

Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Catch Returns Data Summary 2024



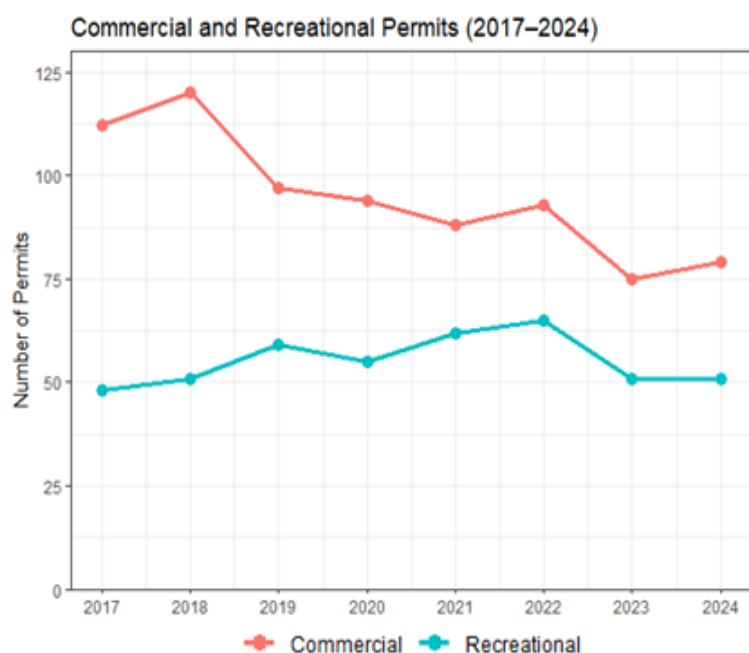
Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority has a responsibility to promote and maintain sustainable inshore fisheries whilst conserving and protecting the marine environment.

In 2016, the Authority introduced a comprehensive suite of management measures for pot and trap shellfish fisheries under the Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015. This built upon existing measures, such as minimum sizes, and introduced new measures, such as pot limits, escape gaps, and protection of berried lobsters. These effort and gear restrictions aim to manage the impacts of fishing activity on the District's shellfish populations and improve stocks, in turn promoting productive and sustainable fisheries.

The Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015 requires all shellfish fishers to acquire a permit, a condition of this permit is to submit monthly catch returns, detailing number of pots fished and total weight of the catch for each species. These catch return data allow Sussex IFCA to gather the evidence needed to monitor each fishery and inform any future management decisions. Trends in total landings, total effort, and LPUE (Landings Per Unit Effort) are all vital to understanding the performance of the fishery and its response to changes in fishing activity.

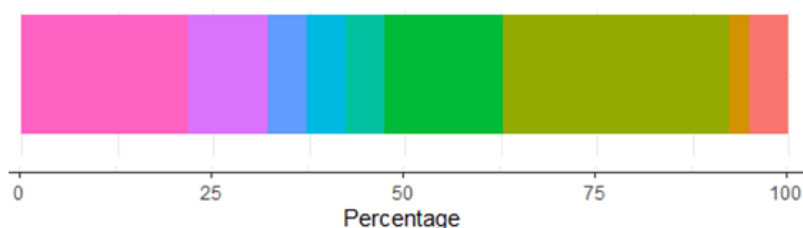
The Authority hopes that trends in the catch return data may also be of interest to permit holders and provide a valuable supplement to their own knowledge of the species and grounds that they fish. Seasonal and spatial trends in catch rates, may be of particular interest and can help inform future business decisions.

Size of the fishery

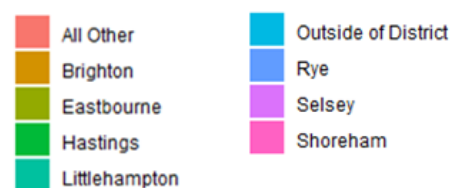


- Since the introduction of the byelaw 368 permits have been issued; the graph shows that the number of commercial permits has declined, and the number of recreational permits is stable
- In 2024, 29 permits expired (8 com. and 21 rec.), 37 permits were renewed (24 com. and 13 rec.), 40 permits remained active (did not expire and weren't renewed; 34 com. and 6 rec.), and 25 new permit holders applied (13 com. and 12 rec.)
- Commercial permits increased from 75 in 2023 to 79 in 2024, recreational permits remained at 50. The second graph shows the home port of permits holders; the vast majority of permits belong to fishers out of Sussex ports, Eastbourne, Shoreham, and Hastings are the largest.

Permit Distribution by Home Port (2024)



Permitted Vessel Home Port



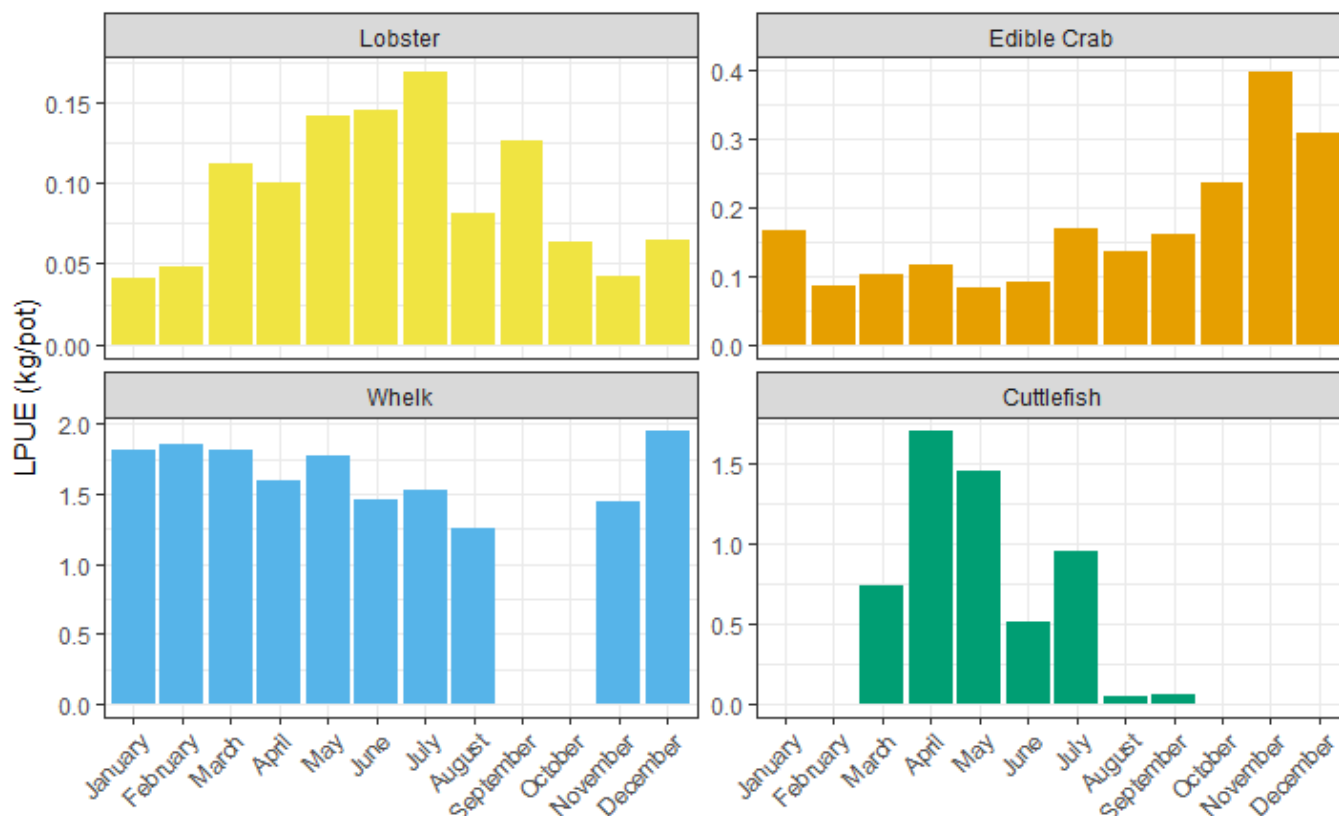
Year overview

A total of 911 tonnes of shellfish was landed from pots in 2024, with an additional 4.6 tonnes from nets/trawls:

- Whelk 746.1 tonnes (82%)
- Edible crab 39.3 tonnes (4%)
- Cuttlefish 111.3 tonnes (12%)
- Lobster 13.8 tonnes (2%)

Seasonal trends – LPUE

The seasonality of fishing efficiency can tell us about how the performance of a fishery, and the activity of it's fishers, may be changing through the year, and the seasonal opportunities that mixed-gear fishers anticipate. In this report, landings per unit effort (LPUE) is the weight landed, divided by the number of pots used, which gives us the weight landed per pot, this therefore controls for effort and is a good measure of fishing efficiency.

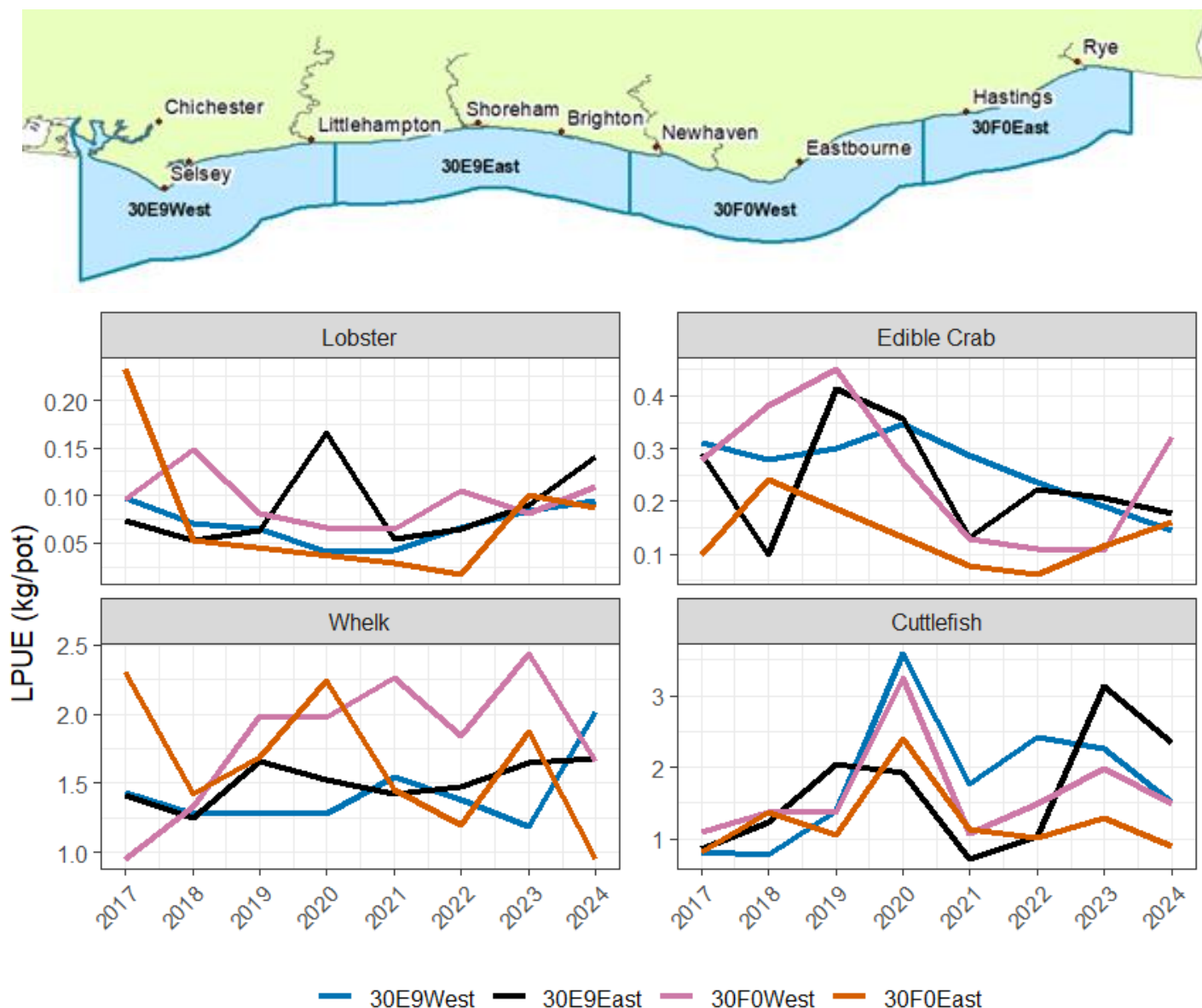


- Lobster is a seasonal fishery in Sussex with the highest LPUE occurring during the summer (May-June) and the lowest from November to February, however lobsters are targeted here round.
- Edible crab is slightly more seasonal than lobster, with the peak in the season higher relative to the rest of the year. Crab LPUE peaks in November and December and is low from February to June.
- Whelk LPUE was relatively stable throughout the year but highest in December and lowest in September and October due to zero effort. Whelk landings decrease in the summer months when higher sea temperatures cause them to move to deeper, cooler waters. Whelk was again the highest effort shellfish fishery in Sussex in 2024.
- Cuttlefish is a highly seasonal fishery, occurring primarily between March and June, with peak LPUE in April and May. This coincides with seasonal migrations into the shallower coastal waters associated with their reproductive behaviours. From August to February, the fishery is minimal or inactive.



Spatial trends - LPUE

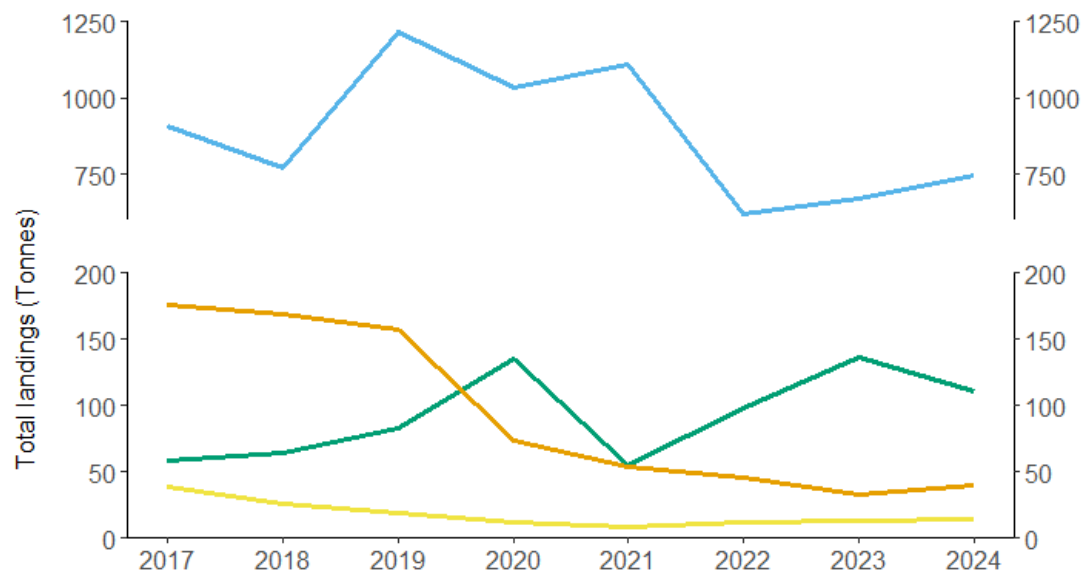
The map below shows the four ICES sub-squares that are present within the Sussex IFCA district. Selsey, located in 30E9West, is primarily a crab and lobster port, with both species holding significant economic and cultural importance. Hastings, in 30F0East, has historically been a productive port for cuttlefish. Whelk is found throughout the region, though the majority are landed into ports in 30F0West and 30E9East.



- Lobster LPUE relatively constant across most ICES subsquares, notwithstanding a spike in 2020 in 30E9East, except for in 30F0East where it declined substantially 2017-2022, and then partially recovered.
- Edible crab LPUE generally declined 2017-2024, however the direction and scale of the trends was not consistent. LPUE declined across all subsquares 2017-2021, but partially recovered in 30F0West and 30F0East.
- Excluding an increase in 30E9West in 2024, whelk LPUE in 30E9West and 30E9East was relatively stable. However, 30F0West saw a substantial increase, and 30F0East saw a substantial decrease across the study period.
- Cuttlefish LPUE fluctuated consistently across subsquares, with most seeing a noticeable peak in 2020. 30E9East was unusual in that in 2023 there was a increase in LPUE much larger than any other ICES subsquare.

Longterm trends - Total landings

- Lobster landings have declined with a substantial drop 2017-2020 but increased slightly to 13.8 tonnes in 2021-2024.
- Edible crab landings increased from 33.4 tonnes in 2023 to 39.3 tonnes in 2024 after decreasing from 179 tonnes in 2018, 66 tonnes in 2020 and 46.6 tonnes in 2022.
- Whelk landings were highest in 2019 (1224 tonnes) and lowest in 2022 (635 tonnes), and fluctuated substantially across the study period.
- Cuttlefish landings were the highest in 2023 (145 tonnes) and lowest in 2021 (56 tonnes). There was a decrease to 111.3 tonnes in 2024.



Longterm trends – LPUE

- Lobster LPUE has increased (0.11 kg/pot in 2024) for the second year in a row from 0.09 kg/pot in 2023 and 0.07 kg/pot in 2022. Lobster LPUE has recovered to 2017 levels after dipping to lows in 2021.
- Edible crab LPUE decreased from 2020 (0.34 kg/pot) to 2024 (0.17 kg/pot). The average across all years is 0.33 kg/pot. Edible crab LPUE has generally decreased since 2017.
- Whelk LPUE decreased in 2024 (1.58 kg/pot) from a record high in 2023 (2.02 kg/pot). The average across all years is 1.68 kg/pot. Whelk LPUE has remained relatively consistent since 2017, indicating a stable fishery.
- Cuttlefish LPUE decreased from 2.03 kg/pot in 2023 to 1.23 kg/pot in 2024. Cuttlefish LPUE fluctuated substantially from 2017 to 2024, with a large peak in 2020, followed by a steep decline, before increasing again between 2021 and 2024.

