

Impacts and Management of Paddleboards in the Solent (IMP Solent)

Project Brief

May 2021

Background

The Solent Forum are aware of the rising levels of Paddleboards in the Solent and in 2016 produced some guidelines for the use of Paddlesports generally to assist local managers.

[*Paddlesports Guidelines to Avoid Bird Disturbance \(3\) \(solentems.org.uk\)](https://www.solentems.org.uk)

The Solent Forum Natural Environment Group (NEG) has been set two actions in 2021/22 by the Solent Marine Site (SEMS) annual monitoring programme.

1. NEG to research the evidence base for potential impacts from increased use of paddle boarding
2. NEG to discuss how we can develop the evidence base to focus more closely on the impacts on the Solent's designated habitats and species from activities

This brief sets out a methodology for NEG to achieve this; the issue has been discussed and minuted at the last two NEG meetings and an IMP Solent Project Group met on 26th May to agree the brief (see Appendix C Meeting Notes).

The brief concentrates on waterbased disturbance from Paddleboards. It does not include the launching of Paddleboards, as this problem and the associated disturbance is covered by other research on shorebased disturbance to birds.

Objectives

The objectives of the project is:

Develop the evidence base on the impacts of paddleboarding on the Solent's designated habitats and species, in particular birds, as explore suitable management options, using Chichester Harbour as a case study.

Actions:

1. List current national and local evidence (see Appendices)
2. Agree proposed new evidence and case study approach.
3. How link the evidence to Solent's designated habitats and species
4. Detail who could collect evidence and training and procedure
5. Outline management tools with pros and cons

Methodology

Where Paddleboards takes place

SEMS Annual Monitoring – details concerns of Relevant Authorities. Data for Paddlesports can be extracted

Bird Aware Data – ranger team observe different activities inc. Paddleboards. They are planning to conduct specific activity data gathering surveys . Data can be abstracted to form a picture of where Paddleboards take place

Evidence from Rangers – This will be picked up in SEMS. Data from North Solent NNR manager Adam Wells – See appendix

Incidence of Paddleboards data

Measurable evidence as to the numbers of Paddlesports users present by location is not yet available.

Chichester Harbour Conservancy proposed a survey regime and will send a methodology to cover:

- Summer counts, using Seal regular summer counts conducted at low tide between May and August 2021. This may include observance of proximity (within 40 metres) to terns and gull nesting sites?
- Winter 2021 – planned counts. Methodology on how this will be measured expected from CHC

Bird disturbance data

Bird Aware counts of paddleboard above would also include statement if birds flew away

CHC counts above would also include statement if birds flew away

Engage with organisations such as the Hampshire Ornithological Society (HOS) in terms of recording? Given that they have numerous members recording information, and many are recording at the same places for WeBS counts too.

Obtaining any relevant information Footprint Ecology hold, particular data collected during SDMP

Evaluation of survey data to understand impacts on birds

Link with any NE condition monitoring surveys across all SSSIs. The North Solent NNR sits within the North Solent SSSI and this has had a condition monitoring survey using CSM guidance over the last month, the results are not yet available. The NNR manager also conducts some surveys on levels of activities but this is very much on an ad hoc basis. The conclusions from these surveys will be made publicly available on Natural England's Designated Sites System.

Potential Management Options

It is one of the objectives of this project to categorise possible management options. These could include a range of tools that are branded across the Solent. Bird Aware are working on branding and the use of a logo for all sites.

It would be useful to contact various paddle boarding user groups and website to work with them to get the right messages across.

Bird aware will be producing maps for paddlesport users to help them undertake their activities. This work will include a code of conduct.

Tools could include:

- Buoys around sensitive sites
- Signs at sensitive sites

NE Briefing note (see Appendix C) suggested management options as follows.

Potential management options for marine recreational activities (note, not specific to non-motorised watercraft and Paddlesports activity), include:

On-site access management, for example:

- designated areas for particular activities (voluntary agreements or underpinned by byelaws);
- provision of designated access points eg slipways, in locations likely to be away from nature conservation access (voluntary or permit condition or underpinned by byelaw).

Education and communication with the public and site users, for example:

- signs, interpretation and leaflets;
- voluntary codes of conduct and good practice guidance;
- wardening;
- provision of off-site education/information to local clubs/training centres and/or residents.

Legal enforcement of, for example:

- byelaws which can be created by a range of bodies including regulators, Local Authorities and landowners (collectively referred to as Relevant Authorities); and
- permitting or licence conditions.

Specific examples of management measures which have been applied to non-motorised watercraft and paddlesport activities are described further in a Management Toolkit which can be accessed from Marine evidence > Marine recreational activities [Natural England Access to Evidence - Marine recreational activities](#) and include:

- codes of conduct;
- voluntary zonation – eg, exclusion zones, specified activity zones and defined landing areas;
- signage
- permit systems – eg, managing access to slipways, often supported by byelaws.

Based on expert judgement, it is considered that where management measures, which would be considered current good practice, are applied to non-motorised watercraft activities, adhered to and enforced, the likely risk of significant impact on a site's Conservation Objectives would be Low

in relation to all activity/pressure impact pathways. For further information and recommendations regarding management measures, good practice messaging dissemination and uptake, refer to the accompanying project report which can be accessed from Marine evidence > Marine recreational activities. [Managing marine recreational activities: a review of evidence - NECR242 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)

Solent Initiatives

Solent Forum Paddlesports guidelines

Chichester Harbour Conservancy are in the process of placing marker buoys around high tide roosts to dissuade Paddlesports users from accessing the shoreline. Messages will be placed on the buoys such as 'wildlife refuge'.

Signs have been put up on the Hamble at Burridge and Curbridge

NE North Solent reserves manager working with Bird Aware and Lymington and Beaulieu Harbours

Langstone Harbour have noted high levels and have introduced a small licence fee for Paddlesports usage in the harbour so that they have a database to send guidelines to.

Key Contacts

Kate Ansell SEMS	
Peter Hughes CHC	Key contact for CH case study
Contact at Sandy Point?	information on paddle boarding, windsurfing and bird disturbance
Tim Ferrero HIWWT	require a methodology for marine champions to obtain evidence).
Alison Fowler RHHA	reports of impacts from paddleboarding by direct dragging and disturbance. In particular at Burrige Hard and Curdrige. Evidence obtained by wardens and signs have been put up. Has obtained a link to a useful facebook site (Brighton, Hove & Shoreham SUP group)
Louise MacCallum Langstone Harbour	–reports of impacts from paddleboarding by direct dragging and disturbance
NE North Solent Solent Reserves Manager Adam Wells (Adam.Wells@naturalengland.org.uk)	has been noting records of paddleboarding (and other activities) on the NNR Works particularly in Beaulieu.
Julie Simms Birds Aware	Code of conduct and mapping for Paddlesports users in Western Solent and Southampton Water

Working Group

Kate Ansell

Peter Hughes

Adam Wells

Julie Simms

Appendix A

EVIDENCE

Key evidence

SEMS Annual Management Reports (See appendix B). This shows concerns about the impact of Paddlesports on the Solent marine sites.

MMO Non -licensable activities work nationally and locally (see Appendix C). This show particular concerns about impacts of Paddlesports in the Solent and links to designated features.

Anecdotal evidence

Adam Wells to Ian Barker

In the New Forest over the years there has been a steady increase in visitor numbers (certainly last year) to the area, and as you are most probably aware there has been great pressures put on the shoreline habitats

Last year saw some devastating impacts on nesting birds along our shorelines from disturbance, people going into areas that were protected for breeding birds etc, especially our shingle beaches where ringed plover and oystercatcher breed, and onto saltmarsh areas where gulls and terns were nesting.

I am sure you read in the local and national papers that the Peregrines failed with 2 chicks due to people landing on private restricted areas and having BBQs.

One particular area which problems have been directed from is "recreational water sports" . paddleboards, inflatable boats, etc.

I have been working with "Solent bird aware group" and we are now meeting with many recreational water sport clubs and associations to try to produce a leaflet like you have on a "code of conduct" for recreational water sports.

Other

Newspaper article in Times April 2021

The rise in popularity of kayaking and paddle boarding is damaging important bird habitats, conservationists warn.

Remote parts of harbours and estuaries that were once rarely explored by people are now being visited, with native sea birds driven away from feeding and breeding grounds. Novice paddlers are being alerted to the effect they can have on wildlife habitats. Poole Harbour in Dorset, an area of international importance for wildlife conservation has been badly affected. It has three nature

reserves run by the RSPB, National Trust and Dorset Wildlife Trust on one side and water sports businesses on the other. One owner said that demand for paddleboards and kayaks had soared since the first lockdown ended last year. Peter Robertson, senior site manager of the RSPB's Dorset reserve said: "Sandwich terns, Mediterranean gulls and little egrets have breeding populations the harbour and need undisturbed space to feed and breed.

The charity 'Birds of Poole Harbour' has tweeted a picture of a paddleboarder nearing a mudflat. It said: 15 mins before this paddleboarder arrived there were 306 avocet, 104 curlew and 88 oystercatcher on this mudflat.

Luke Johns, Poole Harbour nature reserves officer for Dorset Trust said.

"While we are sure that the majority of water users wouldn't want to adversely affect wildlife, we anticipate another difficult year with this." He added that one problem area was Brownsea Island. "It takes some physical effort to get there, so numerous people rest on our shoreline, where there is no permitted landing. They disturb nesting birds .and some clutches of eggs or chicks have undoubtedly been lost."

On the Isle of Wight, the Newton National Nature Reserve has also been affected. Robin Lang, of the National Trust, said "When birds see a human figure on a paddleboard coming to-wards them, they see that as a threat and take flight in great number."

Appendix B

SEMS PADDLEBOARDING EVIDENCE 2021

Survey Summary Response

Recreation - non-motorised watercraft

Survey 2021 for 2020 results

There was a notable increase in this activity, thirteen respondents reported an increase and eleven thought that this activity was impacting on the SEMS sites. Authorities reported a large increase in the use of paddlesports, including first time users, due to Covid restrictions and the costs of such craft coming down. Peak times are in the summer months, particularly school holidays and weekends when the weather is good. Participants having picnics and BBQs at sensitive locations exacerbate the problem, as can the taking of dogs on paddle boards and canoes and fishing from canoes.

Respondents noted that the shallow draughts of these vessels, combined with the ability to launch from almost anywhere with no training, means they allow access to very sensitive sites (such as seabird breeding colonies and seal haul outs) causing great disturbance. Participants can also trample over fragile habitats such as saltmarsh and seagrass during launch and recovery.

Recreation – non-motorised watercraft				
<i>Activity includes windsurfing, kite surfing, kayaks, canoes, row boats, punts, paddle boards, dinghies and sailing boats. Includes all related participation such as launching and recovery (shore access and trailers) and any land based practice. Please include information on events and competitions.</i>				
Change in Activity Level reported				
Increase	Decrease	No Change	Don't Know	Total Responses
2019 2	1	8	8	19
2020 13	1	1	6	21
Do you think the Activity is having an impact on the SEMS Site?				
Yes		No	Total Responses	
2019 4		15	19	
2020 11		10	21	
Source: SEMS Annual Survey Report, 2020 and 2021				

Evaluation and Discussion

Non-motorised watercraft is a generic term which includes both small sailing boats (without a motor) and paddlesports. Small sailing boats include dinghies, day boats or other small keelboats which are usually taken out of water at end of use. Paddlesports is a term for a range of watersports which involve the use of a paddle for propulsion. This includes sea kayaking, surf kayaking, sit-on-top kayaking, Canadian canoeing and stand up paddle boarding (SUP).

Most small sail boat activity occurs in relatively sheltered areas. Vessels are launched from slipways or sheltered beaches using a trailer or trollies. Activity is centred around sailing clubs, activity centres, harbours and marinas. Paddlesports are generally undertaken close inshore (typically within 1-2 km of the coast). Watercraft that are used for paddling activities have a shallow draught. This allows access to shallow areas of the coast (which are often inaccessible to larger vessels or humans on foot). The focuses of these activities are generally centred around beaches and exploring coastal features such as rock formations (sea caves, arches, cliffs etc), inlets, estuaries and wildlife. Kayaks are also increasingly used as a platform for recreational fishing (source: Marine recreation evidence briefing: Non-motorised watercraft including paddlesports (EIN028)).

The Annual Watersports Participation Survey, 2018 showed that, of all boating activities, canoeing was the most popular. Approximately 2.1m people go paddling at least once a year, in canoes, kayaks or on stand up paddleboards. This is due to their accessibility, without the need for any training or expensive equipment. See:

<https://www.rya.org.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/sportsdevelopment/2018-watersports-study-exec-summary-final.pdf>.

Potential Impacts

Natural England's 'Marine recreation evidence briefing: Non-motorised watercraft including paddlesports (EIN028)' (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6087131801321472>) reports that the main impacts of this activity are through abrasion from trampling during launch/recovery of non-motorised watercraft, visual disturbance of birds, marina mammals and fish related to the presence of both people and watercraft and above water noise disturbance of hauled out seals and birds related to people noise during launch or activity.

Impacts on SEMS

In 2021 Natural England assessed the impacts as:

An increase in this activity, particularly paddle sports, has been noted across SEMS. Further study is therefore required to determine whether the use of non-motorised watercraft is having an adverse effect upon SEMS. Therefore, this activity and the impacts from both disturbance and trampling should be monitored as usage has increased and is anticipated to continue to do so.

Still being assessed by Natural England. In 2020 the assessment was as follows:

Management Measures

In 2016, guidelines for paddlesports were produced by the Solent Forum's Natural Environment Group's working group on recreation. See:

http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Recreation_Non_Motorised/Paddlesports_Guidelines_Avoid_Bird_Disturbance.pdf.

The EIN028 report noted above gives examples of management options, the three broad options are on-site access management, education and communication with the public and site users, and legal enforcement. The user groups for the activities in this category also provide advice to their members on how to minimise their environmental impact, for example, The Green Blue has the 'Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters'. A list of these resources and guidance is available at:

http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Recreation_Non_Motorised/.

Guidance on best practice for paddlesports users is available from the British Canoe Union at:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/go-canoeing/access-and-environment/environment-good-practice>.

From summer 2020, Bird Aware Solent will be looking to work with recreational watercraft users to address any impacts from their activities on the Solent's birds.

Appendix C

MMO AND NATURAL ENGLAND NON-LICENSABLE ACTIVITY WORK

The MMO has been developing an evidence base of non-licensable activities looking at a range of activities. This has been used by Natural England to provide briefing notes. Paddlesports is one activity.

The NE briefing note for Paddlesports can be found below:

NE Marine recreation evidence briefing: Non-motorised watercraft including Paddlesports (Nov 2017)

[Marine recreation evidence briefing: Non-motorised watercraft including paddlesports - EIN028](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/nature-conservation/science-and-research/marine-recreation-evidence-briefing-non-motorised-watercraft-including-paddlesports-ein028)
([naturalengland.org.uk](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk))

MMO evidence has assessed the impacts of a range of activities including Paddlesports for their impact on the designated sites.

Two impacts of concern (ie higher than low impact) were identified from Paddlesports

1. Above water noise changes and visual disturbance – seals (hauled out only)

Confidence Low–High depending on geographical location of activity i.e. if the activity is undertaken in close proximity to established seal colonies (high)

Strong visual disturbance stimulus to hauled out seals observed in non-motorised watercraft with most responses recorded occurring at distances of less than 50-100 m (high). The level of response is typically dependent on a range of factors, such as the species at risk, age, weather conditions and habituation

Sensitivity to pressure is high - hauled out seals sensitive to visual disturbance (medium) Evidence suggests common seals more sensitive to pressure than grey seals (high)

Likelihood of effect on feature is Medium– based on wide range of likely overlap between pressure and feature. Where overlap occurs, strong evidence base for impact and high feature sensitivity.

Likelihood of impact on designated site Low-Medium

2. Above water noise changes and visual disturbance – Birds

Confidence is Low–High depending on geographical location of activity (high)

Non-motorised watercraft often produce unpredictable but relatively high intensity visual disturbance stimuli caused by a quiet approach (which can delay the development of early warning cues and responses). Flight responses in birds as a result of non-motorised activities typically occur at distances of less than 40 m In some studies kayaks and small sailing boats recorded a higher disturbance frequency than motorboats or windsurfers (high)

Low-High Sensitivity to pressure - will differ between species. Some species e.g. red-throated diver, curlew, are highly sensitive to disturbance; other species e.g. gulls, have high thresholds (low sensitivity) to disturbance (high) Certain behavioural activities are considered more susceptible to disturbance e.g. nesting seabirds or breeding birds (expert judgement) Limited evidence of sensitivity of diving seabirds to pressure

Likelihood of effect on features is Medium–High based on the wide range of overlap between pressure and features and the high sensitivity of some species/behaviours

Likelihood of impact on designated sites is Low-Medium

The MMO also conducted work on the impacts of non-licensable activities on Marine Protected Areas (MMO1136). [Non-licensable Activity Impacts on Marine Protected Areas \(MMO1136\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) This has resulted in a series of local factsheets showing for each activity, the current and potential intensity and risk of impact for each MPA. Each published November 2019

There are 3 **Solent** MPA factsheets and Paddlesports was of particular concern in Chichester and Langstone Harbour and Solent Maritime SAC.

- Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA [MMO Report Style and GIS Guide \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Paddlesports a particular concern taking place daily with medium participation (11-20 score), **medium to high intensity**, medium confidence, throughout whole MPA and an increasing trend.

- Solent and Southampton Water SPA [MMO Report Style and GIS Guide \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Paddlesports mentioned taking place regularly with medium participation (11-20 score), low to medium intensity, low confidence, in part of the MPA and an increasing trend.

- Solent Maritime SAC [MMO Report Style and GIS Guide \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Paddlesports a particular concern taking place daily with very high participation (100 score) **high intensity**, confidence unknown, throughout whole MPA and an increasing trend.

Appendix D

Impacts and Management of Paddlesports in the Solent (IMP Solent)

Meeting Notes

26th May 2021

Invited:

Adam Wells, NE (Apologies)

Peter Hughes, Chichester Harbour Conservancy

Julie Simms, Bird Aware

Kate Ansell, Solent Forum

Karen McHugh, Solent Forum

AGENDA

Terms of Reference: Background to inaugural meeting, agreement to continue as a group

Agreed – see brief

Agree objectives of Project.

Agreed – see brief

Discuss project methodology – new evidence required, case study approach

Updated brief to reflect discussion

Action: PH – produce short methodology of summer and winter surveys. First round to be complete by May 2022

Action: JS – when know more to detail aspirations and plans for generating activity data that include Paddlesports

Action: KM: Pass methodology to Langstone Harbour and to MMO and NE for comment

Discuss how to link evidence to Solent's designated habitats and species

SEMS 2021 data shows clear concerns and NE return suggests impact on sites

MMO data on non-licensable activities on local MPAs (November 2019) on Solent designated sites show concerns.

Action: KM to speak with Adam Wells to make links. Also Jess Taylor and Eleanor Johnstone at MMO. To make links with suggested survey methodology

Produce an action plan, to define how and who could collect evidence, including procedures and training requirements.

Updated brief. Much more detail on this expected September 2021

Brief look ahead to the type of management tools that might be appropriate to reduce impacts of Paddlesports.

Updated brief. Much more work on this to start May 2022

Future meeting date

8th September 2021