



## Natural Environment Group (NEG)

1st November 2023 via MS Teams

### Meeting Notes

#### 1. Welcome

Jess Taylor (JT) the NEG chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and a round robin was held for introductions.

Please see Appendix 1 for attendees and apologies.

#### 2. Actions Arising from the Last Meeting (26/04/23)

Karen McHugh (KM) updated the group on action arising from the last meeting.

The outstanding action was for the Environment Agency to send details of the Sustainability and Innovation fund – link to fund here. [KTN SIF Homepage - SIF \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/funding/ktn-sif/)

#### 3. Update: NEG actions from SEMS

KM presented Paper 1 that reviews the actions for NEG arising from the SEMS Annual Management Report 2023.

The most important current project for NEG is Solent Seascapes which covers the key SEMS actions for NEG. The Solent Forum is on the Project Advisory Group and chairs the Recovery Working Group, which will design the Solent Recovery Plan. ABPmer are producing a marine data portal and a State of Nature report.

A generic action is to look at trend data for activities, during COVID activities increased and they now remain constant but elevated. For those activities where we are concerned about impacts, we need to evaluate how we can better reduce and manage activity levels especially at sensitive sites.

There was discussion on the numerous fishing evidence projects underway and how these will capture evidence on the recreational angling sector for use by SEMS. There is a need to collaborate on these projects.

The work looking at monitoring the evidence base for potential impacts on designated sites from paddlesports via pilot work by Chichester Harbour Conservancy is still underway. Surveys began in October 2021. The next report on results will be spring 2024.

***SEMS Fishing Action: KM to provide a short summary paper of all the recreational fisheries/sea angling projects taking place in the Solent. To include Catchwise, Angling for Sustainability, CAST, Fish INTEL. Speak to IFCA's, Solent Seascapes and University of Portsmouth for details. Also to arrange presentations for NEG on these projects at appropriate times and feed any data to SEMS.***

#### **4. Update: NEG Funded Projects**

KM updated the group on NEG projects awarded funding.

##### **Previous years' project (2022/23)**

Fathom Ecology were funded for an Intertidal Seagrass Restoration project in the Solent, please see Appendix 3 for an update. This work is expected to be completed in March 2024.

##### **Projects for 2023/24**

One project was funded for 2023/4, 'It's the water quality stupid! Id risks to support successful restoration in the Solent', by the University of Portsmouth. This is due to end November 2023. Please see PowerPoint presentation from Gordon Watson at the University of Portsmouth.

*Action: KM to ask Rayner Piper from Fathom Ecology to speak at a NEG meeting on his seagrass work.*

*Action: UoP project reporting to be sent to NEG when complete by December*

#### **5. Presentation: It's the water quality stupid! Id risks to support successful restoration in the Solent – Gordon Watson, University of Portsmouth**

Gordon Watson (GW) presented the initial findings from this NEG funded project. Please see PowerPoint presentation. His next step is to speak to the Environment Agency about how to take the Solent pilot forward as the code developed can be used nationally. There is a need to understand why some sites in the Solent have improved in terms of water quality and others have deteriorated. The overall picture is plateaued levels of nitrate pollution over the last twenty years (with increases in some cases) with phosphorous levels reducing over the same period. PH levels have shown an increase over the period and the cause of this is not currently known.

##### **Questions**

GW noted that currently the data set doesn't enable source apportionment of a pollutant. It looks at the concentrations of determinants and their parameters. E-coli data comes from the rivers.

JT has colleagues in NE who are able to support projects to source external funding and who currently have some capacity.

Megan Roberts noted that Langstone Harbour Board have finished a course of bacterial testing in Langstone Harbour over the bathing water season. There was lots of variation within the data because of the strange summer weather. The report should be available in early 2024.

Carolyn Herbert asked regarding E-coli, can you separate the sources out into human/avian. GW replied that this has not been explored yet and he would need to speak to the Environment Agency to see if the data is separated in their standard reporting mechanisms.

Fay Pisani is writing Three Harbours (Langstone, Chichester, Pagham) strategy which will have a strong focus on water quality and she needs to explore if the data can look at in this spatial area. GW replied that currently they are looking Solent wide and haven't looked at specific areas yet.

GW has data from the RanTrans project for Langstone harbour and the River Hamble to link nitrate pollution with weather events. This looks at the toxicity of nitrates on habitats. The data is currently being written up.

## **6. Discussion: Kite Surfing in Western Solent**

KM presented paper 2 on managing non-licensable activities (NLA) outside of Statutory Harbour Authority Areas and opened the floor for discussion. The case study is kite surfing in the Western Solent. She also noted the importance of the issue being reported in the SEMS Annual Survey process so we can get a better understanding of what is happening.

Regarding issues at Hurst Spit, Julie Sims (JS) is in discussions with a small working group of local organisations and is happy to act as a conduit between this group and NEG. The ringed plover disturbance data came from a community group not Bird Aware and this can't be evidenced directly to kite surfing although it is believed likely. She noted that NFDC is leasing the area from the Merrick Estate which runs out in nine years, the Estate manages the moorings but has no interest in being a Harbour Authority. It's a very complicated picture regarding landownership and leasing/sub leasing. HIWWT lease an area of the site and there are multiple landowners.

Pete Durnell (PD) noted that HIWWT lease Pennington marshes but they have sublet that to HCC so HCC monitor the site and signage. There is a need to find out which is the most relevant authority and who has responsibility for management measures.

Jessica Churchill-Bissett (JCB) from the MMO commented that they have a responsibility for assessing and managing NLAs up to 12nm. Where site level assessments indicate an impact, they have a responsibility to manage activities. They are joining regional groups like NEG to understand the picture better, what management measures may be appropriate and how to collaborate with local groups. The MMO are committed to assisting JS by bringing coastal team patrols on site regularly at key observational points and record and take photos of NLAs of concern, such as Kite surfing. They will work with JS to make a plan on how regularly they will visit (perhaps monthly) and at what conditions which may be suitable for kite surfers (high tide and when windy).

Charlotte Stadden is the newly allocated lead for disturbance within the MMO marine planning team. She noted that disturbance management will come more under their marine conservation team and MMO enforcement teams. They are keen to collect data to ensure that the South Marine plan disturbance policies are effective.

JT added that NE are undertaking condition assessments of MPAs and will look at whether a primary attribute. Such as bird abundance, might fail. The conservation advice has a reduce target already. Condition assessments will give a clearer picture of the situation regarding bird disturbance. It was however pointed out that even if the condition assessment does not fail on overall bird abundance, that there still could be considerably harm to birds on a localised level. JT asked for any data for the condition assessments, PD recommended asking [Hampshire Ornithological Society](mailto:keithbetton@hotmail.com), email [keithbetton@hotmail.com](mailto:keithbetton@hotmail.com).

KM asked PD if they have any evidence for disturbance at Pennington, and how to get better input from HCC regarding the SEMS survey. PD replied that there is only anecdotal evidence as kite surfing occurs sporadically depending on weather conditions and there are no organised groups, Tanners Lane and Mount Lake are access locations. PD said to send the SEMS survey to him in the first instance to disseminate, he personally covers New Forest and central Hampshire; Chris Hodson from HCC covers the West.

JBC added that the MMO have a steer from Defra that they won't have to wait for condition assessments to put in management measures, they just have to meet the evidence threshold and have NE support. They are looking at novel ways of addressing activity evidence gaps, such as using data from activity Apps, she asked to please pass on details if you know of Apps that can be used. Operation Seabird is an awareness raising programme and if felt beneficial they could try and organise events during 2024. The Wildlife and Countryside Act makes it an offence to disturb species, this is hard to prove, but if there is evidence they can build the case for management measures, please report specific incidences to the MMO. Kate Heath will be MMO site lead for the Solent.

JS commented that in terms of evidence she did a sweep of what is available and the literature supports that kite surfing disturbs birds and can completely displace them. She is going to see if these findings can be used as a proxy against known incidence of these activities in the Solent and thus providing enough evidence of harm.

Tristan Norton agreed that we are reliant on anecdotal information and that we need a more systematic approach, stating that it is useful to know that the condition assessments won't hold up management. He cited two national evidence papers included in the chat resources below.

Wez Smith added that he is more concerned about disturbance impacts on nesting birds, so we need to look at the wider context.

KM added from a NEG point of view we need to build up a picture and undertake a disturbance incidence project if the data shows the need and that NEG will review the actions of others over the year and await next years SEMS monitoring to look for trends.

**Actions:**

*All to pass on details of known activity apps to MMO.*

*All to pass any bird data to Jess Taylor for condition assessment work.*

*JS to work with MMO on site visits to Hurst.*

*NEG review the situation throughout the year and when next year's SEMS AMR is published.*

*SEMS to add Pete Durnell and Chris Hodson from HCC to SEMS Management Group contacts as they will be in a position to return the annual monitoring survey*

*JS to continue understanding if national evidence data can be used as a proxy for evidence of harm when coupled with kite surfing incidence data*

**Chat Resources**

<http://www.deeestuary.co.uk/decgks.htm>

[The effects of kitesurfing on waterbirds - a review \(researchgate.net\)](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312111111)

[Managing marine non-licensable activities in marine protected areas - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-marine-non-licensable-activities-in-marine-protected-areas)

## **7. Presentation: NE marine natural capital ecosystem assessment - James McClelland, Natural England (NE)**

JM in NE national team presented on Natural England's natural capital ecosystem assessment.

PD asked whether work has been done on looking at the value of the water column as this has an intrinsic value and provides services such as pollution dilution and dispersal. JM replied the EA are leading a pelagic theme looking at the water column with a focus on plankton and wider water body habitat. They also have a project called land-sea interface that looks at the terrestrial/sea interface and a catchment based approach.

## **8. Presentation: Solent Biosecurity Planning Update – Kate Ansell, Solent Forum**

Kate Ansell gave a brief presentation on the work that has been done this year on Solent biosecurity planning. She will discuss with the harbour officers the best way to coordinate information to go into harbour guides.

## **9. Update: Impacts of bird flu on breeding season**

Wez Smith from the RSPB gave an overview on avian flu that first hit the Solent in the 2022 breeding season; there was high mortality at Pagham, but Langstone was unscathed and there was a mixed picture elsewhere. This year lots of colonies were hit, the Pagham colony didn't exist this year but Langstone got a boost. Avian flu hit in June and tends to spread when chicks hatch. On the productivity side the number of fledged birds looked okay, but this is when they are more susceptible to the virus. In 2022 it was the Sandwich terns that were affected, this year it was Common Terns and Black Headed Gulls.

The Life on the Edge (LoTE) project has been working on sites across the Solent to monitor and protect nesting birds. Fencing has been erected and cage nets. It seems to have been a good year at sites with public access, the fledge numbers for Ring Plovers look good. A report will be produced in due course.

## **10. Update: Life on the Edge Capital Works for Seabirds - Wez Smith, RSPB**

Wez Smith from the RSPB presented on the Capital Projects being undertaken for Solent Seascapes project and LoTE. Please see presentation.

## **11. Finance**

KM presented Paper 3 on finance. The reserve brought forward is approx. £10k which means there is £5k available for projects for 2024/5.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

The group will next meet on 24th April 2024 via MS Teams.

## **Appendix 1 – Attendees and Apologies**

### **Attendees**

Jess Taylor - Natural England, NEG Chair  
Karen McHugh - Solent Forum, NEG Secretary  
Kate Ansell - Solent Forum, SEMS Secretary  
James McClelland - Natural England  
Alison Fowler - River Hamble Harbour Authority  
Julie Sims - Bird Aware  
Zoe Keeble - Winchester CC  
Andy Davidson - Hants CC  
Gill Glover - Havant BC  
Wez Smith - RSPB/Life on the Edge  
Caitlin Mason - Royal Haskoning Dhv  
Dominic Parry - Southern IFCA  
Tom Day – Chichester DC  
Goshie Hiett - Coastal Partners  
Rachel Hardy - Southern Water  
Dan Ross – Southern Water  
Pete Durnell – Sites Team Manager northwest Solent, HCC  
Charlotte Stadden - MMO  
Jessica Churchill-Bissett- MMO  
Paul Howe – Eastleigh BC  
Gordon Watson - University of Portsmouth  
Jake Wilson - Sussex IFCA  
Tristan Norton - Havant BC  
Jasmin Godbold - University of Southampton  
Jenny Mallinson - University of Southampton  
Carolyn Herbert - IoW Council  
Megan Roberts - Langstone HB  
Tom Day - Chichester DC  
Fay Pisani - Three Harbours

### **Apologies**

Ricardo Zanre - WWF  
Sue Hawley – Isle of Wight Estuaries  
Peter Hughes – Chichester Harbour Conservancy  
Richard Unsworth – Project Seagrass  
Ian Barker – NFNPA  
Nick Hey - Wightlink

## Appendix 2 – Update on SEMS actions for NEG 2023/24 (Paper 1)

The following table shows only NEG actions included in the SEMS Annual Management Report 2023 and these actions were set in Autumn 2023 to be worked on until Autumn 2024. They entirely supersede the actions from the previous year. The AMR includes many more actions allocated to others. It incorporates actions allocated to NEG in previous years.

NEG Actions
<p><b>Generic Actions relevant to NEG</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>NEG Action:</b> to assist the Blue Marine led Solent Seascapes Project in identifying how anthropogenic activity pressure can be reduced and managed to help habitat and species restoration and the delivery of a voluntary restoration plan. <b>Action Progress:</b> Solent Forum chairing Solent Recovery working group which will design Solent Recovery Plan, to remove pressures. Work to produce a data portal and state of nature report</li><li>• Trend data for activity change is showing that activities in the Solent are elevated but stable. For those activities where Relevant Authorities, particularly Natural England, are concerned about impacts on designated sites, we need to evaluate if and how we can reduce or better manage those activities; focusing on sites that are especially sensitive. <b>NEG Progress:</b> These concerns will be found in the state of nature report noted above</li></ul> <p><b><u>Fishing including shellfisheries</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>NEG Action (2023):</b> NEG to monitor the <a href="#">Catchwise project</a> outcomes and report back to SEMS once data becomes available. <b>Action Progress:</b> yet to be determined.</li></ul> <p><b><u>Recreation - light aircraft</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>NEG Action (ongoing):</b> NEG to request data annually from Bird Aware Solent on winter drone use and disturbance. Updates will be added to the SEMS website section on <a href="#">aerial recreation</a>. The Bird Aware data is also summarised in the evaluation and discussion section above (4.13.2). <b>Action Progress:</b> On-going - Data for 2023 showed no concerns. Next data request will be made March 24.</li></ul> <p><b><u>Recreation - non-motorised watercraft</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>NEG Action (ongoing):</b> Monitor the evidence base for potential impacts on designated sites from paddlesports via pilot work by Chichester Harbour Conservancy and Solent Seascapes pressure mapping of sensitive sites. <b>Action Progress:</b> Please visit <a href="#">Solentems - Paddlesports in the Solent (IMP Solent)</a> for details. Surveys began in October 2021 and will continue for at least two years. Next report on results expected in Spring 2024.</li></ul>

## **Actions that NEG may be able to help with**

### **Accidental Vessel Discharges/Emissions including Oil Spill and Clean-up**

- All to continue to promote and share best practice in addressing the potential environmental impacts of vessel discharges/emissions.

### **Boat repair and maintenance**

- All to continue to promote and share best practice in addressing the potential environmental impacts of boat repair/maintenance, including preventing marine invasive spread. For resources see:  
[http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Boat\\_repair/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Boat_repair/) and [Solent Forum - Solent Biosecurity Planning](#).

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### **Fishing (shorebased activities)**

- Continue to report and liaise with the local IFCA, and if necessary, the marine police, where it is considered that bait collection or foreshore hand gathering is commercial or having a detrimental impact. Use the [Guidance for Solent Relevant Authorities for monitoring shore-based fishing](#) to record this activity.

### **General Beach Recreation**

- SEMS MG members to be aware of the Natural England recreational evidence note on general beach life and use this guidance to identify issues and management measures ([Marine recreation evidence briefing: general beach life - EIN034 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](#)).
- SEMS MG members to consider including information on potential impacts on designated sites when updating local codes of conduct or signage. Resources to assist this are available at:  
[http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/General\\_Beach\\_Recreation/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/General_Beach_Recreation/).

### **Grazing and foraging**

- SEMS MG members to report any concerns regarding the foraging for wild plants or shellfish in designated sites to the SEMS office via the annual survey and to the local IFCA.

### **Land recreation - Dog walking**

- RAs to identify and communicate with their own rangers, coastal staff, and comms teams details of how they can support Bird Aware Solent in the delivery of their educational messages and liaise on recreational disturbance issues.
- Local authorities to continue to consider the use of Public Space Protection Orders and SANGS as measures to mitigate dogs disturbing birds, particularly disturbance to overwintering birds.

### **Land recreation - Walking (other than dog walking)**



- SEMS MG to read and be aware of the issues and measures raised in the assessments relating to the stretches of coastal path in their jurisdiction. To view please see: [http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Land\\_Recreation/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Land_Recreation/).
- SEMS MG to help publicise the [Countryside Code](#) and [Marine and Wildlife Coastal Code](#) through existing communications.

#### **Littering and removal of litter**

- The Solent Forum will continue to maintain the Solent Plastics Pollution Hub as a legacy output of the Agency's Preventing Plastic Pollution Interegg funded project. This hub will link closely with the Forum's work on Clean Solent Shores and Seas. See: [Solent Forum - Solent Plastics Pollution Hub](#).

#### **Mooring and anchoring**

- All to support, promote and share information from the four-year LIFE ReMEDIES project. See: [Recreational boating - Save Our Seabed](#).

#### **Operation of Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management Schemes (FCERM)**

- All to support, promote and share information from the four-year LIFE ReMEDIES project. See: [Recreational boating - Save Our Seabed](#).
- Promote and share information on best practice on this activity including new methodologies and innovation. See: [Solentems - Operation of coastal flood and erosion risk management schemes, barrages and sluices](#).

#### **Operation of Ports and Harbours**

- Promote and share information on best practice on this activity including work on the ecological enhancement of port and harbour infrastructure. [Solent Forum](#) (via Bournemouth University led working group).
- Utilise the resources and implement relevant actions in the [Solent Biosecurity action plans](#) to address the impacts from marine invasive species.

#### **Recreation - non-motorised watercraft**

- SEMS MG members to use the paddlesports guidelines (published 2016) and the other resources available on the [SEMS website](#), to help manage impacts.

#### **Recreation – Powerboating with an engine**

- Promote and share environmental studies, reports and good practice. Information is collated on the [SEMS website activity page on motorised craft](#).

#### **Slipway and Jetty cleaning and maintenance**

- Continue to follow best practice guidance when undertaking slipway and jetty cleaning. See: [http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Slipways/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Slipways/).

## **Appendix 3 - NEG Project Update**

### Fathom Ecology, Intertidal Seagrass Restoration in the Solent (Rayner Piper)

#### **November 2023**

Fathom Ecology met with Chichester Harbour Conservancy for SSSI consent approval in October 2023. The conservancy signed the SSSI consent and sent it to NE.

There have been no real questions regarding the changes to the project but they were keen on involving citizen scientists. After some debate we decided the best way to involve the public was to ask them to collect seagrass from the strandline. This weekend is the Eco-fair at the Emsworth sailing club and I shall be there along with Chichester conservancy's outreach officer displaying a poster about the seagrass in Emsworth Harbour and how they can collect it. We are going to encourage the attendees to walk the strandline and collect any seagrass that they find depositing it in a bucket at the sailing club. The bucket will be left in place until the end of October. Any seagrass collected shall be stored over winter and the seeds planted early next spring. All being well the real work will begin next spring when we start planting and monitoring the seeds. This will be done by myself and Natalie Huckle a PhD student at Brighton University with support from conservancy staff. We did not think it a good idea to take the public out onto the mudflat.

#### **April 2023**

The sites that will be used have now been identified within Chichester Harbour and we have permissions from the conservancy for use for the project. I now have to get out on site and measure redox potential (I have ordered the redox sensor with money from the project and this is due to arrive later this week), slope and take twelve sediment samples for PSA and organic carbon. All being well this work should be completed by this coming weekend. For the actual seagrass work, I have made to make some small changes to the project so as to comply with what Natural England will license within a SSSI. The original plan had hoped to trail the use of plugs and rhizomes but this has not proved possible and so I have submitted alternative techniques which have proved successful in the Baltic and Wadden seas. These are:

1. Replanting of *Zostera* collected from strandline by attaching plants to an iron nail using corrodible wire. This technique has proved extremely successful in the Baltic and I am hoping will have similar results here.

2. The other technique proposed involves using modified sealant guns to inject seeds to a depth of 1-4 cm in the mudflat. Two planting densities will be trailed:

- Planting of seeds at a concentration of fifty seeds per litre sediment
- Planting seeds at a concentration of one hundred seeds per litre sediment.