European Lobster Fishery

While there is some targeted creel fishing for lobsters (*Homarus gammarus*) they are largely caught as bycatch in the crab fisheries, which are regulated via creel limitations.

Data from SSMO logbooks show an initial period of decline in landings from 2000 to a low of around six tonnes in 2005 (based on a mean lobster weight of 0.8 kg; Figure 1). This was followed by a period of increase to 36 tonnes in 2017, followed by a drop to just below 25 tonnes in 2018 - 2022. The increase in landings observed between 2007 and 2017 coincided with a period of increased observations of undersized lobsters entering the fishery.

Effort, calculated as the total number of creels fished where lobsters were recorded in the landings data, has shown a steady decrease since a peak in 2009. However, effort has risen between 2019 and 2021, equivalent to 2017 levels (Figure 1). The decrease in LPUE observed between 2017 and 2019 was marked and could be representative of a return to lower levels of recruitment following the increased recruitment observed in 2007-17. Landings per unit effort (LPUE) remains well above the mean at 8.9kg/100 creels.
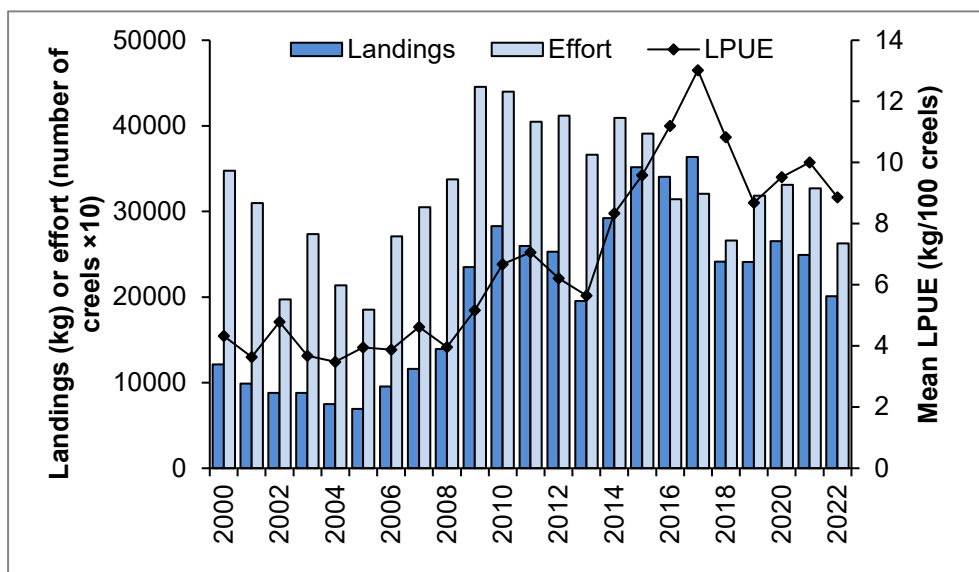

Figure 1 Total European lobster landings (kg), total numbers of creels and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

The lobster fishery is widespread (Figures 2-4), with areas of the highest LPUE observed around the north isles and North Mainland. Whilst overall distribution remains similar between years, inter-annual variation in the fishery result in fluctuations around Foula and Fair Isle.
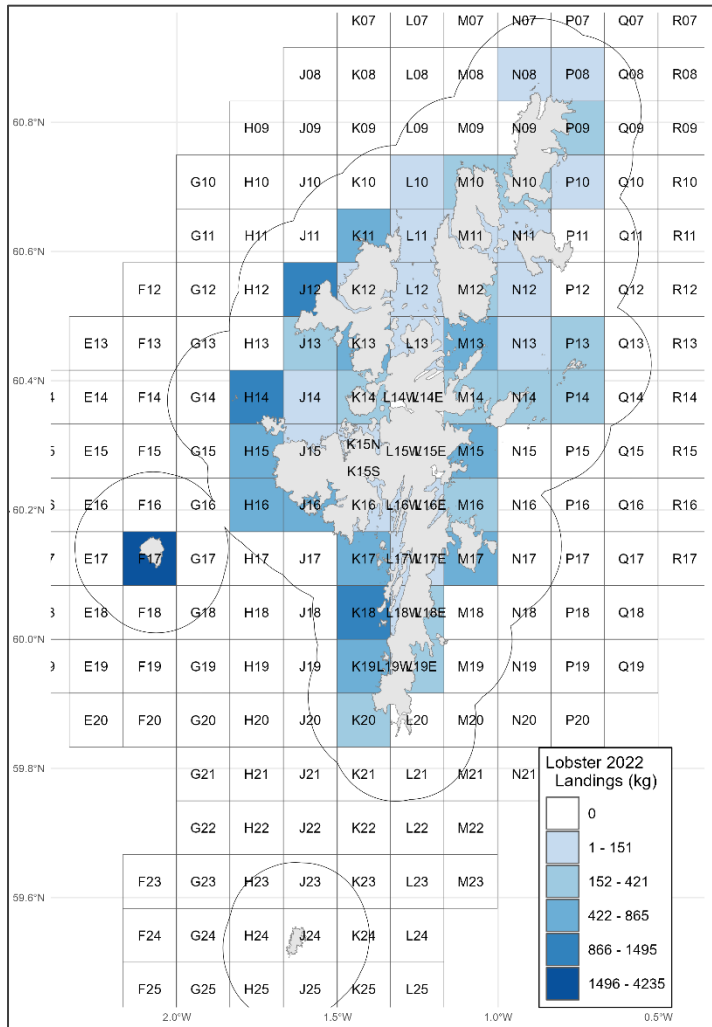
Figure 2 Geographic distribution of European Lobster landings (kg) per SSMO statistical square in 2022.
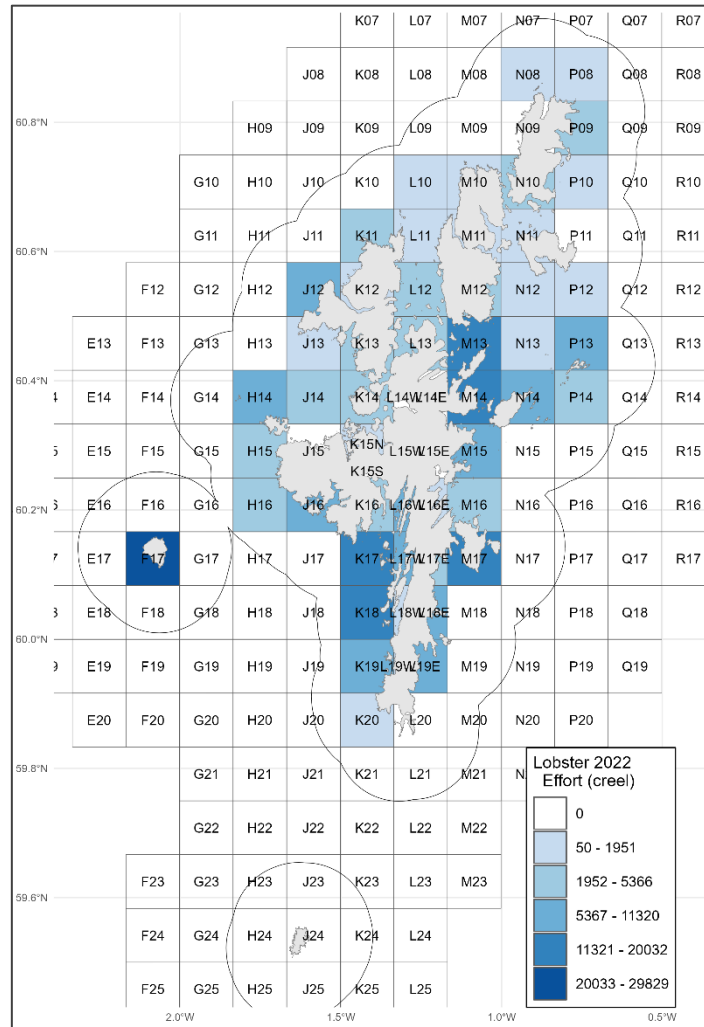
Figure 3 Geographic distribution of European Lobster effort (creels) per SSMO statistical square in 2022.
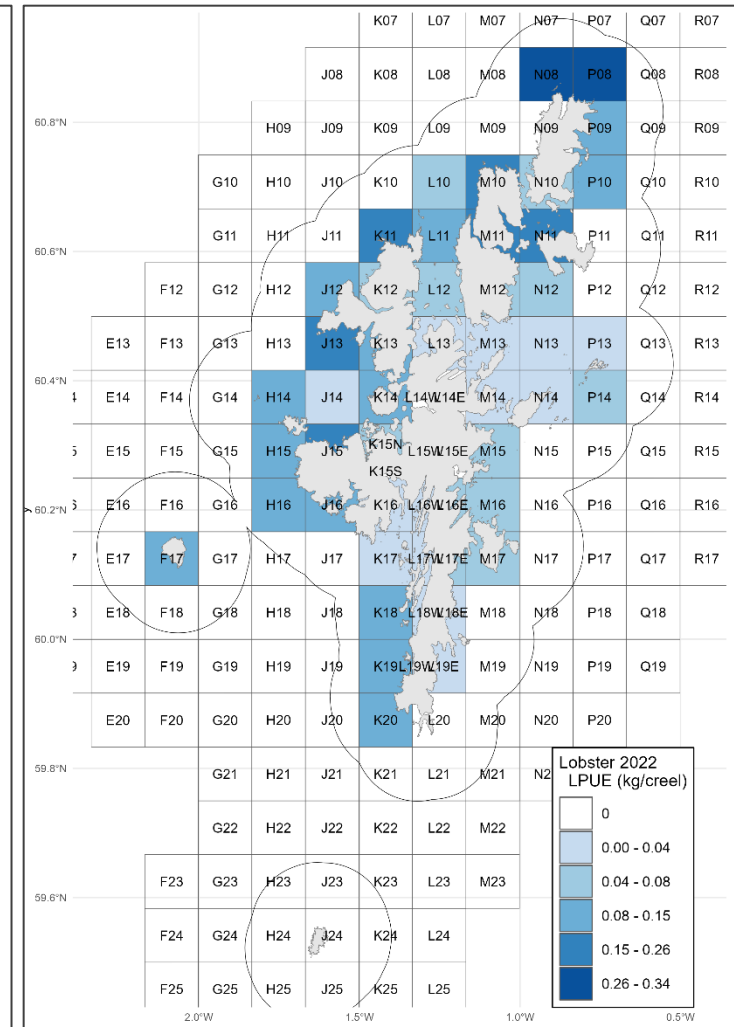
Figure 4 Geographic distribution of European Lobster LPUE (kg/creel) per SSMO statistical square in 2022.