

European Lobster Fishery

While there is some targeted creel fishing for lobsters (*Homarus gammarus*), they are primarily caught as bycatch in the crab fisheries, which are regulated via creel limitations. Data from SSMO logbooks depict an initial decline in lobster landings from 2000 to a low of around six tonnes in 2005 (based on a mean lobster weight of 0.8 kg; Figure 1). Subsequently, there was a period of increase to 36 tonnes in 2017, followed by a decrease to just below 25 tonnes from 2018 to 2022. The rise in landings observed between 2007 and 2017 coincided with 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 exhibited a steady decrease since peaking in 2009. However, effort increased between 2019 and 2021, reaching levels equivalent to those seen in 2017 (Figure 1). The notable decrease in LPUE observed between 2017 and 2019 may indicate a return to lower levels of recruitment to the fishery following high numbers of smaller lobsters reported by fishers between 2007 and 2017. Despite this decline, LPUE in recent years has increased and remain well above the mean of 7.1 kg/100 creels, sitting at 11.1 kg/100 creels in 2024.

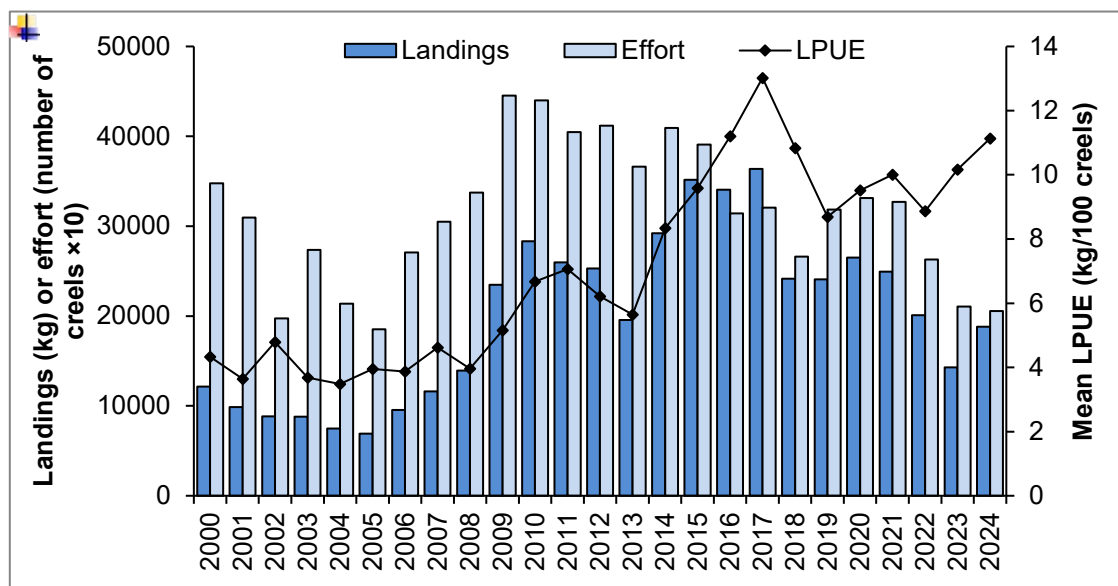


Figure 1 Total European lobster landings (kg), total numbers of creels and the average LPUE obtained from SSMO logbook data with 95% confidence intervals shown.

The lobster fishery is widespread (Figures 2-4) with landings and effort highest off Scalloway and around Lerwick. Areas of highest LPUE are observed around the north isles and Northwest Mainland. Whilst overall distribution remains similar between years, inter-annual variation in the fishery results in variations around Foula and Fair Isle. For some areas there is a limited amount of fishing activity and therefore data, and this can inflate the mean LPUE values, as is seen around Fair Isle.

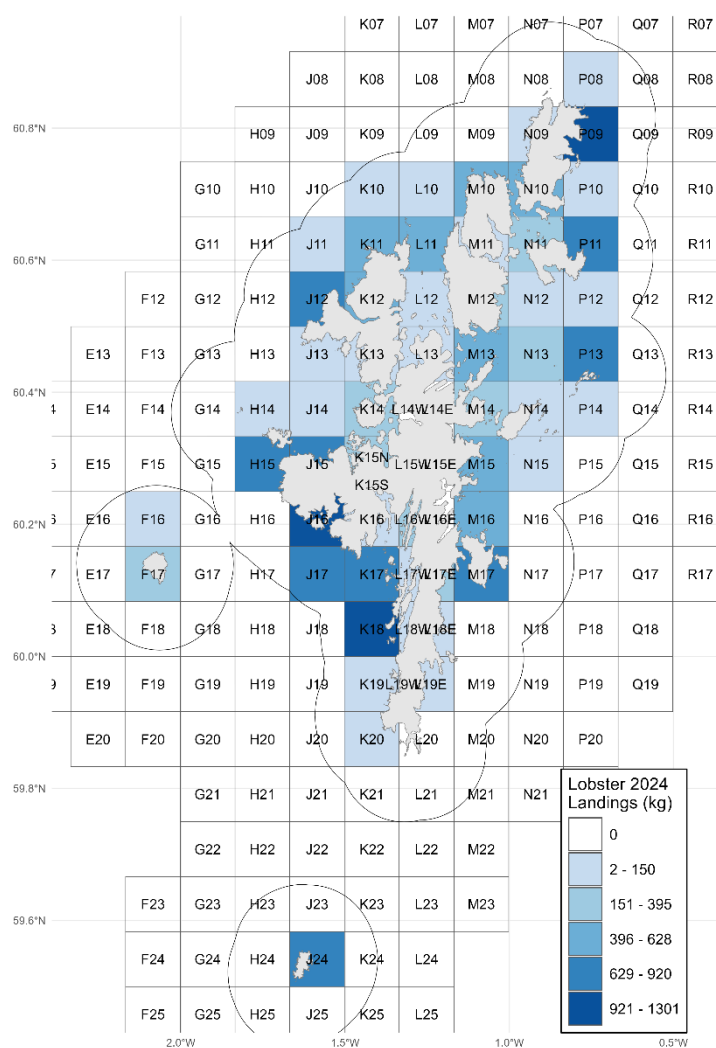


Figure 2 Geographic distribution of European Lobster landings (kg) per SSMO statistical square in 2024.

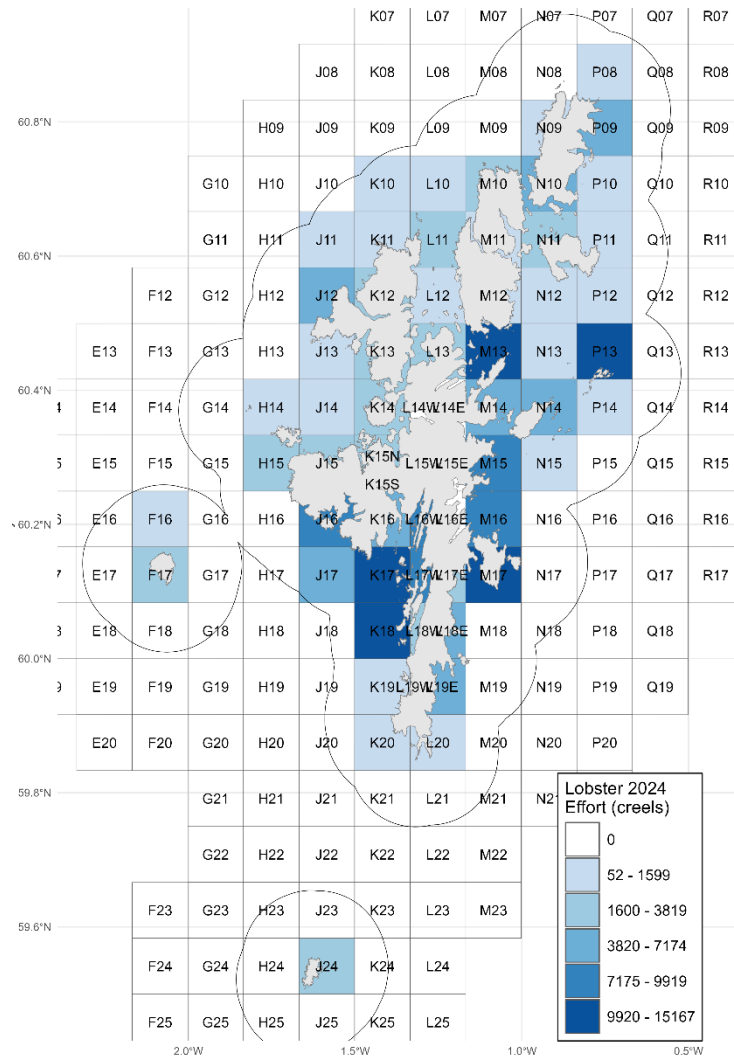


Figure 3 Geographic distribution of European Lobster effort (creels) per SSMO statistical square in 2024.

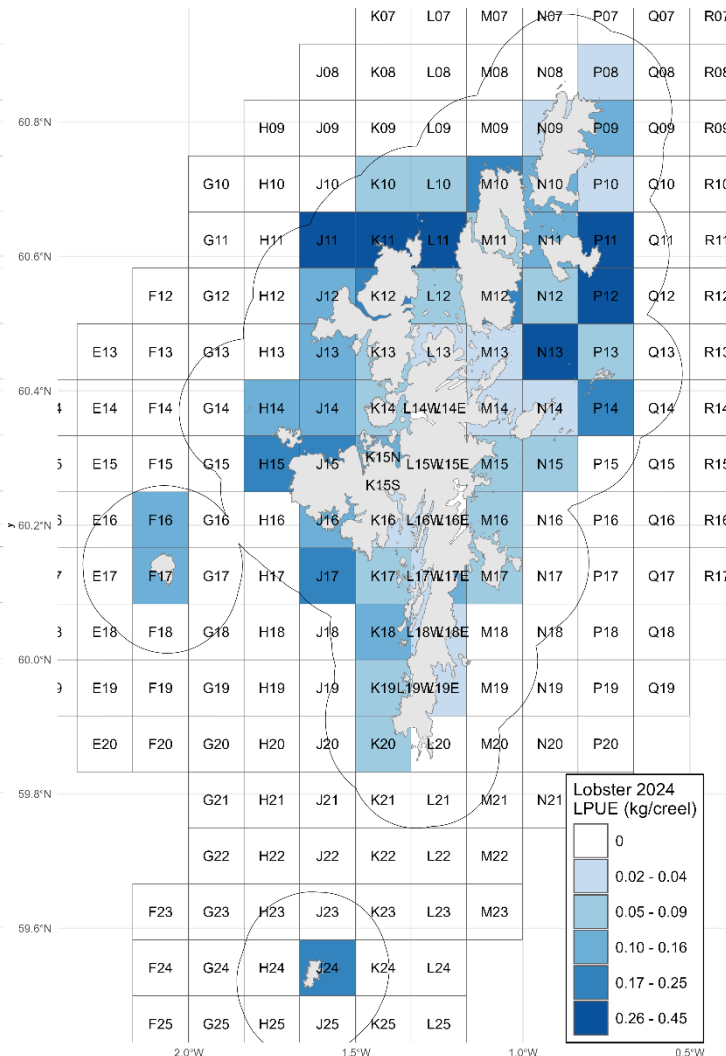


Figure 4 Geographic distribution of European Lobster LPUE (kg/creel) per SSMO statistical square in 2024.