

The coastline of the Solent contains the largest most tightly clustered area of small estuaries anywhere in Great Britain and is one of the few major sheltered channels in Europe.

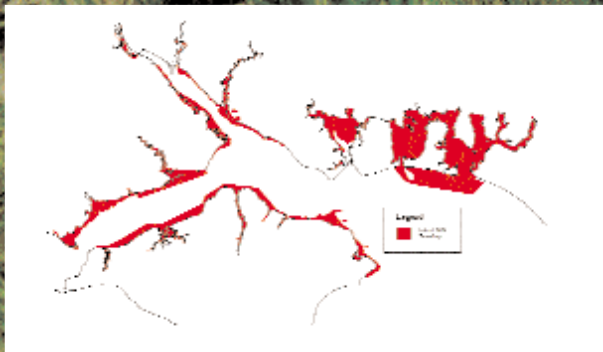
The Solent and its inlets are unique in Britain and Europe for their complex tides, with long periods of tidal stand at high and low tide.

The wide number of habitats support extensive areas of mudflats, featuring eelgrass, green algae and saltmarshes as well as natural shoreline features such as drift line vegetation. Many of these areas provide important feeding, nesting and roosting sites for nationally and internationally important birds.

The importance of the area is recognised by its designation as the Solent European Marine Sites (SEMS), which stretches from Hurst Spit in the west to Chichester harbour in the east and includes areas along the north coast of the Isle of Wight from Yarmouth to Bembridge Harbour, as well as the mainland shores (as shown on the accompanying map).

The SEMS project was set up in November 2000 with the aim of developing a strategy for managing the marine and coastal resources of the Solent in a more integrated and sustainable way.

Map of the Solent European Marine Site



The bait collector's code

1. Observe local bylaws and regulations which affect the use of the coast, or access to permanently and seasonally closed areas.
2. Collect bait sustainably.
3. Back-fill all holes for safety, and to maintain the intertidal habitat.
4. Tell someone where you intend to dig.
5. Avoid disturbing wildlife and marine heritage wherever possible.
6. Be aware of local hazards and conditions.
7. Treat the foreshore with respect.
8. Replace all rocks and stones, and preserve the food chain by not digging in eel grass beds.
9. Do not dig around moorings, slipways, and sea walls.
10. Take all your litter home.

Want to know more?

For more information, visit www.solentems.org.uk or contact the SEMS project at Environment Department, Hampshire County Council, The Castle, Winchester, Hants, SO23 8UD.

Alternatively, you can email your query to: sems@hants.gov.uk

THE BAIT COLLECTORS' CODE

BE AN AMBASSADOR FOR ANGLING AND BAIT COLLECTING



Bait collectors operate in a complex natural environment. The worms, shellfish and other invertebrates which live in the sediment are an essential food supply for the birds, fish, crabs and shrimps living above them.



This leaflet has been produced with support from The Crown Estate's Marine Stewardship Fund



This voluntary code of conduct is not a complete statement of law

Introduction

Bait collectors have worked on the Solent coastline for many years.

Whether digging for lugworm and ragworm, or collecting crabs by hand, bait collectors and anglers have first-hand experience of the local estuaries and harbours.

Now, bait collectors, anglers and conservationists have pooled their knowledge to develop these guidelines for responsible and sustainable bait collection.

The code will help bait collectors to protect the Solent's wildlife, so that there's enough bait for everyone – both now, and in the future.

The Solent contains nationally and internationally important habitats and birds which is reflected in its status as a European marine site.

Legal briefing

The code applies to everyone who collects bait in and around the Solent, but it doesn't affect your right to fish. Collecting seafish is subject to fisheries legislation.

Collecting bait for personal or recreational use is part of the public's right to fish, but there is no legal right to gather bait commercially for sale or reward.

Commercial collectors must get the landowner's permission before starting work, and check whether they need consent from agencies such as English Nature.

Generally speaking, anyone who damages or destroys a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) may be fined up to £20,000. But the court will take account of any profits made from the offence, and Crown Courts have power to impose unlimited fines.

In some places there may be bylaws to prohibit dangerous activities, or to safeguard wildlife. English Nature will assess allegations of damage by bait collectors realistically, on a site-by-site basis.

The code has been designed to encourage sustainable bait collecting. Properly authorised commercial operators and personal bait collectors have nothing to fear, however if bait collection is carried out irresponsibly and unsustainably further action maybe necessary.

The code in detail

- 1. Observe local by laws and regulations which affect the use of the coast, or access to permanently and seasonally closed areas.**
 - Check the local situation before collecting bait in unfamiliar areas. Ignorance of the law is no excuse.
 - You'll find more information about bylaws on the SEMS website at www.solentems.org.uk
- 2. Collect bait sustainably.**
 - Anglers have rights under Magna Carta, but you should still gather only what you need to ensure future supplies of bait.
 - Leave plenty of adult worms and crabs to enable them to reproduce as small populations may die out. For instance, sperm puddle density is an important factor for lugworm reproduction.
 - Avoid damaging other animals in the sediment or on rocks.
 - Store your bait correctly to reduce the numbers that die.
 - Careful collection causes less disruption to the foreshore and reduces the risk of exposing black layers in the sediment.
 - Recreational sea anglers may gather bait to share with family or friends, **but not for sale or reward.**
 - Do not take green spawning worms, or king rag less than 100mm long.
 - Carefully return any unused bait to similar areas.
- 3. Back-fill all holes for safety, and to maintain the intertidal habitat.**
 - The foreshore will recover much more quickly, and you'll save other animals from suffocating under spoil mounds.
 - The beach will look better. Unsightly heaps always cause problems.
 - The shore will be safer for other bait collectors, sailors and walkers.
 - Back-filling helps to reduce pollution from heavy metals that may be trapped in the sediment.
 - You'll help to protect worms, shellfish and crabs from being eaten by birds.
- 4. Tell someone where you intend to dig.**
 - Don't forget to tell someone what time you intend to return.
 - Do contact them if you are delayed. It could save them from calling out the emergency services.
 - Remember your mobile phone, and a compass if you have one.
- 5. Avoid disturbing wildlife and marine heritage wherever possible.**
 - Disturbing over-wintering seabirds wastes the energy they need for migration.
 - Nesting birds may lose their eggs if they are frightened from their nests.
 - Some seabirds are attracted to areas that have been dug, but this will only benefit a few species for a short time.
 - Avoid disturbing seals or other mammals on their haul-outs.
- 6. Be aware of local hazards and conditions.**
 - You may be at risk from unfamiliar tides, soft mud, quicksand or adverse weather.
- 7. Treat the foreshore with respect.**
 - Keep to access paths and close gates.
 - Avoid trampling on plants and animals, so that other people can enjoy them.
- 8. Replace all rocks and stones, and preserve the food chain by not digging in eel grass beds.**
 - Take care not to crush wildlife when turning boulders.
 - Animals and plants are specifically adapted to where they live so it is important to replace all rocks and stones as you find them so that the animals and plants can survive.
- 9. Do not dig around moorings, slipways and sea walls.**
 - Existing harbour bylaws often prohibit digging for health and safety reasons.
 - The combined effect of tides, waves and digging may undermine walls and allow moorings to shift.
 - Digging around fixed structures tarnishes the reputation of anglers. It creates conflict with other shore users, property owners, and harbour authorities.
- 10. Take all your litter home.**
 - Human litter causes extensive damage to the marine environment. Modern materials degrade slowly, and may threaten marine life for decades.
 - Litter is an eyesore that spoils the coast for everyone.
 - Collect and remove any angling debris such as discarded fishing line wherever possible.