The Oyster in the News – June 2025

In June 2025, the European flat oyster made its return to the North Sea, norovirus was closely monitored, British oyster farmers saw new export opportunities, and the iconic oyster vessel YE-132 *Vertrouwen* was decommissioned. Below is an overview of the key developments.

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Ecological Recovery: The Flat Oyster Returns

Along the Belgian and Dutch North Sea coasts, the European flat oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) is slowly making a comeback. In the Voordelta, ARK Rewilding and Ørsted released millions of young oysters into biodegradable cages, attached to recycled shells. This initiative aims to help restore the once-vast oyster reefs. In Belgian waters, a fishing ban came into effect on 1 June around newly placed oyster structures, giving the young oysters a safe environment to grow.

Norovirus and Warm Weather Increase Risks of Oyster Consumption

June 2025 was exceptionally warm, with Belgium recording an average temperature of 19.3°C — the second warmest June since records began in 1833. Such temperature rises have a direct impact on the oyster industry: oysters are sensitive to warmer waters, which can promote the growth of pathogens such as norovirus.

Norovirus is a highly contagious stomach bug that can be transmitted through raw or undercooked shellfish. As filter feeders, oysters can accumulate viruses from contaminated water. As a result, food safety measures were stepped up in June 2025. In the UK, producers such as the Whitstable Oyster Company used advanced qPCR tests that detect viral presence within 24 hours — a method recognised by food safety authorities like the EFSA.

With warmer summers and increased recreational water use, rigorous monitoring is becoming more critical. For consumers, this means extra caution is needed when eating raw oysters during warm months — especially outside regulated supply chains.

New Trade Opportunities for British Farmers

After years of post-Brexit trade hurdles, British oyster farmers are seeing renewed opportunities. A relaxed trade agreement between the UK and EU has reopened access to European markets. Producers like Tom Haward of Mersea Island are hopeful about exporting to France, Belgium, and the Netherlands once again — potentially marking a turning point for the struggling sector.

End of an Era in Yerseke

In February, the YE-132 *Vertrouwen*, a 100-year-old oyster vessel from Yerseke, was dismantled. Owner Hans Verschuure stepped down due to health reasons. Built in 1923, the vessel was a long-standing icon of oyster culture in the Eastern Scheldt. Its decommissioning marks the end of a maritime era and raises concerns about preserving sailing heritage.

Conclusion

June showed that oysters are more than a delicacy. From ecological restoration to cross-border trade and cultural heritage, the oyster symbolises the resilience of marine ecosystems, the role of science in food safety, and the importance of honouring tradition. As historic ships disappear, new life is quietly returning beneath the waves — a powerful comeback in the making.