

# **Historical Analysis of the Fishing Activity Within the Anglian MAREA Region Study Area Over the Past 30 Years**

**Terry Plumb MBE  
Independent Fisheries Consultant**

**December 2009**

The following analysis gives a brief insight into the fishing industry's activity within the East Coast AODA Study Area over the past 30 years. It tends to portray the trends in commercial activities by statistical evidence, number of fishing vessels active in the area, species of fish caught and landed.

There has undoubtedly been a decline in the East Coast Fishing Industry over the past 30 Years. Fishermen argue that they are struggling to survive in an industry hit hard by quotas, fish and licensing restrictions coupled with declining fish stocks. Most fishermen blame the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) agreed in Brussels in 1983 for this decline. The CFP set up a system of quotas for each member state to conserve depleting fish resources. It also established a coastal band around the shores of each country reserved for local fishermen.

Many of the fishermen involved in the industry believe the CFP system is poorly enforced and does not work. They argue that millions of tonnes of fish are thrown back into the sea as a result of the quota rules. They also point out that for year's foreign vessels, especially from Spain, registered fishing vessels in Britain under "flags of convenience" to claim part of the UK's annual fish quota. This led to bitter battles between British and Spanish fishermen in the 1990s. Although the previous Conservative government under John Major did put a stop to this so-called "quota hopping".

## **East Coast AODA Study Area.**

The East Coast AODA Study Areas covers the area between Cromer in the north to Orford Ness in the south and out to a distance of 23 miles from the coast. In order to give an insight into the fishing activity that has, and is now taking place within the Study Areas, it has been decided to give a description of all the coastal fishing ports whose vessels fish within the area. A great deal -of the following information has been obtained from CEFAS Report No 100 "The Coastal Fisheries of England and Wales 1992-1994".

### **Cley, Salthouse and Weybourne**

All boats operating from these three ports for the past 30 years have been under 10 metres overall length and still are. Although these three ports are outside the Study Area boats from these ports have in the past fished within the Study Area. In the 1990s these three villages supported around a dozen longshore boats, although few depended on fishing as their only source of income. Chalk reef between Cley and Bacton provided good crab and lobster potting grounds and most of the catch was processed by local shellfish factories exporting their product all over Europe. In 1976, the north Norfolk creel fishery supported 45 full-time boats this number had reduced to 40 boats by 1993 whereas now the number of boats operating from these three ports is down to 2 full-time vessel and perhaps 3 part-timers. During their prime time of fishing full-time boats used up to 250 pots, with strings of 25 pots per line, setting them up to 5 miles offshore. The peak landing months for crab were and still are between May and June with further catches throughout the summer. As in the past boats also set nets and lines for cod and whiting in the winter, targeting ray and dogfish in the spring.

### **Sheringham**

In the 1990s nine full-time boats of 5-7 metres all beach launched operated from Sheringham many fished from crab and lobster within the Study area. Almost all depended on pot fishing using the inkwell pot single-handedly for brown crabs and lobster from March to October. Today the number of boats has

been reduced to about 6 all operating and using the same gear fishing for brown crab and lobster but now in an easterly and northerly direction outside the Study area. In the late 1980s and early 1990s fishermen blamed trench construction work (for gas and sewage pipes) for the release of chalk into the water which they claimed had discouraged crustacean from either moving into the area or feeding. Winter fishing consists of longlining, gill and trammel netting for cod and whiting

### **East and West Runton**

These two ports are situated outside the Study Area but boats from these ports do fish within the Study Area. During the 1980s and 90s some 10 longshore boats based themselves at these two landing points and concentrated on potting, fishing mostly for brown crab and lobster for most of the year. During the winter months around 6 boats continued to use longlines, gill and trammel nets to catch cod. Over the years the number of boats operating from these ports has fallen to 3 full-time and about the same number part-time. As the cod caught inshore has fallen in recent years some of the boats are now using up to 20 to 30 nets. When the herring quota permits herring are caught in drift nets within 2 miles of the coast in the autumn.

### **Cromer, Overstrand and Trimmingham**

During the 1980s and 90s a fleet of around 20 boats all of between 5-10 metres operated from these three ports setting pots principally for brown crab from March to November and for lobster during the summer months. Nowadays this fleet has reduced down to about 12 full-time boats with perhaps 3 part-timers, all are of the same length and are beach launched. The fishermen themselves or their family as in the past, processes much of the fishermen's catch. A few boats set whelk pots, use lines and nets for cod in the winter and drift nets for herring in autumn should the quota permit. The crab fishery peaks between April and June, each boat setting between 150 to 300 pots out to 5 miles from the coast. Pot bait includes cod and plaice frames acquired from the Lowestoft fish market or dabs, founders, gurnard and other species not saleable.

### **Mundesley, Bacton, Happisburgh and Sea Palling.**

In the 1980s and 90s up to a dozen beach boats fished along this section of the coast using mainly nets and pots, although a couple of these boats also trawled for shrimp and flatfish. Many of the nets were set for an array of species including cod, whiting, dogfish, ray, sea trout, bass, mullet, herring, mackerel and sole in season. Large mesh sized tangle nets were set for ray, catching the occasional turbot or brill, whereas tangle and trammel nets with smaller mesh size were used to catch sole, plaice and dabs. The coastal waters off Sea Palling did form and still does form the southerly limit of the Norfolk potting grounds. A prosperous whelk fishery did exist off Sea Palling in the past and up to the late 1980s. This whelk fishery supported up to 10 full-time Cromer boats during the winter. The fishery started to decline during 1988 and by 1992 only 2 boats were involved in the whelk fishery. Today there are about 8 full-time boats and perhaps 2 or 3 part-timers fishing the area using mainly pots for crab and lobster and nets and lines in the winter for cod and whiting.

### **Winterton, Hemsby and California.**

During the 1980s and 90s about a dozen beach boats from Winterton and the surrounding small landing points fished mainly using pots on a small scale from spring to autumn for crab and lobster. Today this number has reduced to about 3 part-time vessel fishing in the same manner for the same species.

### **Caister.**

Four full-time and several part-time longshore boats use longlines and nets, although fishing is hampered by marine traffic navigating along this part of the coast, using ports further to the south. Longlines are set in the winter for cod, and in the spring for ray and dogfish. Gill nets are set for the same species and drift nets are used for herring, when permitted, in the autumn. Flatfish such as sole, plaice and dabs are taken in tangle nets from spring and sea trout and bass are taken in drift nets. Some boats do trawl from time to time. Little has changed over the years there are still 4 full-time fishermen and a few part-timers fishing the same way for the same species of fish.

### **Great Yarmouth and Gorleston.**

An offshore fleet of 4 over 10 metre longliners and 10 under 10 metre inshore vessels did base themselves at Great Yarmouth during the 1980s and 90s. The offshore boats using longlines mainly to fish for cod in the winter and ray and dogfish in the spring and summer, with ling, whiting and turbot also being caught. A few of these boats also used baited lines attached to jigging machines. The 10 inshore boats used drift and fixed nets, longlines and trawls. Nets were drifted for herring and sprats in the autumn and winter, and sea trout, bass and mullet in summer. Fixed nets and longlines were used to catch a variety of white fish during the course of the year, for example cod were targeted in winter, ray and dogfish in spring and flatfish in spring and summer. Up to the late 1980s 7 boats beam trawled for pink and brown shrimp from autumn through to spring. Today there are only 2 fulltime over 10 metre vessels fishing out of Gorleston.

### **Hopton and Corton.**

Fishing activity carried out in the 1980s and 90s involved 5-7 longshore boats operating from these two ports. Drift nets were used to catch herring in autumn and spring and sea trout and bass during the summer. Gill and trammel nets were set for cod and whiting in winter and sole, plaice, ray and dabs from spring onwards. Small beam trawls were used for brown shrimp in the season. Today the number of vessels operating from these two ports has dwindled to 2 or 3 part-timers. As in the past operating from this section of the coast is very much at the mercy of the weather and water currents, where onshore winds and large swells can prevent launching for long periods of time.

### **Lowestoft.**

Up to 30 years ago this port supported a fleet of around 50 vessels plus 20 or so part-time boats that provided fish on a daily basis for the fish market. The 20 strong offshore beam trawler fleet, all over 30 metres, fished throughout the southern and central North Sea and Norwegian waters south of 62°N. A dozen vessels of less than 24 metres using either beam or otter trawls periodically fished within 12 miles of the coast, landing mainly plaice, sole, turbot, ray, dabs, cod and whiting. Herring, sprats and mackerel were occasionally taken in pelagic trawls. Ten to twelve vessels of 10-20 metres set longlines and sometimes trawled. The larger longliners were fully automated and concentrated offshore, whilst the smaller longliners often set nets for white fish on their way out to longlining grounds. The under 10 metre fleet used a variety of fishing methods such as fixed and drift nets, pots, longlines, handlines and trawls. Nets were set for plaice, sole, turbot, ray and cod, and drift nets for herring, mackerel, bass, mullet and sea trout. Shrimp and white fish were taken in light otter trawls or beam trawl gear and pots were set for lobster and crab. Inshore fishermen had to, as they do today, contend with marine aggregate dredging activities occurring on traditional fishing grounds and the high level of fishing intensity that use to be exerted by beam trawlers of up to 15 metres fishing right up to the shore. Today the Lowestoft fleet is reduced to 15 full-time fishermen and 7 part-timers operating 4 over 10 metres and 18 under 10 metres vessels. All fish for the same species of fish using beam, stern and side trawling, pots, drift and fixed nets also longlines.

### **Pakefield and Kessingland.**

There used to be about 25 small boats that operated from these two ports, all beach launched, and fishing along this stretch of coast. All were part-time vessels landing and selling their catch from beach huts. Today this number has reduced to about 3 or 4 part-time vessels all fishing for the same species of fish using the same type of gear. Nets are to catch plaice, sole, turbot, ray and cod, drift nets to catch herring, mackerel, bass, mullet and sea trout. In the past some shrimp trawling did take place off this section of the coast but little is carried out today. Some potting takes place for crab and lobster.

### **Southwold and Walberswick.**

These two landing places are based on either side of the River Blyth and did support, in the past, around a dozen full-time boats of 6-11 metres plus an additional 20 or so part-time boats. Fishermen, as they do today, sell their catches along the harbour from stall. The majority of the full-time fleet did trawl and set nets for white fish, netting did become increasingly popular from the 1980s as catch rates had fallen and overhead compared to trawling were far less. Some of the larger boats used to set gear out to 40 miles in calm weather. In the past sole provided the mainstay from spring with plaice, ray, dabs and flounder also taken in substantial quantities and in late autumn cod and whiting were targeted using nets and longlines. Pots were also laid for crab and lobster. Longlines were used for rays and dogfish with herring and sprats

sometimes being used as bait. Nets were drifted in the summer for sea trout, bass and mullet and in the autumn through winter for herring and sprats. A few fishermen in the past used fyke nets for eels in the estuary and up the river although far fewer, if any, are involved today. A few boats using beam trawls also use to take brown shrimp in the estuary and along the coast. Today there are 3 full-time and about 4 part-time vessels operating from these two ports fishing for the same kind of species using drift and fixed nets, pots and longlines.

### **Dunwich, Sizewell and Thorpeness.**

In the 1980s and 90s around a dozen of the 30 or so longshore boats that fished along this stretch of coast did so on a full-time basis. Nets were drifted for herring and sprats and longlines and gill nets were set for cod and whiting from autumn through the winter. Longlines were set in the spring for ray (predominantly thornback) and dogfish, with trawls and fixed nets used from spring through to autumn for sole, plaice, turbot, brill, flounders and ray and small beam trawls were used for brown shrimp. Both drift and set nets were used during the warmer months to catch bass, mullet and sea trout and bass handlining became increasingly popular. Many full-time and significant number of part-time fishermen set pots for both brown crabs and lobster from spring through to autumn, particularly off Sizewell and Thorpeness. Today there are 3 full-time and 1 part-time fishermen operating from Dunwich, 1 full-time from Sizewell and 1 part-time from Thorpeness.

### **Aldeburgh.**

A fleet of 25-30 longshore boats use to fish from Aldeburgh during the 1980s and 90s mainly from spring through to autumn selling part of their catch from stalls. Only the larger boats were able to be launched from the beach during the winter owing to the weather and strong tides. From the start of the year some 10 boats used to longlines and net (gill and trammel) for cod, whiting, ray and dogfish. A few boats used nets for herring and sprats in the River Alde and Ore during the same period. From March through to November pots were set for brown crab and lobsters and some of the larger boats trawled using otter and beam trawls for sole, plaice, ray, whiting and shrimp, whilst flatfish and ray were taken in fixed nets. During the summer nets were drifted for bass, sea trout and mullet. Bass were caught on hand and longlines and eel were taken using fyke nets set in the Rivers Alde and Ore. Today there are 4 full-time and 2 part-time fishermen working out of Aldeburgh using drift and fixed nets, pots, longlines and trawls, all fishing for the same species of fish.

### **Orford.**

Between 15 and 20 boats, nearly all of which were under 10 metres used to fish along this stretch of coast and within the River Ore during the 1980s and 90s. Hollesley Bay was renowned for its variety of demersal and pelagic fish. Many of the boats trawled and sometimes paired-up when targeting sprats and herring in the bay and in the River Ore between autumn and spring. Other boats used drift nets to catch these 2 species. Longlines were used during the same period for cod, ray and dogfish. In the spring, sole, plaice, turbot, brill and dabs were taken using trawls, tangle and trammel nets. Nets and handlines were used to catch cod, pollack, ling and bass, often around wrecks with some boats fishing some 40 miles from the coast. Sole, bass, mullet, crab and lobster were also caught in the river. Nets were drifted along the coast for sea trout, bass and mullet, some bass being taken using longlines. Several boats used up to 200 pots to catch crab and lobster in season. During the summer, 1 or 2 modern GRP boats (known as "fastworkers") jig lines on wrecks up to 30 miles offshore mainly for cod, pollack, ling and bass. Fyke nets were used to catch eels in the River Ore usually at night, although the eel fishery did attract less interest over the years as catch rate fell off. Pacific and native oysters, and to a lesser extent mussels were cultivated in the Rive Ore and Butley Creek, where holding pits were constructed for storing molluscs prior to first sale. Today the number of boats fish from the beach at Orford has reduced to 3 full-time and 1 part-time fishermen. Oysters are still cultivated in the River Ore and Butley Creek.

### **Other Fishing Vessels that use to fish in the AODA Study Area over the Years.**

Over the past 30 years beam trawlers from King's Lynn often fished the Study Area for shrimp. Most of their fishing was carried out in the northern half of the area north of Pakefield. Larger vessels from Felixstowe Ferry and Harwich also fished the Study Area mainly for demersal species such as sole,

plaice, cod, whiting, ray and dogfish. Over the years as the number of vessels based at these two ports has declined so the number of fishing trips to the Study Area has also fallen off.

A number of over 10 metre beam trawlers based at West Mersea still fish the Study Area. Most of their fishing takes place in the southern part of the area off the Sizewell Bank, Aldeburgh Ridge and Aldeburgh Napes area. Large beam trawlers from Plymouth and Portsmouth also used to fish the Study Area mainly for sole during the spring and autumn. Again the number of these visiting boats has declined as the number of larger vessel based at these two ports has declined.

During the 1990s a large number of vessels from Sheringham and Cromer used to fish in the Study Area for crab and Lobster. Most of their potting was carried out in the northern half of the area.

### Number of Fishing Vessels that were operating from Ports within and just outside AODA Study Area in the 1990s and 2008/09

Port	1990s No FVs Full & Part Time	2008/09 No FVs Full & Part Time
Weybourne	5FT 2PT	2FT
Morston/Blakeney	7FT 2PT	6FT
Sheringham	9FT 1PT	7FT
East & West Runton	12FT 2PT	9FT
Cromer	15FT	8FT
Overstrand	5FT 2PT	3FT
Mundesley/Bacton	9FT 4PT	5FT 1PT
Sea Palling	4FT 2PT	1FT 1PT
Winterton/Hensby	12FT 3PT	3PT
Caister	4FT 4PT	4FT 3PT
Gt Yarmouth/Gorleston	14FT 4PT	2FT 2PT
Hopton/Corton	6FT	2PT
Lowestoft	50FT 20PT	15FT 7PT
Pakefield/Kessingland	25FT 3PT	3PT
Southwold	12FT 20PT	3FT 3PT
Dunwich/Sizewell	8FT	2FT
Aldeburgh/Orford	25FT 7PT	7FT 3PT

### Landings by British Fishing Vessels from Statistical Rectangles 33F1&F2, 34F1 &F2

Year	Rectangle/Quantity (tonnes) & Value (£)			
	33F1	33F2	34F1	34F2
1995	412.9 £974,631	969.6 £1,097,742	840.3 £1,307,722	588.6 £822,113
1996	352.4 £788,773	987.4 £1,296,333	780.7 £1,334,729	645.2 £888,806
1997	362.1 £725,879	545.9 £695,141	1006.2 £1,592,012	677.9 £882,648
1998	489.9 £817,292	339.8 £494,052	1704.8 £2,462,634	233.5 £345,136
1999	1526.6 £1,110,673	673.4 £1,073,038	921.5 £1,435,800	211.5 £332,935

2000	471.8 £854,612	461 £844,842	687.4 £1,244,349	230.1 £415,761
2001	1455.5 £1,240,568	105.5 £225,334	515.5 £836,343	105.2 £179,414
2003	1590.5 £151,281	47.2 £115,858	422.3 £900,154	26.8 £51,629
2004	901.1 £875,303	102.2 £586,154	462.8 £1,229,160	21.2 £36,172
2005	925.4 £1,007,789	342.6 £220,869	315.1 £802,960	21.3 £51,175
2006	371.9 £1,053,392	19.8 £907,768	399.2 £1,096,143	1.1 £2,237
2007	278.5 £857,457	6.6 £141,597	340.9 £905,759	16.2 £32,425

### **What the Future holds for the Fishing Industry that fish in the AODA Study Area.**

There are two pieces of Fisheries Legislation that are due to come into effect over the next 3-4 years that will have a great effect on the way fishermen fish in our waters, this includes the AODA Study Area.

#### **Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009.**

Firstly there is the Marine and Coastal Access Bill this is due to receive Royal Assent on 12 November 2009.

The key areas of interest are as follows:-

#### **Marine Management Organisation.**

The Government will set up a new Marine Management Organisation (MMO) to deliver many of the objectives for the marine area. The new organisation will be a centre of marine expertise, provide a consistent and unified approach, deliver improved co-ordination of information and data and reduce administrative burdens. The integration will provide benefits from joined up delivery and economies of scale that could not be realised by placing those functions in separate organisations.

#### **Marine Planning.**

The Act creates a strategic marine planning system that clarifies our marine objective and priorities for the future, and directs decision makers and users towards more efficient, sustainable use and protection of our marine resources. The first stage of this marine planning system will be the creation of marine policy statement to create a more integrated approach to marine management and setting both our short and long-term objectives for sustainable use of the marine environment. It is then intended that the second stage will be the creation of a series of marine plans, which will implement the policy statement in specific areas, using information about spatial uses and needs in those areas.

#### **Seabed Mapping.**

Without a proper appreciation of the location of seabed resources and important features of nature conservation it is difficult to manage marine activities in sustainable manner in order to achieve the aim of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Seabed maps therefore provide a tool to help deliver integrated marine management. Marine seabed maps provide fundamental information for the sustainable management of offshore resources. The ability to visualise seabed has led to significant interest in the use of maps for nature conservation, economic development and resolving conflicts of multiple impacts on the seafloor. CEFAS is currently working on seabed mapping.

#### **Marine Licensing.**

The changes that the Act makes to the marine licensing system will result in better, more consistent licensing decisions delivered more efficiently by a system that is proportionate and easier to understand and to use. They will integrate delivery across a range of sectors and, through the creation of a Marine Management Organisation and the functions it will perform, be a vital link in the chain from planning to enforcement.

### **Marine Nature Conservation.**

The act introduces new tools for conservation of marine wildlife that together with existing ones can, halt the deterioration in the state of the UK's marine biodiversity and promote recovery where practicable, support healthy functioning and resilient marine ecosystems, ensure environmental considerations are at the heart of decision making processes, and provide mechanisms that can deliver current and future European and international conservation obligations.

### **Fisheries Management and Marine Enforcement.**

Fisheries and environmental management arrangements are strengthened by the Act so that more effective action can be taken on conserve marine ecosystems and help achieve a sustainable and profitable fisheries sector. As part of modernising inshore fisheries management in England, Sea Fisheries Committees (SFCs) will be replaced by Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs).

### **Environmental Data and Information.**

The Act highlights the importance of high quality marine data and the need for a sound evidence base for making information policy and management decisions. The MMO will provide a renewed focus and centre of expertise for the collection, storage and accessibility of up-to-date data and information relating to the marine areas. The scale of information that the MMO will need to manage will range from a UK wide basis to very local issues. It will need scientific and environmental data as well as socioeconomic data.

### **Migratory and Freshwater Fisheries.**

The Act modernises powers for the management of migratory and freshwater fisheries. In particular the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 introduces a new licensing and authorisation system for fishing activities, give the Environment Agency powers to make emergency byelaws to respond to unforeseen threats to fish stocks and allow for the introduction of a new authorisation scheme for the movement of live fish in order to better protect national and local biodiversity.

### **Coastal Access**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 enables the creation of a continuous signed and managed route around the coast plus areas of spreading room, for example beaches, dunes and cliffs, where it is appropriate to do so. The coast is very popular with people for beach activities and wider forms of recreation. There is evidence that walking is the single most popular activity along the coast. Research shows that 30% of the coast has no access. Improving access will give people the confidence and certainty that wherever they arrive at the coast there will be clear, well managed access in either direction, and they would be able to enjoy a rich and varied natural environment.

### **Coastal and Estuary Management.**

Current arrangements for co-ordinating activities in busy estuaries and other coastal areas can be complex and at times, inconsistent. There is no single overall piece of coastal legislation or management mechanism in the UK, on land, Local Authorities have a key responsibility for planning and at sea, management mainly falls to central government departments, who have traditionally followed a sectoral approach to managing activities in the marine area. It has long been thought that if we are to look at the coast in a more sustainable way, we should aim to improve co-ordination between these mechanisms and communication between all those with an interest in coastal issues. This is becoming more important as the proposals for a new system of marine planning are developed. We therefore need to ensure that there is coherence between these proposals and the different policies and management processes at work in coastal areas.

### **Reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.**

Secondly there are big changes proposed for the Common Fisheries Policy. The European Commission has set out its thoughts on these changes in a Commission Green Paper. The EU is of the opinion that the current Common Fisheries Policy has failed to address one of the fundamental problems in that there are "too many boats fishing for too few fish". In the Green Paper the EU sets out some of the reasons why fish stocks have declined and how the new CFP might overcome these. They are:-

- Over fishing for years has depleted fish stocks. There is concern that fish stocks are being over fished particularly on the younger fish so much so that fish stocks may never recover.
- Fish quotas are currently set on a Total Allowable Catch basis for each fish stock. Many countries feel that quota allocations are unfair and over generous to some. Those countries arguing for an increase in quota do so knowing that to obtain this increase will also push up the TAC and therefore permit over fishing.
- It is felt that decision making is too centralised and there should be more delegation to Member States or to Member States and the Industry. Would it be possible to devolve decision making to national or regional authorities? Should more responsibility be given to the industry so that it has greater flexibility whilst still contributing to the objectives of the CFP?
- Should Producer Organisations take more responsibility for self-management?
- Should the catching sector take more responsibility by paying for management costs, controls etc.?
- Can data collection be improved for enforcement purposes?
- How should small-scale fisheries and their links to coastal communities be protected?
- How could the Maximum Sustainable Yield commitment be implemented in mixed fisheries while avoiding discards?
- What should the main aims of Fisheries Management be? Catch limitations, control of fishing effort, how do we eliminate discards?
- Should access to the 6 to 12 mile belt be eliminated for small-scale fishing vessels and fisheries?
- How could market conditions be improved to encourage the development of fisheries as well as sustainability?
- How can fishermen and POs improve processing and distribution?
- How can the future CFP support adaptations to climate changes and to safeguard fish stocks?
- How can the CFP better promote the fishing industry's involvement in research projects?
- The new CFP would also review the financial support given to the fishing industry.
- Contrary to the current free access principle, should fishermen pay for the right to fish on the high seas under the Regional Fisheries Management Organisation?

These are many of the points highlighted in the EU Green Paper which is currently with Member States for discussion and views. It is due to be implemented into EU legislation in 2013.