

RIVER DART NON BENEFICIARY GROUP.

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Minutes of Meeting in Dartmouth 16th April 2009.

1. Present

Councillor John Baron (Chairman)	JB	Dittisham
Councillor Terry Connolly	TC	Ashprington
Mr John Dingle	JD	D & K Society
Captain Philip Gibbon (Secretary)	PG	Anthony Steen MP
Councillor Jonathan Hawkins	JH	Kingswear, SHDC, DCC
Councillor Ian Longrigg	IL	SHDC
Councillor Richard Rendle	RR	Dartmouth
Councillor Ian Slatter	IL	Totnes
Councillor Graham Sowerby	GS	Kingswear
Councillor Becky Taylor	BT	Cornworthy
Mrs Sue Puddock	SP	DHNA Board
Captain David White	DW	CEO DHNA
Mrs Sarah Clark	SC	DSFC

Guests;

Mrs Liza Gibbon
Mr Peter Puddock

2. JB welcomed everyone to the meeting; in particular Councillor Graham Sowerby who will represent Kingswear PC on our committee. JB thanked RR and Dartmouth Town Council for allowing us to use their Council Chamber for the evening. JB then welcomed Mrs Sarah Clark and asked her to take the floor.

SC started by giving a brief background of the Sea Fisheries Committees of which there are 12 in England & Wales. Devon Sea Fisheries

Committee was formed in 1892 and the main piece of legislation is the Sea Fisheries Regulation Act of 1966. Since then numerous other pieces of legislation have given the Committee further enforcement powers. The primary rôle of all SFC's is the enforcement of legislation to conserve sea fish stocks which is achieved through bye-laws.

Devon's SFC jurisdiction is from Mean High Water Springs to the 6-mile limit ie from the Totnes Weir out to 6-miles offshore. They operate through Bye-laws of which there are 28 in our area. The SFC operate an ocean-going patrol boat 'Drumbeat of Devon' and a 7-metre RIB.

SC said her job was primarily concerned with environmental aspects of Devon's fisheries in particular looking at Crustacea stocks, mainly lobsters & crabs, and Molluscs, mainly oysters & mussels in Devon's estuaries. She showed a chart of the 117 hectare Waddeton Fishery Regulating Order administered by the Committee since 2001 covering the Dittisham Lake area. Within this area there are eleven 50m² plots of which 8 are currently leased to fishermen. Production has risen from 14.2 tonnes in '06/'07 to 17.6 tonnes in '07/'08 and, judging by recent seed purchases, looks set to rise further. Two licences have been issued for shore crab potting but only one of which is operating at the moment; the requirements for 'escape gaps' due to come in this autumn for parlour pots (not inkwells) will also apply to this fishery.

She carries out mollusc stock surveys on Devon's estuaries and has a number of trials in hand. She showed photographs of a trial she is carrying out on growth rates of oysters at Waddeton (similar trials are also in hand on the Exe, Teign, Salcombe, Avon & Yealm). In these trials oysters are grown in conventional bags on racks and are compared to those grown in Australian swinging bags under racks.

Sea Fisheries environmental responsibilities have increased markedly over recent years and are likely to increase still further with the Marine Bill. SC said that Natural England was negotiating with the fishing industry over the status of the Pacific oyster, classified under the Water Framework Directive in UK as a Red List 'species', which is now the mainstay of the oyster mariculture worldwide including here on the Dart. Introduced into France after WW2 and, by MAFF, into UK in the 1950's it has spread as far North as Denmark as sea-temperatures have risen. This oyster requires water temperatures around 20C to spawn and almost the same during its 3-4 week spell in the plankton offshore. Sustainable reefs of Pacific oysters supporting about 40 fishermen can be seen off the Kent coast and along the S coast. Feral spatfalls of Pacific Oysters have been identified around the SW, in particular in Plymouth Sound and the

Yealm though these are currently not sustainable. SC also showed pictures of the Mediterranean mussel, another ‘non-native species’, that is now making an appearance in our SW estuaries.

PG asked whether the number of crab-tiles (peeler pots) on the estuary was increasing. SC said that the number of tiles was, if anything, decreasing slightly as indeed they were on other S Devon estuaries. The ‘Good Practice Guidelines’ developed on the Exe on the use of crab-tiles was available to fishermen.

3. **Apologies.**

Apologies from Councillor John Robinson (Stoke Gabriel) and Mr John Stevens (Treasurer).

4. **Minutes of Ashprington Meeting.**

There were no amendments and JB signed the Minute Book.

5. **Matters arising.**

5.1 Replacement for Tidelines. There was full agreement between DHNA & DNB that the loss of the DEEM newsletter ‘Tidelines’ was a blow to good two-way communication between the Authority and the public it serves. ‘By the Dart - The free monthly community magazine and business directory for Dartmouth and local villages’ (01803 752243 mark@bythedart.co.uk) could become a useful aid to improve communications and is commended to Parish Councils and our riparian community. There is no plan to replace ‘Tidelines’ by a South Hams estuary publication.

5.2 Stakeholder representation on the Estuary Board of Trustees.

No progress on this issue. *[Sec’s Note; Since our meeting I have heard from the Estuary Officer that the public and press may now attend Estuary Steering Group meetings. A small success! They next meet in the Smyth Room, Follaton House 1000 Monday 27th April]*

5.3 Sharpham Marshes. DW reported that there had been little or no change in the size of the ‘Hole-in-the-Wall’ over the past year or so.

PG, whilst agreeing that ‘no action’ was probably right for the moment, suggested that the projected sea-level rise figures currently in use by SHDC meant that action on the embankment would be required in the not so far distant future *[Sec’s Note; The current Planning figures are; Net Sea Level Rise (mm/yr) Relative to 1990*

1990 to 2025 - 3.5 2025 to 2055 - 8.0 2055 to 2085 - 11.5 2085 to 2115 - 14.5].

5.4 **Higher Ferry.** DW reported that the wire cables for the new ferry had been increased from 28 to 38 mm diameter thus increasing their weight and the depth over the cables under tension. The MCA (Maritime and Coastguard Agency) were satisfied with the design of the new ferry system. New braking arrangements involving the cable terminations are being installed. The provisional date for the start of the new service is 16th June but, since this is a new system, DW felt that teething problems might be expected.

RR pointed out that the new ferry, although carrying twice the number of vehicles, required disembarking before reloading unlike the Torpoint ferry. Since the loading/unloading time per vehicle was unlikely to change much he doubted whether the overall number of vehicles transported across the river would increase significantly. Queues on either side of the river would certainly grow. JH agreed.

6. **Report by the Chairman.**

January Meeting. JB reminded the Cttee that, at our Ashprington meeting, IL had suggested that we should organise a business and social get-together of the four Stakeholder Groups instead of the DNB January meeting. The LUG & RAMROG Chairmen, who were present, agreed. The aim would be to review the current set-up, assess its strengths and weaknesses, expose where improvements were needed and generally to look for better ways to communicate with our constituencies and with DHNA. In early October we agreed with the other three Stakeholder Chairmen on who should chair the meeting, sought and obtained his agreement, briefed him and agreed the form of the meeting. In November we e-mailed the other Groups with our detailed proposals and asked for comments. In conversation with the RAMROG Chairman after the DHNA public forum in mid-December we were surprised and shocked, at this late stage, to find him totally at odds with the arrangements despite his previous agreement on the Chairman and silence on our November proposals. We felt that this disagreement was so fundamental that it was bound to disrupt the meeting and that this would not only destroy the possibility of a useful outcome but compromise whatever long-term credibility the stakeholder system may have in the eyes of our constituents. With the Christmas and New Year holidays upon us and with elections pending for the Chair of each of the other three Groups we saw no prospect of sorting things out before 22nd January and so cancelled the event.

Mr Phil Sheardon has now taken over from Mr Mike Rowley as CUG Chairman and we await the outcome for the LUG & RAMROG. When the dust clears we will ask whether a Stakeholder Group meeting is now desired and who should organise it. **Action; JB & PG**

DHNA Board Selection Panel. Mr Tony Hoile (Deputy Chairman CUG) has represented all four Stakeholder Groups on Sir Geoffrey Newman's Panel that selects DHNA Board members. It was agreed by the then Stakeholder Chairmen that Mr Hoile's election to this position would run for a term of three years. That term is now up and we felt that, as a matter of principle, a new election should be held and we put forward to the other Stakeholder Chairmen Councillor Terry Connolly (Ashprington) as the DNB candidate. This issue is now on hold pending the LUG & RAMROG elections.

RR (past Harbour Board) bewailed the fact that so many Board Members were not generally known to the public. SP said that the Board was acutely aware of the difficulty of communicating with river users and the public. She said that the Board and the Stakeholder Groups shared a common public relations problem here and must work together to address it. One important Board initiative this year will be to create a 'DHNA Award' for young people; the details should be published before the end of the month and she asked for help from the DNB to get the message over. [*Sec's Note; I will pass the details on as soon as they are available*]

During the general discussion TC asked where vacancies on the Board were advertised. It seems that advertisements go out in the local press but few seem to have seen them.

DW said that the Board do not see details of prospective candidates. JH (past Harbour Board) said that representation on Sir Geoffrey's Panel is one of the few points on which estuary-users and the local community have a direct say in the way our Harbour is run. He emphasised the importance of the post and endorsed JB's view that a fresh election for a stakeholder representative should be held.

RR proposed and JH seconded that TC should be the DNB candidate. **Action; JB & PG**

Stakeholder Chairmen Tuckenhay meeting. JB reported that he, with Mr Phil Sheardon (CUG) and Mr Nick Walbridge (LUG), had attended a meeting in Tuckenhay called by Mr Roger Jobson (RAMROG). The purpose of the meeting was to explore those

practices in the stakeholder system that worked and see how matters might be improved. There was a friendly and constructive discussion but nothing concrete emerged.

In tonight's discussion that followed there was a general feeling that in the eyes of the public the stakeholder groups were viewed, if they were viewed at all, as 'lobbies' to promote sectional interests. DHNA accreditation places an obligation upon the Board to consult with and respond formally to an accredited Group's views. In return accreditation places an obligation upon the Stakeholder Group to play a responsible rôle in the overall governance of the port.

RR said that until the DNB could demonstrate a 'success' that could be seen and understood by the public then gaining public recognition would continue to be an uphill task.

7. AOB.

JH seconded by RR proposed that the DNB should write a thank-you letter to Mr Julian Distin in recognition of the outstanding leadership and service that he has given to the Port over his years as Chairman and DHNA Board Member. (*Sec's Note; Done*) **Action; JB & PG**

JD asked whether the DNB had someone responsible for relations with the Press. PG supposed it was part of the Secretary's job but admitted that it had gone by default. **Action; PG**

8. Next Meeting.

IL agreed that Totnes should host a DNB Meeting in the Guildhall at 1930 on **Thursday 8th October** [*Sec's Note; Confirmed*]. PG proposed that Transition Town Totnes should be invited to provide a speaker to address the question of peak oil, climate change and the way that these changes may impact upon how we use the river and estuary. **Action; IL & PG**