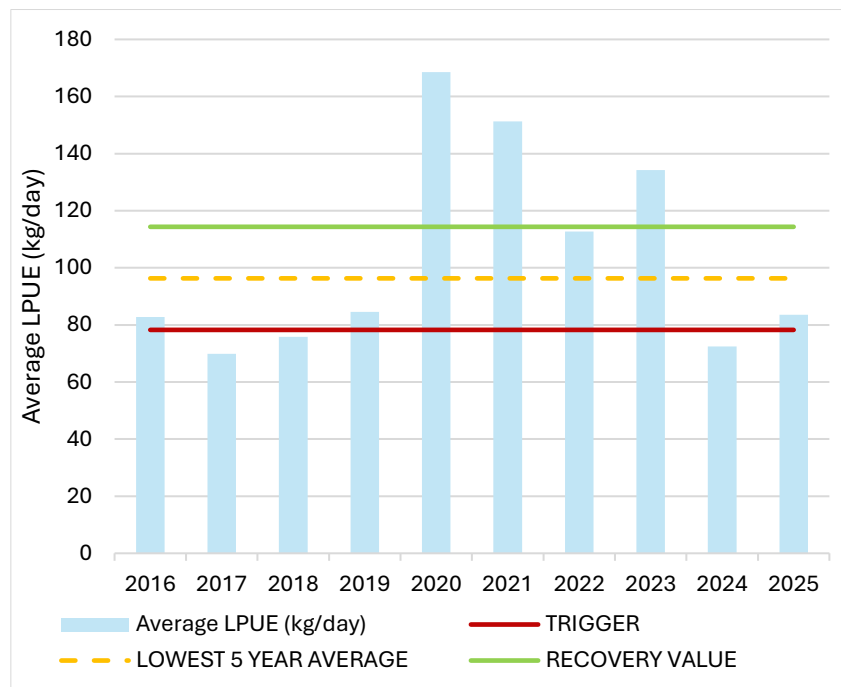


Figure 19. Graph shows the average LPUE (kg/day) from 2016- 2025 fishing seasons (blue bars), LPUE TTL (red), LPUE RT (green) and lowest 5-year rolling average used to calculate the TTL and RT values (orange).

3.2.2 Monthly Landings PER Unit Effort

- Analysis of monthly catch-return data for the 2025/26 season indicates that mean monthly Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE) increased relative to the 2024/25 season (Figure 20).
- LPUE was higher in every month, with increases ranging from 6.0% in May (110.44 kg/day in 2025 compared with 104.17 kg/day in 2024) to 61.2% in August (118.84 kg/day in 2025 compared with 73.70 kg/day in 2024).

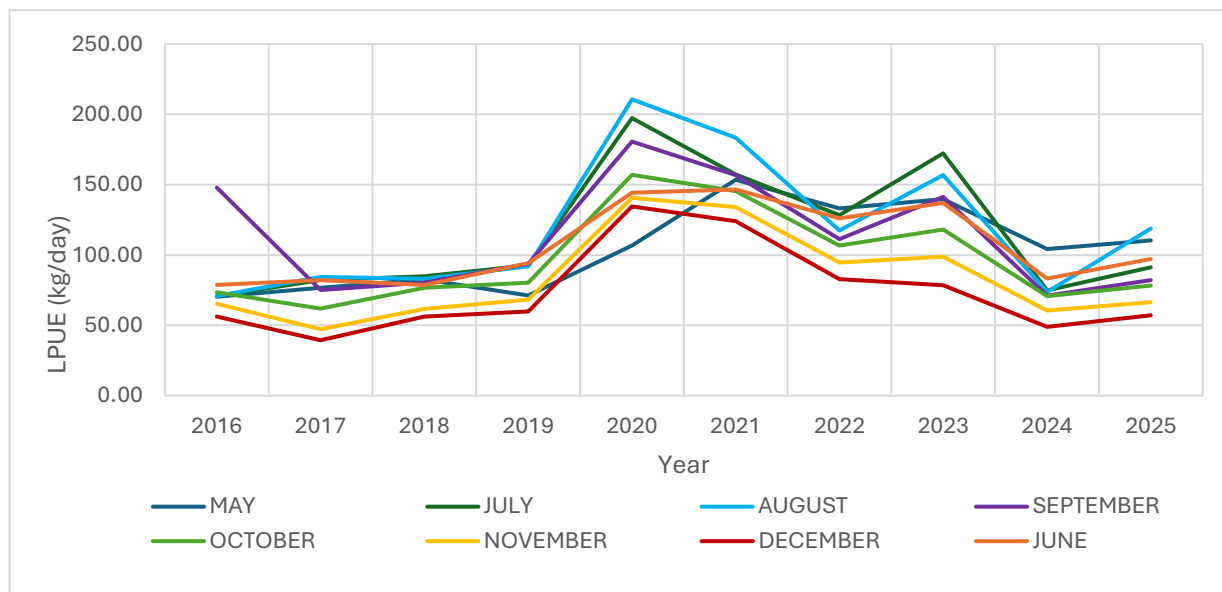


Figure 20. Monthly landings per unit effort (LPUE) of Manila clams in the PHDPF, as kg/day, from 2016-2025. Months are represented using trend lines highlighted in different colours.

4.0 Summary

4.1 Manila Clams:

CPUE Trends: The distribution of CPUE reflects environmental conditions influencing the habitat preferences of both species. Manila clams exhibited higher CPUE in muddy, fine-sediment areas of the harbour. Total CPUE of Manila clams in the harbour was statistically lower than that seen in 2024 though statistically similar to that seen in 2025, with some areas showing increased abundance compared with the 2025 survey. Although several Shellfish Catch Zones exhibited lower CPUE than in previous years, post hoc Dunn's tests with Holm adjustment identified no statistically significant differences between survey years. These observed variations are therefore likely to reflect natural fluctuations in stock abundance rather than a sustained decline.

Size Distribution: The average shell length of Manila clams was significantly lower in 2026 than in 2024, although was similar to that observed in 2025. The narrower spread of lengths in 2026 indicates a less variable size distribution compared with 2024. Mean shell length exceeded the MCRS at all sites except Sites 17 and 19. The 2026 survey showed greater variability in Manila clam size distribution compared with cockles, which were predominantly above the MCRS. Previous studies and zonal observations suggest that Manila clam growth varies across the harbour, with some individuals growing wider but remaining relatively thin, while others grow deeper but remain narrower. Consequently, thicker Manila clams may be retained by the dredge despite being below the MCRS in length. In contrast, the more uniform growth of cockles may reduce the likelihood of undersized individuals being retained.

Landings Data: Total landings increased in 2025 following a decline in landings shown in the 2024 fishing season. The last 3 years shows no significant differences in total landings suggesting the fishery is stable. Zones 8 and 10 remain the favoured zones for Manila clam harvesting and were supported by high CPUE values in the 2026 survey. Other less targeted zones such as 5, 6 and 7 also showed high CPUE levels in the 2026 survey.

4.2 Common cockle:

CPUE Trends: Common cockles were more abundant in sandy, coarse sediments of the harbour. Total CPUE was significantly lower in 2026 compared with the previous two years although, this difference is most likely attributable to the unusually high cockle abundance recorded in Zones 1 and 3 during the 2024 and 2025 surveys. Overall, CPUE appears to be returning to typical baseline levels while remaining the highest CPUE in zones 1 and 3.

Size Distribution: Average cockle shell length has remained similar over the last 3 survey years with all sites displayed average length above the MCRS. The length-distribution profile for 2026 shows a similar spread of sampled sizes as seen in 2024 and 2025.

Landings Data: Annual cockle landings have continued to increase over the last 3-year period by 208.6%, from 44.6t in 2023 to 137.6t in 2025. Zones 1, 3 and 8 were the most favoured for cockle harvesting areas in 2025. Zones 1, 2, 3 and 8 displayed significantly higher landings in 2025 than all other zones. Zones 1 and 3 also displayed high CPUE ahead of the 2026 fishing season.

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4.3 Fishery Management:

Monitoring and Control: The Southern IFCA continue to monitor the sustainability of Manila clam stocks through the M&CP, considering CPUE data derived from survey outputs and fisheries catch data from the previous fishing season, against Trigger Threshold Levels calculated under the On-Site Monitoring Programme. The M&CP will continue to be implemented for Manila clam within the fishery with both annual and in-season monitoring of stock levels and Southern IFCA are working to explore integrating Common cockle into the M&CP with corresponding trigger levels.

Management Recommendations: For the 2026/27 fishing season the Authority determined that no additional management intervention was required to support a sustainable fishery.

In summary, the fishery appears to be operating sustainably for both species. Observed changes in CPUE and population structure are likely to reflect natural fluctuations in stock abundance, with some zones showing decreases and other increases relative to previous surveys. Overall, the results do not indicate any consistent evidence of a decline in stock status across the fishery.