

Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Byelaw Review

September 2025

The Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015 was developed to help achieve more productive and sustainable shellfish fisheries in Sussex. Sussex IFCA hugely appreciate the efforts of fishers to comply with the byelaw and provide catch returns, which are vital to allowing us to track and better understand the health of shellfish stocks in the District.

We are now working to review the Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Byelaw. Our aim is to incorporate the views and expertise of local fishers at the earliest possible stage of the review process to inform our consideration of potential changes to the byelaw.

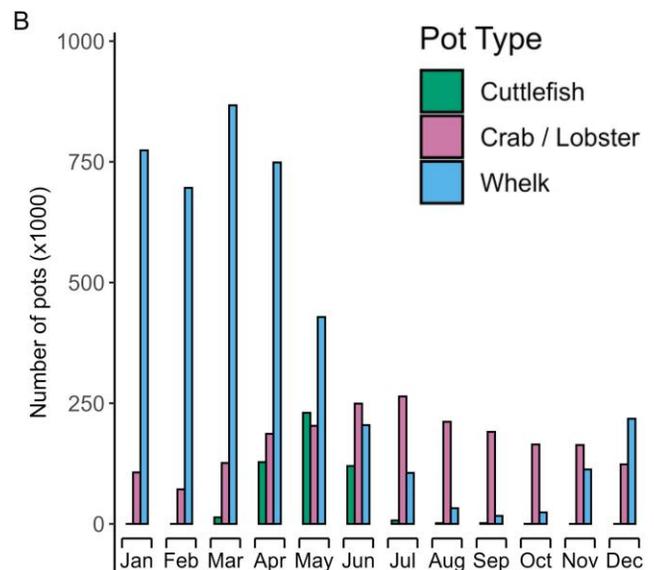
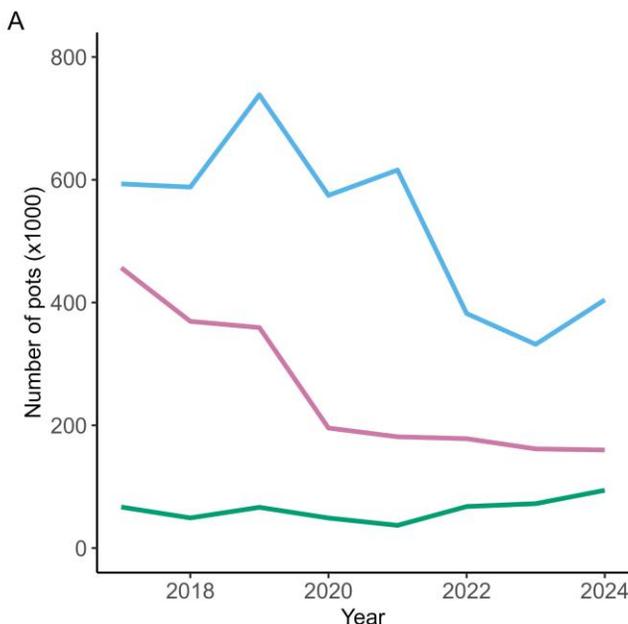
We now invite you to take part in conversations with the Sussex IFCA Conservation and Research Team, to help us understand the opinions of local fishers. Understanding your perspective is our first step in the review process. This understanding, of your vision for shellfish fisheries in Sussex, and opinions on specific topics such as stock health will be central to any changes made to the byelaw. Importantly, this information will be collected anonymously.

Trends in Sussex shellfish stocks 2017-2024

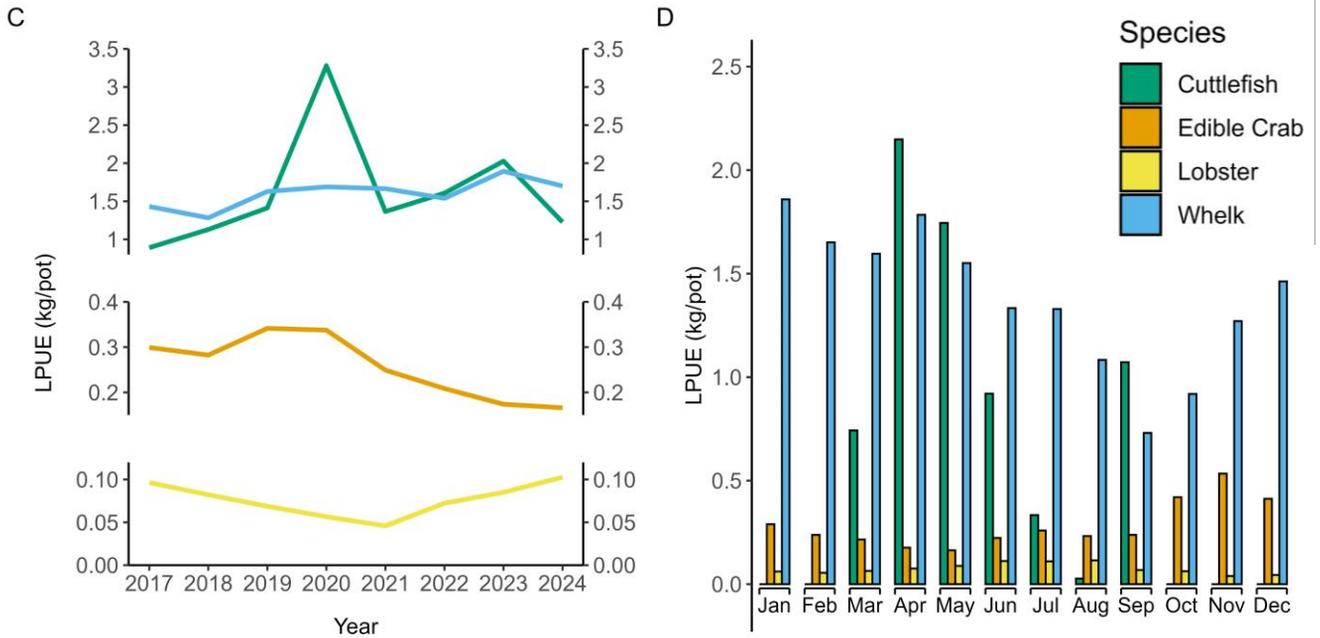
Before we ask for any of your time, we want to share information with you about the performance and status of the fishery; this is only possible due to the catch return data you have submitted between 2017-2024, and we hope this short report demonstrates its value.

Graph A shows that fishing effort (number of pots set) has decreased for crab and lobster over the years, and to a lesser extent for whelk potting, but is increasing for cuttlefish.

Graph B shows the months in which these pots are usually used. Potting effort peaks in Jan-Apr for whelks, May-Aug for crab and lobster, and Apr-Jun for cuttlefish.



Landings per unit effort (LPUE) measures how efficient fishing is, by calculating how many kilos of shellfish are caught per pot. It indicates whether stocks are stable, increasing or decreasing. Graph C shows that LPUE for edible crab has been decreasing steadily throughout Sussex, has remained relatively stable for whelks and cuttlefish, and recently increased following a previous decrease for lobster. Graph D shows how LPUE varies through the year.



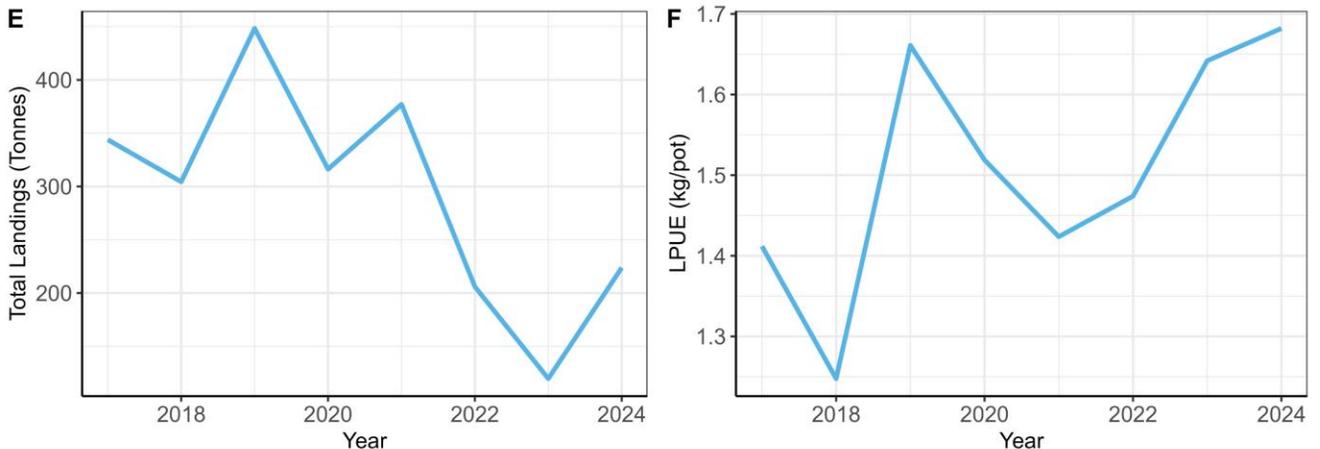
Trends in ICES subsquare 30E9East, 2017-2024

We have produced reports for all subsquares in the Sussex IFCA District, to allow trends to be compared. The rest of this report will describe trends for the **30E9East** subsquare.



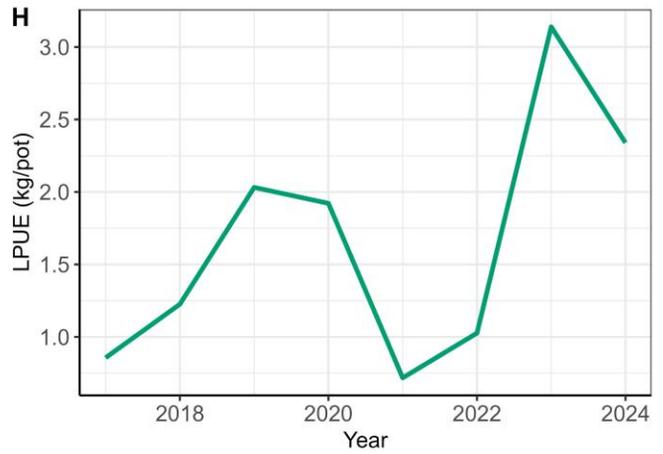
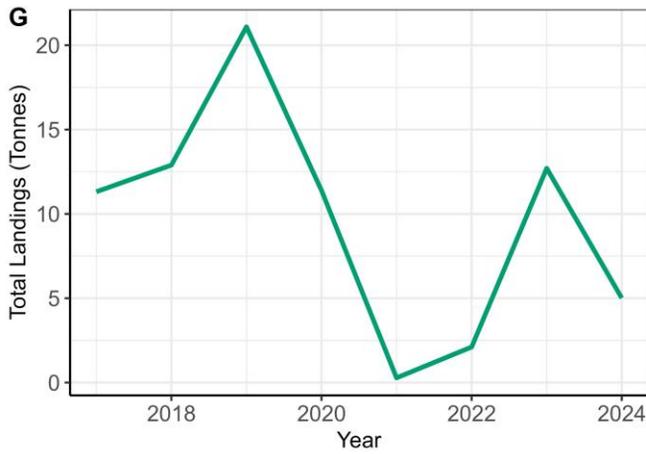
Whelk fishing in 30E9East is efficient

Total landings of whelk increased in 2024 but have generally declined (Graph E), reduced effort is likely involved (Graph A). Whelk landings per unit effort (LPUE) shows us that the efficiency of whelk fishing has increased (Graph F); this is similar to the rest of the District.



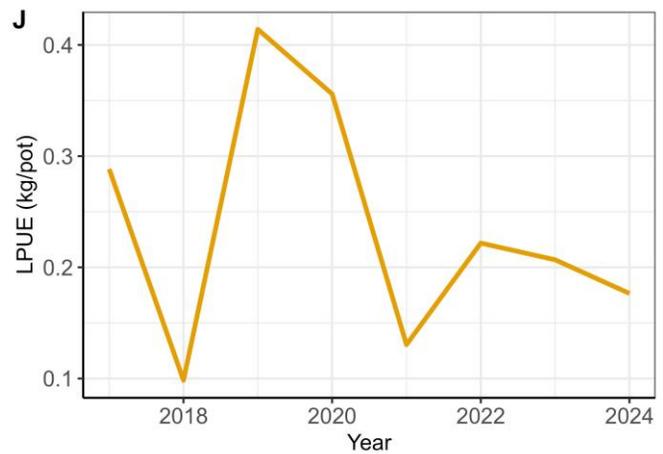
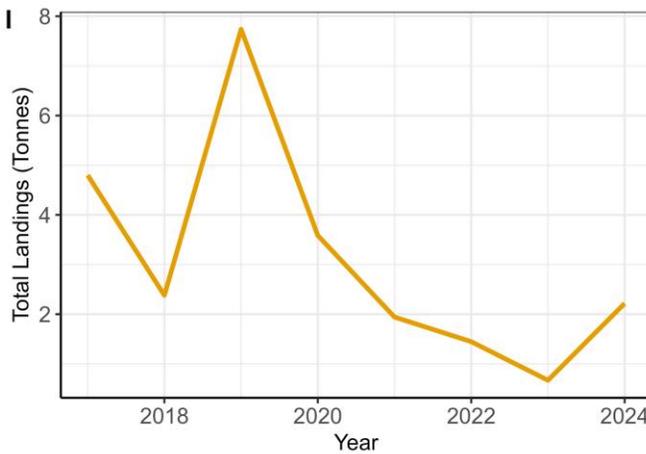
Cuttle trapping in 30E9East is efficient

Total landings of cuttlefish have fluctuated since 2017 (Graph G), but the LPUE is relatively high (Graph H) and has increased across the period of monitoring (2017-2024).



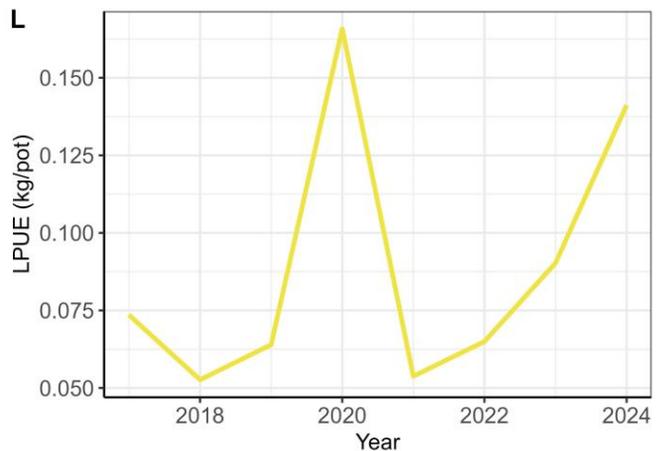
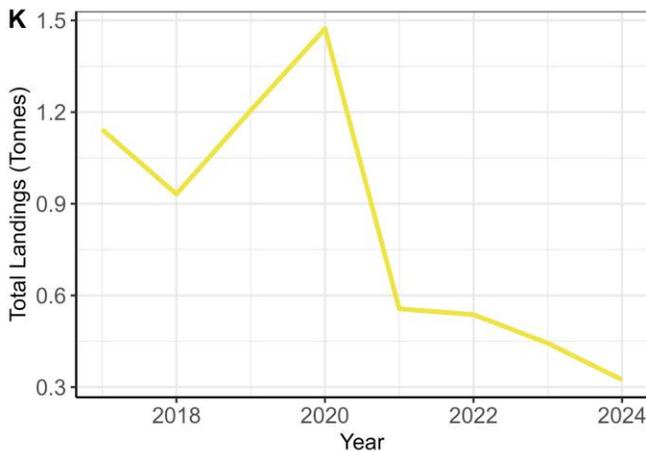
Crab stocks are declining

Both total landings (Graph I) and LPUE (Graph J) of edible crab have decreased since 2017. There are many potential reasons, and fishing pressure – either inshore or offshore – may have contributed, but it could also be caused by climate change, pollution, or other factors.



Lobster LPUE has increased, but total landings have fallen

Graph L shows that LPUE has fluctuated substantially 2017-2024, with large peak in 2020, followed by a steep decline, before increasing again 2021-2024. In addition, total landings (Graph K) and effort (Graph A) have sharply declined, so it is difficult to assess the stock.





The Sussex IFCA Conservation and Research team are now reviewing the Shellfish Permit Byelaw.

As a first step, we are having conversations with local fishers to co-design any proposed changes.

If you would like to take part in these conversations and influence the process, please contact:
Research@sussex-ifca.gov.uk

We would really appreciate your input and expertise!