

Northumberland IFCA Edible Crab (*Cancer pagurus*) Fishery Status Report 2026

Landings

Landings data are collected monthly from shellfish catch returns submitted by permitted vessels to NIFCA. These returns provide detailed information on fishing effort and landings of key commercial species, offering valuable insights into trends within the NIFCA district. A summary of key statistics from the edible crab (*Cancer pagurus*) fishery is presented in the Multiple Indicator Framework (MIF) (Table 1).

Landings per unit effort (LPUE), measured as kilograms per 100 pots hauled (kg/100 pots), is a key indicator of seasonal and temporal trends in the fishery (Figure 1). LPUE for the edible crab fishery shows seasonal variation, peaking in winter (November–February) when effort typically shifts offshore. Since 2011, LPUE has fluctuated, peaking in 2017 before displaying a gradual decline until 2023. LPUE then increased slightly in 2024, and again in 2025 to 29.17 kg/100 pots. This contradicts the wider trend across the brown crab fisheries in the UK, where widespread declines in LPUE have been reported, particularly along the south coast of England. The number of active vessels remained the same in 2025 (65) as in 2024, but overall effort (pots hauled) increased by 8% (~170,000).

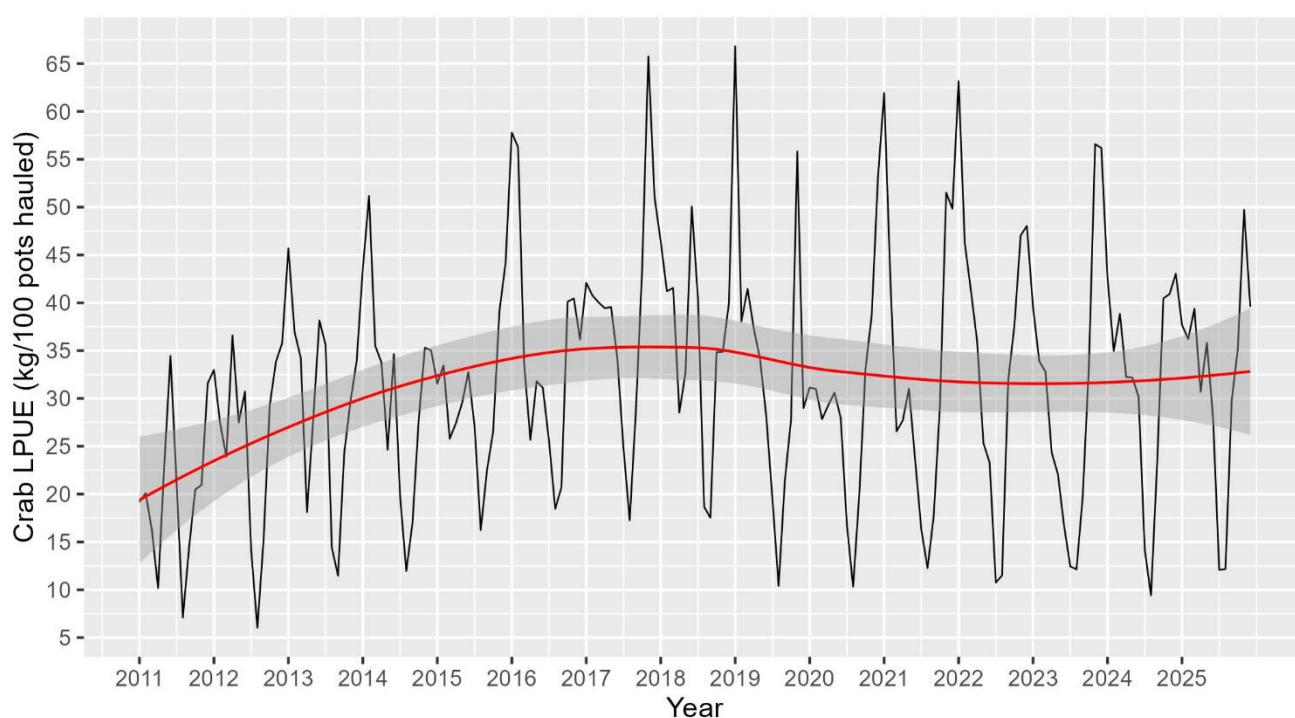


Figure 1: Monthly edible crab landings per unit effort (LPUE) data 2011-2025, including a moving average across the same period (red) with a 95% confidence interval (grey shading), highlighting the seasonal variation in LPUE.

In 2025, landed weight increased by 11% to 669 tonnes (Figure 2) with effort increasing by 8%. Despite this increase, the landed value in 2025 fell by 3% to £1.38 million from £1.42 million in 2024. Similarly to LPUE, landed weight peaked in 2017 but has declined steadily since. Landed weight

into the NIFCA district accounted for around 9% of total edible crab landings into English Ports in 2025, up from 6% in 2024.

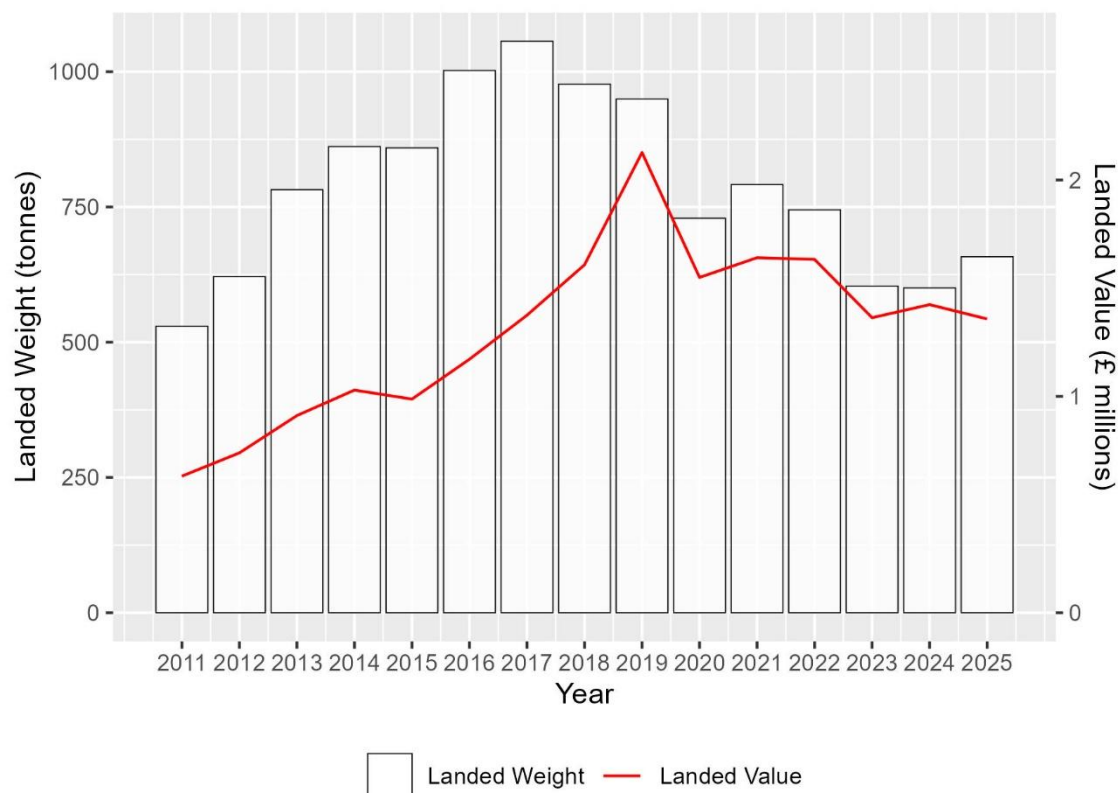


Figure 2: Edible crab landed weight and landed value taken from permit returns and officer reports for price/kg with the estimated value of landed weight from the fishery annually.

Biometric Data

Biometric data are collected through a combination of offshore sampling on board fishing vessels, targeted fleet sampling at sea, and shore-based sampling of landed catches.

Data collected includes information on animal size to better understand the distribution of the population, both under and over the minimum conservation reference size (MCRS). Since 2018, 21,487 edible crabs have been measured as part of this work. A summary of sample numbers, average size, and maximum size is provided in Table 1.

Post-hoc Fisher's exact tests did not identify any significant changes in the size distributions for male edible crab between those sampled in 2025 when compared to 2020-24 (adjusted $p > 0.05$). However, post-hoc Fisher's exact tests performed for female edible crab for the same period identified a number of significant changes in the proportional size-frequency distribution of female brown crab between 2025 and the amalgamated 2020-24 data. The proportion of females increased significantly across several of the smaller size classes from 85-130mm (all adjusted $p > 0.05$), while significant decreases occurred across the larger size classes from 135-180mm (all adjusted $p > 0.05$). This indicates a shift towards a greater proportion of smaller females in the 2025 sample and is consistent with the observed decline in female median size above the MCRS (Figure 3).

This pattern is also evident in Figure 4, where no notable change in male median size is observed. In contrast, the median size of female edible crab sampled above the MCRS shows an overall declining trend. Quantile regression identified a significant decline in the median size of female edible crab above the MCRS over the study period, with median size decreasing by approximately 1.33mm per year. The observed shift towards smaller female size classes may indicate a greater representation of smaller individuals in the sampled population. However, it is unclear whether this pattern is driven by increased mortality of larger females associated with fishing pressure, changes in recruitment, or other demographic and sampling processes.

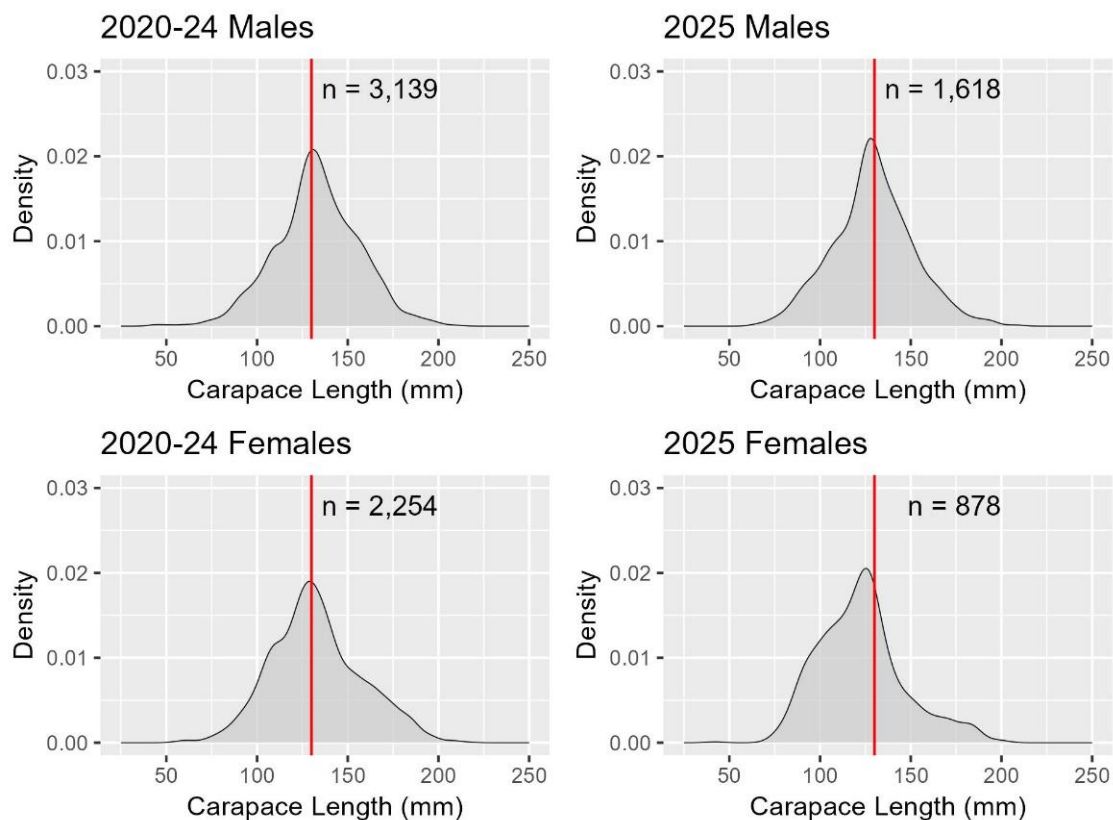


Figure 3: Amalgamated size distribution density plots of edible crab measured during offshore surveys between 2020-2024, compared to size distributions observed during offshore surveys in 2025, with the MCRS of 130mm indicated in red.

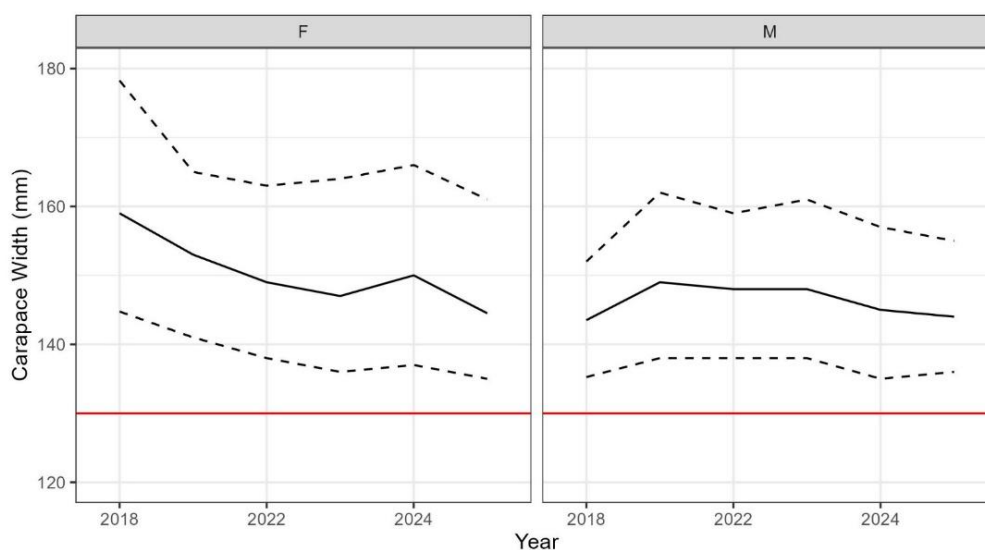


Figure 4: Median animal size of animals measured above the MCRS during offshore surveys. Dashed lines denote the 95% upper and lower confidence intervals. The red line indicates the 130mm MCRS.

Table 1: Edible crab (*Cancer pagurus*) multiple indicator framework.

Fishery Overview	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Value Ref	Data Source
Total Landings (NIFCA)	861.7	859.3	1,002.3	1,056.6	977.1	949.5	729.2	791.5	744.7	603.7	600.5	668.6	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Amble Landings	281.4	175.7	205.4	241.2	213.9	163.7	115.4	138.7	91.3	73.23	83.02	118.53	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Blyth Landings	112.6	105.0	161.8	100.9	92.8	160.7	124.6	157.9	161.2	120.31	42.88	58.85	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Burnmouth Landings	112.9	137.1	138.5	100.8	126.3	125.0	85.8	75.3	60.1	46.29	60.04	24.17	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Holy Island Landings	105.0	167.1	253.2	269.8	200.1	196.5	168.0	133.1	138.2	116.43	125.06	140.53	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Seahouses Landings	133.7	159.5	122.4	196.3	190.9	185.7	137.3	151.4	149.2	127.07	149.64	171.10	Tonnes	NIFCA Returns
Total Effort (Pots Hauled)	3.14	3.02	3.12	2.91	2.89	3.12	2.75	2.77	2.47	2.38	2.10	2.29	Million	NIFCA Returns
Total Effort (Pots Set)	37.98	36.58	33.80	34.39	35.94	37.74	39.64	39.70	35.71	33.48	28.30	30.32	Thousand	NIFCA Returns
Q1 Catch Distribution (% of Annual Total)	26	19	27	26	23	32	19	27	26	25	23	23	Q1 %	NIFCA Returns
Q2 Catch Distribution (% of Annual Total)	26	27	21	22	25	25	20	20	21	21	26	26	Q2 %	NIFCA Returns
Q3 Catch Distribution (% of Annual Total)	23	26	25	23	28	21	24	21	21	22	19	22	Q3 %	NIFCA Returns
Q4 Catch Distribution (% of Annual Total)	25	28	28	29	24	22	37	33	32	32	32	29	Q4 %	NIFCA Returns
Primary Reference Points	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Value Ref	Data Source
Mean LPUE	27.47	28.35	32.14	36.30	33.78	30.48	26.51	28.60	30.21	25.31	28.53	29.17	KG/100ph	NIFCA Returns
Economic	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Value Ref	Data Source
Average Annual Price	1.19*	1.15*	1.17*	1.30*	1.65*	2.25	2.08	2.06	2.19	2.24	2.37	2.05	£/kg	NIFCA IFCO Reports*
Gross Catch Value	1.03	0.99	1.18	1.39	1.61	2.14	1.55	1.64	1.63	1.36	1.42	£1.38	£ Million	NIFCA Returns
No. Active Vessels	80	75	70	73	85	74	89	82	77	69	65	65	#	NIFCA Returns
No. Employment	168**	158**	147**	153**	179**	155**	187**	172**	162**	114	113	113	#	NIFCA IFCO Reports
Biometric	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Value Ref	Data Source
Number of Animals Measured	x	x	x	x	143	12,993	692	44	1,790	1,798	1,530	2,497	#	NIFCA Survey
Average Carapace Length M (mm)	x	x	x	x	132	136	138	83	139	130	136	129	mm	NIFCA Survey
Average Carapace Length F (mm)	x	x	x	x	156	141	139	87	140	126	138	123	mm	NIFCA Survey
Max Carapace Length M (mm)	x	x	x	x	191	207	200	158	211	206	212	210	mm	NIFCA Survey
Max Carapace Length F (mm)	x	x	x	x	207	210	207	160	210	208	217	201	mm	NIFCA Survey
Sex Ratio (% Female)	x	x	x	x	62.2	49.1	39.9	50.0	45.2	40.2	37.4	35.2	%	NIFCA Survey

*This was taken from MMO landings data but has not changed to IFCO reports to allow for more region-specific figures.

**This is calculated by using an approximate crew number of 2.1 per vessel throughout the district. This is taken from a 2019 Effort Report by officers.