

Velvet Crab Fishery

The creel fishery for velvet crab (*Necora puber*) around Shetland was established in the late 1980s. This fishery heavily relies on overseas markets and thus depends on vivier operators for transporting live crabs. Past issues have arisen when landings exceeded market demand and/or vivier capacity. Currently, vivier operators prioritize maintaining a regular supply, although less so during September/October when catch quality diminishes in the months following the moult period. The fishery is regulated via creel limitations and two 4-week closures during the summer peak of the moult season when crabs are soft.

Since the implementation of the regulating order in 2000, effort and landings have shown variability (Figure 1), initially increasing to a peak in both landings and effort in 2009. This was followed by a period of decline, although increases have been observed from 2018 to 2021. A peak in landings per unit effort (LPUE) was observed in 2007, with LPUE declining until 2013 (Figure 1). Overall trends since 2000 indicate that while LPUE has been variable, it has remained relatively stable in the last 10 years following the initial peak. Currently, LPUE is increasing above the 2014 value, reaching 0.53 kg/creel.

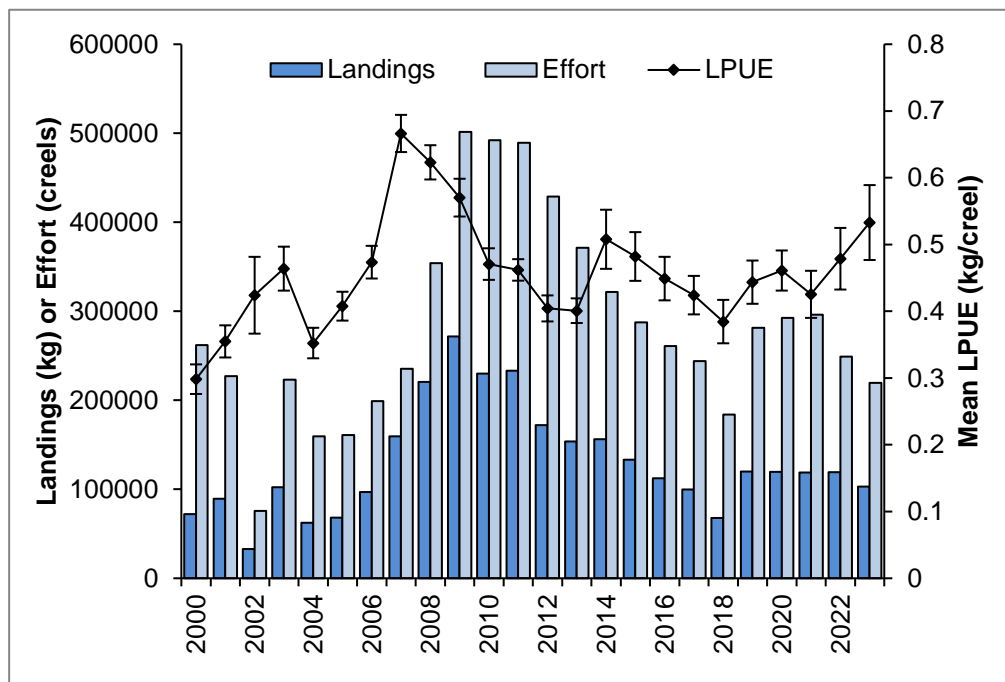


Figure 1 Total velvet crab landings (kg), total numbers of creels and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

The spatial distribution of fishing activity in 2023 is broadly similar to that observed in 2022. 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 North Mainland, North Isles and Skerries to the east. This could indicate that fishing activity is impacting the stock in areas with higher effort but lower LPUE. Nevertheless, standardised LPUE data indicates the fishery is stable at present.

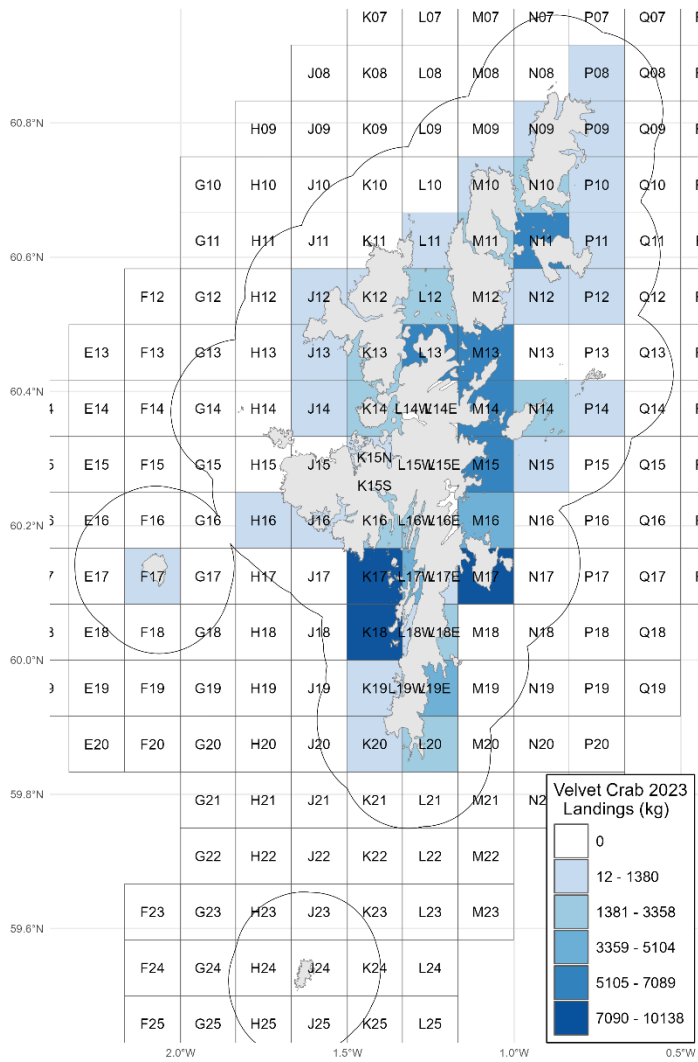


Figure 2 Geographic distribution of velvet crab landings per SSMO statistical square in 2023.

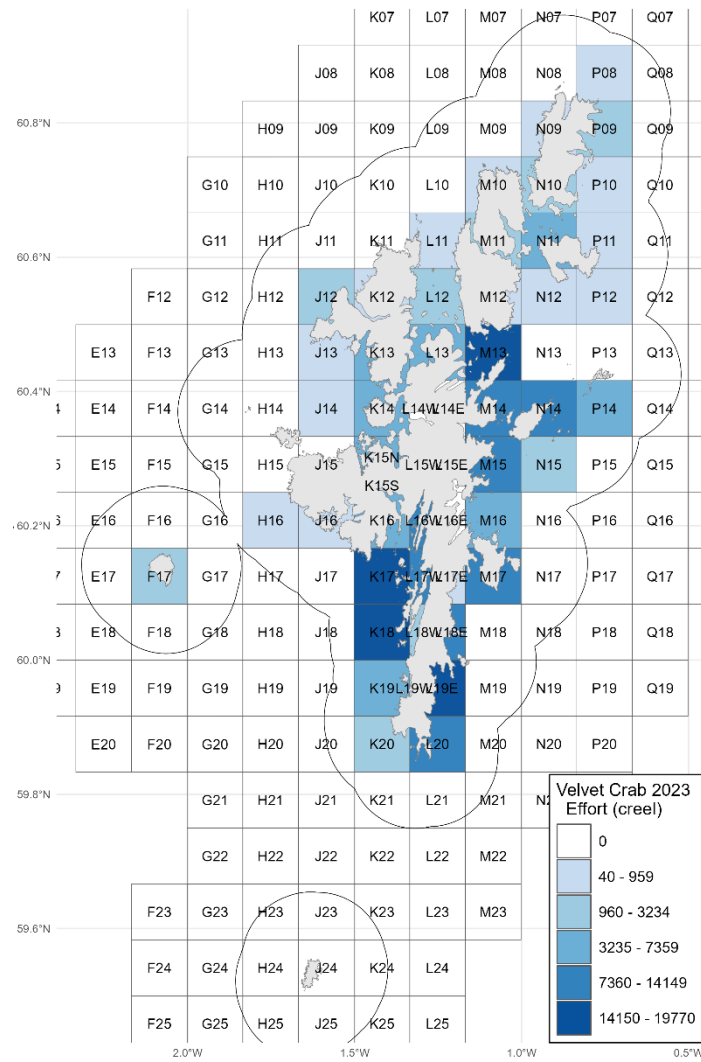


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of velvet crab effort per SSMO statistical square in 2023.

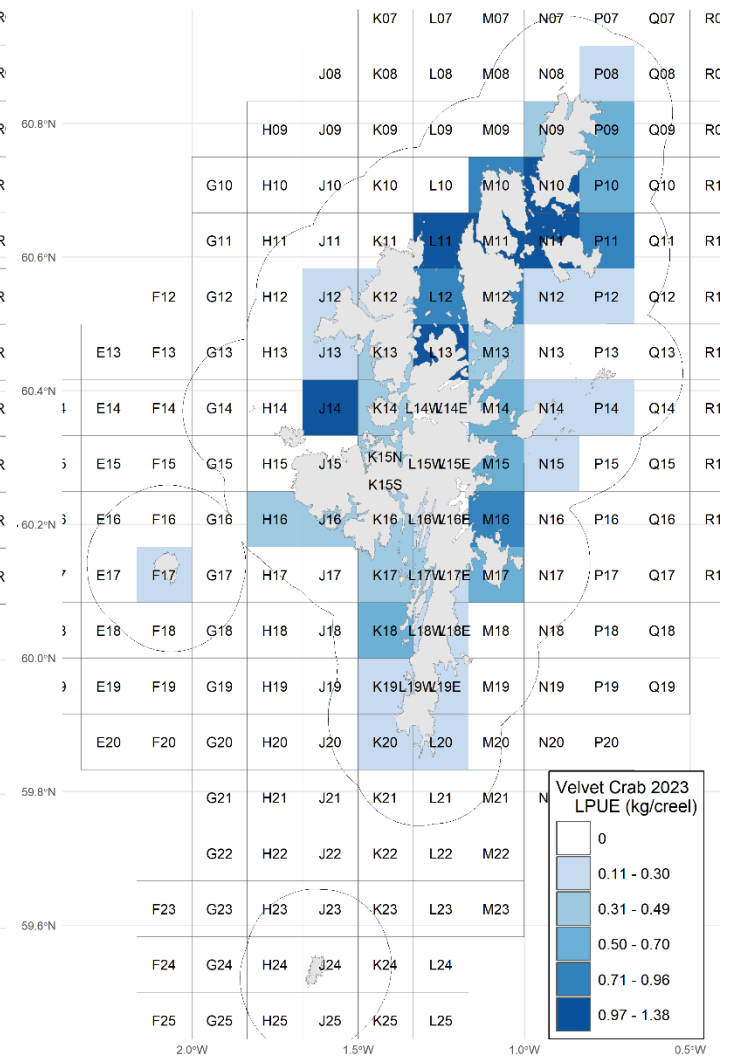


Figure 4 Geographic distribution of velvet crab LPUE per SSMO statistical square in 2023.