

Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Catch Returns Data Summary 2025



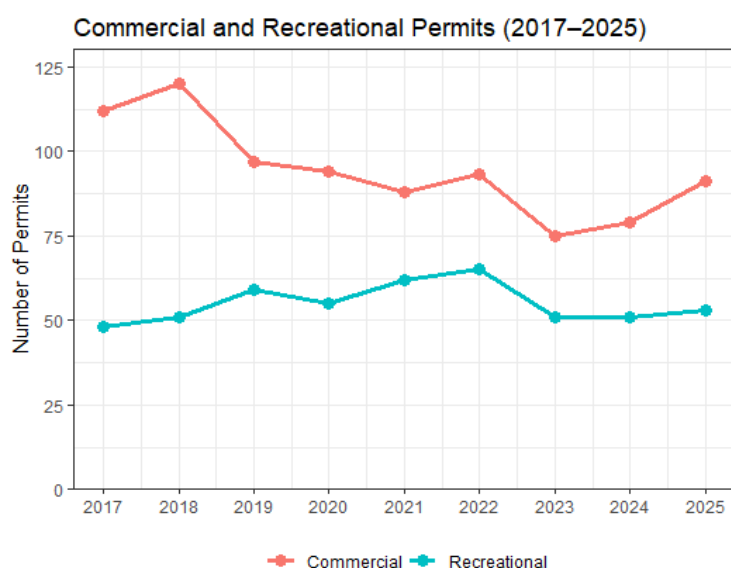
Sussex Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority is responsible for securing sustainable inshore fisheries whilst conserving and protecting the marine environment.

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 controls aim to ensure that the impacts of fishing on the District's shellfish populations are effectively managed, with a view to improving stocks and thereby promoting productive and sustainable fisheries.

The Sussex IFCA Shellfish Permit Byelaw 2015 requires all shellfish fishers to obtain a permit; a condition of this permit is to submit monthly catch returns detailing the number of pots fished, pot type, and the total weight of the catch for each species. These catch return data allow Sussex IFCA to monitor each fishery and inform any future management decisions. Trends in total landings, total effort, and LPUE (Landings Per Unit Effort) are vital for understanding the performance of the fishery and how it responds 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.

Total Permits



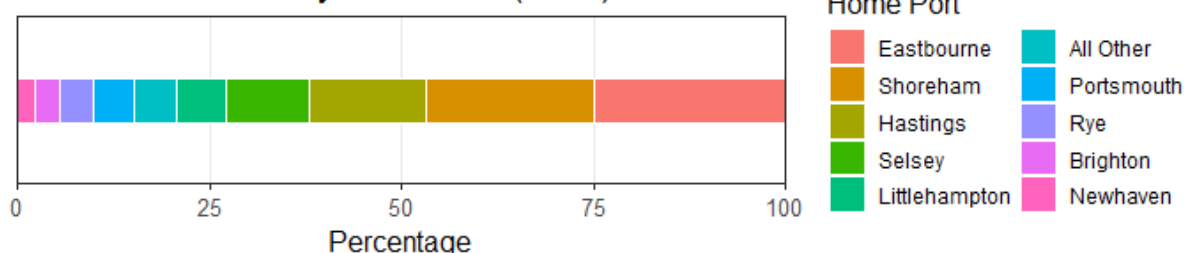
Since the introduction of the byelaw, 416 permits have been issued. The graph shows that the number of commercial permits has declined overall since 2017 but has increased in recent years, while the number of recreational permits has remained stable.

In 2025, there were 91 commercial permits and 53 recreational permits. 27 permits expired (16 com. and 11 rec.), 41 renewed (29 com. and 12 rec.), and 27 new permit holders applied (7 com. and 20 rec.).

Commercial permits increased from 79 in 2024 to 91 in 2025, and recreational permits increased from 51 to 53. The second graph shows the home port of permit holders; most are out of Sussex ports,

especially Eastbourne, Shoreham, and Hastings.

Permit Distribution by Home Port (2025)



Year overview

A total of 1162 tonnes of shellfish was landed from pots in 2025, with an additional 2.3 tonnes from nets/trawls:

- Whelk 1049.1 tonnes (90%)
- Edible crab 24.2 tonnes (2%)
- Cuttlefish 70.4 tonnes (6%)
- Lobster 18.7 tonnes (2%)

Seasonal trends – Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE)



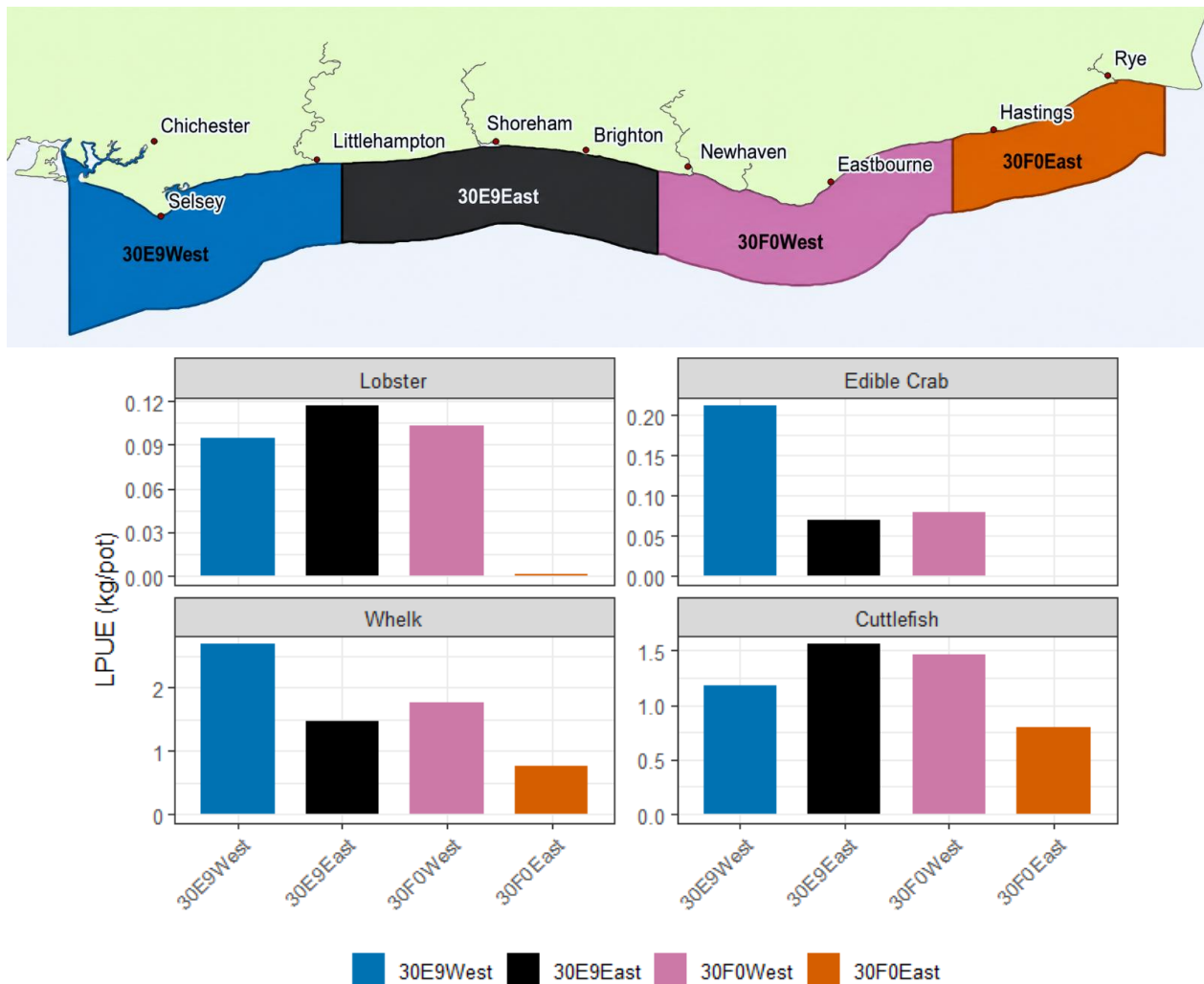
Landings Per Unit Effort is calculated by dividing the weight (in kg) of fish landed by the number of pots fished, giving us the average number of kg landed per pot fished. LPUE effectively controls for fishing effort and is therefore a measure of fishing efficiency. The seasonality of LPUE tells us about how the performance of a fishery changes through the year and the seasonal opportunities that mixed-gear fishers anticipate.

- Lobster potting is a seasonal fishery in Sussex with the highest LPUE occurring during the summer (May-July) and the lowest from December to March; however, lobsters are targeted year-round.
- Edible crab potting is more seasonal than lobster, with the peak in the season higher relative to the rest of the year. Crab LPUE generally peaks in November and December and is low from February to June.
- Whelk LPUE was relatively stable throughout the year, but highest in September and lowest in July. 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 and most productive shellfish fishery in Sussex in 2025.
- Cuttlefish trapping is a highly seasonal fishery, occurring primarily between March and July, 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 – Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE)

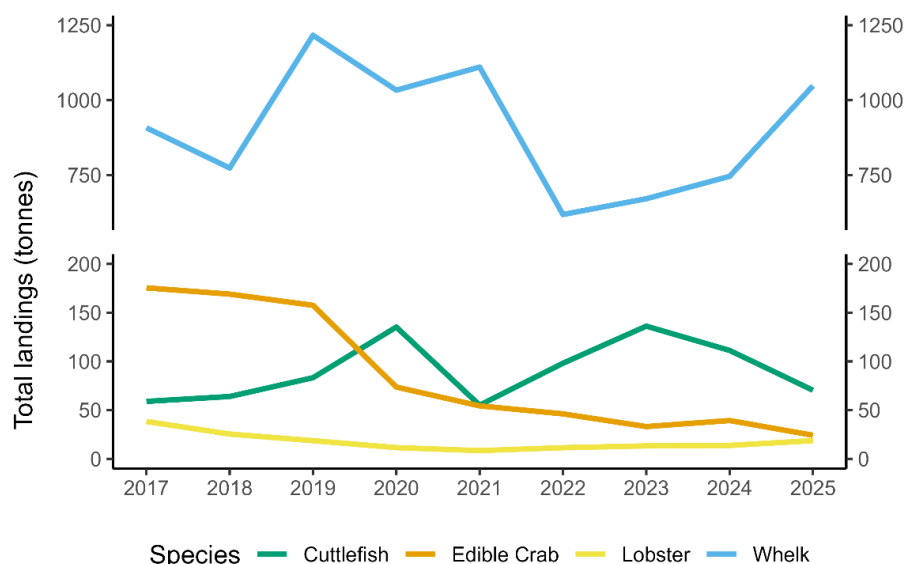
The map below shows the four ICES sub-squares within the Sussex IFCA District: 30E9West, 30E9East, 30F0West and 30F0East. Selsey, located in 30E9West, is primarily a crab and lobster port, with both species holding significant economic and cultural importance to the local fishing community. Hastings, in 30F0East, has historically been a productive port for cuttlefish, reflecting the seasonal importance of this fishery in the eastern part of the District. Whelk is found throughout the region, though the majority are landed in ports in 30F0West and 30E9East. It is important to note that LPUE is influenced not only by shellfish abundance, but also by fisher behaviour, gear type, seasonality, weather conditions, market demand, and the areas where fishers choose to operate. As a result, spatial trends should be interpreted alongside local knowledge and wider patterns in landings and effort. Overall, the spatial LPUE trends show that catch rates have not changed uniformly across the Sussex IFCA District. Some fisheries, such as edible crab, show a broad District-wide decline, while others, particularly whelk, show stronger spatial divergence between the western and eastern ends of the District.



- Lobster LPUE in 2025 was relatively similar across 30E9West, 30E9East and 30F0West, with 30E9East recording the highest value. In contrast, 30F0East showed a much lower LPUE than the other sub-squares, indicating a clear spatial difference within the District.
- Edible crab LPUE in 2025 was highest in 30E9West. LPUE in 30E9East and 30F0West was considerably lower, while 30F0East recorded no landings from pots.
- Whelk LPUE showed the strongest spatial variation in 2025, with an east-west contrast. 30E9West recorded the highest LPUE by a clear margin, followed by 30F0West and 30E9East. 30F0East recorded the lowest LPUE in the District.
- Cuttlefish LPUE in 2025 was highest in 30E9East and 30F0West, with 30E9West also recording relatively high LPUE. 30F0East, the subsquare furthest east, had the lowest LPUE.

Longterm trends - Total landings

- Lobster landings declined substantially from 2017 to 2021, before showing a gradual recovery in recent years. Landings have increased year-on-year since 2021, reaching 18.7 tonnes in 2025. However, despite this recent increase, lobster landings remain below the levels recorded in 2017.
- Edible crab landings show a clear long-term decline. Landings have steadily declined over time, with only limited evidence of recovery in recent years. In 2025, edible crab landings fell again to 24.2 tonnes, representing the lowest level recorded since 2017.
- Whelk landings fluctuated substantially since 2017 but remained much higher than all other species. After declining in 2022, landings have recovered. This continued in 2025, when whelk landings rose to 1,049 tonnes, making whelk the main driver of the overall increase in shellfish landings.
- Cuttlefish landings were highly variable across the years, reflecting the cyclical and fluctuating nature of the fishery. Unlike edible crab and lobster, there is no clear, consistent long-term increase or decline. However, landings have decreased in recent years, falling to 70.4 tonnes in 2025.



Longterm trends – Landings Per Unit Effort (LPUE)

- Lobster LPUE also declined 2017-2021, before showing a gradual recovery. Since 2021, LPUE has increased steadily, suggesting improved catch rates relative to fishing effort. In 2025, lobster LPUE reached 0.10 kg/pot, returning to levels similar to those recorded in 2017.
- Edible crab LPUE again shows the clearest long-term decline of the four main shellfish species. After higher LPUE values in earlier years, catch rates have generally declined, indicating lower landings per pot. This downward trend continued in 2025, when edible crab LPUE fell to 0.13 kg/pot, the lowest value recorded since 2017.
- Whelk LPUE has remained comparatively stable over time, particularly when compared with the declines or fluctuations seen in other species. Although there has been some year-to-year variation, whelk LPUE has generally remained within a relatively narrow range. In 2025, LPUE decreased slightly to 1.77 kg/pot, but remained close to the long-term average, suggesting that the fishery has remained relatively consistent.
- Cuttlefish LPUE has fluctuated but remained reasonably stable. There is no clear long-term trend, but LPUE has exhibited some mild peaks and troughs since 2017. Following higher catch rates in recent years, cuttlefish LPUE decreased to 1.08 kg/pot in 2025, bringing it closer to the lowest recorded values.

