



## Common Whelk Fishery

Traditionally, whelks (*Buccinum undatum*) or buckies as they are known locally, were typically fished in the western region during the closure of the velvet crab fishery in the summer months. Though, in recent years the fishery has targeted whelks from as early as February through to September, with the fishery currently subject to a closure from September to January during their breeding season. The fishery is targeted using pots and there is an increased local minimum landing size of 75mm.

Landings and effort were variable from 2000–2006 with landings around 200 tonnes. This was followed by a decrease in fishing which saw low landings until 2015 (Figure 1). Much of this change was driven by market access. Landings have subsequently increased in the period from 2016 to 2020, with 450 tonnes landed in 2020. Landings per unit effort (LPUE) have steadily increased from 2005 with high annual variability. The highest LPUE were recorded in 2017 and 2020 at a value of 2.5kg/pot, although LPUE variability continues to be high, denoted by error bars.

The areas of highest LPUE are observed around Yell, Fetlar and west of the South Mainland (Figures 2-4), exhibiting greater distribution across multiple SSMO squares than in 2019 (for example, F17, J17, K17, L11 and N12). Whelks are highly substrate-dependent and therefore occur in distinct patches, which can mean they are vulnerable to localised overfishing.

Although the fishery appears to be relatively stable at the moment, with an increasing trend in LPUE, a cautious approach may be appropriate as whelks are slow growing and late to mature.

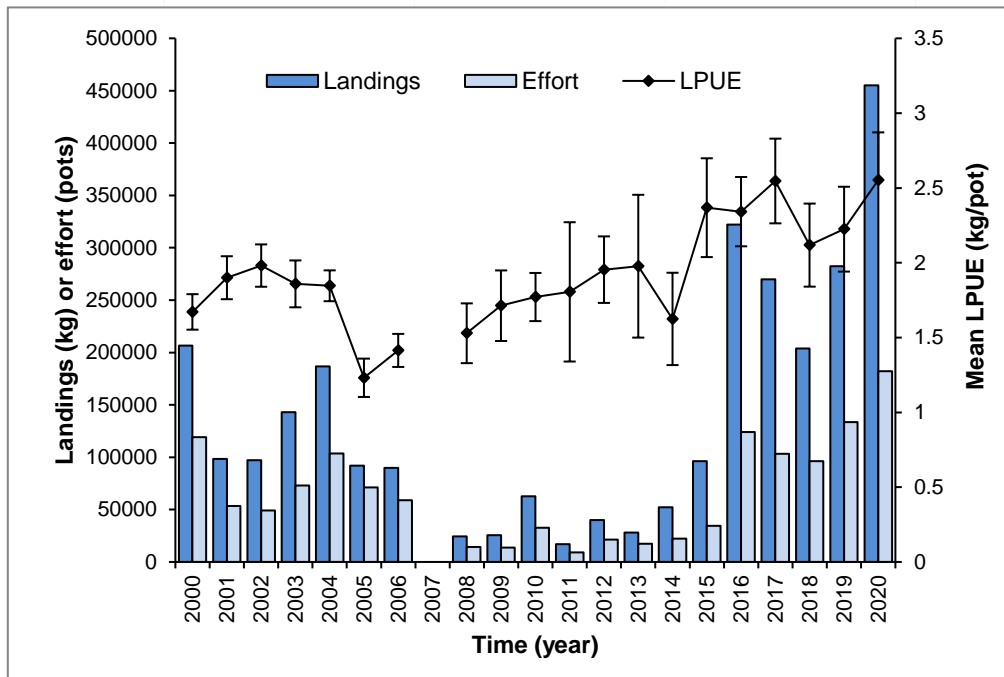


Figure 1 Total whelk landings (kg), total numbers of creels, and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

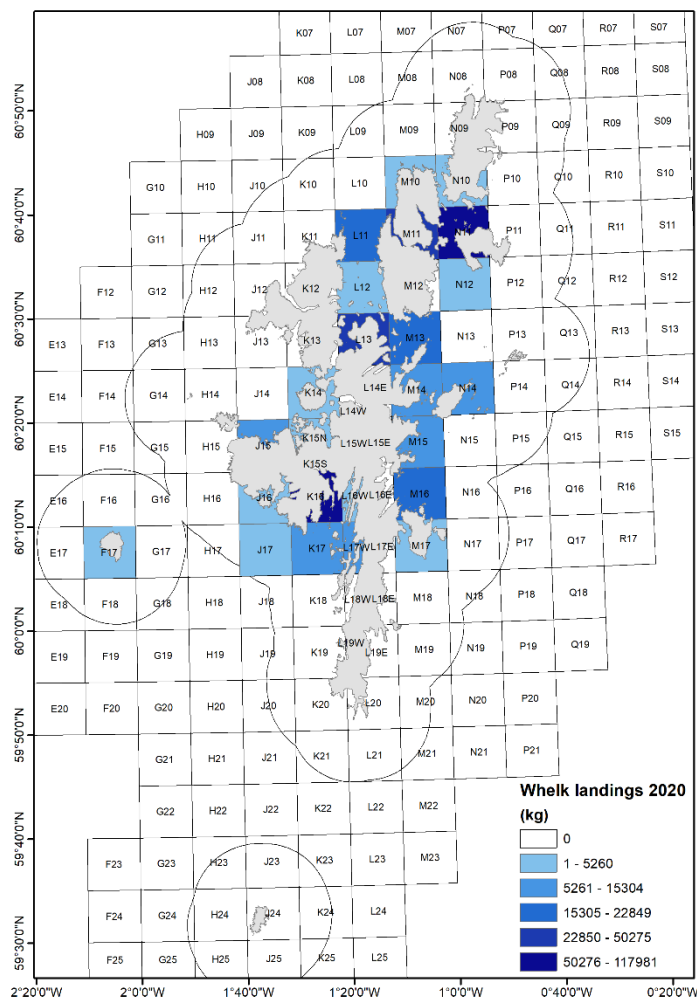


Figure 2 Geographic distribution of whelk landings per SSMO stat square in 2020.

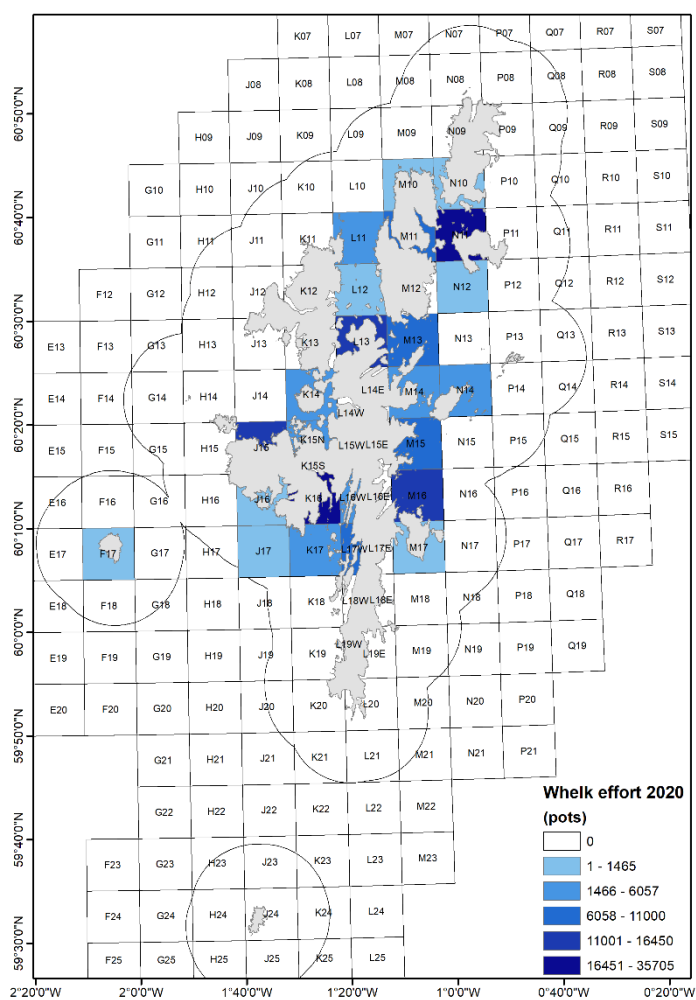


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of whelk effort per SSMO stat square in 2020.

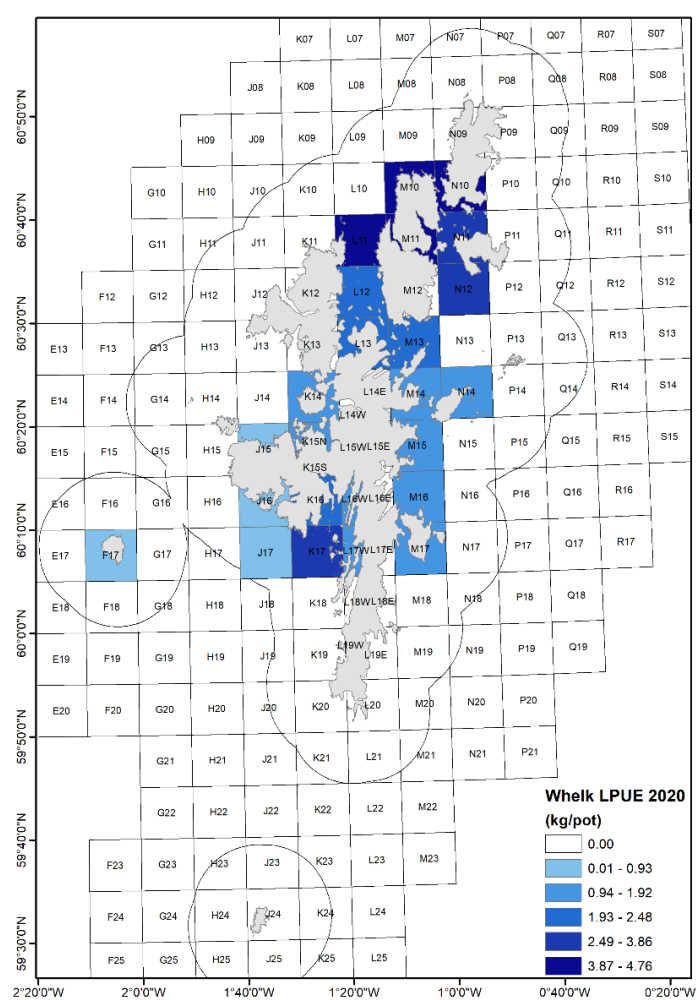


Figure 4 Geographic distribution of whelk LPUE per SSMO stat square in 2020.