Solent News

The newsletter of the Solent Forum

Issue 58: Summer 2025

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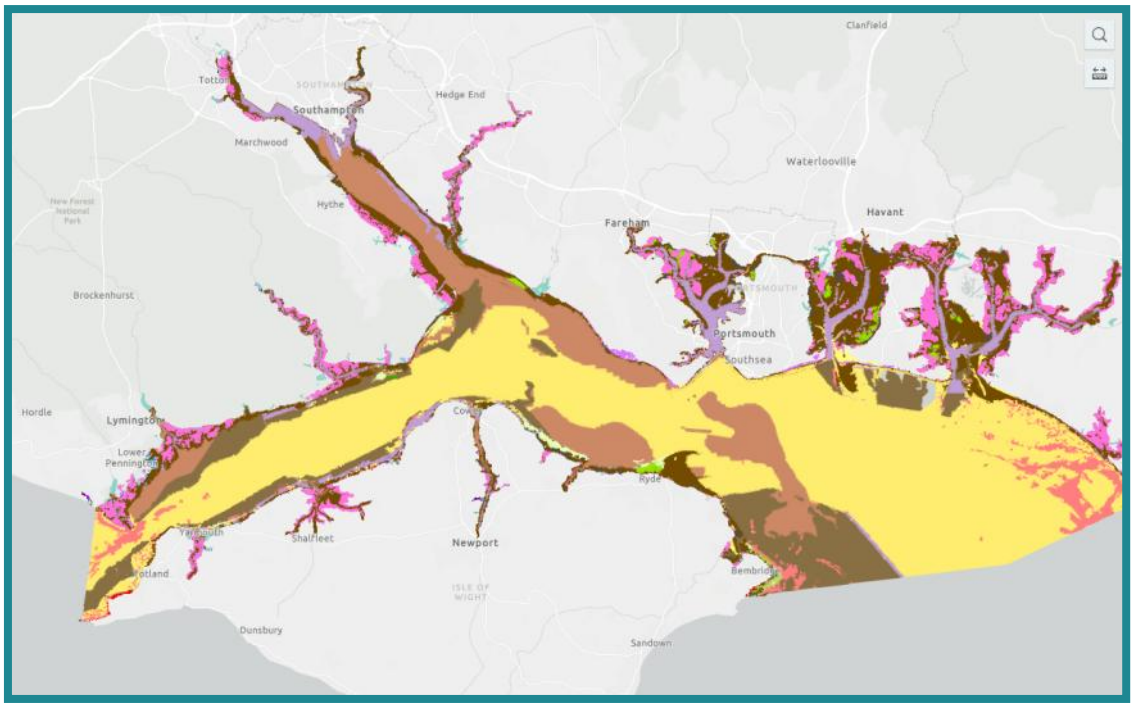
Solent Seascape Data Explorer



Solent Seascape Data Explorer © Solent Seascape Project

The Solent Seascape Project is the first of its kind in the UK to undertake nature recovery of the marine and coastal environment at a seascape (regional) scale. The long-term vision for the project is to protect and restore the Solent's seascape, tipping the balance from its existing degraded state to a naturally expanding, connected and productive ecosystem.

Its Data Explorer is a mapping tool created for the Project, designed by ABPmer, to showcase the state of habitats, activity pressures and restoration and recovery opportunities.

Key datasets included are:

- Baseline habitats/species
- Condition data
- Activities and pressures
- Restoration and recovery
- Restoration opportunity mapping
- Monitoring and management
- Designated/protected sites
- Physical data

It also includes a storymap of The Solent State of Nature report. This presents an overview of the current status of coastal and marine wildlife, including consideration of the trends and pressures that are currently affecting these features.

Visit the Explorer at: Solent Seascape - State of Nature Data Explorer.

News from the Forum

Chairman's Column

Phil Horton, Solent Forum Chair

I would like to start by paying tribute to my predecessor, Peter Barham, who spent more than 10 years at the helm of the Solent Forum. He will be a difficult act to follow! I would also like to thank the Forum's steering group for giving me the opportunity to take on this role.

The Forum is undergoing a period of change as we look to find a new host following more than thirty years with Hampshire County Council. We are in discussions with a range of organisations, and I am keen that we move forward with a new partner as soon as possible to provide certainty for all. Progress with hosting has been ably supported by Simon Cramp at Hampshire County Council, who has helped the Steering Group to prepare a robust financial plan for the future.

By the time this newsletter is published, I will have moved on from the RYA and I will have started in a new role as Sustainability and Utilities Manager for the University of Portsmouth. This is clearly a time of change, and I am excited to be part of it!

Peter Barham has taken up the post of Chair of the Coastal Partnership Network, a grouping of partnerships such as the Solent Forum all around the UK coast. This network has recently become a Community Interest Organisation (CIO). We will be working closely with Peter to ensure that we get the best out of that national network, whether that be shared learning or potential sources of project and core funding.

You will all be aware of the devolution plans for the area. We can't second guess the outcome of these changes to local government, but the Forum will remain a key local convener of those with a shared interest in the coast and marine space regardless of the final structure. Whatever happens we see this as an opportunity to raise our profile and reiterate the importance of our activities at all levels.

I look forward to working with you all, and to seeing many of you at our next Forum meeting in Cowes in October.

Solent Forum Update

We welcome Phil Horton as our new Chair, Phil was appointed in March 2025 at the start of our new Business Plan Cycle.

The Solent Marine Sites (SEMS) Annual Survey for 2025 has been published. The Forum is now preparing the SEMS Annual Management Report for the Management Group meeting in September. The Solent Forum provides the Secretariat for the statutory SEMS management scheme, which assesses the impacts of non-licensable activities on designated sites.

The Natural Environment Group met in April and received reports on the two projects funded in 2024/25. These looked at how starlings use intertidal mudflats and a citizen science dive project that recorded information on the habitats and species in Langstone Harbour. Information on both projects is available on the Natural Environment Group webpages.

We are progressing our Beneficial use of Dredgings Solent (BuDS) Phase 4 project that is looking to licence a disposal site at Cockleshell Bay in Lymington to provide sediment for saltmarsh restoration. It is proposed that two of the Solent's harbours will initially use this new disposal site if granted. The Forum has also been invited to sit on the national BuDS working group.

The Forum will next meet in Cowes on 15 October and then Portsmouth in March 2026. If you would like a speaker slot for one of these meetings then please could you let us know in advance as they become booked up very quickly.

Our annual members survey was carried out in July and we would like to thank all members who filled it in, there has been some very helpful feedback.

Finally we wish you a happy and successful summer 2025 and we hope that you get to go out and enjoy the Solent and its shores.

Kate Ansell, Solent Forum Manager

Climate Change

Reshaping the Map of UK Marine Life

New research led by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) has revealed how climate change will reshape the UK's marine environment, with some species gaining suitable habitat while others face significant decline. The study examines how climate change will affect 19 threatened or declining UK marine species under projected sea temperature rises.

The key findings include:

- Northward shifts: Most species currently designated as 'threatened or declining' show increasing habitat suitability toward northern and central North Sea waters over the next 50 years. These areas may become biodiversity 'hotspots', while some southern and western waters risk losing key species as habitats become less suitable.
- Climate 'winners' and 'losers': Species like basking sharks, spurdog, thornback ray and undulate ray are expected to gain suitable habitat, while others found on the seabed could lose up to forty percent of their suitable habitat by the end of the century. Native Oysters are expected to see a doubling of suitable habitat.
- Mobile species show greater resilience: The study suggests that more mobile species may be more adaptable to climate pressures, provided human disturbance is minimised. This mobility gives them an advantage in seeking out more favourable conditions, but static or coral species may be more affected by environmental change.
- Habitat connectivity is critical for vulnerable species: For species facing habitat decline, the research emphasises the need to consider 'habitat connectivity' when designing management options.

Saltmarshes as Carbon Sinks

The UK's saltmarshes are vital "sinks" that lock away climate-warming greenhouse gases in layers of mud, according to a new report from WWF. It is now calling for these muddy, tidal habitats to be added to the official UK green house gas inventory.

Working with researchers from the UK's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, a WWF team installed solar-powered greenhouse gas monitoring stations on Hesketh Out Marsh, a saltmarsh in the northwest that has been restored and is managed by the RSPB.

Analysing gases in the air flowing around the marsh, over the course of a year, revealed how plants there "breathe in" more carbon dioxide in the summer than they release in winter. These new findings build on previous studies that have measured the amount of carbon in the marshland's mud.

WWF has published its first year of findings in a report called The Importance of UK Saltmarshes. This been co-published with an insurance company, that is interested in understanding the role these sites have in protecting homes from coastal flooding.

Carbon flux tower © WWF

Marine Business

Beneficial Use of Dredged Sediment to Improve Boiler Marsh, Lymington

Lymington Harbour Commissioners (LHC) is working to restore of up to ten hectares of saltmarsh on Boiler Marsh island which lies at the entrance to the Lymington Estuary. It worked with Land and Water Services Ltd, the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and other stakeholders to raise the bed elevation of an ecologically deteriorating central part of the island.

Image © ABPmer

The restoration area was once covered in saltmarsh plants but it is now unvegetated and in an ecologically poor condition. To return vegetation to this area, dredged sediment is being used to raise the intertidal bed level so that it matches, or even exceeds, the height of the surrounding healthier marsh. The intention is to expand the healthier vegetated marsh and provide much needed habitat for breeding seabirds as well as help to delay the loss of this large eroding marsh island.

The approach involves using dredged sediment that has been, and will be, placed in front of Boiler Marsh. This sediment is placed at a licenced deposit ground at the lower lying seaward edges of Boiler Marsh using a 'bottom placement' approach; sediment is dropped directly from split hopper sediment transport barges that can access upper mudflat habitat at high water on larger spring tides.

This deposit ground has been licensed for sediment placement since 2017. Each year places several thousand more cubic meters at this location. This regularly placed sediment has accumulated and a mound of sediment has built up which is providing protection to marsh island behind. The most recent licence for this activity now allows for this deposition to continue until the end of 2034 and for up to 20,000 wet tonnes (around 17,500 m^3) to be placed annually.

Fawley Green Hydrogen

Hynamics, a 100% subsidiary of EDF Group specialising in low-carbon and renewable hydrogen, has been successful in being shortlisted for the government's Hydrogen Allocation Round 2 (HAR2) for its project Fawley Green Hydrogen.

Image © ExxonMobil

The Fawley Green Hydrogen project will be built on land adjacent to the ExxonMobil Petrochemical Complex. Hynamics will install a 120 MW electrolyser to reduce carbon emissions, replacing fossil fuels used for heating with low carbon hydrogen, with the potential to reduce CO2 emissions by up to 100 000 tons/year.

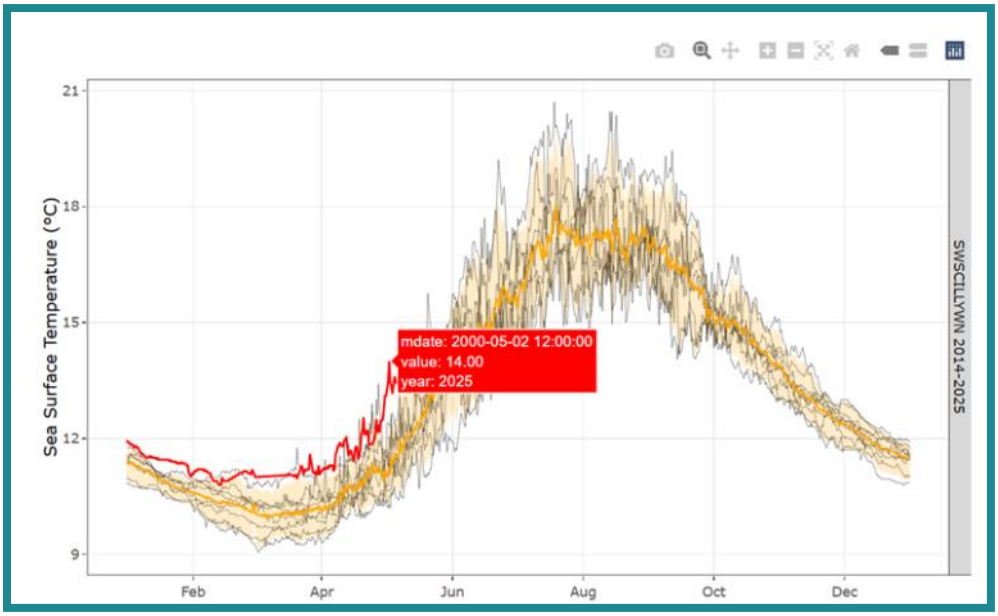
The Net Zero Hydrogen Fund is a £240 million program overseen by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, aiming to support the commercial deployment of hydrogen production projects across the UK as part of the UK Government's wider net zero strategy.

Water

UK Marine Heatwaves

Latest sea temperature data from Cefas' WaveNet platform suggests UK waters are experiencing signs of a marine heatwave, with temperatures in parts of the North Sea and southwest coast well above seasonal averages.

Data from WaveNet, indicates that sea temperatures recorded at several coastal locations in May were between 1.2 to 2.9 degrees Celsius higher than average for the time of year, and at one location briefly 4.6 degrees Celsius higher (at Tyne/ Tees off the Yorkshire coast).



Temperatures for the Scilly Isles, red line is current year

Sites in the Firth of Forth (Scotland), Dowsing (off the Lincolnshire coast), Southwold and West (Suffolk), South Knock (Thames Estuary), Poole Bay and Hastings (both in the English Channel) and off the Scilly Isles (on the southwest coast) all recorded higher than average temperatures.

The data supports a recent rolling brief by the National Oceanography Centre which suggests UK waters are experiencing a marine heatwave with sea surface temperatures up to three degrees Celsius above the seasonal average.

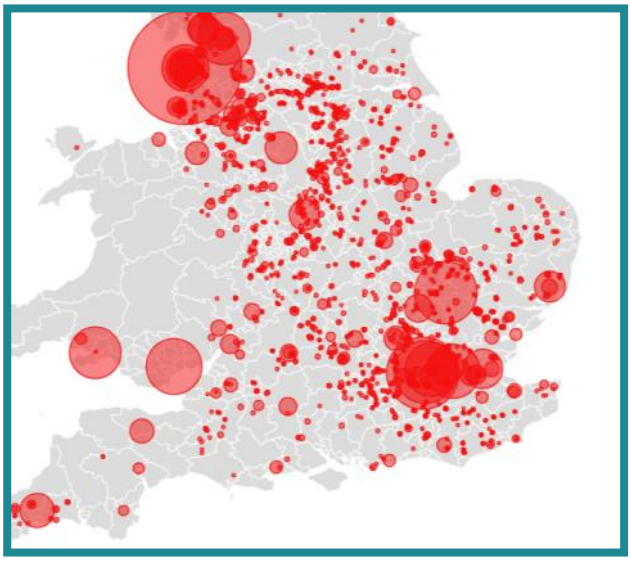
Over the past 40 years sea temperatures in the UK have risen by around one degree Celsius and overall the number of marine heatwaves has increased by around four per year in recent decades. In June 2023, the seas around the UK experienced sea surface temperatures reaching their highest levels for June since records began in 1850.

Addressing the risks from Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) are a large, complex group of about 14,000 synthetic chemicals used in a wide variety of everyday products. For example, they are used to keep food from sticking to packaging or cookware, make clothes and carpets resistant to stains, and create firefighting foam that is more effective.

PFAS chemicals do not degrade easily in the environment and for this reason they have often been referred to as 'forever' chemicals.

An inquiry will consider whether enough is being done to address the risks of PFAS in the UK and whether research institutions and the Environment Agency are equipped to detect and monitor their impact. It will also explore what regulatory mechanisms are in place across the UK and how they compare to other jurisdictions around the world.



PFAS concentration levels in water courses, source: ONS

Fisheries & Aquaculture

Changes in the UK Fishing Fleet

News statistics from the MMO give an insight into how the UK fishing fleet has been changing. In 2023 there were 5,418 UK registered fishing vessels. This represents a fifty four percent reduction since 1993. The power (kW) of the UK fleet has also decreased by forty two percent over the past three decades. Gross Tonnage (GT) has decreased by thirty seven percent since 1996 when recording of this metric began, to 200 thousand tonnes. Approximately seventy nine percent of the UK fleet is represented by vessels under 10 metres in length, of which forty nine percent are administered in England. The majority of UK vessels operate within the non-sector (87%) with the remaining vessels in membership of a Producer Organisation.

Quantity of landings by UK vessels in 2023 by species group

The quantity of landings in 2023 increased compared to 2022 driven by an increase (14%) of pelagic species landed. The overall value of landings also increased mainly due to landings of pelagic species, increasing by seventeen percent.

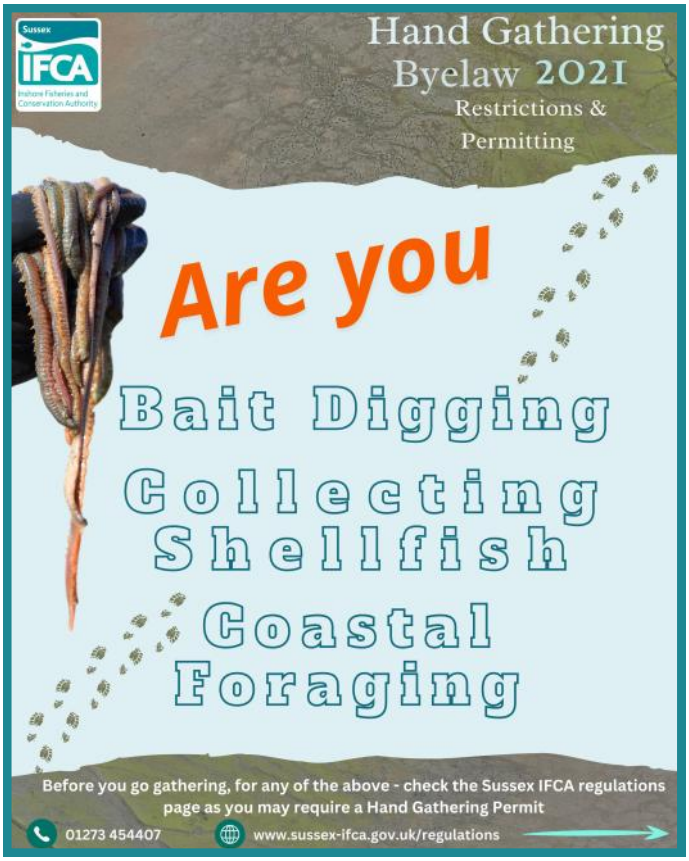
Sussex IFCA Hand Gathering Byelaw Approved

Sea fisheries resources within the Sussex IFCA District, will receive enhanced management to ensure the long-term sustainability of shore gathering activities on marine organisms in their intertidal areas. The Hand Gathering (Restrictions and Permitting) Byelaw 2021 has been approved by the Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The new Byelaw will enable the regulation and recording of hand gathering activities for a range of marine organisms, including shellfish, bait species and seaweeds. It introduces bag limits for various specified species, for anyone hand gathering within the Sussex IFCA district.

Anyone intending to gather any of the specified species above the limits will require a Hand Gathering Permit. It also introduces additional bespoke restrictions for relevant Marine Protected Area sites, that will protect the designated features of those sites.

Voluntary measures were not considered viable to achieve the required management outcomes, based on compliance experience with hand gatherers over many years.



Marine Business

FastRig Results Published

Smart Green Shipping (SGS) has released the results of recent sea trials of its cutting-edge FastRig wind-assisted propulsion system (WAPS), conducted in late 2024 aboard the MV Pacific Grebe, a nuclear waste carrier.

Despite the technical challenges involved with installation on such a specialised vessel, the SGS team successfully installed the lightweight FastRig dockside via its easy-on/easy-off installation process, carried out intensive sea trials, and then rapidly uninstalled the system on budget and within eight weeks.

The system was also validated with performance modelling by the University of Southampton confirming fuel savings of up to forty percent annually.

Image © Smart Green Shipping

The sea trials were delivered as part of the Winds of Change project, supported by the UK Government's Clean Maritime Demonstration Competition Round 3 (CMDC3).

Solent Gateway Wins Award

Associated British Ports (ABP), along with project partners Boskalis Westminster, Knights Brown, and Ramboll, won the Best Project Asset Maintenance Award at the Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) South East Awards for the ABP Solent Gateway Marine Infrastructure project.

This project successfully maintained and future-proofed the 40-year-old Falklands Jetty, ensuring its continued utilisation for current and future Ministry of Defence (MOD) and commercial operations.

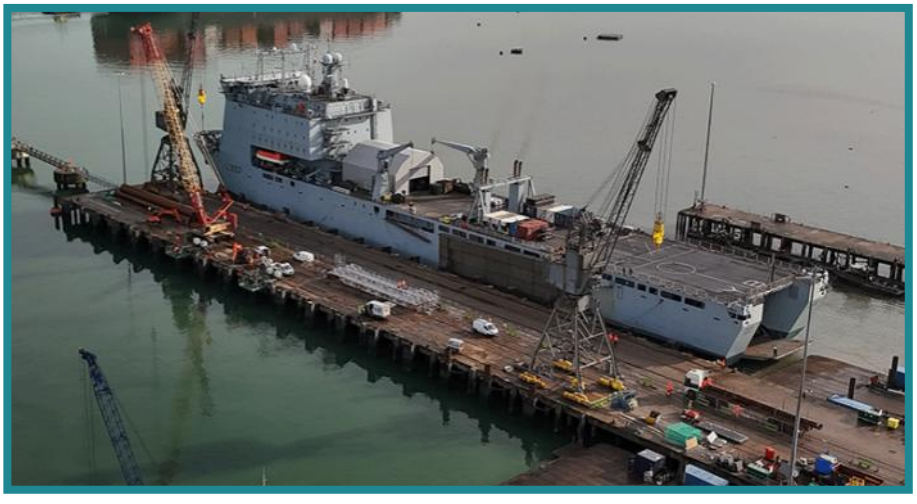


Image © Solent Gateway

In 2023, ABP acquired Solent Gateway, the operator of Marchwood Military Port, with plans for its development. The landside development, known as Phase 1, has been completed and includes 21 acres of open storage, a new security facility and port entrance, including 60 acres of off-site biodiversity net gain (BNG) within the New Forest.

This project, known as Phase 2, will maintain the Falklands Jetty, ensuring it remains capable of accommodating a wide variety of vessel sizes for at least another 40 years. Backed by a £17.5 million investment, the scope of works included deepening the berth, constructing two new dolphins, and increasing the load capacity of the existing mooring bollard and fixed fender configurations.

Heritage & Archaeology

New Museum for the Royal Marines

The boathouse in Portsmouth's Historic Dockyard is undergoing a circa £15m transformation to turn it into a new Royal Marines Experience for the public to enjoy interactive displays and activities.

On the 80th anniversary of VE Day, the National Lottery Heritage Fund awarded £4.4m to transform the boathouse, with the Royal Navy contributing £2m this year.

Image © Royal Navy

The new display will take visitors on a journey through four centuries of Royal Marines history, from the creation of its forerunner in 1664 to today. The Royal Marines have been without a building to tell their 360-year-long story since their former museum in Eastney closed in 2017 after it was deemed to be in need of urgent renovation.

The intention is that the story of the Corps will be told in an active and engaging way, enabling visitors not only to learn about who the Royal Marines are (past and present), but also inviting them to partake in a number of tasks designed to give a taste of the level of physical and mental fitness required to do the job.

The boathouse will also house a new dedicated exhibition gallery and Royal Marines-themed laser quest.

Anchor Discovered

A Southsea Coastal Scheme team was working along Southsea Common in Portsmouth, when it found an iron Admiralty-type anchor weighing about 200kg (441lbs). It was recovered along the area which stretches from the Blue Reef Aquarium to the Hovertravel terminal.

The project said anchors of that type had been frequently left behind as they had been considered "disposable" in their day, making it an exciting, but not entirely unexpected discovery.

Photo © Southsea Coastal Scheme

Maritime Archaeology Centre at Yarmouth

The Maritime Archaeology Trust (MAT) are delighted to have agreed a long-term lease for the buildings and a substantial part of the site of the former Yarmouth Primary School to make their dreams of a state-of-the-art museum and maritime archaeology centre a reality. This has been made possible due to the kind support of the Yarmouth Community Foundation, the Herapath Shenton Trust and a Trustee.

Delivering the new, yet to be named centre, will involve a range of site developments and the required plans; surveys and fundraising now begins in earnest. They hope to have a number of temporary exhibitions on site during the development process to give a taste of what is to come and update with their latest news.

The museum will display and interpret the submerged prehistoric landscapes of the Western Solent, including the unique Mesolithic collections from Bouldnor Cliff, which includes worked wood features, preserved artifacts and a range of flint tools.

The Trust is keen for people to donate maritime archaeology books to the Yarmouth Centre.

Recreation

Solent Seascapes Project – Community Engagement & Behavior Change

A survey carried out by Solent Seascape Project (SSP) to further understand the anchoring habits of boaters, has highlighted the need for clear, accessible information and targeted interventions to promote sustainable boating practices while protecting seagrass habitats.

The survey follows on from volunteer data captured during the five-year ReMEDIES Project which recently came to an end; it will continue its legacy in supporting marine management measures and creating a Wilder Solent.

The Boaters Survey aimed to understand boaters' motivations, influences, and barriers to inform behaviour change solutions. The initial data has provided interesting results for how we might work together to reduce pressures on the Solent's seagrass beds, holding boating community values in tandem with protective measures. With sixty seven percent of boaters saying they would only anchor in seagrass in an emergency, but only fifty one percent of boaters knowing where to find seagrass, the survey highlights the need to raise awareness of seagrass locations and provide alternative anchoring options, as well as a need to work more closely with the Solent's communities.

If you would like to be involved, please get in touch with our Senior Engagement Officer Emily.Stroud@hiwwt.org.uk and be part of the conversation and on-going solutions.

Image © Emily Stroud, HIWWT

Studland Bay Voluntary No Anchor Zone: 2024 Review

In December 2021, a voluntary no anchor zone (VNAZ) was established to prevent anchoring over seagrass beds in Studland Bay Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ). The findings, from a review of its effectiveness during its third year, (2024) have now been published.

Since the initial ten ecomoorings were installed in 2021, seagrass density around the moorings has been monitored using divers, towed seabed video, and side scan sonar. The survey results have shown encouraging signs of seagrass recovery around the ecomoorings due to reduced anchoring pressure.

New seagrass shoots in patches of bare sand © Ken Collins

Divers have recorded footage of new seagrass shoots growing in previously bare sand. Measurements of 25 anchor scars since 2021 have shown a decrease in area, with new seagrass shoots filling in the bare sand as anchoring within the VNAZ has decreased. The monitoring has shown no negative impacts from the installation of the ecomoorings on the seagrass or seabed.

Conservation

Solent Seascape Project Update

It's been a busy first half of the year for the Solent Seascape Project. The partnership of 10 organisations undertook active restoration across seagrass, oyster and seabird habitats, and worked with local stakeholders, the public and volunteers.

Image © Wez Smith, RSPB

They started the year with the launch of The Solent State of Nature Report which highlighted the state of nature in the region, with most habitats considered in decline and native oysters being functionally lost. From this, they invited local stakeholders to join their Seascape Recovery Plan workshops. As part of this, a new Data Explorer was created by ABPmer (please see cover article).

As part of the active restoration work, in April and early May they extended their native oyster reef in the Hamble, placing a new area of cultch next to the existing reef and, with the help of 140 volunteers at the Institute of Marine Sciences, scrubbed 10,545 oysters for placement.

In May they announced their new Solent Seascape Artist in Residence as Richard Walters, a Grammy nominated singer/songwriter. He is currently working on creating 'Songs from the Solent', an EP of original songs inspired by, and featuring the sounds of, the Solent coastline, exploring themes of community, nature, history, industry and nostalgia.

They also launched 'Solent Seabird TV- Live', in advance of the nesting season. Working with the RSPB, the livestream provides all the nesting seabird action from Langstone Harbour as it happens. Most recently, in June and on his 104th birthday, they released their latest film 'Bill's Story' which tells the tale of Isle of Wight resident Bill Smith and his love of sea swimming, which he credits with his long and happy life.

Seahorse Cities: Reviving Marine Life in Langstone Harbour

In an exciting collaboration led by the University of Portsmouth's Institute of Marine Sciences, the "FatFace Seahorse Cities" project is using innovative artificial structures to support seahorse conservation in Langstone Harbour. With input from partners including the Final Straw Foundation, The Seahorse Trust, and local diving groups, the initiative is helping protect two native UK species: the Short-snouted Seahorse and the Spiny Seahorse.

These elusive, slow-moving creatures are sensitive indicators of marine health and are increasingly threatened by habitat loss, plastic pollution, and fishing activity. The Seahorse Cities, two types of purpose-built artificial habitat, offer shelter, promote biodiversity, and encourage seagrass growth, a key ecosystem engineer that improves water quality and stores carbon. Following a successful feasibility study with Natural England, Phase 1 involves deploying these habitats under pontoons, where early signs of biodiversity gain have already been recorded. Phase 2 will see expansion near natural seagrass beds, tracking both seahorse populations and vegetation regrowth.

Monthly monitoring, underwater surveys, and community outreach are central to the project. Educational programs and public engagement, including school visits and events with FatFace staff and customers, are raising awareness of marine conservation and the challenges seahorses face. By combining science, innovation, and community, Seahorse Cities aims to turn the tide on seahorse decline, restoring balance beneath the waves, one artificial habitat at a time.

Restoration

River Hamble Seagrass Restoration

Seagrass has returned to the River Hamble for the first time in decades, thanks to a major restoration effort by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust.

On 10 April 2025, 2,000 seeds were planted directly into the seabed by the Trust's marine conservation team. This is the first time seagrass has been sown in the Hamble since its once-abundant underwater meadows were lost to disease and degradation nearly a century ago.

Historical records show that eelgrass once stretched from Southampton Water up the Hamble to Bursledon, until a wasting disease outbreak in the 1930s caused widespread loss. Surveys in 2011 and again in 2023 found no remaining beds.

Planting seagrass seed in the River Hamble © Caitlin Woombs

The Trust used an innovative Dispenser Injection Seeding technique, which plants seed directly into the seabed. This technique increases the chances of germination success and reduces disturbance to the marine environment, making it a valuable tool in habitat restoration.

The Zostera seeds used were collected, with the help of dedicated local volunteers, in October 2024 from intertidal beds at Farlington, Portsmouth. After collection, the seeds were safely stored in a cold, dark, high-salinity storage aquarium at the University of Portsmouth's Institute of Marine Science, which put them in a state of dormancy over the winter months.

Healthy Harbours Animation

With funding from the Environment Agency Sustainable Innovations Fund, three animations have been created by Chichester Harbour Conservancy to reach communities, partnerships and members of the public to increase understanding of the complexity of issues affecting the harbour, and the role they may have in addressing these issues. They focus on nature recovery, sea-level rise, and coastal squeeze and water quality. They will be launched across Chichester Harbour and the wider Solent region, using a range of media, signage, stickers and more. View at:

- https://www.conservancy.co.uk/nature-recovery-animation
- https://www.conservancy.co.uk/water-quality-animation
- https://www.conservancy.co.uk/coastal-squeeze-animation

More News

Revised National Policy Statement for Ports

The UK government is consulting on a major policy update on ports. The National policy statement for ports (NPSP) was published in January 2012. Since then, there have been many economic changes in the economy, leading to structural changes in the needs and priorities for ports infrastructure. At the same time, there have been significant changes in policy especially in planning and environment.

Key proposed updates include:

- Streamlined planning for port expansions and upgrades.
- Emphasis on green technologies, clean energy, and resilience to climate change.
- Integration with road and rail links to improve freight efficiency.
- Enhanced Appraisal of Sustainability (AoS) and Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) to ensure environmental compliance

The UK's port freight demand forecasts, show an expected rise in UK port freight tonnage overall, particularly of roll-on-roll-off cargo such as cars, buses, trailers, containers and dry bulks.

Solent Boating Trends

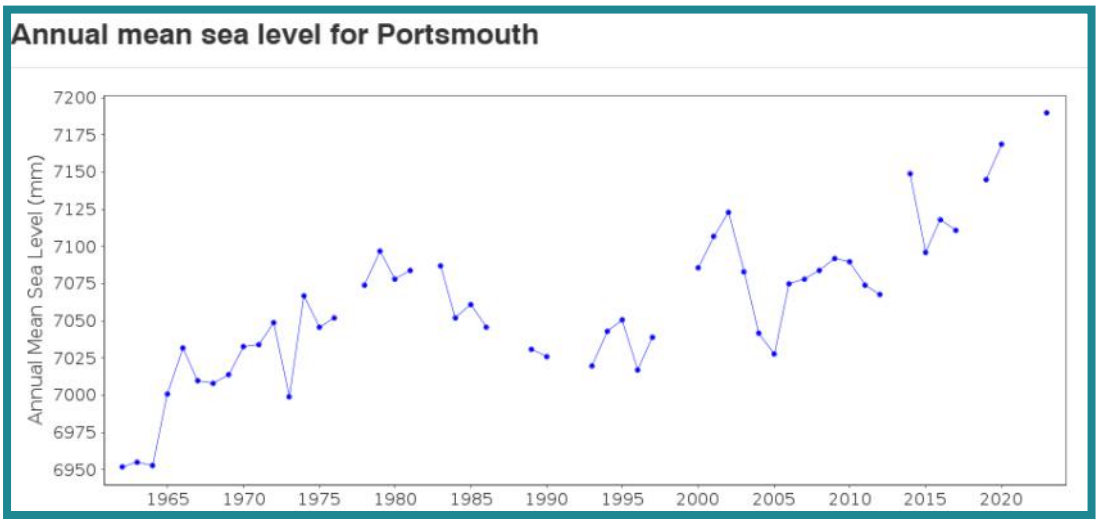
According to industry insights trends in the boating world, including the Solent, we are seeing:

- Eco-conscious boating: Increased demand for electric and hybrid propulsion systems, especially for RIBs and day cruisers.
- Smart tech integration: Use of AI-assisted navigation, real-time weather routing, and automated docking systems.
- Charter growth: More people are choosing bareboat or skippered charters for events and holidays, especially around Cowes and Lymington.
- Experience-focused boating: Growth in corporate team-building charters, family day trips, and luxury RIB experiences.

The Solent remains one of the UK's most vibrant boating regions, with a packed calendar of events.

Storm Events and Coastal Flooding

The National Tidal and Sea Level Facility (NTSLF) is the UK's centre of excellence for sea level monitoring, coastal flood forecasting, and the analysis of sea level. It is the focus for sea level research and for its interpretation into advice for policy makers, planners and coastal engineers.



Data shows that the UK has experienced an uptick in storm surge activity, especially during winter months. These surges are often linked to Atlantic low-pressure systems.

The NTSLF uses real-time tide gauge data and storm surge models to forecast coastal flooding risks. Their latest updates show increased frequency of "compound events" where high tides, storm surges, and heavy rainfall coincide.

Sea levels in the Solent have risen by approximately 15 to 20 cm since 1900, this is consistent with global trends. The rate of rise has accelerated in recent decades, now averaging 3 to 4 mm per year. Rising baseline sea levels mean that storm surges will ride on higher seas, increasing the risk of coastal flooding . In late 2023 and early 2024, the UK experienced a very active storm season. When storm surges coincide with spring tides are times of high risk.

More News

Deathwatch Beetles Studied at London Zoo

Image © ZSL London Zoo

A colony of deathwatch beetles can now be found at ZSL's London Zoo, offering scientists and visitors a chance to learn more about the pests that have gnawed through historic wooden structures for centuries.

The beetle larvae are nestling in a timber taken directly from HMS Victory during The Big Repair; the ten-year, £42m conservation project designed to secure the ship for future generations.

The National Museum of the Royal Navy has just completed a joint research project with Cranfield University, to investigate the activity of these beetles on the ship. Scientists and conservationists from ZSL (Zoological Society of London) and the National Museum of the Royal Navy have teamed up to establish the colony, continuing efforts to uncover new insights into the beetles' behaviour. These pests have plagued Lord Nelson's final flagship since they were first identified within her timbers in 1932.

Over many centuries, the resourceful creatures have made their way from their natural woodland habitat into the timbers of historic buildings and ships. They are named after the tapping noise they make to attract mates. In past times, it was said to sound like the ticking of a clock to those holding silent vigil over someone on their deathbed.

Historic Yacht Race Revived in Yarmouth

Keen sailors from Wightlink and the Royal Solent Yacht Club have got together to revive a traditional regatta, off Yarmouth.

The Captains' Cup started in the year 2000 and was last held in 2010. Fifteen years later, six of Wightlink's seafarers from the Lymington-Yarmouth ferry route joined sailors from the RSYC to race around the buoys in XOD day boats, before sinking a pint or two in the bar.

Wightlink's winner was Captain Rupert Bambach, Captain Richard Cruse came second and Captain Stuart Norris third.

Image © Wightlink Ferries

Shipwright's Way

The Shipwrights Way is a long-distance route linking villages and towns in east Hampshire. It starts at Alice Holt Forest near Farnham and goes across the South Downs to Portsmouth. The route is open to walkers and cyclists and, where possible, horse-riders and people with disabilities.

The final section of the Shipwrights Way is five miles long, it starts at the ferry from Hayling Island and crosses the maintained parkland of Southsea Common using a path known as the 'Ladies Mile'.

It ends at the Historic Dockyard, where you will find the sculpture of a Shipwright's tool bag which marks the end of the Way.

The route is named for its symbolic connection to shipbuilding. It traces the imagined journey of oak timber from the ancient woodlands of Alice Holt Forest to the historic naval dockyards of Portsmouth, where ships for the Royal Navy were once constructed.

The Master Rigger and the Master Shipwright were the most important roles in the dockyard; a shipwright was a skilled and respected workman, who worked on everything from design through to delivery of the final ship.

More News

Helping River Itchen Salmon to Reach the Sea

The Environment Agency is looking at options to make the journey of juvenile salmon out to sea easier. Each spring, shoals of juvenile salmon, known as smolts, begin their journey to the sea. This journey begins on the River Itchen, through the estuary, and out to the sea where the salmon feed and grow before returning to the river as adults to spawn. However the bottom section of the River Itchen, where it transitions to the estuary, has been changed many times historically. It was once used for transport and trade as a sea lock and onward travel to Winchester. Now, the current structures control water levels through Riverside Park.

Smolt are struggling to get past water control barriers on the River Itchen like Woodmill sluice. © Environment Agency.

Historic structures present the biggest obstacles for smolts, especially in large groups. The sharp change in water velocity created by these structures causes smolt to become hesitant and bunch up, making them vulnerable to predation and poaching. The situation is further complicated by issues upstream in Riverside Park, where the manmade channel sits higher than the natural floodplain. Gravity has caused the river to 'breach,' meaning a significant amount of water is now branching off from the main river and finding its own natural course through the floodplain.

The River Itchen is an internationally renowned chalk stream. It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, a Special Area of Conservation and one of six chalk stream rivers in England to have Atlantic salmon. Despite this list of protections, the Atlantic salmon population remains at high risk of extinction. In response to recent declines the Itchen Salmon Delivery Plan was launched.

Policy Brief on Microplastics

Together with leading UK scientists and policy experts, the University of Portsmouth have published a policy brief urging the UK Government to adopt a national strategy to tackle microplastic pollution. It asks for clear targets, regulatory action, and a coordinated response to the most harmful and preventable sources.

The Brief highlights that Microplastics (≤5 mm in size) contaminate air, water, soil, food, and living organisms. They have been detected in processed samples from the human body and over 1,300 species across food webs.

They persist in the environment and risk disrupting key Earth systems that support economic growth. Efforts to remove them have limited impact. Up to 40 million tonnes of microplastics leak into the environment annually, expected to double by 2040 without action.

Work at Calshot Activities Centre

Hampshire County Council are progressing a programme of essential planned maintenance works at Calshot Activities Centre. The site is unique and complex in nature and includes listed buildings along with various designations such as being a site of special scientific interest.

The programme of work has already commenced with repairs to the main access road and the installation of a new pedestrian path carried out during May 2025.

Further work includes the decoration of the outside of most of the buildings. This will include repair, and preventative maintenance works to protect the buildings against the elements

Further essential maintenance works are planned and will run into 2026 . These include repair works to slipways and jetties.

News & Snippets

Car Tyres Shed a Quarter of all Microplastics

Image © Environment Agency

Monitoring efforts on the lower Itchen estuary are intensifying with Environment Agency teams and Cefas deploying new high-tech pollution monitoring equipment. The Itchen, part of Southampton Water, faces numerous water quality pressures and has important environmental designations. Recently, several water quality monitoring instruments were deployed near Ocean Village to track pollutants from bacteria to 'forever chemicals'.

The 'Fluidion' Alert sampling system was installed to monitor E. Coli levels and general water quality parameters. E. Coli can affect human health and bioaccumulate in shellfish. The Fluidion system, technology used on the River Seine during the Olympics, was deployed alongside traditional real-time water quality instruments from the National Instrumentation Team to understand contamination levels and patterns.

Additionally, two types of passive sampler devices (PSDs) for chemicals are being trialled as part of the UK government's Coastal Health, Livelihoods and Environment Shared Outcomes Fund project. Cefas and the Environment Agency deployed Silicone Rubber passive samplers for monitoring nonpolar organic compounds and Diffusive Gradient in Thin film (DGT) samplers for monitoring metals and PFAS (synthetic chemicals used in various industrial and consumer products), known as 'forever chemicals'. This project aims to provide a data framework to monitor coastal marine organisms' health.

Snippets

- Portsmouth naval base will increase its number of operational jetties and ship berths thanks to new government investment, known as Project Bentham, it includes replacing and regenerating aging buildings and infrastructure with more modern facilities. Funding will also be used to protect against forecast sea level rises, as well as improve ship availability.
- Researchers on board RRS James Cook are pioneering a new project about the sounds of the deep sea. With microphones deployed deep in the North Atlantic at sites including PAP and Whittard Canyon, they’re listening for underwater landslides, storms, ships, and elusive beaked whales.
- Current Government policy is that biodiversity net gain cannot be used to enhance designated features of the protected site, except if the habitat is intertidal. So, whilst biodiversity units can be created on and used to create or enhance habitat in protected sites, they can only be used to get a site to favourable condition (i.e. improving the condition of the special features) for intertidal sites.
- An Official Statistic in Development. is designed to quantify the status of vulnerable marine features flagged for protection by summarising published status assessment results. In the latest (2019) assessment, the majority of all listed habitats features,16 out of 17 (94%), were in Unfavourable-Inadequate or Unfavourable-Bad status. Of these, three (18%) had a declining trend and for the remainder, the trend was either stable or unknown.
- Mooring holders have helped to celebrate the grand opening of Buckler’s Hard Yacht Harbour boatshed after a £2m redevelopment to create workshops, waterfront offices and meeting rooms with views across the Beaulieu River.

Solent News

Beneficial use of Dredgings (BuDS) Solent Phase 4

The Solent Forum is facilitating a project to obtain a ten year Marine Management Organisation (MMO) marine licence, to dispose of dredgings from two donor sites for beneficial use at a new disposal site at Cockleshell Bay, Lymington.

The funding was secured by the Environment Agency as part of the consultation of ABP's Marine Licence MLA/2023/00237, for the Western Docks (Capital Dredge) Widening Project.

In June 2024, for BuDs Solent phase 3, a MMO licence application was submitted for a multi donor disposal site at Lymington, which was later withdrawn. This new application will revise this licence and addresses the issues raised by the MMO in their response.

If the site is licensed for disposal it is hope that it can be used by Lymington and Cowes Harbours in the first instance, with the possibility of other locations joining at a later date. Lymington Harbour Commissioners will be the licence holder.

There is widespread support across the Solent for BuDS work and it is hoped that other sites can be identified and licensed for disposal in the future.

The Solent Forum

Since 1992, the Solent Forum has provided a platform to deliver Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Solent sub-region of the southeast. It operates at a strategic coastal management level, providing a network for closer working relationships, information dissemination and discussion of topical coastal issues. The Solent Forum members meet twice a year and will next meet on 15 October 2025 in Cowes.

Solent News is prepared and edited by the Solent Forum Officers. It is a biannual publication and issue 59 will be produced in winter 2025/26. To find out more about the publication, how to submit articles or be included on the mailing list, please visit our publications webpage.

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