

Velvet Crab Fishery

The creel fishery for velvet crab (*Necora puber*) around Shetland began in the late 1980s. The fishery is dependent on overseas markets, and therefore reliant on vivier operators to transport the live crabs. Issues have emerged in the past where landings superseded the market demand and/or vivier capacity. Currently, vivier operators are keen to maintain a regular supply, but less so during September/October as catch quality is reduced in the months following a moult period. The fishery is currently regulated via creel limitations and 8-week fishery closures during the summer months during the peak of the moult season when crabs are soft.

Since the implementation of the regulating order in 2000, effort and landings have been variable (Figure 1), initially showing an increasing trend to a peak of both landings and effort in 2009. This was followed by a period of decline; however, increases have been observed from 2019 to 2021. A peak in landings per unit effort (LPUE) was observed in 2007, with LPUE exhibiting a downward trend until 2013 (Figure 1). In looking at the overall trends since data collection began, while variable, LPUE has been relatively stable in the last 10 years following the initial peak.

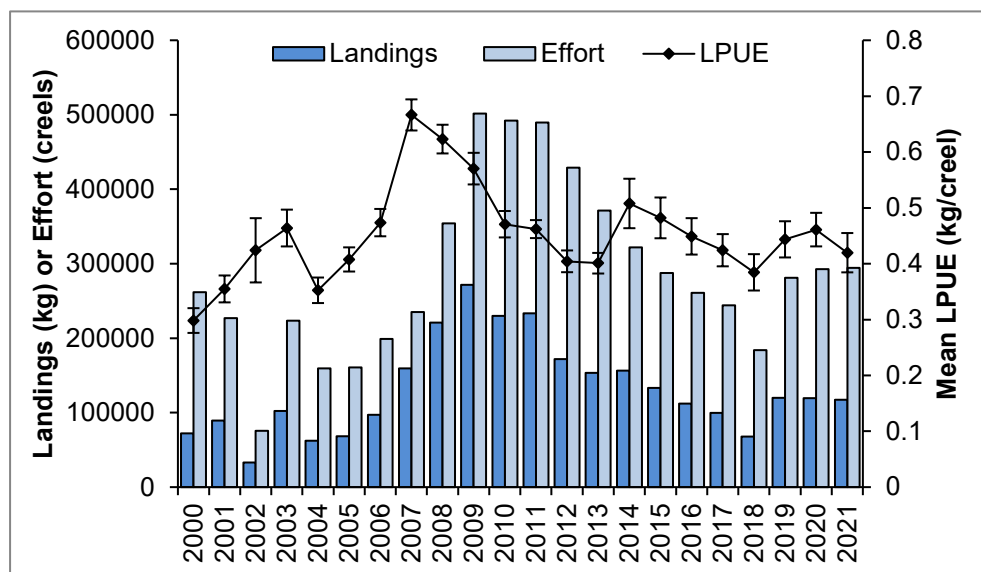


Figure 1 Total velvet crab landings (kg), total numbers of creels and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

The spatial distribution of fishing activity in 2021 is broadly similar to that observed in 2020. It can be seen from the maps (Figures 2 – 4) that the areas of highest effort and landings, concentrated around the south and east mainland, are not those which have the highest LPUE, around the north mainland, northern isles and Skerries to the east. This could indicate that fishing activity is impacting the stock in areas with higher effort but lower LPUE, however, standardised LPUE data indicates the fishery is stable at present. It should be noted that there was some disruption to the fishery in 2020 due to both Brexit and Covid.

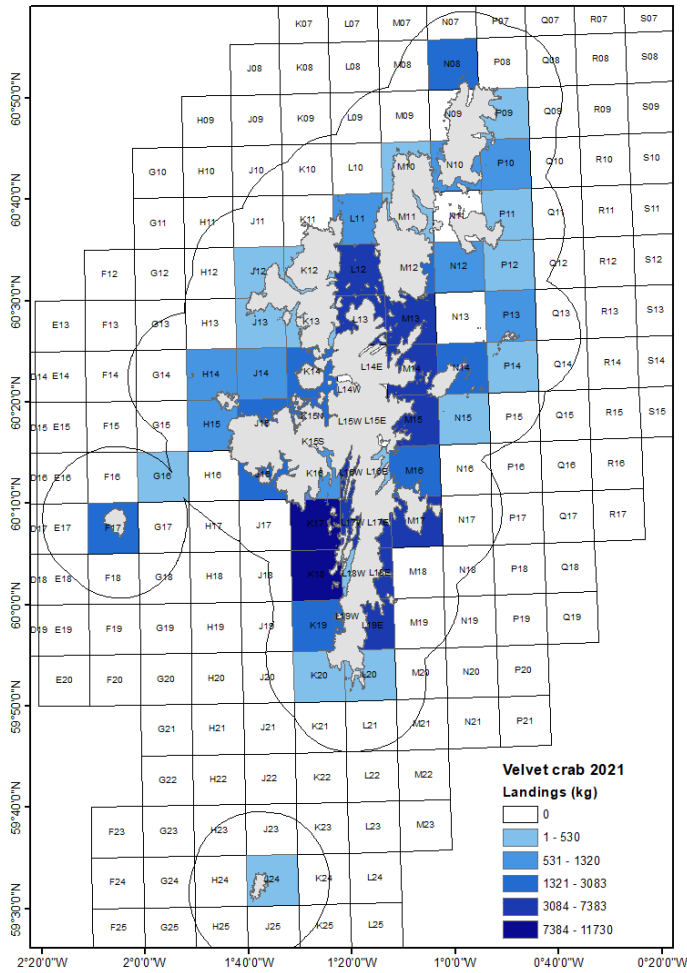


Figure 2 Geographic distribution of velvet crab landings per SSMO statistical square in 2021.

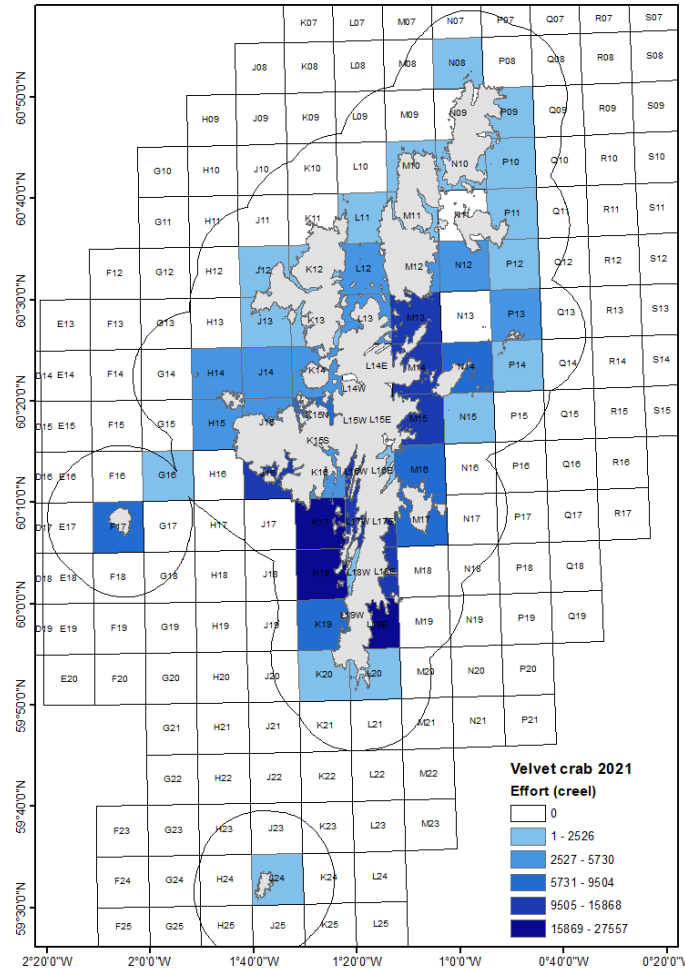


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of velvet crab effort per SSMO statistical square in 2021.

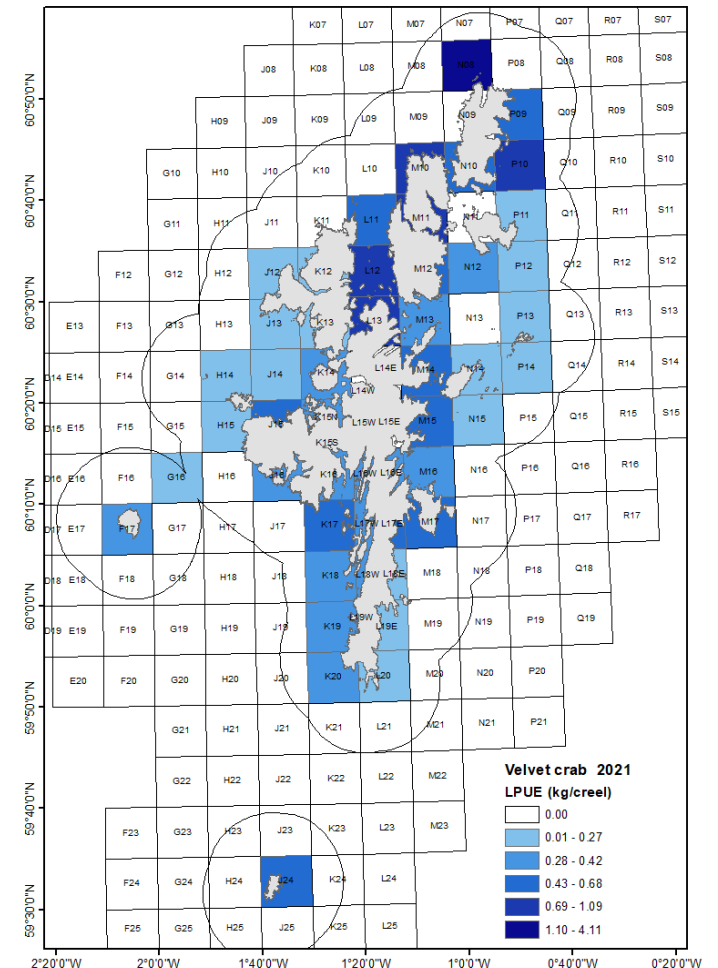


Figure 4 Geographic distribution of velvet crab LPUE per SSMO statistical square in 2021.