

Common Whelk Fishery

Traditionally, whelks (*Buccinum undatum*), locally known as buckies, were primarily fished in the western region during the closure of the velvet crab fishery in the summer months. In recent years the fishery extended from February to September before a restriction was applied last year with the support of the fishermen. This limits the catching season to five months from February to the end of June. The fishery employs pots for harvesting, with a local minimum landing size of 75mm, in contrast to the national MLS of 45mm.

From 2000 to 2006, landings and effort in the fishery exhibited variability, with landings around 200 tonnes. This period was followed by decreased fishing activity, resulting in low landings until 2015 (Figure 1), largely influenced by shifts in market access. Subsequently, landings have fluctuated between 200 and 460 tonnes between 2016 and 2021, with a prominent peak observed in 2020 at 460 tonnes. Landings per unit effort (LPUE) have displayed an overall increasing trend since 2005, albeit with some interannual variability, and has stabilised in recent years. The mean LPUE data for 2024 recorded the highest value in the fishery's history, reaching 2.8 kg/pot as a result of increased landings and decreased effort compared to the previous year.

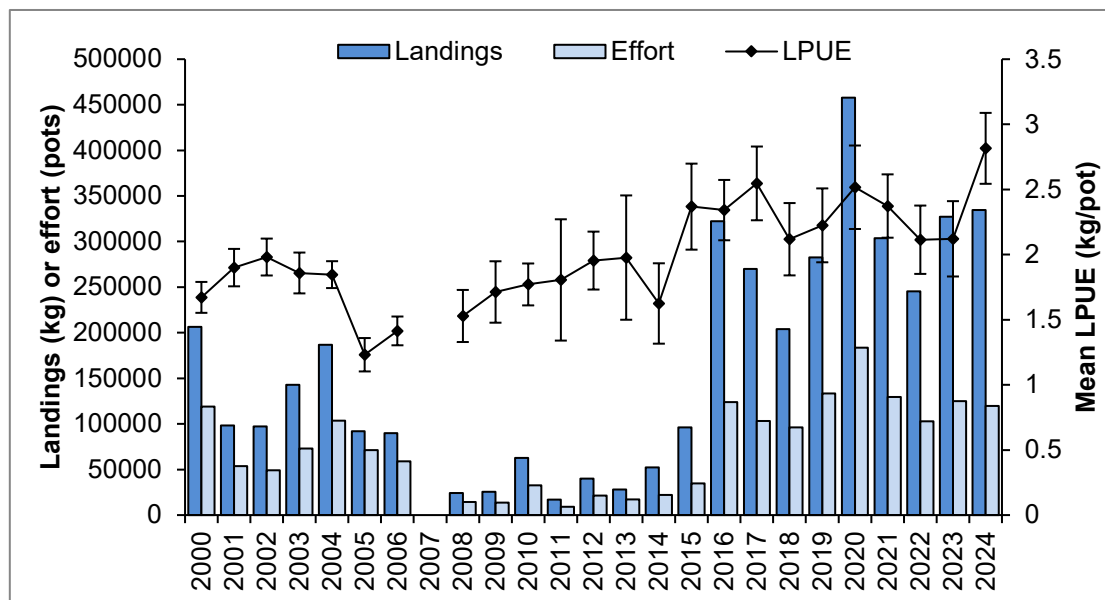


Figure 1 Total whelk landings (kg), total numbers of creels, and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

The areas with the highest LPUE are consistently observed around Yell and Fetlar (Figures 2-4), mirroring the distribution of historical landings and effort. Whelks, being highly substrate-dependent, tend to aggregate in distinct patches, rendering them susceptible to localised overfishing.

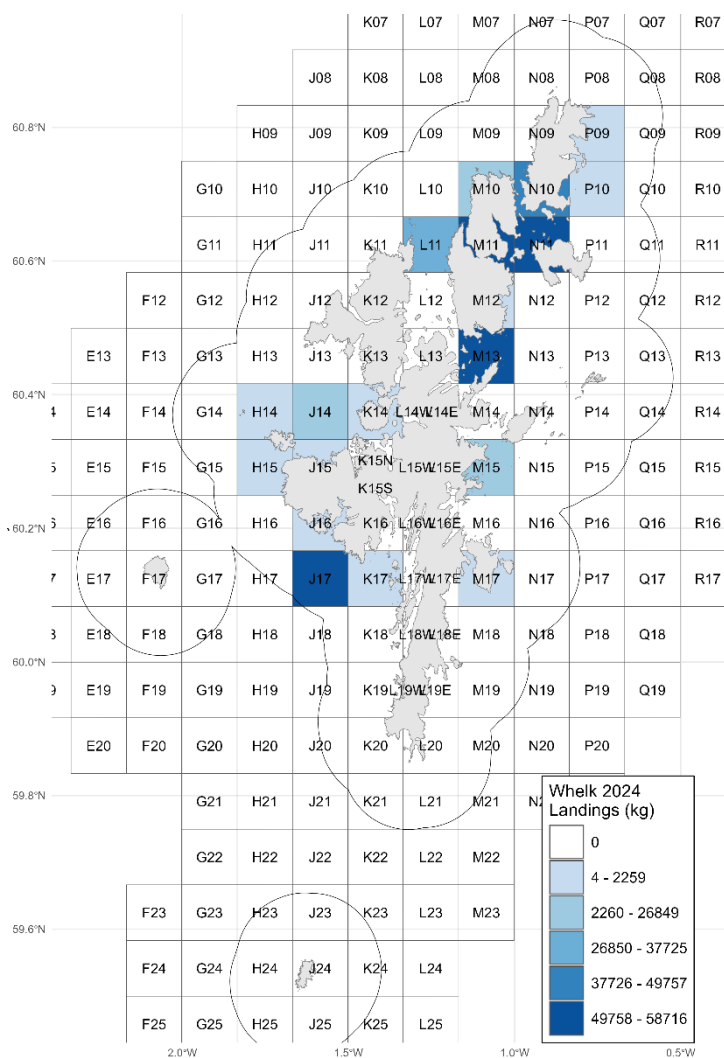


Figure 2 Geographic distribution of whelk landings per SSMO stat square in 2024.

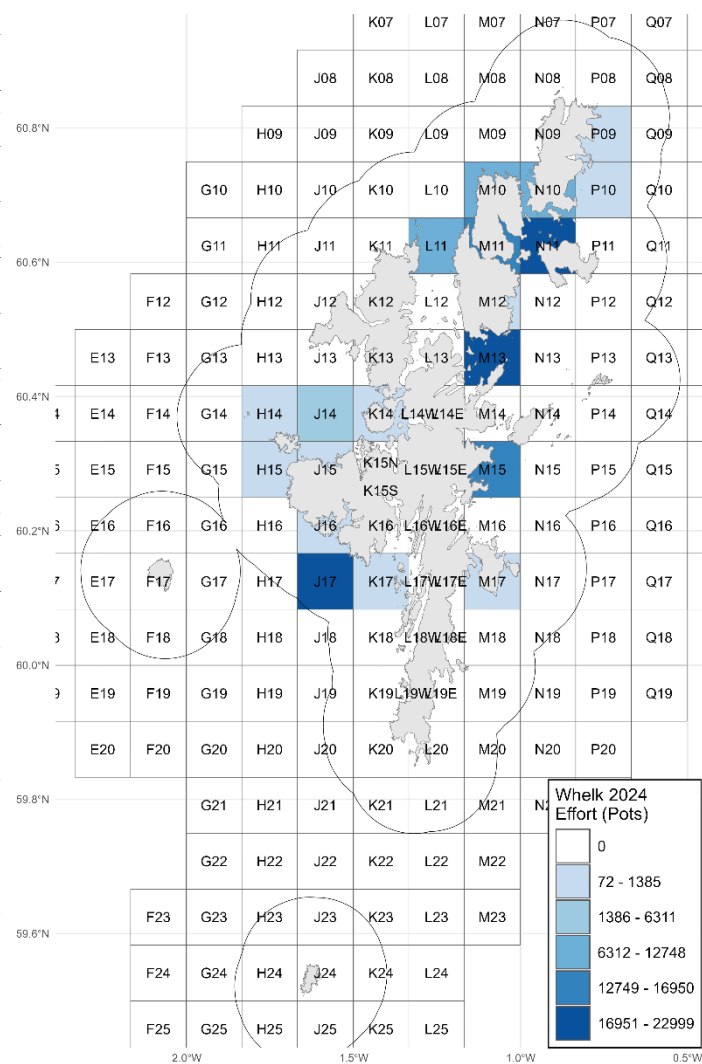


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of whelk effort per SSMO stat square in 2024.

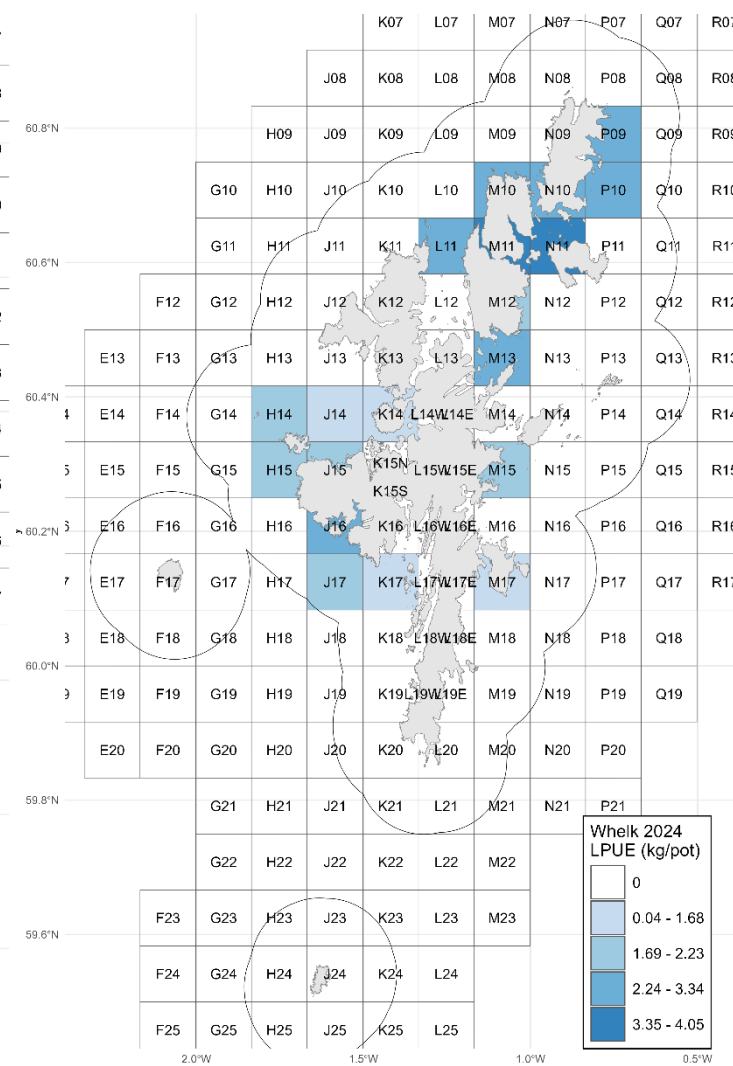


Figure 4 Geographic distribution of whelk LPUE per SSMO stat square in 2024