

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
DART ESTUARY FORUM**

**HELD AT TOTNES BOATING ASSOCIATION CLUBHOUSE
ON TUESDAY 30th April 2019**

1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Ian Adams	IA	Totnes Boating Association
Julian Burn	JB	personal interest
Rosemary Burn	RBrn	personal interest
Capt. Mark Cooper	MC	Harbour Master/CEO Dart Harbour Authority
Dave Curno	DC	Royal Yachting Association
Brian Deacon	BD	Stoke Gabriel Boating Association
James Dodd	JD	Vice-chairman Dart Harbour Board
Steven Guilbert	SG	Devon Maritime Forum & Devon Local Nature P'ship
Mike Pearey	MP	Chairman, local farmer & environmentalist
Rob Price	RP	Environment Agency
Emma Reece	ER	National Trust
Stephen Westcott	SW	Guest presenter – seal disturbance
Christine Wood	CW	Marine Biological Association
Penny Woollams	PW	Marine Conservation Society
Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Adam Davison	AD	AONB Project Officer
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager

Apologies for absence were received from:

Cllr. Hilary Bastone	HB	South Hams District Council
Rachel Bolden	RB	Marine Management Organisation
Dr. Ross Brown	DrRB	Exeter University
Angela Gall	AG	Natural England
Richard Haycock	RHk	Royal Dart Yachting Association
Cllr. Jonathan Hawkins	JH	Devon County Council
Prof. Tom Hutchinson	TH	Vice-chairman; University of Plymouth
Roger Jobson	RJ	Royal Yachting Association South West
Lynne Maurer	LM	Representative: parishes
Sir Geoffrey Newman	GN	Blackpool & Start Estate
Peter Osborne	PO	Royal Dart Yachting Association
Kirstie Pritchard	KP	Devon County Council

2. MINUTES OF THE 13th NOVEMBER 2018 DART ESTUARY FORUM MEETING FOR APPROVAL & ANY MATTERS ARISING

Prior to reviewing the previous meeting notes, the format the minutes should take was discussed. It was agreed they should be more concise with clearly documented actions, aiding clarity and quicker distribution following each meeting.

2.1 Previous actions not covered in this meeting's agenda

- a. Decide where DEF should target education effort to support for SWW's "3 Ps" waste water campaign (PW). PW informed the group that she had come to a dead end. MP added that South West Water (SWW) had included a 'love your loo' update in their newsletter that was distributed to all customers. DEF main target group is the hard-to-reach visitors, such as those staying in Airbnb. PW will continue efforts to reach out to this target group.
Action c/fwd: (PW)
- b. Pass appropriate SWW contact details that covers in-house monitoring and new pesticides used in farming to TH.
Action c/fwd: Rhidian Howells (RH)
- c. Take lead on constructing an open / available infographic for water quality data (TH) MP informed DEF that SWW appear to have withdrawn from the verbal agreement made by RH at the last meeting.
Action 1 (RP): Request a general update from RH regarding SWW approach on the Dart and confirm the environment representative details via the Catchments Partnership.
- d. Write to all relevant Town & Parish Councils to draw attention to planning guidance for drainage (NM). Copy letter was distributed with notes from the previous DEF meeting
- e. DEF member organisations to send a brief outline covering their organisations to NM; some responses are outstanding
Action c/fwd: (all)
- f. Let NM know if you are interested in surveying Pacific Oysters on the Dart. Update: NM is struggling to find groups of volunteers for the Dart estuary.
Action c/fwd: (all)
- g. Marine Conservation Zone update (NM). Expect to hear outcome in June.
- h. Port waste management plan to set example for mariners (MC)
Found and added to Dart Harbour website:
<http://www.dartharbour.org/waste-management-page>

3. SEALS IN THE DART

Stephen Westcott (SW) has studied grey seals as his primary interest for over thirty years and wrote procedural guidelines to study grey seals for Natural England that was issued in 2010. Stephen gave a short talk with some photographs to Dart Estuary Forum members, focussing on seals on the Dart and disturbance. Of particular note:

3.1 Visits to the Mew Stone are increasing in popularity.

- a. This is an important site for grey seals, being one of the eastern most hauling out places regularly used in the English Channel. The Dart is also normally taken as the western most limit of the less common 'common' or harbour seal.
- b. This is also a safe area for grey seals; they can retreat into the deep water here.
- c. Natural England, National Trust, Dart Estuary Environmental Management (DEEM) wanted to know if disturbance was increasing and whether this was having a negative effect on seals. Studies took place over a 6 week period in 2000, 2006 and 2018. The three studies found that both seal numbers and disturbance is increasing.
- d. Stakeholders agreed in 2000 to make a voluntary exclusion zone around the Mew Stone lagoon however this does not seem to be widely known or it might be considered as lapsed.

Action 2 (NM): Look for a copy of this agreement and, circulate if found.

Post meeting note – agreement could not be found however a leaflet will be distributed with the meeting notes.

- 3.2 There are more grey seals using the river Dart and the estuary than elsewhere in Britain, possibly more than the Tees.
- 3.3 Risks associated with increasing contact and disturbance
- a. Potential for seals to abandon the site.
 - b. Habituation – disturbance used to be triggered from at a distance of 100m, now it can be as close as 25m if approached slowly.
 - c. Seals mouths and teeth harbour some quite nasty bacteria (for humans) and habituation could increase the risk of people coming into close enough contact to be bitten.
- 3.4 Observation of seals on the Dart is not funded.

Action 3 (all): Pass on suggestions of groups that may assist with observations to the AONB Estuary Officer

- a. AD suggested Devon Birds
- b. RBn suggested Fishtek, who capture fish pass data on Totnes weir, may also be able to assist. <https://www.fishtek.co.uk/howweare.html>
- c. ER suggested National Trust volunteers, who are based on both sides of the Dart Estuary, could also help capture sightings on grey seals.
- d. MP suggested all boat and river user clubs.

Action 4 (NM): Circulate Stephen Westcott's information on seal observation.

- 3.5 Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, grey seals have some protection for example disturbance is not allowed, however enforcement is an issue.
- 3.6 During the discussion it was confirmed that there have been organised kayak trips to the Mew Stone lagoon.

Action 5 (PW): Act as liaison for Stephen with local kayaking clubs regarding these trips.

- 3.7 DC informed DEF members the RYA Green Blue has guidance on wildlife disturbance in general along with guidance on how to approach, how close to get, how long to stay etc. He also informed the group that the Green Blue arrange RYA club talks that includes the subject of wildlife disturbance.

Action 6 (SW): Liaise with RYA over their guidance and talks.

- 3.8 The Dart Harbour Master would like to help get the message out, suggesting that guidance could be incorporated into the harbour guide.

Action 7 (SW): Draft a succinct message for incorporation into the next harbour guide via PW. Message to incorporate advice for the river as well as the Mew Stone.

Action 8 (NM): Develop a leaflet to raise awareness. This could be distributed electronically however funding would be needed for a printed version.

- 3.9 RP suggested that British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) may be able to help get the message across <http://www.bdmlr.org.uk/index.php>

Action 9 (SW): Liaise with BDMLR

- 3.10 DC suggested that the RYA Green Blue wildlife guide could be incorporated into the packs provided to mooring holders. It was suggested a link on the Dart Harbour website would be preferable:

Action 10 (DC): Send link to the RYA Green Blue wildlife guide to the Dart Harbour Master.

<https://tinyurl.com/yxj29vqz>

The Chairman thanked Stephen Westcott for his interesting and informative talk. Stephen thanked members for their time and offered to come to future DEF meetings.

4. DART ESTUARY FORUM TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 4.1 All agreed the Dart Estuary Forum Terms of Reference, circulated in February, will prevail.

5. AONB ESTUARY OFFICER REPORT AND UPDATE

- 5.1 Recently met development planners from South Hams District Council.
- Covered the issues of development on the foreshore and jurisdictions: local planning authority jurisdiction down to mean low water and MMO for marine licencing up to mean high water springs. There are defined heights, which differ across estuaries.
Post meeting note Dart estuary MLW 1.3m ACD (-1.32m BOD); MHWS 4.9m ACD (2.28m AOD)
 - In the absence of big industry, 'cumulative impacts' affect our area more. For example, a big issue is the cumulative impact of loss of foreshore and seabed (many nibbles over time). The new JLP has a policy (DEV26) of no further net loss of intertidal habitats
<https://www.southhams.gov.uk/jointlocalplan>
 - Within the marine environment conservation is more difficult, focussing on prevention rather than cure. For example, preventing the spread of invasive non-native species, as management once spread is hugely problematic and expensive.
 - Construction process is important with respect to how waste and materials are transported to and from the site; run off from the site during build and the development's use and maintenance; rainwater drainage and wastewater treatment.
- 5.2 Green Blue has a good report on facilities for cleaning hulls
<https://www.thegreenblue.org.uk/Boat-Users/Cleaning-and-Maintenance>
- 5.3 A workshop was held for the Pacific oyster project volunteers enabling them to identify some of the other invasive non-native species. Volunteers are encouraged to get to know their area and report change.
- MC reported there are Pacific oysters by the double steps in Dartmouth that can be easily viewed and photographed from the pontoon.
- 5.4 Marine Conversation Zone outcomes are due to be announced in June.

6 SOUTH DEVON CATCHMENT PARTNERSHIP <http://south-devon.org/>

South Devon AONB co-host South Devon Catchments Partnership with West Country Rivers Trust and Environment Agency. As part of the national Catchment Based Approach movement, the partnership is made up of local groups, organisations and individuals across South Devon who work together to ensure our rivers and estuaries are healthy and full of life, now and in the future.

7 ROUND TABLE UPDATES

7.2 Capt. Mark Cooper (MC) – Harbour Master

- a. Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority (DHNA) has an environmental projects fund. The money is intended for environmental endeavours that improve awareness, knowledge, and processes etc. that directly benefit the Dart. Introduced in 2018, £20,000 was allocated however none was spent. This year's allocation is £50,000 and ideas for projects that can be trialled and tested on the Dart are being sought. Suitable projects will be taken forward to the DHNA Board for consideration.
- i. Energy schemes such as solar panels were looked into last year. Unfortunately, solar panels are not a cost effective solution for the Harbour Authority.
 - ii. Wave energy power generation may be a possibility, using buoys that piston up and down.
 - iii. A range of matters were discussed such as anti-foul, in particular the possibility that some containing TBT may still be stored for use (now banned from sale); jetting flakes into the river; sea bins; Sharpham salt marsh hole in the wall; residual metals in the water etc.

Action 11 (NM): Complete an email reply to MC with respect to anti-foul and the benefits of reducing non-native species spread.

- iv. Residual metals - RP suggested that although water sampling takes place, testing on residual metals, tailored for the Dart, could include looking at the invertebrates present in the sediment, which will give an indication on the quality of the water and the impact of pollution on the sediment. If a concentration of metals of a particular type is found, the EA can trace back to the source, allowing the EA to do some pollution prevention work upstream to help protect the estuary. Seed funding combined with student involvement may be an approach to take on this. The first step however is to see what is already taking place.

Action 12 (TH): Inform DEF members on what is already taking place regards residual metals.

- v. Sharpham salt marsh and hole in the wall – a feasibility study on what approach to take is required. The first of two free drone flights, offered by Plymouth Marine Laboratory, took place a couple of months prior to the meeting. A second flight will survey for changes, looking specifically at accretion and erosion within the creeks. If erosion is significant, the ideal would be to balance that by ensuring silt is retained by the salt marsh, with the health of the salt marsh conserved at the same time.

Action 13 (all): Consider potential environmentally beneficial project ideas; Specific action on RP & NM to produce three tangible and realistic project ideas for environmental benefit on the Dart and pass any suitable suggestions to JD/MC.

7.3 Christine Wood (CW) – Marine Biological Association

- a. Dart surveyed for non-native species last year; will also go on a canoe trip with NM on the Dart this year to look at sites they could not access from land. Will survey Teign and Fal this year.

Action 14 (CW): Provide presentation on findings from the non-native species survey at next DEF meeting.

7.4 Rob Price (RP) - Environment Agency

- a. Mitigation measures assessment discussions have taken place with DHNA. EA looking internally at the role they have in this.
- b. West Country Rivers Trust, catchment partner together with South Devon AONB, has been successful in securing £750k water environment grant, European funding jointly administered by the EA and NE. This is to create a soils alliance throughout Devon and Cornwall to establish a standard for all landowners to work towards, involving best practise techniques and regimes. Covers the next three years. Starting conference taking place on 3rd June at Roadford Reservoir. Open to attend however spaces are limited:
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/devon-and-cornwall-soils-alliance-tickets-58987860278>
- c. EA and the Government organisations have declared 2019 as year of green action. All are challenged to do more personally, including volunteering effort. Six hundred people work in the EA across Devon and Cornwall so there is a potentially large number of additional people volunteering this year.
Action 15 (all): Send volunteer opportunities, such as Pacific Oyster project, seal observations etc. to RP.

7.5 Emma Reece (ER) - National Trust

- a. A lot of the land managed on both sides of the Estuary is steep woodland. There has been a lot of flora removal over the last two winters with volunteers to improve the diversity of woodland flora.
- b. Clearance work taken place along coast for grassland restoration.
- c. Compass Cottage undergoing restoration, expected completion by summer. Intention is to let this as a holiday cottage.
- d. Repairing steps around Compass Cove with volunteer help.
- e. Funding from SWCPA and RDPE obtained for car park improvement works around Little Dartmouth car park. Expected to take place this year.
- f. Gallants Bower full of bluebells. The tenant cleared brambles and scrub from the fort over recent years.

7.6 Brian Deacon (BD) – Stoke Gabriel Boating Assoc.

- a. Stoke Gabriel has an outfall to the Mill Pool and creek when sewers are overloaded. There are water-based activities including open water swimming; it would therefore be useful to have prior notification when overloading is predicted or at the time it is occurring. Already in dialogue with SWW to establish the number of occasions this happened and to request notification. RP suggested to ask whether they have telemetry units on the outfalls, as there may be a way of generating automated email notifications.
- b. If pollution to water or land identified, report to EA incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60. This will then be recorded as an event, helping EA to monitor the number of events and helps SWW prioritise upgrades to systems that have the greatest pressure.

7.7 Mike Pearey (MP) - Chair

- a. Had written to the EA of behalf of DEF supporting a campaign to ensure that a future environmental independent watchdog, not an in-house EA body, should support

legislation. Involved in campaigning on climate change and biodiversity issues, and promoting Ash dieback monitoring and removal across the riparian parishes.

7.8 Ian Adams (IA) – Totnes Boating Assoc.

- a. Suggests that if a seal observation guide/pamphlet is produced that yacht clubs are included in the circulation.

Action 16 (SW): Produce seal observation guide, suitable for distribution to yacht clubs

- b. At Totnes, several boats do not need anti foul due to the changeability of fresh and salt water mix.

7.9 David Curnow (DC) - RYA

- a. 13-17th May is invasive species week; Wednesday 15th is the marine day. More information: <http://www.nonnativespecies.org/index.cfm?sectionid=132> CW added there will be a workshop at Roadford Reservoir on 13th May: <https://www.swlakestrust.org.uk/events/south-west-invasive-species-forum/>

7.10 Rosemary Burn (RBrn)

- a. Dartington Trust is conducting a soil survey, the results of which can be compared to the previous survey that took place in the 1930's. Since the original survey the land has gone organic. Some heavy metal pollution has been found on Queens Marsh that will have come from the former tanning works at Buckfastleigh.
- b. Schumacher College is expanding so there is an increasing pool of people that can be involved in assisting environmental projects.

7.11 Julian Burn (JB)

- a. Former member of DEEM. Around ten years ago, work had been done on the hole in the wall to see whether tidal turbines could be installed. This did not progress as it was not a cost effective solution at the time.
 - i. NM added that there would be too much of a voltage drop because of the distance between the electricity generation and where it would be used.
 - ii. Similar study, conducted around five years ago around the Anchorstone at Dittisham, found that the current strength was not sufficient over the tidal cycle and would not be cost effective.

7.12 Adam Davison (AD) – AONB

- a. AD provided an update on the Management Plan and thanked everyone that took part in the consultation. The South Devon AONB Management Plan is a statutory document that must be produced/revised every five years. The revised Plan has been signed off by all local authorities in the South Devon AONB (Devon County Council, Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council, Torbay Council) as well as Natural England. A link to the revised Management Plan has now been submitted to Defra.
 - i. The Management Plan is policy led, having 96 policies that can be used as material considerations in planning matters.
 - ii. The Estuaries Management Plan is now a formal annex of the statutory Management Plan.

<http://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/about-the-aonb/looking-after-the-aonb/aonb-management-plan/>

- b. Marine Planning engagement consultations have now closed however a public consultation of the draft SW Marine Plans is likely in late 2019.

- i. MC informed DEF members that the Dart estuary is within the South marine plan area, as the SW and South Marine Plans divide is to the west of the Dart estuary mouth <http://mis.marinemanagement.org.uk/>

8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing raised

9 FUTURE MEETINGS

Tuesday 19th November 2019, venue tbc.

IA kindly offered Totnes Boating Association Clubhouse as a venue, if available.

Action 17 (IA): Check booking diary at Totnes Boating Association Clubhouse