

MEETING NOTES OF THE DART ESTUARY FORUM

MEETING HELD ONLINE ON WEDNESDAY 1st DECEMBER 2021

1. INTRODUCTIONS & APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Those present were:

Julian Distin	JD	Dart Harbour Authority
Mike Pearey	MP	Chair, local farmer & environmentalist
Lauren Henly	LH	Devon & Severn IFCA
Rob Price	RP	Environment Agency
Christine Wood	CW	Marine Biological Association
Lauren James	LJ	Marine Management Organisation
Lilly Anna Stokes	LAS	Marine Management Organisation
Graham Anderson	GA	Dittisham Parish Council
Brian Deacon	BD	Stoke Gabriel Boating Association
Stuart Greaves	SG	Ashprington Parish Council
Pat Fletcher	PF	Stoke Gabriel Parish Council
Dave Curno	DC	Royal Yachting Association, South West
Ruth Crundwell	RC	Natural England

AONB unit staff attending

Nigel Mortimer	NM	AONB Estuaries Officer
Vanessa Gray		AONB Office Manager – note taker

Apoloies for absence were received from:

Isabel Carlisle		Bioregional learning centre
Tom Stratton		Duchy of Cornwall
Emma Reece		National Trust

Stuart Greaves of Ashprington Parish Council and Pat Fletcher of Stoke Gabriel Parish Council were welcomed to the forum.

Abbreviations used: WRT – Westcountry Rivers Trust; MCZ – Marine Conservation Zone; MMO – Marine Management Organisation; JNCC – Joint Nature Conservation Committee; WFD – Water Framework Directive; DLNP – Devon Local Nature Partnership; DISI – Devon Invasive Species Initiative; MPA – Marine Protected Area

2. APPROVAL OF 4 MAY 2021 DEF MEETING NOTES

- 2.1 Approved.

3. MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 None raised.

4. AONB ESTUARIES OFFICER REPORT AND UPDATE

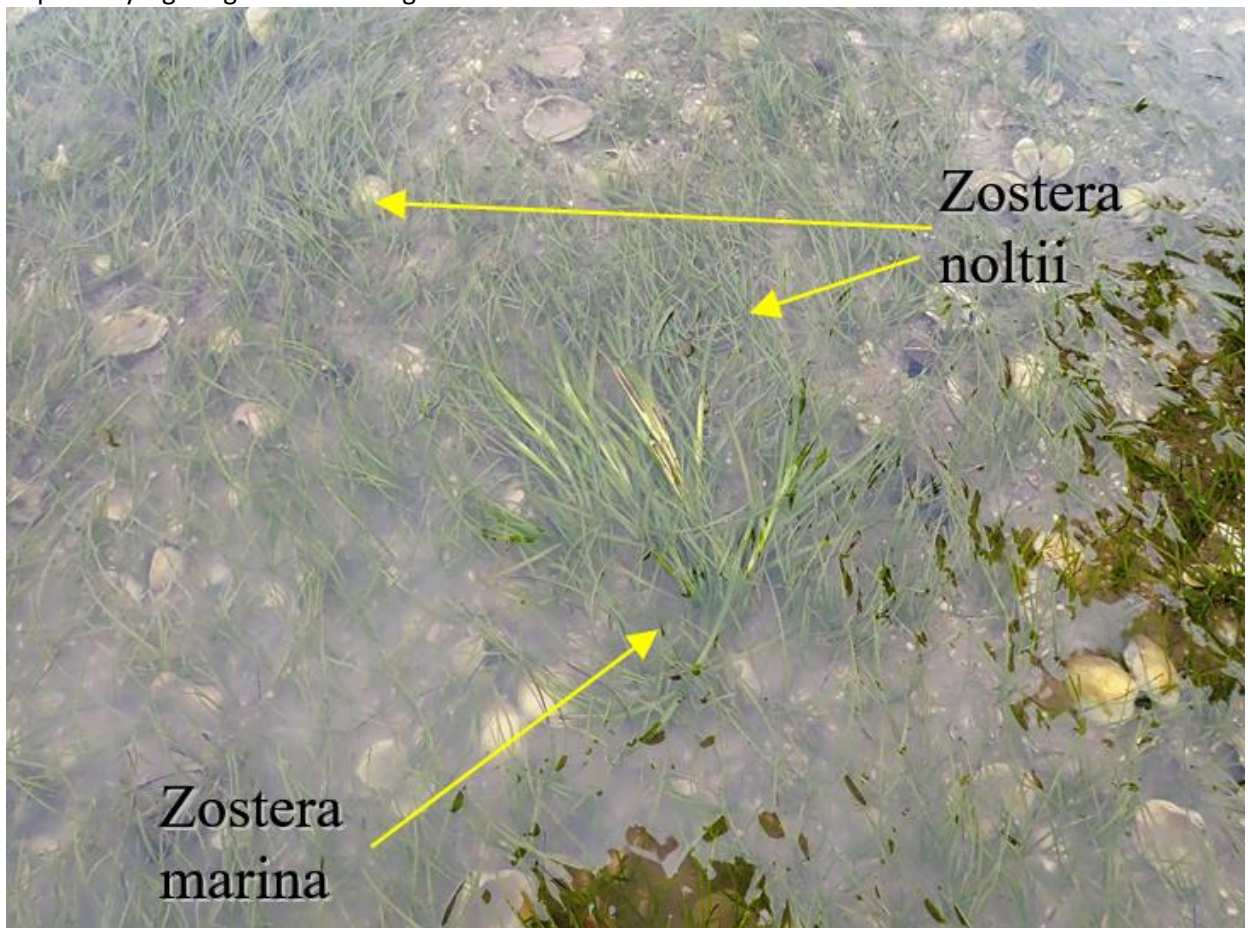
- 4.1 The AONB Estuaries Officer provided an update of recent activity. Activity included:
- 4.2 Pacific oyster report now published¹

¹ <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4889256448491520>

- i. Confirms they can & do displace native species & communities
- ii. Can lead to significant loss of beach amenity, damage to vessels and facilities, and are a danger to beach users and presumably wildlife
- iii. Managed control can and does make a difference where volunteer support allows
 - Pacific oyster managed control is containment and not eradication
 - Provided we have continued volunteer support, and where access is possible, we should be able to manage Pacific oyster numbers.
 - Where there are large volumes there still needs to be further research/investigation into the logistics of their removal, transport and legal/sustainable disposal/processing.
 - There has been interest in establishing a plant to process these into chicken feed however there are a number of hurdles such as licensing and ensuring processed oysters are safe as chicken feed.
- iv. Potential for oyster reefs developing and displacing intertidal seagrass meadows is of particular concern.

4.3 Seagrass

- i. Report any sightings of dwarf seagrasses to the Estuaries Officer



- please also report any interesting wildlife sightings via the iNaturalist app²
- ii. Where dwarf seagrass has grown historically, there may be an increase in growth of the number of patches of seagrass ... in 2021 at least!
- iii. Rafts of dwarf seagrass have been found at Beesands, this could be a dispersal mechanism and could be washed into nearby estuaries and establish ... let's keep our eyes open.

4.4 Salt marsh

² <https://uk.inaturalist.org/>

- i. At the end of lockdown a lot more people were out and about enjoying the health and wellbeing benefits of being out and on the water. The volume of kayaks and stand-up paddleboards etc. being dragged down to and across the foreshore led to concerns – individually the impact is small but cumulatively could easily become or be significant at popular launching sites. The Estuaries Officer has made contact with the British Canoe Union and worked with them to raise awareness.
- ii. We are considering a project to assess the condition of the saltmarshes around the Dart Estuary, to consider and suggest what management options could be offered to the landowner to enhance the saltmarsh's biodiversity and carbon lockup potential.

4.5 Publications

- Worked with Dart Harbour Authority to update the Dart Harbour Guide's³ environmental pages for the 2022 season - incorporating the suggested wording for discouraging seal disturbance within the Harbour and Mew Stone; and guidance on minimising disturbance of dolphins, whales & basking sharks - covered by legislation against intentional or reckless disturbance.
- ii. Several handbooks published recently
 - Saltmarsh restoration⁴
 - Seagrass restoration⁵
 - Native oyster habitat restoration⁶
 - Restoring estuarine and coastal habitats with dredged sediment⁷
 - Some concerns:
Sediment is spread on top of existing mudflats etc.
 - Reuse of dredged sediments can also spread Non-native species.



4.6 Story Maps

- i. The Rivers Trust have released a State of Our Rivers story map⁸
- ii. South Devon AONB have released State of Nature story maps⁹
- iii. A new fund, Championing Coastal Coordination ('3Cs' fund), recently closed. Together with other Devon Estuary Partnerships, looking to combine forces to work towards the production of a State of Our Devon Sea report to be used for engagement with local communities. Also put in for funding to promote our water catchment and quality animation, The Drip¹⁰

4.7 South Devon Catchment Partnership meeting taking place on 8th December.

- i. Meeting will focus on a workshop on the Consultation Drafts of the new River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) 2022 - 2027 and Flood Risk Management Plan (FRMP).
- ii. Colleagues from the Environment Agency will give a 30 minute presentation for each plan followed by a Q&A.
- iii. **ACTION 1 (NM):** Circulate the meeting link

4.8 Water Catchment & Marine Literacy course

- i. University of Plymouth Teaching students are being offered an opportunity to widen their teaching skills with a short course in Marine Literacy – 'marine literacy' includes freshwater catchment and estuarine waters

³ <https://tinyurl.com/dartharbour2022>

⁴ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/saltmarsh-restoration-handbook/>

⁵ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/seagrass-restoration-handbook/>

⁶ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/european-native-oyster-restoration-handbook/>

⁷ <https://catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/restoring-estuarine-and-coastal-habitats-with-dredged-sediment/>

⁸ <https://theriverstrust.org/key-issues/state-of-our-rivers>

⁹ <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/state-of-nature/>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2avbg9MwyWl>

- ii. The course is being developed by the Plymouth Institute of Education, Plymouth National Marine Aquarium's Ocean Conservation Trust and the South Devon AONB Estuaries Partnership.
 - iii. Due to run in 2022 with plans to offer to non-formal education providers too.
- 4.9 Fleet Mill creek and Totnes, Stoke Gabriel and Paignton Cycling Project updates
- i. No further developments reported on either.
- 4.10 New Farming in Protected Landscapes programme¹¹
- i. Funding projects that support nature recovery; mitigate the impacts of climate change; provide opportunities for people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage; support nature friendly sustainable farm businesses.
 - Four themes: **Climate** (including reduced flood risk and more carbon sequestered & stored); **Nature** (including greater habitat connectivity and biodiversity); **People** (including greater public engagement in land management); **Place** (including conserving historic structures)
 - ii. Open to farmers and land managers within or benefitting the AONB.
 - iii. The Estuaries Officer is keen to encourage water quality improvements through actions of farmers and land managers through this scheme.
- 4.11 Dart estuary MCZ
- i. Lauren Henly: D&S IFCA are currently undertaking an MCZ assessment for the Dart estuary. The assessment process involves writing a report on the fishing activities that occur within the MCZ to better understand fishing locations and level of activity. A call for information has recently been circulated.
 - ii. Devon & Severn IFCA Fishing Activity Survey
 - **ACTION 2 (NM):** Circulate details

The Bioregional Learning Centre are starting a Voices of the Dart project¹²
 "Voices of the Dart: If Water could speak, what would it say?"

The Dart is our local river in South Devon. Because we live close to it, and drink it from our taps, and swim in it, and our sewage goes back into it, we at BLC have been figuring out ways to take action to keep it clean and save water. Climate change, with unpredictable and heavy rainfall, means that in the future we can't take water for granted. At some times of the year demand already exceeds supply, and that is going to get more critical. How can we prepare for both floods and droughts? What can we do to ensure the river ecosystems are healthy and water clean? If citizens and policy-makers work together, what might we achieve?

Voices of the Dart is an R&D project that asks these questions together with communities in Dartmouth, Totnes, Buckfastleigh, Ashburton and the Upper Dart. It is funded by South West Water and our partners include the Global Systems Institute at Exeter University and Westcountry Rivers Trust. Through the arts we are inviting the river to speak, we want to hear what it has to tell us. With a whole range of data and information available, we are asking people 'what are the most useful things to know that would enable you and your community to plan for climate-resilient water futures?'"

- 4.12 Gallants Bower is being heavily affected by Ash Dieback disease. The National Trust are carrying out a safety assessment process where there is public access, that may have to result in some permissive path closures or rerouting where there are large numbers of mature ash over the next few years.
- 4.13 At the last meeting, Capt. Geoff Holland asked for South West Water to be invited to this meeting.
- i. In particular, this was to find out about the proposed River Dart Inland Bathing Water Scheme as part of the Green Recovery Scheme.

¹¹ <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/opportunities-for-farmers-2021-24/>

¹² <https://bioregion.org.uk/project/voices-of-the-dart/>

- ii. The Estuaries Officer looked into this and found: “Inland river bathing water pilot - implement a pilot on the Dart and Tavy rivers investigating water quality drivers”. This is an exciting project for the Dart: if the water quality on part of the river is safe enough to bathe in then all the water quality downstream of the ‘bathing waters’ would be greatly improved.
 - Dave Curno raised the following: diversion of surface water away from the sewers reduces the occurrence of storm overflows. However, If road run off and contaminated rain water (etc.) does not go through the sewage system but instead goes straight into the river, this can increase water pollution. A lot is dependent on the scheme SWW propose to implement to improve bathing water quality (*E.coli*).

5. PARTNER UPDATES

5.1 Dave Curno, Royal Yachting Association, South West

- i. Main focus is [‘common’] seagrass conservation with the ReMEDIES project¹³. Five sites, nearest Plymouth, looking at trialling advanced mooring systems.
- ii. MMO have used Studland Bay as the first managing of non-licensed activities site (anchoring & mooring).
- iii. Received a press release from The Crown Estate who are developing proposals for a floating wind project, producing up to 4GW, in the Celtic Sea.
- iv. Questions and in discussion
 - Advance mooring systems trial could also be applicable for the Dart
 - Planting seagrass may also be applicable on the Dart
 - The RYA is mainly involved in informing boat users how to anchor, where not to and how to identify seagrass
 - Along the shores of the Dart (unsure if building started) there will be an area for growing on seagrass; the intention is this will be for planting in Torbay

5.2 Ruth Crundwell, Natural England

- i. ReMEDIES
 - Plymouth Sound: 12 advanced mooring systems (replacement, not additional).
 - Installing swim area markers with in-water floats to raise chain risers off the seabed and seagrass.
 - Jennycliff: voluntary no anchor zone markers – giving seagrass restoration a chance
 - Notice to mariners informing of these
 - Ocean Conservation Trust is carrying out planting at the end of November and early December at Jennycliff Bay in Plymouth Sound, where one hectare of seagrass was planted earlier this year.
- ii. Marine team updates
 - Highly Protected Marine Areas: NE working with Defra, JNCC and other bodies, to help identify potential pilot sites. Will go out to consultation next year.
 - Conservation advice packages: Marine designated sites have conservation advice packages that are interactive¹⁴. Advice on operations, activities that may impact on vulnerable features includes recreation activities and paddleboards will now be mentioned.
 - Working closely with IFCA as they continue their assessments of fishing in Marine Protected Areas.
 - Pacific oyster report now published; there are some recommendations.
 - The national principal advisor and specialists are currently looking at the report.

¹³ <https://saveourseabed.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://designatedsites.naturalengland.org.uk/SiteList.aspx?siteName=dart&countyCode=&responsiblePerson=&DesignationType=All>

- The area team are looking at the recommendations and how some can be taken forward locally
- Team formed to look at a strategic overview
- New members of staff onboard.
 - Lead Advisor: Jay Boyle new site contact for Torbay
 - Site Leader: Jade Riding, Plymouth Sound and estuaries
- iii. Questions and in discussion
 - Chair re MCZ – following a meeting of the Dart Harbour Community Group, there is a need to have information to understand how the MCZ and management of that will impact them.

ACTION 4 (MP/RC): contact the Chair to go through the queries (MP to forward his email address to RC). The Estuaries Officer said if there is general interest this could be opened up to a wider audience.

Post meeting note: NM has been working up a draft MCZ Management Guidance document. This is still being refined.

- GA - Dittisham Parish Council would be interested to know more

5.3 Stuart Greaves, Ashprington Parish Council

- i. Volunteer for NCI at Torbay. In summer, a number of boards were discarded on the beach, some of which float away.
- ii. Questions and in discussion
 - Rob Price provided a link to a recycling scheme for bodyboards launched at Newquay¹⁵
 - Dave Curno informed the group that there is a company in Plymouth who "recycles" end of use GRP boats. For yachts it costs around £100 a foot which is comparable with landfill. The company decontaminates the vessel, removes reusable fittings, then shreds the GRP for use in a cement plant in Germany.

5.4 Graham Anderson, Dittisham Parish Council.

- i. The parish council are considering a good practise guide for kayakers, paddle boarders and so on. Dittisham is quite a hub in summer for launching paddleboards / kayaks and now seeing erosion of foreshore.
- ii. A tree policy is being drawn up for Parish. Around the foreshore of the parish they see and try to deal with some of the larger trees/debris that floats down. This time of year tend to see more of this.
- iii. Yearly beach clean.

5.5 Julian Distin, Dart Harbour Authority

- i. Recruiting for a Harbour Master, interviews taking place next week. In the meantime Rob Everitt has stepped up.
*Post meeting note: Paul Britton is the new Harbour Master, now in post.*¹⁶
- ii. Modern mooring systems: invitation to all for information on performance of advanced mooring systems in tidal waters such as the Dart that has a 5m tide.
 - **ACTION 5 (DC):** has information that can be provided to JD. They are in a trial phase, with problems to overcome, but are being used successfully. They can still be used for swinging moorings.

5.6 Rob Price, Environment Agency

- i. Report environment incidents to the incident hotline 0800 80 70 60 - <https://www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident>

¹⁵ <https://www.inyourarea.co.uk/news/special-bodyboard-recycling-bins-installed-at-beaches-in-newquay/>

¹⁶ <https://www.dartharbour.org/about-dart-harbour/dart-harbour-staff/staff/paul-britton/>

- ii. Funded work underway with Atkins looking at shoreline evolution for modelling and forecasting purposes. Looking at the impacts of climate change, rising sea levels and the impact on our coast and shorelines. There are opportunities, particularly on the Dart around coastal squeeze. The Dart estuary is a heavily modified water body in terms of its water framework directive designation – modified for flood risk and navigation purposes. By completing this work together with other estuaries in Devon and Cornwall, may provide the opportunity to put a case together to work with landowners to look at how to address coastal squeeze and stop sea level rise squeezing out important habitats allowing them to migrate ‘inland’.
- iii. Rob provided an update: a copy of the slides will be circulated with the notes
- iv. Questions and in discussion

- Significant fish pass projects have completed
 - A weir has been removed in the River Dart Country Park, removing a significant barrier to migratory species.
 - A new fish pass has been opened on Buckfast weir allowing fish to get over the weir, in particular at low flows, to get to spawning grounds upstream.
- Gara Healthy Rivers: over the last two years EA have been working with WRT and NE looking at interventions on the River Gara. Total project, cost £82,500 has been successful in achieving improvements to over 5km of water body and 10Ha. Important because this discharges into Slapton Ley, SSSI.
Chair - Blackawton is of interest, would like to receive further information on the work taking place.

ACTION 6 (RP): email MP with a view to setting some time aside to go through it

- Rural Diffuse Pollution: Devon and Cornwall - EA are piloting a land management team of five specialists, working closely with other partners they will be targeting farm advice to landowners to try to remedy some of the practises that lead to incidents.
- Draft River Basin and Flood Risk Management Plans are in final draft stage. Input to the River Basin MP closes April 2022 and Flood Risk MP January 2022. See 4.7 for details on the workshop taking place on 8th December.
- Environment Bill now enacted. As part of that, EA/Ofwat are investigating to respond to self-reporting from the industry reports.
- Final assessment on all bathing water for this year has been delayed to January/February 2022. The delay is to accommodate an additional data sweep needed to avoid any challenges for bathing water status.

ACTION 7 (RP): circulate link to the data when available¹⁷

- Devon and Cornwall Local Outcome Plan refresh
- Online tools available
 - New Look Catchment Data Explorer¹⁸
 - Natural Flood Management Studio¹⁹
 - Natural Capital Market Place²⁰
- Funding
 - Natural Environment Investment Fund – round 2
 - Water Environment Investment Fund

¹⁷ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/profile.html?site=ukk4305-24700>

¹⁸ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/OperationalCatchment/3123> -‘Help’ section explains all

¹⁹ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/3065971ddb42079f63b950eed58f1e>

²⁰ <https://app.naturalcapital.market/>

- Chair - regarding sharing water quality data: when the Dart Estuary Forum was re-established, the hope was for a single app that would combine a number of data sources such as EA, SWW, WRT, Universities etc.

ACTION 8 (RP): share link to EA's Water Information Management System²¹

Other information is available however there is no consolidation: WRT provide information from citizen science; Some data from SWW is shown on the safer seas app; EA bathing explorer.

- Chair – Other groups do regular water testing, such as Harbourne sustainability group, is there a way of incorporating the data? EA monitoring programme changing to do things differently.

RP – the way EA sample is changing, it is unlikely this will be at such a fine spatial scale going forward so citizen science increases in importance. The change is to more of a statistical approach as not much changes. A few sites do swing however a lot are static. Hence a new approach using data gathered over the last 10 years to inform sampling. However, everything in the current WFD will continue to be sampled (unless responding to an incident).

5.7 Lily Anna Stokes, Marine Management Organisation (from meeting 'Chat box')

- Currently our work is all behind the scenes. The planning team are working on developing surveys and indicators to monitor the effectiveness of and stakeholder perception of the recently adopted marine plans in both a qualitative and quantitative state. So please keep an eye out in early next year as we will be contacting stakeholders to get feedback; some through interviews, some through surveys and some through both. So please do engage with us on these as the responses and feedback will be used to improve the plan at the next due refresh. Both positive and negative feedback welcome as we need to know how to improve the plans not just for the environment but for the people and industries who use them. And on a side note, a fishing boat in Plymouth caught one of the bluefin tuna spotted around (unwanted bycatch of course), so we had one of those in Sutton Harbour which was a sight to behold.

5.8 Christine Wood, Marine Biological Association

- Have been asked to review the biosecurity plan for the Tamar estuary. Will pass on new species information.

ACTION 9 (CW): Provide new species information

- Also sit on the DISI²² group (DLNP). DISI covers all habitats, Christine represents marine estuarine species
- Carpet sea squirt, already in the Dart, appeared in Plymouth on one panel on one site (now removed).

5.9 Lauren Henly, Devon & Severn IFCA

- Responding to a question on Pacific oyster farming: Pacific oysters are important mariculture species within Devon & Severn district. Farms were in place before MCZ designated and widely encouraged in the past. Currently awaiting a policy steer from Defra and subsequent guidance from NE about management of Pacific oyster mariculture in MCZs in general. Overall the Defra group is not currently supportive of new Pacific oyster farms or extensions to existing farms within MPAs or where the species is locally absent.

5.10 Mike Pearey, Chair

- Chairmanship of the Dart Estuary Forum is for a two year term, however I have now served as Chair for four years. Unfortunately now just too busy for this role. Seeking someone with the interest and capacity to take over as Chair. Names to NM.

²¹ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/water-quality/view/explore?search=&area=&samplingPointType.group=&samplingPointStatus%5B%5D=open&loc=217366%2C84360&limit=500>

²² <https://www.devonlnp.org.uk/knowledge-hub/invasive-species/>

ACTION 10 (all): Let the Estuaries Officer know if you are interested in taking on the role of Dart Estuary Forum Chair.

7. NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 18th May at 5pm, venue tba.

We may need to continue to hold meetings online however venue suggestions for the next meeting are welcome. At the meeting Noss Marina suggested and seconded.

Minutes remain in draft until approved by members of the Dart Estuary Forum at the next meeting.