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# **Solent Marine Sites (SEMS)**

## **Annual Management Report, 2025**

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**Prepared by the Solent Forum on  
behalf of the SEMS Management  
Group**

**Sept 2025**



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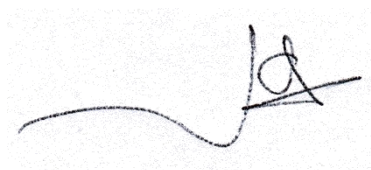
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## 1 Foreword

Thank you, as ever, for making your contributions to this important record of how activities are impacting on our sites. This year, we have received responses from every one of our management group members for the first time in my term as Chairman. The importance of this cannot be overstated, as budgetary pressures become greater each year and members seek to justify financial contributions. In our Annual meeting, we will be discussing how a collective approach is not only more effective and efficient but also allows each of us to fulfil statutory responsibilities far more economically than would be the case if a lone approach were to be taken.

I am very grateful for your continued contribution to this important group.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Scott', written over a horizontal line.

Jason Scott  
Chair, Solent Marine Sites  
River Hamble Harbour Master

## 2 Executive Summary

In February 2025, sixteen non-licensable coastal and marine activities that take place in the Solent were surveyed for the Solent Marine Sites (SEMS) Annual Management Scheme. Of the thirty-one Relevant Authorities in the Solent invited to complete the survey, all responded. Respondents were asked how participation in activities had changed during 2024, and whether they believed they were having an impact on SEMS. The Survey results can be accessed via the Annual Survey Report on the [SEMS website](#).

This Annual Management Report evaluates and discusses the survey responses, highlights existing management measures and identifies actions. Natural England comment on whether they believe an activity is impacting the condition of SEMS sites. Those organisations holding powers and responsibilities, where specific activities are a concern in their location, will find this report useful as evidence for guiding policy and effort in addressing and managing non-licensable activities.

Supplementary information and additional resources on each of the activities can be found on the [SEMS website](#).

The past years' data shows that the mode value for participation of activities in the Solent is no change. However activities such as coastal walking, (including dog walking) general beach recreation and paddle and windsports have been at elevated levels for some time as people increasingly value the physical and mental health benefits of visiting the coast and using the marine space. There are concerns that high levels of baseline activity are having negative impacts, particularly at sensitive sites, and there is a case to look at reducing or managing activity levels at these locations. We also need to gather more evidence on certain activities as there is a lack of knowledge on levels of participation, this year we have used Strava's Global Heatmap to gain an overview of where recreational activities are taking place across the Solent.

The activities highlighted this year as impacting on SEMS sites include coastal walking (mainly with dogs), littering, coastal squeeze (from FCERM works), and non motorised watercraft use (paddlesports). Table 5b summarises this data.

This Report also illustrates the ongoing good work by the Solent's Relevant Authorities, trade associations, partnerships and user groups, to protect and conserve the Solent's designated sites. These 'management measures' are set out in the evaluation and discussion for each activity section. SEMS will continue to promote this work and share best practice across the Solent.

## 3 Introduction

This Solent Marine Sites (SEMS) Annual Management Report provides an overview of how the [SEMS Management Group](#) acts to comply with the [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) for non-licensable activities. It summarises, evaluates and sets actions for each of the sixteen non-licensable activities surveyed in the SEMS annual survey.

Actions to address the issues raised are discussed at the annual SEMS Management Group meeting, which takes place each September. The Solent Forum's [Natural Environment Group \(NEG\)](#) takes forward and delivers strategic actions, whilst more localised or specific actions are undertaken by the appropriate individual Relevant Authority (RA).

### 3.1 Solent Marine Sites

The Solent is a complex site encompassing a major estuarine system; it is unique in Britain and Europe for the complexity of the marine and estuarine habitats present. Sediment habitats within the estuaries include extensive areas of intertidal mudflats, saltmarshes, eelgrass and natural shoreline transitions, such as drift line vegetation. The rich intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, shingle beaches and adjacent coastal habitats, including grazing marsh, support nationally and internationally important numbers of migratory and over-wintering waders and waterfowl, as well as important breeding gull and tern populations.

The Solent Marine Site (SEMS) Management Scheme covers the designated coast and marine space for the Solent Maritime SAC, Solent and Southampton Water Special Protection Area (SPA), Portsmouth Harbour SPA, Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA and the Solent and Dorset Coast SPA that covers much of the marine area.

[Marine Conservation Zones](#) are designated via separate legislation and are not formally included in the SEMS Management Scheme. However, since their designation in the Solent, we have included questions on these sites in the Annual Survey; we ask respondents if they are undertaking any monitoring and if they have any concerns about activities having an impact. Please see section 8 for more details.

Section 9 shows a map of the Solent's Marine Protected Areas.

## 3.2 SEMS Management Scheme

In the Solent, a Management Scheme (MS) was first established in 2002 by the Relevant Authorities (RAs) opting to work together, see the [terms of reference](#). The Solent Forum provides the secretariat for the SEMS MS. This is a statutory scheme under the Habitats Regulations, 2017.

The overall MS components include an annual survey, an annual management report, an annual meeting of RAs, consultation with strategic stakeholders and agreed actions. These outputs are supported by the SEMS website, this provides more detailed resources and guidance. Figure 1 shows the timetable.

**Figure 1. Solent Marine Sites Management Timetable**

|                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Annual Survey Undertaken by SEMS Management Group</b></p> <p><i>Feb/March</i></p>                    |
| <p><b>Annual Survey Published</b></p> <p><i>May</i></p>                                                    |
| <p><b>Annual Management Report (AMR) Prepared and Consulted</b></p> <p><i>June to August</i></p>           |
| <p><b>SEMS Annual Management Meeting: Agree the AMR and Actions</b></p> <p><i>September</i></p>            |
| <p><b>AMR Strategic Actions delivered to the Natural Environment Group (NEG)</b></p> <p><i>October</i></p> |

### 3.2.1 Relevant Authority Duties and Responsibilities

The RAs individually report on SEMS activities within their area of duty and responsibility. They provide information on non-licensable activity changes and potential impacts on designated sites by completing an [online survey](#) every spring. This survey data forms the basis of this Annual Management Report. Additionally, RAs need to have regard to the Habitats Regulations and aspire to good practice through their [normal work and roles](#).

Since 1 January 2023, all public authorities have been under an [enhanced statutory duty to conserve and enhance biodiversity](#).

### 3.2.2 Natural Environment Group

SEMS RAs are automatically members of the Solent Forum's [Natural Environment Group \(NEG\)](#); other invited organisations with an interest in the natural environment can also join. NEG assists the SEMS MG in the delivery of strategic actions. The Solent Forum provides the secretariat for NEG.

### 3.2.3 Strategic Stakeholder Group

The Strategic Stakeholder Group (SSG) exists to ensure that stakeholders are briefed and can comment on the content of the draft SEMS Annual Management Report. They are also asked to provide feedback to the management group on key strategic issues.

## 3.3 Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

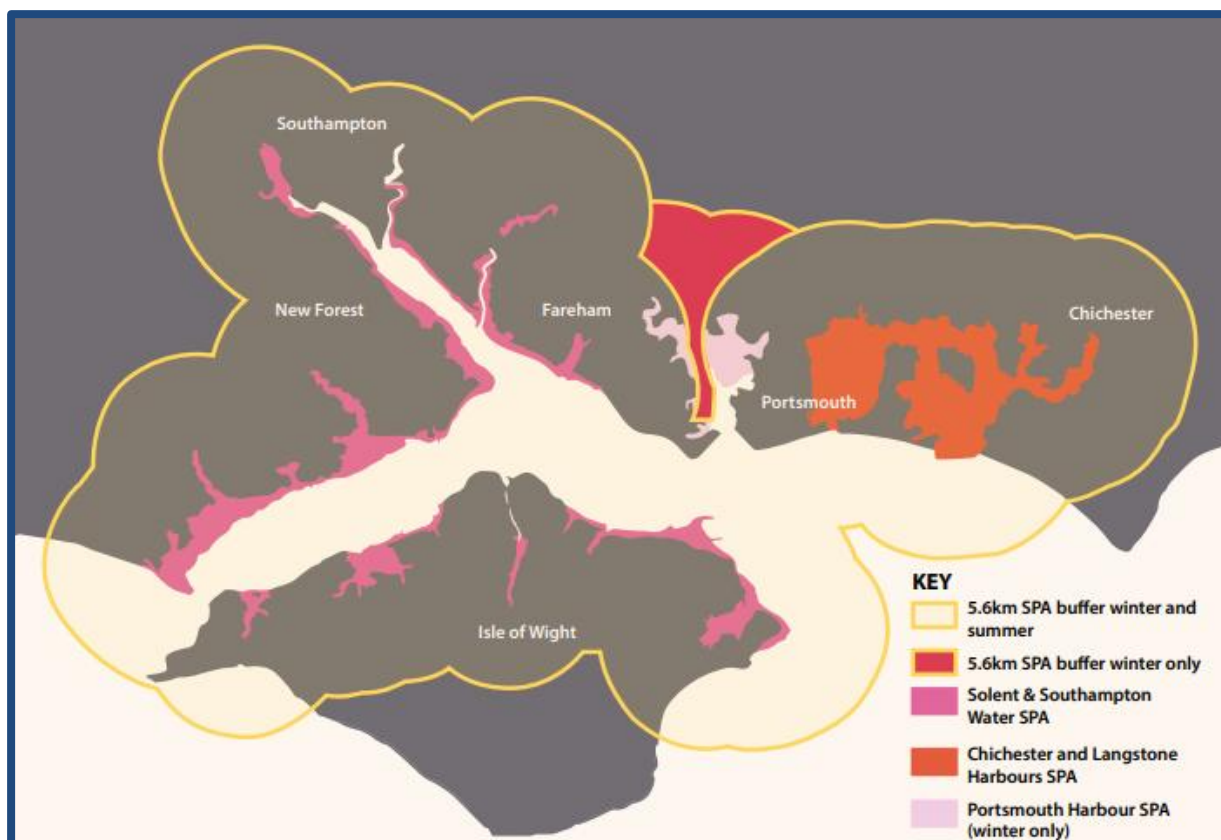
The MMO is responsible for assessing and managing [marine non-licensable activities](#) below MLWM within marine protected areas (MPA) to further the conservation objectives of the site. This applies regardless of whether the MPA is within harbour authority jurisdiction. Where the MPA is within harbour authority jurisdiction, MMO liaises with the relevant harbour authority with regards to management. The MMO does not have jurisdiction over activities which take place on the foreshore. These fall within the remit of other parties such as local authorities.

## 3.4 Bird Aware Solent

[Bird Aware Solent](#) is a strategic mitigation Partnership operating across the Solent, to reduce the recreational impacts on protected birds from local housing development. It is the public facing brand name of the Solent Recreation Mitigation Partnership. Fifteen of the Solent's local authorities are members of this Partnership and use it to help fulfil their duties to mitigate bird disturbance from the additional recreational activity created by new housing. Partners also include Natural England, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, and Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

In September 2024, Bird Aware published its [revised strategy](#). It updates and enhances the original approach by drawing on the recommendations of an independent 5 Year Review undertaken in 2023. In response to new evidence that came forward during the initial Strategy period, these proposals have, for the first time, taken on board the needs of the breeding SPA birds and now provide mitigation for the entire year (was previously 6 months).

The [Bird Aware Solent Annual Report](#) gives an overview of the current work of the Partnership.



Developer contribution winter and summer zones. © Bird Aware Solent

### 3.5 LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES

The [EU Life Recreation ReMEDIES \(ReMEDIES\)](#) project ran from October 2019 to October 2024. As part of this project, recreational activity surveys were conducted at five locations within the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC) to provide semi-quantitative evidence to inform the current understanding and create a baseline of patterns of recreational activity taking place adjacent to, or directly over protected seagrass meadows. These surveys were conducted through the months of August and September from 2021 to 2024 using volunteer surveyors and Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) staff. The occurrence and frequency of a number of recreational activities such as boat movements, anchoring and mooring, and activities like bait digging and dog walking were recorded. Outputs for the first three years of recreational activity surveys are available at: [Home - Save Our Seabed](#). The final report, with findings from the surveys conducted in 2024, and a summary of all the surveys is due to be published in 2025. Natural England will share this report as soon as it is available. Key conclusions:

- The Recreational activity surveys have built an important baseline of activity and impacts at five sites in the Solent.
- Patterns of recreational intensity and usage vary considerably between the five survey sites.
- Some changes in activity patterns may be linked to the removal of Covid-19 restrictions and the return to more normal activity patterns.
- Recreational boating activity was highest at Osborne Bay, Yarmouth West and Kings Quay Shore.
- Anchoring/mooring pressure was observed at all sites, although was lowest at Yarmouth

West and Bouldnor.

- Highest levels of anchoring pressure were observed at Osborne Bay and Kings Quay Shore.
- Continued monitoring at Osborne Bay and Kings Quay Shore would be beneficial to better understand recreational activity pressure along this stretch of coast, including whether the Voluntary No Anchor Zone (VNAZ) is working.
- The installation of a VNAZ at Osborne Bay has significantly reduced anchoring pressure at this site, but there remains the need for further engagement and/or wider management of pressures on seagrass beds.
- The presence of visitor moorings at Yarmouth West appears to reduce anchoring within the adjacent seagrass.
- Small sailing yachts were the most recorded single vessel class, although combined motor vessel class activity was higher at some sites e.g. Yarmouth West.
- Beach recreation, dog walking and swimming were the most frequently observed shoreline recreational activities, although there were significant differences between sites.
- Yarmouth West, Bouldnor and Langstone Harbour (southeast corner) had the lowest interaction with seagrass, however, bird disturbance may be an issue at the Langstone Harbour site.

Whilst the final survey, as part of the LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project was conducted in Summer 2024, it is hoped that surveys at some of the locations, notably Osborne Bay and King's Quay Shore, will continue as part of the [Solent Seascape Project](#).

### 3.6 Operation Seabird

Operation Seabird (#OpSeabird) is a police led operation with forces and joint partners working together, across England, Scotland and Wales. This network brings together knowledge and expertise from a variety of agencies and organisations to tackle coastal wildlife crime, marine wildlife disturbance and antisocial behaviour. Associates of the programme engage and educate the public and local stakeholders about how to enjoy our coastal habitats while minimising negative impacts on our marine wildlife.

### 3.7 Weather

Activity participation is weather dependent, particularly for watersports and more informal recreation like general beach recreation. Relevant authorities regularly report the close link between the weather and activity levels in their Annual Survey returns. It obviously follows that with better weather more people will access the coast and there will be more pressure on designated sites. The predicted long-term trend of hotter temperatures could see both an increase in visitors and additional events at the coast like beach festivals. It is recommended to continue to pre-plan and test additional measures that may need to be taken if good weather leads to an influx of coastal visitors at sensitive sites.

### 3.8 Activity Infrastructure

Development of infrastructure is subject to licences and conditions such as planning permission and/or marine licensing which require a [Habitats Regulation Assessment \(HRA\)](#). The HRA will assess both the construction and usage impacts. The increased use or expansion of existing infrastructure could increase impacts on SEMS sites, for example the extension of a coastal path. SEMS does not cover the development aspects of infrastructure, but it does look at the impacts of activities arising from its use.

### 3.9 Natural England's Advice and Position

#### 3.9.1 Natural England's Conservation Advice

Natural England's (NE) conservation advice (CA) packages provide statutory advice which informs the SEMS MS. All designated MPAs within SEMS now have a formal conservation advice package, these are available on [Natural England's Designated Sites System](#).

The CA package includes Advice on Operations (AoO) which identifies pressures associated with the most commonly occurring marine activities, and an assessment of the feature/sub-feature or supporting habitat sensitivity to these pressures. This advice also helps users understand which features could be impacted by a plan or project and help screen it as part of the initial phases of a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

For an activity, the risk of harm will be determined by its extent, magnitude and duration, together with the sensitivity of the feature/sub-feature or supporting habitat. Where available, site condition data is used to inform this assessment. The aim of this process is to help the initial screening to identify whether the risks posed by an activity are likely to have a significant effect on the designated sites. The CAs are used as the basis to evaluate the potential impact of each activity within this SEMS Annual Management Report. Detailed advice can be provided by Natural England upon request.

#### 3.9.2 Site Condition Assessments

Understanding SEMS site condition is important in supporting management decisions. The annual surveying of activities by the SEMS MG aims to identify threats to site condition or, anecdotal signs of any deterioration, so that timely management action can be taken to avoid damage or further evidence can be collected.

The condition of EMS' are assessed by feature and reported on by Natural England every six years.

Condition assessments for SEMS interest features indicate their current condition, and if unfavourable, what the reasons are for this. In addition, threats which have the potential to impact their condition and therefore require further monitoring or management are identified. In this report, site condition is referenced where further action is needed.

Condition assessments have been completed for the Solent Maritime SAC, which shows all marine features and sub features, apart from coastal lagoons to be in unfavourable condition. This unfavourable status is largely due to a few key factors:

- Elevated nutrient levels
- Elevated aqueous contaminants (water pollutants)
- Low infaunal quality index (benthic invertebrate communities)

- Anthropogenic pressures including trampling and anchoring

[Condition assessments](#) have also been completed for the South Wight Maritime SAC, which is in favourable condition, and for the Solent and Isle of Wight Lagoons SAC which is in broadly favourable condition.

In 2024, Natural England published the first condition assessment for a SPA in the Solent at [Portsmouth Harbour](#). This shows one feature to be in unfavourable - recovering condition, one feature to be in unfavourable - no change condition and two features to be in unfavourable - declining condition. Disturbance caused by human activity, including recreation, is cited as being one of the adverse condition reasons for all species designated as part of the SPA.

Subsequently, the condition assessment for Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA was published in 2025, with five features considered to be in favourable condition, two features to be in unfavourable-recovering condition, four features to be in unfavourable – no change condition and eight features to be in unfavourable – declining condition. Again, disturbance caused by human activity, including recreation, is cited as being one of the adverse condition reasons for those species in unfavourable condition.

Natural England include terrestrial drivers into its advice on adverse condition/condition threat that reflect how land-based activity can impact on coastal designated sites. Drivers now include forestry, freshwater input and agriculture.

As part of the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) government has committed to ensuring that 48% of marine protected area (MPA) features are in favourable condition by 2028, and 70% by 2042, with the remaining in recovering condition.

### 3.9.3 Natural England's Summary of Activity Impacts

Of the sixteen activities considered in this SEMS annual management report, five have been identified through the formal condition assessment process undertaken by Natural England as there being evidence to demonstrate that they are impacting on at least some features of SEMS sites.

These include:

- General beach recreation, land recreation (including dog walking) and recreation (non motorised watercraft), which all have the potential to cause disturbance to birds and other wildlife and may also result in trampling / abrasion of sensitive habitats.
- Operation of some Flood Coastal Erosion Risk Management schemes (excluding those that are considered through the [Habitat Compensation and Restoration Programme](#)) which are contributing to the loss of designated habitats including saltmarsh and,
- Mooring and anchoring which is contributing to loss and abrasion of sensitive habitats such as seagrass.

In addition, there are two activities which have been identified as having the potential to impact on SEMS but where more specific information may be required, these include littering and removal of litter, and recreation (powerboating or sailing with an engine).

It is important to note that this is based on the condition assessment which uses a defined set of attributes, and therefore there may be pressures from the other activities that are not picked up through this process. Therefore, it is important to continue to report activities if there is evidence

that these are impacting SEMS features, for example fisheries activities being undertaken in byelaw areas.

Please see the full text on impacts of SEMS for each activity for detailed information.

### 3.10 Other Plans

Other plans also impact on the management and condition of SEMS, for example Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the South Marine Plans. The [Habitat Regulations Assessment](#) for the South Marine Plan details a wide range of pathways and impacts of activities.

### 3.11 Strava Global Heatmap

For the first time in this SEMS Annual Management Report, we have used data from Strava's Global Heatmap to give an overview of where activities are taking place in the Solent. These maps are a visual representation of activities, uploaded by Strava users, and show where people are most active, based on their public GPS data. Brighter lines indicate more frequent participation. It displays public aggregated activities from the past 12 months.

### 3.12 SEMS Annual Survey Respondents

Out of the 31 Relevant Authorities (RAs) who were invited to complete the 2025 all responded. Table 1 shows the list of respondents. Table 2 identifies the types of RAs which responded.

| Table 1. SEMS Survey Respondents      |                                            |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Associated British Ports (ABP)        | Natural England (NE)                       |
| Beaulieu Enterprises (BRM)            | New Forest District Council (NFDC)         |
| Chichester District Council (CDC)     | New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA) |
| Chichester Harbour Conservancy (ChHC) | Portsmouth City Council (PCC)              |
| Cowes Harbour Commissioners (CoHC)    | Portsmouth International Port (PiP)        |
| Eastleigh Borough Council (EBC)       | River Hamble Harbour Authority (RHHA)      |
| Environment Agency (EA)               | Southampton City Council (SCC)             |
| Fareham Borough Council (FBC)         | Southern IFCA (SoIFCA)                     |
| Gosport Borough Council (GBC)         | Southern Water (SW)                        |
| Hampshire County Council (HCC)        | Sussex IFCA (SxIFCA)                       |
| Havant Borough Council (HBC)          | Test Valley Borough Council (TVBC)         |
| Isle of Wight Council (IoWC)          | West Sussex County Council (WSCC)          |
| KHM Portsmouth (KHM)                  | Wightlink (WL)                             |
| Langstone Harbour Board (LHB)         | Winchester City Council (WCC)              |
| Lymington Harbour Commissioners (LHC) | Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners (YHC)       |
| Marine Management Organisation (MMO)  |                                            |

| Table 2. The type of Relevant Authority who responded to the Survey |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Government Agency                                                   | 3  |
| Harbour Authority                                                   | 7  |
| IFCA                                                                | 2  |
| Local Authority                                                     | 13 |
| Other                                                               | 2  |
| Private Company                                                     | 2  |
| Water Company                                                       | 1  |
| National Park                                                       | 1  |

## 4 Activity Summary

Section 4 summarises the annual survey findings of the sixteen activities covered by SEMS. Detailed observations and actions for each individual activity are set out in section 5.

### 4.1 Jurisdiction of Activities in the Solent

Table 3 illustrates how many relevant authorities (RA) recorded that a particular activity takes place within their jurisdiction.

| <b>Activity</b>                                                         | <b>Percentage of Relevant Authorities</b> | <b>Response</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up | 52%                                       | 16              |
| Boat Repair and Maintenance                                             | 42%                                       | 13              |
| Fishing (including shellfisheries)                                      | 52%                                       | 16              |
| Fishing (shore-based activities)                                        | 68%                                       | 21              |
| General Beach Recreation                                                | 58%                                       | 18              |
| Grazing and Foraging                                                    | 23%                                       | 7               |
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                               | 65%                                       | 20              |
| Littering and removal of litter                                         | 68%                                       | 21              |
| Mooring and Anchoring                                                   | 52%                                       | 16              |
| Operation of FCERM schemes                                              | 65%                                       | 20              |
| Operation of ports and harbours (maintenance of infrastructure)         | 55%                                       | 17              |
| Recreation - light aircraft                                             | 35%                                       | 11              |
| Recreation - non-motorised watercraft                                   | 61%                                       | 19              |
| Recreation - powerboating or sailing with an engine                     | 58%                                       | 18              |
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance                              | 48%                                       | 15              |
| Wildfowling                                                             | 23%                                       | 7               |

### 4.2 Summary of Changes Recorded in Activity Levels

Respondents were asked whether, since the last survey in spring 2024, each activity had increased, decreased, had no change since the previous year or they don't know due to a lack data. Table 4a summarises the data. The mode value of the responses has been highlighted in green. Table 4b looks at the percentage of answers that were 'don't know'. This illustrates where we need to gather more evidence.

| <b>Activity</b>                                                         | <b>Increased</b> | <b>Decreased</b> | <b>No change</b> | <b>Don't know</b> | <b>Total Responses</b> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up | 0                | 0                | 14               | 2                 | 16                     |

**Table 4a. Summary of reported changes in activity levels from spring 2024 to spring 2025**

| Activity                                                        | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Boat Repair and Maintenance                                     | 0         | 0         | 11        | 2          | 13              |
| Fishing (including shellfisheries)                              | 1         | 2         | 9         | 4          | 16              |
| Fishing (shore-based activities)                                | 1         | 0         | 11        | 9          | 21              |
| General Beach Recreation                                        | 2         | 0         | 9         | 7          | 18              |
| Grazing and Foraging                                            | 0         | 1         | 3         | 3          | 7               |
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                       | 2         | 0         | 9         | 9          | 20              |
| Littering and removal of litter                                 | 0         | 0         | 12        | 9          | 21              |
| Mooring and Anchoring                                           | 0         | 3         | 10        | 3          | 16              |
| Operation of coastal flood and erosion risk management schemes  | 5         | 1         | 11        | 3          | 20              |
| Operation of ports and harbours (maintenance of infrastructure) | 2         | 0         | 14        | 1          | 17              |
| Recreation - light aircraft                                     | 1         | 0         | 5         | 5          | 11              |
| Recreation - non-motorised watercraft                           | 1         | 1         | 10        | 7          | 19              |
| Recreation - powerboating or sailing with an engine             | 0         | 2         | 10        | 6          | 18              |
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance                      | 0         | 0         | 13        | 2          | 15              |
| Wildfowling                                                     | 0         | 0         | 6         | 1          | 7               |

**Table 4b. Percentage of respondents that reported 'don't know' to activity changes**

| Activity                                                                | Don't Know | Total Responses | % Don't know |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Recreation - light aircraft                                             | 5          | 11              | 45%          |
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                               | 9          | 20              | 45%          |
| Fishing (shore-based activities)                                        | 9          | 21              | 43%          |
| Grazing and Foraging                                                    | 3          | 7               | 43%          |
| Littering and removal of litter                                         | 9          | 21              | 43%          |
| General Beach Recreation                                                | 7          | 18              | 39%          |
| Recreation - non-motorised watercraft                                   | 7          | 19              | 37%          |
| Recreation - powerboating or sailing with an engine                     | 6          | 18              | 33%          |
| Fishing (including shellfisheries)                                      | 4          | 16              | 25%          |
| Mooring and Anchoring                                                   | 3          | 16              | 19%          |
| Boat Repair and Maintenance                                             | 2          | 13              | 15%          |
| Operation of coastal flood and erosion risk management schemes          | 3          | 20              | 15%          |
| Wildfowling                                                             | 1          | 7               | 14%          |
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance                              | 2          | 15              | 13%          |
| Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up | 2          | 16              | 13%          |
| Operation of ports and harbours (maintenance of infrastructure)         | 1          | 17              | 6%           |

### 4.3 Activity Impacts on Designated Sites

Respondents were asked whether they thought that the activities surveyed were having an impact on the features of the Solent Marine Sites. Tables 5a and 5b summarise the data. The mode value in Table 5a has been shaded green.

**Table 5a. Activities Impacting on Designated Sites by Total Responses**

| Activity                                                                | Yes | No | Total Responses | Org Names (where yes)              |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up | 3   | 13 | 16              | LHB, MMO, ChHC                     |
| Boat Repair and Maintenance                                             | 1   | 12 | 13              | ChHC                               |
| Fishing (including shellfisheries)                                      | 5   | 11 | 16              | EA, GBC, SxIFCA, HCC ,ChHC         |
| Fishing (shore-based activities)                                        | 5   | 16 | 21              | FBC, EBC, SxIFCA, HCC, ChHC        |
| General Beach Recreation                                                | 7   | 11 | 18              | FBC, EBC, NE, PCC, MMO, ChHC, IOWC |
| Grazing and Foraging                                                    | 1   | 6  | 7               | ChHC                               |

**Table 5a. Activities Impacting on Designated Sites by Total Responses**

| Activity                                                        | Yes | No | Total Responses | Org Names (where yes)                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                       | 13  | 7  | 20              | FBC, LHB, WSCC, GBC, EBC, NFNPA, NE, PCC, CDC, HCC, ChHC, SCC, IOWC |
| Littering and removal of litter                                 | 12  | 9  | 21              | ABP, LHC, FBC, LHB, EA, EBC, PCC, HCC, MMO, ChHC, SCC, IOWC         |
| Mooring and Anchoring                                           | 6   | 10 | 16              | FBC, LHB, NE, MMO, ChHC, SCC                                        |
| Operation of coastal FCERM schemes                              | 11  | 9  | 20              | CoHC, LHC, LHB, EA, GBC, BRM, NE, PCC, MMO, ChHC, IOWC              |
| Operation of ports and harbours (maintenance of infrastructure) | 1   | 16 | 17              | ChHC                                                                |
| Recreation - light aircraft                                     | 1   | 10 | 11              | ChHC                                                                |
| Recreation - non-motorised watercraft                           | 10  | 9  | 19              | LHC, FBC, LHB, GBC, EBC, NE, HCC, MMO, ChHC, IOWC                   |
| Recreation - powerboating or sailing with an engine             | 8   | 10 | 18              | FBC, LHB, GBC, EBC, NE, MMO, ChHC, IOWC                             |
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance                      | 0   | 15 | 15              |                                                                     |
| Wildfowling                                                     | 1   | 6  | 7               | ChHC                                                                |

**Table 5b. Percentage of respondents stating that an activity is impacting on designated sites**

| Activity                                                                | Yes | No | Total Responses | Percent Yes |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|-----------------|-------------|
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                               | 13  | 7  | 20              | 65%         |
| Littering and removal of litter                                         | 12  | 9  | 21              | 57%         |
| Operation of coastal FCERM schemes                                      | 11  | 9  | 20              | 55%         |
| Recreation non-motorised watercraft                                     | 10  | 9  | 19              | 53%         |
| Recreation - powerboating or sailing with an engine                     | 8   | 10 | 18              | 44%         |
| General Beach Recreation                                                | 7   | 11 | 18              | 39%         |
| Mooring and Anchoring                                                   | 6   | 10 | 16              | 38%         |
| Fishing (including shellfisheries)                                      | 5   | 11 | 16              | 31%         |
| Fishing (shore-based activities)                                        | 5   | 16 | 21              | 24%         |
| Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up | 3   | 13 | 16              | 19%         |
| Grazing and Foraging                                                    | 1   | 6  | 7               | 14%         |
| Wildfowling                                                             | 1   | 6  | 7               | 14%         |
| Recreation - light aircraft                                             | 1   | 10 | 11              | 9%          |
| Boat Repair and Maintenance                                             | 1   | 12 | 13              | 8%          |

**Table 5b. Percentage of respondents stating that an activity is impacting on designated sites**

|                                                                 |   |    |    |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|---|----|----|----|
| Operation of ports and harbours (maintenance of infrastructure) | 1 | 16 | 17 | 6% |
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance                      | 0 | 15 | 15 | 0% |

#### 4.4 Annual Trend Data

Since 2019, we have collated trend data on the levels of activity change from data obtained via the SEMS survey. The mode response has been no change across this time period for all activities. We will continue to collate this data to look for future changes. Please note this does not mean that these activities are not widespread and/or elevated, as we know that the Solent is heavily used for recreation and can exceed carrying capacity at peak times.

### 5 Individual Activity Responses

Section 5 reviews and evaluates each of the sixteen different activities covered in the Management Scheme. There are three sections under each activity:

1. Summary of the survey response from 2025.
2. Discussion and evaluation. This includes sections written by Natural England on their view of impacts on sites. The final section highlights existing management measures.
3. Actions.

In the action section it shows the lead authority or partner for actions that cover a specific area or remit. The Natural Environment Group (NEG) leads on strategic issues that affect the Solent widely and reports on these via its biannual meetings.

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

*Activity includes accidental discharges and/or emissions from all types of vessels, including exhaust fumes, wastewater, sewerage, oils, lubricants, and chemicals, including oil spill and clean-up.*

| Activity                                                                       | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up</b> | 0          | 0         | 14        | 2          | 16              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b>                |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                                | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                                | 3          | 13        |           |            | 16              |

### 5.1.1 Evaluation and Discussion

Respondents noted that port and harbour authorities have published Oil Spill Contingency and Waste Management Plans. They raised that large spills could be catastrophic and need to be dealt with promptly and diligently. There is a move towards using electric and alternative fuels for marine vessels, such as LPG, this will help to minimise craft oil and diesel discharges.

Respondents are still concerned about the impacts of Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO), however these are regulated so are not covered by the SEMS scheme. Landside sewerage failures can cause localised water quality issues and this has happened in the Solent. There is also increasing concern about the impacts of urban highways run off on the water that feeds into the Solent.

#### Potential Impacts

Materials such as oil are of concern in the marine environment due to their buoyancy and easy transport from one location to another on currents, and the damage it can cause to fish and seabird populations. PAH contamination can also lead to the lowering, temporarily or more permanently, of oxygen levels in the water.

Although there is insufficient evidence on the impacts of features within SEMS, it is known that wading birds can be directly impacted by contamination with hydrocarbon, and the accumulation of hydrocarbons caused by feeding on contaminated fauna can cause changes in migratory and breeding behaviour. Most effects are probably linked to chronic exposure to relatively low levels of pollutants.

More research is needed on the impacts of pharmaceuticals and personal care products from wastewater treatment works and the impacts of road run-off on designated sites.

#### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Natural England do not consider this activity to be having an impact on the SEMS sites when considered alone. However, elevated contaminant levels in both the sediment and water column have been identified as one of the reasons causing Solent Maritime SAC to be in unfavourable condition. Therefore, Natural England support continued review as highlighted in the management measures section of this report.

#### Management Measures

The SEMS MG members, who have jurisdiction under this activity, already have policies and procedures in place to address accidental discharges. Regular emergency spill exercises help to keep equipment and skills up to date. Information on procedures is available on the relevant authorities' websites and other publications such as harbour guides.

The RYA Green Blue have resources on oil and fuel spills for boating including best practice guidance and awareness raising posters. Guidance includes the RYA Green Blue's Water [Pollution Prevention guidance for boaters](#) and [Pollution Control guidance for clubs/centres](#). These webpages include the use of cleaning products, black water disposal and antifouling.

In 2024, the Solent Forum sponsored a student research project on the [Environmental Risks of Car Tyre Leachate Pollutants](#). Via its Natural Environment Group it will look to sponsor further work on this topic. A UN foresight brief has been published on [vehicle tyre particles in the environment](#).

The Natural Environment Group is currently funding a project on drug accumulation in fish of the Solent.

For more resources and information please see: [Solentems - Accidental vessel discharges/emissions incl. oil spill and clean-up.](#)

### 5.1.2 Action

(1) NEG to support further research on how highways run-off could affect the Solent's designated sites.

## 5.2 Boat Repair and Maintenance

*Activity includes vessel maintenance and repair on land or afloat, including hull cleaning. Please also consider the vessels, machinery and vehicles associated with this activity.*

### Survey Response

| Activity                                                        | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Boat Repair and Maintenance</b>                              | 0          | 0         | 11        | 2          | 13              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | 1          | 12        |           |            | 13              |

### 5.2.1 Evaluation and Discussion

No respondents reported new boatyards or facilities have been established since the last survey. Activity levels and frequency of boat maintenance across the wider Solent area remain unclear, however, the harbours' best practice guidance encourages vessel owners to use boatyards for repairs and maintenance, rather than conducting work within the harbour itself.

There are concerns regarding end-of-life vessels being a significant point source of Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) and fibreglass pollution. In Chichester Harbour, microfibres from GRP maintenance have been detected in marine organisms, indicating environmental uptake and potential ecological risk.

Commercial vessels are taken to specialist shipyard repair facilities outside of the Solent.

### Potential Impacts

Natural England's draft Advice on Operations identifies a range of pressures arising from boat repair/maintenance that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations of SPAs. These include above water noise, visual disturbance, contaminants and the introduction or spread of invasive non-native species. A number of designated bird species within the SEMS are considered to be sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement and/or mortality. Similarly, the construction of boat repair/maintenance facilities may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features via pressures such as physical change or loss of habitat, smothering and siltation.

Boat repair/maintenance has the potential to introduce invasive non-native species (INNS) into the marine environment and it needs careful management. Recreational craft have been identified as one of several vectors by which INNS can be introduced to new areas.

## Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Whilst Natural England do not consider this activity to currently be impacting on SEMS it does have the potential to increase the presence and spread of Invasive Non-Native Species which has been listed as an adverse condition reason for the Solent Maritime SAC. Natural England advises that harbours and marinas should promote best practice. In addition, abandoned vessels have the potential to create permanent loss or abrasion of designated habitat and lead to the release of microplastics and other debris.

The release of Tributyltin (TBT) into the marine environment from antifouling has historically been of concern in the Solent. Changes in antifouling practice means that this has now largely become a legacy issue from this source, however, levels of TBT are still reported above Threshold Levels, particularly in the upper parts of Southampton Water, suggesting that either historical TBT is still present in sediments and slowly leaching into the wider environment, some boat owners continue to use TBT or it is entering the site via other routes. Environment Agency monitoring indicates that there is a declining trend of TBT with contamination limited to hotspots.

In addition, elevated contaminants levels are one of the reasons for unfavourable status of SEMS, this includes copper and other derivatives which have replaced TBT. The Environment Agency report that copper has never caused failures of WFD water bodies within SEMS, and it is not currently undertaking any investigations into copper sources. However, previous work showed that copper concentrations were elevated in the Hamble estuary compared to elsewhere in the SEMS, probably linked to the high density of boats in the Hamble. More recent evidence indicates that copper in the Hamble has declined, suggesting that measures to reduce contamination are working and should be continued.

For more information please see the Open data, [Water Quality archive](#) and the Open data, [Biosys archive](#).

## Management Measures

The Solent Forum has developed guidance on [marine invasive species and biosecurity measures](#) which includes the maintenance of recreational craft.

Relevant organisations in the Solent encourage the use of the RYA Green Blue environmental guidance, campaigns and resources. This includes an online [Environmental Facilities Map](#) and [reporting form](#) for end of life abandoned boats.

Some harbour authorities and marinas have invested in filtration or containment systems, but coverage is not universal across the Solent. These are highlighted on the [RYA Green Blue's Environmental Facilities](#) map.

For more resources and information please see:  
[http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Boat\\_repair/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Boat_repair/).

### 5.2.2 Actions

(1) Continue to promote and share best practice in [preventing marine invasive spread](#) by using the Solent Forum's biosecurity plans and record end of life boats on the RYA [Green Blue's register](#).

(2) NEG to promote research into the impacts on designated sites of end-of-life abandoned GRP boats.

### 5.3 Fishing (including shellfisheries)

*Activity includes anchored nets or lines, electrofishing, traps, pelagic fishing (or fishing activities that do not interact with seabed), hydraulic dredges, dredges, demersal trawl, demersal seines, diving, and sea angling.*

#### 5.3.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                        | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Fishing (including shellfisheries)</b>                       | 1          | 2         | 9         | 4          | 16              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | 5          | 11        |           |            | 16              |

#### 5.3.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Southern IFCA reported that the overall fishing activity remains consistent throughout the Solent, with moderate levels of activity in the scallop fishery and a slight increase in activity targeting the manila clam fishery due to its apparent high productivity. The scallop fishery continues to occur in beds east of Ryde and Portsmouth, primarily outside of the SEMS.

Sussex IFCA sightings, data, and officer knowledge, show that angling and netting is known to occur in Chichester Harbour, with low intensity. Potting can occur in Chichester Harbour.

Langstone Harbour noted there are infrequent reports/sightings of large groups (5-8) fishing from small boats, indiscriminately catching and retaining undersize fish.

The Environment Agency have on-going concerns relating to the impact of netting on migratory salmonids (Atlantic salmon and sea trout). This activity occurs in both estuarine and freshwater habitats. They regulate the Beaulieu Seine net. This activity is now regulated by a byelaw rather than the previous net limitation order. The other relevant activity is the fyke net fishery for European eel which operates within designated sites.

Eastleigh BC commented that permitted inshore netting at the mouth of the River Hamble is likely to have a negative impact on estuarine fish species (e.g. mullet sp.). Levels of illegal setting of nets in the Hamble is unknown but probably does occur.

Regarding recreational angling, litter and line remain persistent issues. Anglers can disturb nesting birds (e.g. Ringed Plover, Oystercatcher) at sites like Pylewell, near Lymington.

Natural England reported push netting in subtidal seagrass at Gurnard Bay.

#### Potential Impacts

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies a range of pressures arising from shellfish dredging that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations within SPAs. These include above water noise and visual disturbance. A number of designated bird species within SEMS are sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement and/or mortality. Similarly, shellfish dredging

may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features via pressures such as abrasion/disturbance of the seabed and penetration/disturbance of the substratum below the seabed.

There are concerns over the impacts of discards on marine ecosystems, including changes in population abundance and demographics of affected species, altered species assemblages and food web structures. However, discards also provide important food resources for some scavenging species, including seabirds. Pelagic/mid water trawls, drift nets, pelagic seines and long lines can result in the entanglement and bycatch of a range of fauna.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2025 the Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw 2023 was ratified by the Secretary of State (SoS). This byelaw replaced the Bottom Towed Fishing Gear Byelaw 2016 and includes extensions to already prohibited areas, the establishment of new prohibited areas, and the continuation for the requirement of BTFG to be inboard and above the sea whilst a vessel carrying BTFG is transiting through a prohibited area. The introduction of the expanded byelaw should further reduce impacts from bottom towed fishing gear on SEMS.

As of 12<sup>th</sup> May 2025, the MMO enforced [a license condition requiring Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems \(I-VMS\)](#) for any English licensed under-12m vessel undertaking any trip to sea. This management measure should provide valuable GIS data as to fishing vessels operating in prohibited areas and highlight any areas of intense fishing activity within SEMS.

However, despite the introduction of these measures, Natural England remain aware of reports of BTFG occurring within prohibited areas, which may be damaging designated features and we will continue to work with SIFCA on this.

### **Management Measures**

During 2023, Southern IFCA undertook a review of bottom towed fishing gear (BTFG) activity in MCZs, SACs and SPAs across the District. The BTFG Byelaw 2023 was submitted to the MMO/Defra for quality assurance and consideration in October 2023, and in July 2025 it was ratified.

The bivalve fisheries within the Solent are managed by conditions for a Category A permit under the [Solent Dredge Permit Byelaw](#).

The links below provide further information on the surveys which Southern IFCA run in the Solent.

- [The Bivalve Survey](#), which occurs biannually and looks at Catch Per Unit Effort for Common Cockle, American Hardshell clams, and Manila clams.
- The King Scallop survey, which looks at Catch Per Unit Effort across the Solent tri-annually ([Solent Dredge Permit](#)).
- The Native Oyster survey, which monitors the native oyster population within the Solent and the Harbours every two years ([Solent Dredge Permit](#)).
- The Small Fish Survey, which gathers data on juvenile fish populations biannually in Yarmouth, the River Hamble, and Christchurch ([Net Fisheries](#)).
- The Whelk Survey, which gathers information on the population of whelks within the Solent in the Spring of each year ([Pot & Trap Fisheries](#)).

In 2023, Southern IFCA introduced the [Net Fishing Byelaw](#), which details Net Prohibition Areas (where net fishing is prohibited at all times of year and under any conditions), Net Restriction Areas (where net fishing is subject to seasonal and/or gear restrictions), and Net Permit Areas (where net

fishing is managed by permitting named individuals and specific vessels under flexible permit conditions). Further information can be found on the IFCA website relating to the management ([Net Fishing](#)) or permitting ([Net Fishing Permit](#)) of the net fishery. Within the Solent, there are two Net Restriction Areas (Langstone Harbour & Portsmouth Harbour) and two Net Permit Areas (Southampton Water & River Hamble), and 18 Net Prohibition Areas across the Harbours, Southampton Water, the Solent, and the Isle of Wight. Maps and coordinates for these areas can be found within the [Net Fishing Byelaw](#).

Sussex IFCA will be undertaking a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) in 2025 to evaluate the impact of all fishing activity on the protected features in Chichester Harbour.

The Fixed Engines Byelaw is in place, ruling that no fixed engines (nets), except Fyke nets, between 1st May and 30th September across the entrance of Chichester Harbour from East Head to Sandy Point.

Southern Water have on going water quality projects covering bathing water quality and shellfisheries.

[Catchwise](#) is a ground-truthing survey of recreational sea angling taking place across England and Wales. Substance, the Angling Trust and Cefas have partnered to deliver it. The project has been co-developed with the recreational sea angling community and aims to improve recognition of sea angling's value to coastal communities and inform relevant sea fisheries management decisions accurately.

For further information and resources please see: [Solentems - Fishing \(incl. shellfisheries\)](#).

### 5.3.3 Action

(1) SEMS MG members to report to the [Southern](#) and [Sussex](#) IFCA's or the MMO (helpline 0300 123 1032) any suspected illegal fishing activity seen and raise awareness of the byelaws in place.

## 5.4 Fishing (shore-based activities)

*Activity includes crab tiling, bait digging, shellfish collection (including seed mussel) e.g. by hand (with or without digging apparatus), rake or using 'tiles'. Also includes rod and line angling, the setting of pots and nets from the shore and the use of vehicles or vessels to access the shoreline.*

### 5.4.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                        | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Fishing (shore-based activities)</b>                         | 1          | 0         | 11        | 9          | 21              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | 5          | 16        |           |            | 21              |

### 5.4.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Southern IFCA report that shore-based fishing activity in the Solent covers a range of activities including rod and line angling and the collection of bivalve species such as Pacific oysters (*Crassostrea*

gigas). Levels of activity for these fishing methods remain consistent within the Solent, as do the areas where the activities are occurring (Langstone Harbour, Hayling Island, Hill Head).

Sussex IFCA reported that hand gathering and bait digging is known to occur in intertidal areas year-round at Chichester Harbour. These activities occur daily, but at higher intensity over spring tides in summer months.

Langstone Harbour Board noted that hand gathering is common in places. Most gathering activity is for Pacific Oysters so they are not deemed a concern as they are an INNS. Concerns do arise from access to gathering areas i.e. trampling of seagrass beds.

There were mixed reports on the prevalence of bait digging, it was felt that there was a general drop in commercial collection but hotspot areas for personal digging are still under pressure.

Hampshire County Council staff have seen bait digging offshore from the seawall at Lymington; this causes minor disturbance but also turns over the substrate which could impact food availability. There is some collection of 'sea peat' which is used for keeping ragworm. Bags of material are occasionally removed from the near shore salt marshes.

### **Potential Impacts**

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies a range of pressures arising from shore-based fishing activities that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations of SPAs. These include above water noise, visual disturbance and the removal of target and non-target species. A number of designated bird species within the SEMS are sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement and/or mortality. Similarly, shore-based fishing activities may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features via pressures such as abrasion/disturbance of the seabed and penetration/disturbance of the substratum below the seabed.

A great deal of evidence exists on the impacts of bait digging, for example, the literature reports that during the process of bait collection, by hand, mechanical digging or boulder turning, animals and plants other than those being sought in the intertidal mudflat habitat will be damaged and their population levels reduced.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

Southern IFCA have carried out a review of shore gathering activities across the District to review and, where necessary, develop updated regulations for shore gathering activities in Marine Protected Areas within the National Site Network (SACs, SPAs and MCZs). The outcome of the review was the development of the Shore Gathering Byelaw and an amendment to the Fishing for Cockles Byelaw. The Shore Gathering Byelaw provides spatial management, in the form of prohibition (year-round) or seasonal closure areas, for sensitive habitats and species within MCZs and within or adjacent to SACs and SPAs to mitigate potential impacts from shore gathering activities. The Southern IFCA Seaweed Harvesting Code of Conduct was also developed to support the Shore Gathering Byelaw. The Shore Gathering Byelaw is currently in the process of quality assurance with the MMO prior to consideration by the Secretary of State.

On this basis Natural England advise that we should not seek to evaluate the impacts of shore gathering activities until this process is completed.

## Management Measures

Southern IFCA currently provides management on shore-based fishing activities through a suite of byelaws that can be viewed on its website ([Shore Gathering](#)) these include minimum size requirements, approved shore-gathering practices, and a prohibition on gathering sea fisheries resources in seagrass beds. In addition, Southern IFCA provide guidance and codes of practice for hand gathering of shellfish and bait digging ([Shore Gathering](#)).

In December 2024, Southern IFCA submitted the Shore Gathering Byelaw and the Fishing for Cockles (Amendment) Byelaw to the MMO/Defra for their QA process. The Shore Gathering Byelaw proposes the introduction of defined year-round prohibited areas, summer closure areas (closed 1st March to 31st August), and winter closure areas (closed 1st November to 31st March), within which shore gathering activities will be prohibited. The shore gathering activities covered by the Byelaw include shellfish hand gathering, mechanical harvesting of shellfish, bait digging, crab tiling, shrimp push-netting, and seaweed harvesting. The Fishing for Cockles Byelaw has been amended to remove provisions relating to prescribed methods of harvesting, equipment specifications for hand picking of cockles and the construction/operation of a dredge in relation to fishing for cockles. The Byelaw maintains existing provisions relating to Minimum Conservation Reference Size for cockles and a closed season, applicable to all harvesting methods except use of a dredge in Poole Harbour.

During the review undertaken for these byelaws, a [Seaweed Harvesting Code of Conduct](#) was also written, which will come into effect when the Shore Gathering Byelaw is ratified. Further information is available at [Ongoing Reviews: Southern IFCA](#).

The Sussex IFCA Hand Gathering Byelaw has been introduced to set rules for bag limits and permits for hand gathering in the district. Further information will be posted on its website in summer 2025. Intensities of shore-based activities have increased over the past 12 months. They continue to monitor fishing activity on routine patrols in the district and have conducted drone surveys of bait digging in partnership with the Scottish Institute for Marine Science.

Fishery Officers have the legal powers to inspect anyone involved in angling from the shore or a marine installation and any persons involved in harvesting marine organisms such as bait digging.

Crown Estate's position is, that for the foreshore under their jurisdiction, they do not have any powers to manage bait collection that is exercised as a public right; leases that they grant to local authorities and other regulatory bodies for local management of Crown Estate foreshore are always subject to the public right of fishing, which includes bait collection. Any management would, therefore, need to be by way of the relevant authority exercising its statutory powers rather than by the landowner or one in whom the landowner may vest its rights. Regarding commercial collection, if they were approached, they would consult with the relevant authorities before considering granting any permissions.

Relevant authorities see the need to take a Solent wide approach to prevent this activity being displaced to other locations if management measures are introduced. See [http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Shore\\_based\\_fisheries/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Shore_based_fisheries/) for more resources on this topic. SEMS has produced a [Code of Conduct for Bait Collection](#).

If people have concerns about netting (esp. illegal) they should call the Environment Agency incident 24/7 hotline on 0800 807060. They take a leading role on migratory species such as Salmonids and Eels.

### 5.4.3 Action

(1) SEMS MG members 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 help record this activity.

## 5.5 General Beach Recreation

*Activity includes other coastal land recreation and leisure activities such as educational or scientific studies, horse riding on the beach, fireworks displays, swimming, rock pooling, surfing, and non-motorised land craft (e.g. sand yachting, kite buggying).*

### 5.5.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                        | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>General beach recreation</b>                                 | 2          | 0         | 9         | 7          | 18              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | 7          | 11        |           |            | 18              |

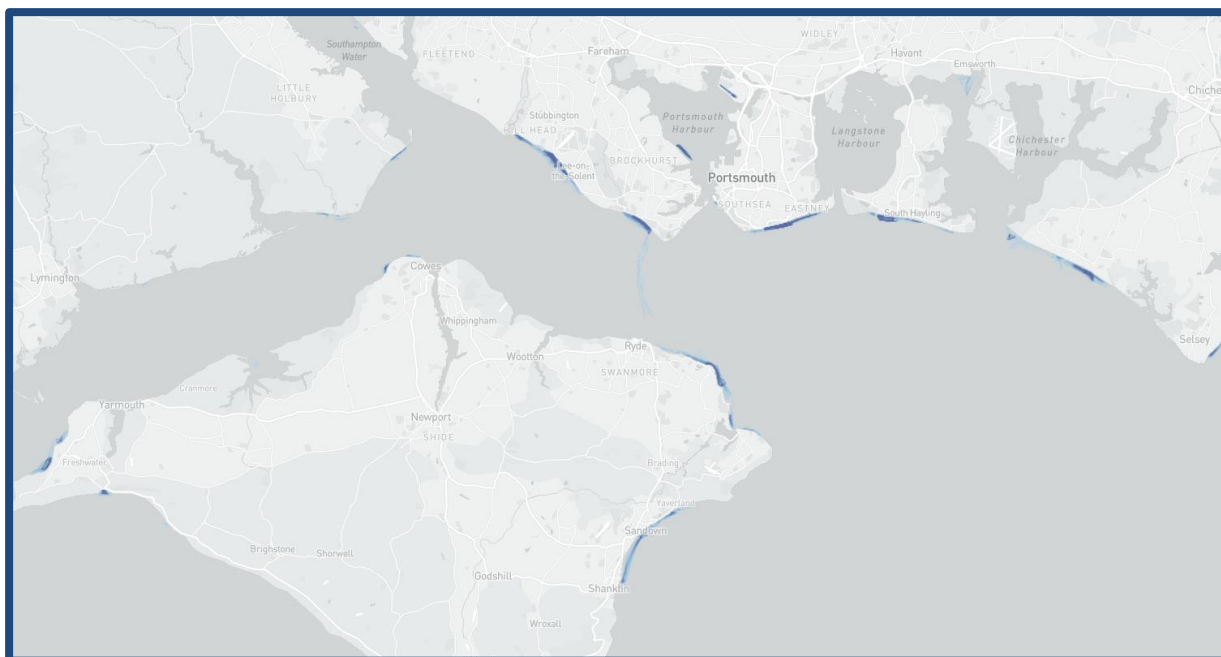
### 5.5.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Respondents noted that there is a significant baseline level of beach activity all year round but this peaks in times of good weather. The sites people favour are determined by their accessibility and the provision of facilities like car parks and toilets. At peak periods people can be pushed into accessing more remote sensitive areas due to a lack of space.

Activities like horse riding, fireworks and motorised landcraft have not been raised as activities of concern in the Solent.

Open water swimming is increasingly popular with local events taking place and informal groups taking to the water. Swim England data shows that 2.45 million prefer to swim in open water (lakes, lochs, rivers and seas).

Water quality is not addressed in this report as it is a licensable activity.



*Popular swimming locations in the Solent © Strava Heatmap, 2025*

### Potential Impacts

Potential impacts noted by respondents include wildlife disturbance, damage from trampling and increased plastic pollution/littering. Ground nesting birds are particularly vulnerable to disturbance in the summer months from visitor footfall.

Natural England have published an evidence guidance note on general beach life at: (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5458695407796224>). This identifies the main pressures from this activity; abrasion/disturbance of the substrate surface, e.g. through general footfall (trampling) or digging holes and noise and visual disturbance, of hauled out seals and birds, from the presence and movement of people on the shore.

### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Recreational pressures, including trampling, are one of the reasons for the unfavourable status of features, including seagrass beds, within Solent Maritime SAC and therefore Natural England considers this activity is currently having an impact on some features within SEMS. The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project, led by Natural England, partly looked at trampling pressures. See Mooring and Anchoring (section 5.9) for further details.

The condition assessment for both Portsmouth Harbour, and Chichester and Langstone Harbours Special Protection Areas have been completed; disturbance caused by human activity is one of the main drivers for the unfavourable status of all designated features within Portsmouth Harbour SPA and fourteen out of nineteen features of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA.

Whilst no formal condition assessment has yet been completed for the other Special Protection Areas within SEMS, a reduce target has been set for all features for the attribute 'disturbance' caused by human activity with a target to reduce the frequency, duration and/or intensity of disturbance affecting roosting, foraging, feeding, moulting and/or loafing birds so that they are not significantly disturbed.

## Management Measures

Unlike many other recreational activities, general beach recreation is not covered by a national governing body or a representative organisation. Good practice messaging regarding minimising impacts on the marine and coastal environment, including wildlife, comes from relevant authorities (e.g. Local and Harbour Authorities) and environmental NGOs. Examples include interpretation boards, signage (e.g. to prevent trampling on vegetated shingle or directions to less sensitive sites), leaflets promoting codes of conduct and wardens (often volunteers) encouraging adherence to codes of conduct.

For the EU Life Recreation ReMEDIES (ReMEDIES) project, a [scheme of surveys](#) provides quantitative evidence designed to inform the current understanding and create a baseline of patterns of recreational activity taking place adjacent to, or directly over protected seagrass meadows within the Solent Maritime Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Natural England's ongoing '[Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment \(MENE\)](#)' studies show how many people are visiting the natural environment and how they interact with it. The publication on visits to the coast gives detailed information on peoples' needs and experiences.

Natural England have volunteer wardens at the North Solent NNR who monitor disturbance to overwintering and breeding birds and managers increase their presence on the reserve to monitor for disturbances caused by the influx of visitors. This involves regular patrols by staff or volunteers to observe visitor behaviour, enforce regulations, and assess any impacts.

Natural England relaunched the Countryside Code in 2021 which also covers the coast. This gives nationally consistent best practice messaging. It can be accessed at: [The Countryside Code - GOV.UK](#). Defra have a [Marine and Wildlife Coastal Code](#).

Many organisations use the hashtag [#ProtectRespectEnjoy](#) to promote best practice across social media platforms.

At sensitive locations, relevant authorities and partners have been fencing off areas to protect nesting birds, using increased staff presence to manage visitors at peak times and controlling access via car parking restrictions. Information boards with QR codes are also being used to educate the public. The dog educational work of Bird Aware Solent is covered in section 5.7 on walking but equally applies to general beach recreation.

The Natural England evidence guidance note on general beach life provides lots of examples of issues and management measures (<http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5458695407796224>). There are also guidance notes on surfing, coasteering, diving and snorkelling, and wildlife watching. These also include details of potential impacts and management measures, they can be accessed at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5615944092614656>.

Please see [General Beach Recreation](#) for further resources, codes of conduct and information.

### 5.5.3 Action

(1) SEMS MG members to consider including information on impacts on designated sites when updating local beach information and/or signs. Look to work with partners to protect sensitive sites like bird nesting sites in areas owned or managed. Sites are mapped on the [Solent Seascape Data Explorer](#) (baseline species layer).

## 5.6 Grazing and Foraging

Activity includes grazing on saltmarsh or intertidal areas.

### 5.6.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                 | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Grazing and Foraging                                     | 0         | 1         | 3         | 3          | 7               |
| Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | Yes       | No        |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | 1         | 6         |           |            | 7               |

### 5.6.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Respondents noted ad hoc foraging of wild food includes plants, seaweeds, shellfish and crustaceans. Gathering can put pressure on the existing stock. Coastal grazing by cattle takes place in limited locations and can be used as a habitat management tool.

#### Potential Impacts

[Grazing marshes](#) are particularly important for the number of breeding waders they support and internationally important populations of wintering wildfowl. They are at risk if they become too dry or are subject to intensive grazing or early cutting. Some areas of grazing marsh are also at risk of change following restoration of naturalised floodplains and as sea-defences are realigned.

Foraging for wild food can lead to disturbance of intertidal habitats via trampling, people can also disturb feeding birds and reduce their food sources, it can also negatively impact on invertebrate populations.

#### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Natural England do not consider these activities to be currently impacting on SEMS. However, it has seen an increase in requests for advice in terms of seaweed foraging, particularly on the Isle Of Wight, and therefore this may indicate that this activity is increasing and so should be monitored.

#### Management Measures

Following a review of seaweed harvesting, as part of the Southern IFCA Shore Gathering Review finalised in 2024, a [Seaweed Harvesting Code of Conduct](#) was written which will come into effect at the point that the proposed [Shore Gathering Byelaw](#) is ratified by the Secretary of State. This is an activity which has the ability to be managed by multiple authorities which was considered as part of the review.

The [Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy](#) is a conservation partnership project, which aims to conserve the internationally important brent goose and wading bird populations within and around the Special Protection Areas and Ramsar wetlands of the Solent coast. It [maps](#) key where birds graze and roost.

Natural England have produced a [seaweed harvesting code of conduct](#).

The Crown Estate licenses sustainable, commercial harvesting of seaweed from areas of foreshore and seabed within its ownership. Seaweed collection for personal use, in small quantities does not require a licence. The Crown Estate does not licence harvesting of natural seaweeds in designated conservation areas. See: [Seaweed harvesting | The Crown Estate](#).

For more information and resources please see:

[http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Grazing/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Grazing/).

### 5.6.3 Action

(1) SEMS MG members to report any concerns regarding the foraging for wild plants or shellfish in designated sites to the local IFCA and help to promote local IFCA byelaws and codes of conduct.

## 5.7 Land Recreation (including dog walking)

*Activity includes walking on upper shore or intertidal zone (including with dogs).*

### 5.7.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                 | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Land recreation (incl. walking with dogs)                | 2         | 0         | 9         | 9          | 20              |
| Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | Yes       | No        |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | 13        | 7         |           |            | 20              |

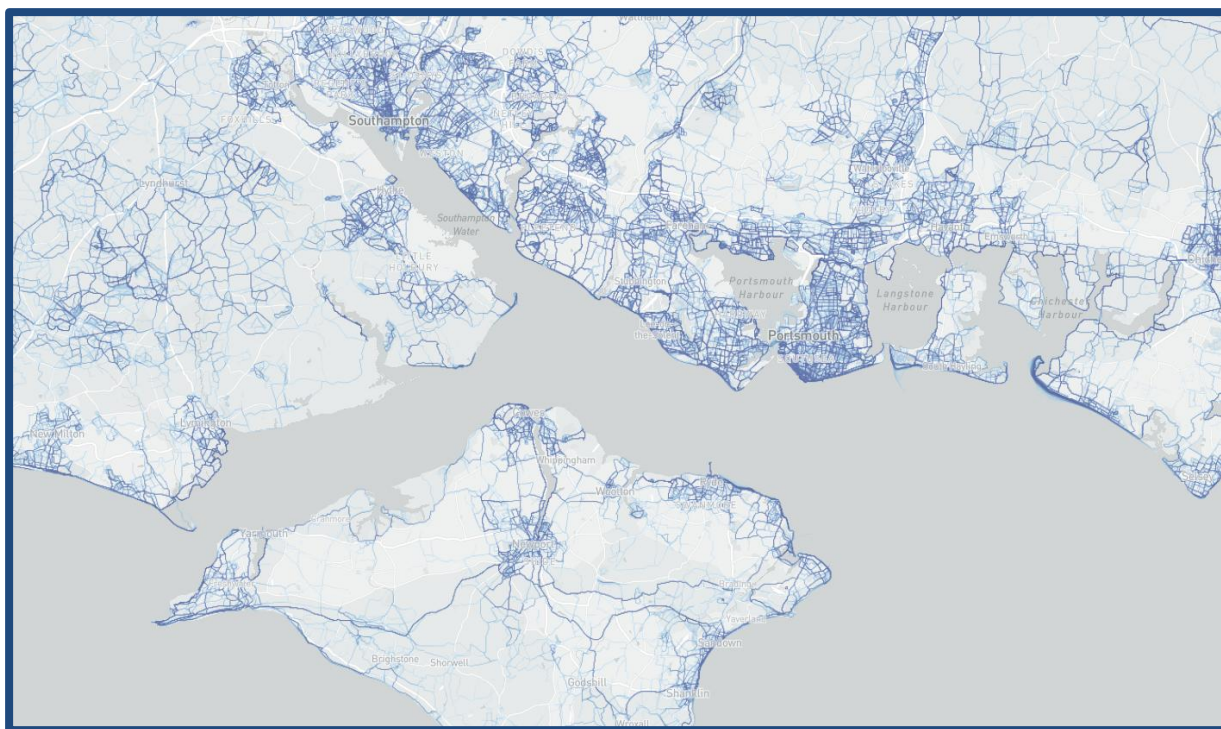
### 5.7.2 Evaluation and Discussion

This activity is consistently reported in the annual survey as the one most likely to impact on the Solent's Marine Sites, thirteen respondents reported concerns about impacts this year. High and sustained levels of land-based recreation, especially dog walking, have persisted since COVID due to increased visitor numbers and pet ownership. Popular areas include the Old Oysterbeds, Hayling Billy Trail, Fishbourne Creek, West Wittering, Weston Shore, Ryde Sands and Lee-on-the-Solent. Seasonal peaks occur in summer, but the base level of activity remains high year-round, especially in urbanised coastal areas.

Hampshire County Council noted that dogs off lead are regularly recorded in the intertidal zone. Up to 400,000 visitors per year visit their owned sites at the Lymington-Keyhaven Nature Reserve and Hurst Spit. Signage and new fencing have been installed on the Nature Reserve to help mitigate impact. New signage/fencing is planned for Hurst Spit to help mitigate the impact on breeding waders.

Respondents noted it would be helpful to have more accurate footfall data for coastal sites.

The urbanised nature of much of the Solent's coastline means that there is a large resident population wishing to access the coast in addition to visitors. The push for 'blue health' and the physical and mental health benefits of walking mean that the coast experiences ever increased demand. Demand peaks during summer weekends and bank holidays and at times of good weather. The opening of stretches of the [King Charles III coast path](#) will lead to greater accessibility.



Popular walking areas in the Solent © Strava Heatmap, 2025

### Potential Impact

Impacts noted were disturbance to wildlife, especially to overwintering birds and summer ground nesting birds, trampling leading to degradation of habitat (saltmarsh, mudflats, reed beds, shingle beaches, etc), littering and erosion.

In 2024, Natural England published the [condition assessment for Portsmouth Harbour SPA](#), and in 2025 published the condition assessment for Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA. All features of Portsmouth Harbour SPA and fourteen out of nineteen features of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA are in unfavourable condition. Visual disturbance and recreation are two of the adverse conditions that have led to this unfavourable status.

Respondents are concerned about dogs disturbing feeding and roosting waders and wildfowl, particularly free roaming dogs at tide roosts and breeding sites. Respondents also noted that dog fouling causes amenity and water quality issues. There is a general feeling that dog walkers still lack education about the impacts they cause, particularly new owners, and this has been exacerbated by the growth in dog ownership.

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies pressures arising from dog walking that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations of SPAs. These include above water noise, visual disturbance, litter, and the removal of species. A number of designated bird species within the SEMS are sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement and/or mortality.

The research underpinning the Bird Aware Solent strategy, reports that human disturbance of the birds can have several impacts. Birds may be more alert, resulting in a reduction in the amount of food eaten, or they may move away from the disturbance. A bird which moves away forgoes valuable feeding time whilst in the air and uses energy in flying, a double impact on the bird's energy reserves. If the disturbance is substantial, then food-rich areas may be little used by the birds or avoided

altogether, leading to other areas hosting a higher density of birds and intensifying the competition for the available food.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

The condition assessment for both Portsmouth Harbour, and Chichester and Langstone Harbours Special Protection Areas have been completed with disturbance being one of the drivers for the unfavourable status of all designated features within Portsmouth Harbour SPA and fourteen out of nineteen features of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA.

Evidence gathered by Bird Aware Solent Rangers and others, found an increase of 26% from 2016-2022 of people visiting the coast in the Solent, as well as site visits with disturbance events increasing by 33% from 2017/18 to 2021/22 across Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA, with the largest number of disturbance effects being dog walkers (please visit [this link](#) for more information).

Whilst no formal condition assessment has yet been completed for the other Special Protection Areas within SEMS, a reduce target has been set for all features for the attribute 'disturbance' caused by human activity with a target to reduce the frequency, duration and/or intensity of disturbance affecting roosting, foraging, feeding, moulting and/or loafing birds so that they are not significantly disturbed.

### **Management Measures**

Natural England assess the impacts from opening access to the coast as part of their work to deliver stretches of King Charles III Coast Path. These assessments provide guidance on both the potential impacts from people visiting the coast to participate in coastal walking and the management measures that can be implemented to mitigate impacts. The Solent stretches of the coast path and the respective assessment documents are linked to the SEMS website at: [http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Land\\_Recreation/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Land_Recreation/).

Volunteer-led initiatives (e.g. WINGS at Hurst Spit) are helping to manage disturbance through education and physical barriers.

Restricting access and car parking can control demand, but at busy times people can park inappropriately, leave main paths and create their own 'desire paths' and seek out quieter areas which can lead to them accessing sensitive sites. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 includes provisions to restrict access for the purpose of conserving wildlife, including ground-nesting and cliff-nesting birds.

Gosport Borough Council (GBC) continues to invest in the Alver Valley Country Park which acts as a SANG to deflect pressure from the coast and it has purchased additional formerly private land within the Alver Valley to improve the Country Park as a destination. Work is ongoing with funds from Bird Aware to create a dog walking park on this land to increase the attractiveness of the Country Park for dog walkers.

The Isle of Wight Council are concerned about the displacement and disturbance of Sanderlings that roost on Ryde Sands (SSSI). This matter is currently being investigated by Natural England and work is ongoing to find a resolution, along with other relevant parties. Dog walking is restricted seasonally on some Island beaches via Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) (dog exclusion zones) between 1 May and 30 September. There will be an opportunity to suggest new PSPOs when they are next reviewed for reinstatement.

A revised [Countryside Code](#) was published in 2021 to give generic national good practice to people visiting the countryside and coast. Defra also launched a [Marine and Wildlife Coastal Code](#) in 2023.

#### Dog Specific Measures

[Bird Aware Solent's Coast and Country Canines](#) initiative encourages dog owners to walk in a safer, more enjoyable and wildlife aware way. It includes a series of dog walks away from bird sensitive areas and a [dog friendly zone map](#). Work is also taking place to encourage dog walkers to visit other areas and less sensitive parts of the coast. Its resources focused on dog initiatives have been greatly increased, both in terms of staff allocated to this work, and budget, to allow Coast and Country Canines to reach its potential and become a valuable resource for the dog walking community.

Public areas in England and Wales can use [Public Spaces Protection Orders \(PSPOs\)](#) to help address nuisance issues. Local Authorities can and do use such orders to exclude dogs from beaches in the summer. Fareham Borough Council have one such [order](#) in place that applies to the coast; an additional restriction on dogs within a designated seasonal exclusion zone at Hill Head, between 1 October and 31 March, has also been implemented to protect overwintering birds.

The New Forest National Park Authority engages with the [New Forest Dog Owners Group](#) and operate a project officer, on behalf of NFDC, that seeks to work with dog owners to provide advice on best practice dog ownership and walking that respects wildlife sensitivities on terrestrial habitats.

At Lepe, Hampshire County Council have implemented areas of no dog access as well as guidance around site for responsible behaviour in the park. They have a [Countryside Canines campaign](#) that highlights that access rights that normally apply to open country and registered common land require dogs to be kept on a short lead between 1 March and 31 July, to help protect ground nesting birds.

The [Paws for Thought](#) report sought to 'take a pause' to collate evidence and appraise the impacts of dog walking on biodiversity in the UK. It identifies and highlights the gaps in knowledge and understanding, and brings together learnings from best practice across the conservation, access and canine sectors towards managing coexistence issues.

Please see: [http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS\\_Activities/Land\\_Recreation/](http://www.solentems.org.uk/sems/SEMS_Activities/Land_Recreation/) for guidance and best practice relating to this activity.

#### **5.7.3 Actions**

(1) MG members to communicate with their own rangers, coastal staff, and comms teams on how they can support Bird Aware Solent and other partnership projects in the delivery of their work on recreational disturbance issues.

(2) Local authorities to consider the use of Public Space Protection Orders and SANGS as measures to mitigate dogs disturbing birds, particularly disturbance to overwintering birds.

(3) MG members to help publicise the [Countryside Code](#) and [Marine and Wildlife Coastal Code](#) through existing communications.

(4) NEG to consider how to obtain greater evidence on coastal footfall across the Solent.

## 5.8 Littering and Removal of Litter

*This activity includes discharges from land, water or air, from all types of vessels, of particulate or solid wastes e.g. plastics, microplastics and other flotsam and jetsam (accidental vessel discharges are a separate category). The toxicity and damage caused by littering materials should be considered as should the cleanup of toxic debris. Please includes information on any strandline clearance and beach cleanup.*

### 5.8.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                     | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Littering and removal of litter</b>                       | 0          | 0         | 9         | 12         | 21              |
| <b>Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites?</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                              | <b>Yes</b> |           | <b>No</b> |            |                 |
|                                                              | 12         |           | 9         |            | 21              |

### 5.8.2 Evaluation and Discussion

The presence of litter and its impact on designated sites is an elevated and ongoing issue reported by the SEMS Relevant Authorities. Most respondents believe that this issue is having detrimental impacts. The limited data available means the mode value is 'don't know', and many are still concerned about high levels of litter at the coast. Sources include watercourses, waterside businesses (incl. WWTW), spread by wind, poor waste management and direct littering by individuals.

Large pieces of litter that cause a navigation issue are removed by the relevant port or harbour authority.

In the Solent there are lots of public interest and community groups conducting litter picks and raising awareness such as the Final Straw Foundation, Plastic Aware, Selsey Ninja's and Southsea Beachwatch.

Beach Clean Data (from Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean) shows that common items found include plastic fragments, wet wipes, fishing gear, and food packaging. Microplastics and sanitary waste remain persistent problems. Litter levels increase during warmer months due to higher visitor numbers to coastal areas.

Microplastics, nurdles used in plastic manufacturing and abandoned GRP boats are areas of concern. Langstone Harbour Board have removed over 70 abandoned boats from the harbour.

#### Potential Impacts

Marine litter is any manufactured or processed solid material from anthropogenic activities that are discarded, disposed of or abandoned once entering the marine and coastal environment including: plastics, metals, timber, rope, fishing gear etc. and their degraded components, e.g. microplastic particles. Ecological effects can be physical (smothering), biological (ingestion, including uptake of microplastics; entangling; physical damage; accumulation of chemicals) and/or chemical (leaching, contamination). Litter can also act as an invasive species vector.

In 2020, ABPmer was commissioned by Defra's Marine Biodiversity Impact Evidence Group to assess the [current evidence of potential impacts of plastic on marine protected species and habitats in](#)

[England and Wales](#). It concluded that marine plastic pollution at current levels is unlikely to pose a high risk to protected features in England and Wales at concentrations of plastic that can be considered currently environmentally relevant levels, although it is expected that these levels could rise.

SEMS survey respondents have highlighted the potential impacts from the abandonment and decomposition of old boats. Pollution concerns include glassfibre causing ‘asbestos-like’ damage to organisms such as oysters and mussels, microplastics, diesel oil and paint leaching into the sea. Langstone Harbour Board has temporarily suspended issuing new private mud mooring licenses, as many of these very cheap moorings, installed and maintained by the individual, were failing due to poor maintenance and vessels ending up on the beach, or left abandoned on the moorings. The RYA have begun to look at the issue of abandoned boats and possible solutions, this includes a [reporting tool](#) for abandoned boats. The Solent Forum links any relevant reports and research to the [litter activity page](#) on the [Clean Solent Shores and Seas information hub](#).

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

Natural England hasn’t yet assimilated impacts from inert waste and litter on features, subfeatures and supporting features into its conservation advice, due to the variety of waste occurring and a lack of data on implications. However, it agrees that litter and waste present in SEMS will, in all likelihood, be impacting species and habitats to a currently unknown degree through pressures such as smothering and abrasion as well as to the prey of SPA features.

Litter is also known to facilitate the presence, colonisation and onward spread of Invasive Non-Native Species which have been shown to be contributing to the unfavourable condition of Solent Maritime SAC. This has been evidenced in a [University of Plymouth Masters project](#) mentored by Natural England in 2024, which found that marine debris had a much higher proportion of INNS to elsewhere on the shore.

Finally, the removal of litter may also contribute to disturbance of birds if done at particularly sensitive sites.

### **Management Measures**

A report, commissioned as part of the LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project, to [map debris in the intertidal areas of the Solent Maritime SAC](#) found a cumulative 242,953 m<sup>2</sup> of the intertidal habitats of Solent Maritime SAC affected by debris; it mapped the removability of each item based on the distance from shore and size of the object. This work will be useful to inform any efforts to remove debris in the intertidal.

The [Environment Agency’s Preventing Plastic Pollution Partnership](#) worked to implement an action plan to improve transitional waters. This Partnership has now concluded but its resources are still available.

There are numerous litter campaigns, initiatives and clean-ups taking place around the Solent, both national and local. The Solent Forum collates information on these as part of its [Solent Plastics Pollution hub](#) and [Clean Solent Shores and Seas \(CSSS\)](#) work to help people coordinate and access information.

The Solent Forum runs a [Facebook page](#) to help collate and share information about litter and plastics across the Solent’s community groups.

The [Great British Beach Clean](#), provides data and information on the amount and type of litter found at the coast. Encouragingly the data show there is a net downward trend of the amounts of litter recorded from this beach clean.

Harbours and marinas have comprehensive waste facilities, which include recycling options, and encourage their users to make use of these facilities. The RYA Green Blue have numerous resources on best practice for boating, see: [Waste & Recycling – The RYA Green Blue](#). Its [environmental facilities map](#) also records disposal locations for items such as flares and hazardous waste.

ABP Southampton operates its Port Waste Management Plan for commercial vessels providing waste facilities. It has also led on a significant project to remove wrecks from the River Itchen, with over 100 vessels removed.

Local authorities are responsible for waste disposal at the coast and will increase resources during the summer months or at times of events to manage bin availability and minimise littering.

The [fishing for litter initiative](#) encourages fishing vessels to actively removing the litter they come across whilst fishing.

Water companies collaborate on a national level on the [WINEP Chemical Investigations Programme](#); this has carried out research on microplastics in the wastewater system. Key findings so far are that the vast majority of microplastics are removed in sludge. This however leads to a need to understand what happens to microplastics in sludge when, for example, it is spread on land. Investigations will continue in AMP8 2025-2030 (including research to look at potential sludge treatment processes to remove microplastics). Southern Water's [Bluewave Innovation team](#) are working with University of Portsmouth to baseline their understanding of microplastics in their wastewater systems.

SEMS will monitor this activity and link any relevant reports and research to the [litter activity page](#) on the SEMS website and the Solent Forum's [Clean Solent Shores and Seas information hub](#).

### 5.8.3 Action

(1) The Solent Forum will continue to maintain the [Solent Plastics Pollution Hub](#) until at least 2026 as a legacy output of the Environment Agency's Preventing Plastic Pollution Intereg funded project. This hub links closely with the Forum's work on [Clean Solent Shores and Seas](#) which includes a page on litter.

## 5.9 Mooring and Anchoring

*Activity includes the operational use of berths, moorings and anchorages including the presence of these structures and the vessels using them. Includes consideration of impacts from vessels when berthing/berthed, mooring/moored, anchoring/anchored. Also includes impacts from anchors and impacts of boat when at anchor or mooring. There is a particular risk of damage from anchoring in seagrass beds.*

### 5.9.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                        | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Mooring and Anchoring</b>                                    | 0          | 3         | 10        | 3          | 16              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b> |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                 | 6          | 10        |           |            | 16              |

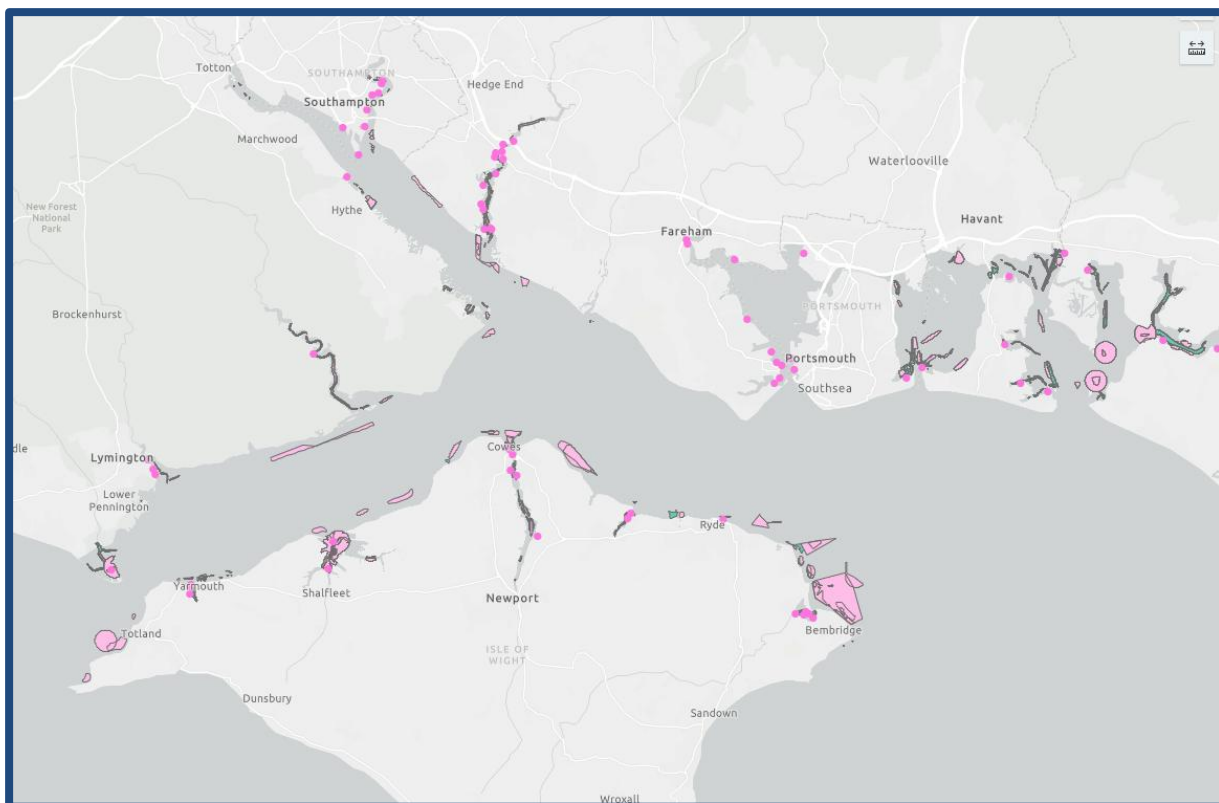
### 5.9.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Different harbour authority areas have different permissions with regards to mooring and anchoring, some do not permit anchoring, others have designated anchoring spots to discourage the use of anchoring in sensitive areas and there is a mix of swing, pile, fixed buoy and permanent moorings in use across the Solent. Most harbour authorities provide resident and visitor moorings.

The general picture reported across the Solent's harbours is that there is a drop in demand for moorings due to a decrease in boat ownership. The Harbours are mindful of licensing new moorings that could lead to the abandonment of vessels which are costly to remove and detrimental to the environment.

Responders noted that while moorings are licensed within the harbours, it is difficult to monitor if people are anchoring in the correct zones. There are also historic moorings within harbour areas which pre-date designations, creating an unnecessary pressure on the seabed habitats in the form of scouring from sinkers. Where there are insufficient moorings due to peak demand, people resort to anchoring.

The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES [recreational activity surveys](#) monitored anchoring and mooring at Yarmouth West, Bouldnor, Osborne Bay, Kings Quay and West Hayling Island between July-September annually from 2021 to 2024 inform potential management. This included the establishment of a Voluntary No Anchor Zone at Osborne Bay on Isle Of Wight.



Moorings (green polygons), anchoring areas (pink polygons) and marinas (pink dots) in the Solent. © MMO, sourced from [Solent Seascape Data Explorer](#).

### Potential Impact

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies pressures arising from mooring and/or anchoring that may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features. These include abrasion/disturbance of the seabed, penetration/disturbance of the substratum below the seabed and the introduction or spread of invasive non-native species. A number of designated features within the SEMS are considered to be sensitive to these pressures.

The LIFE ReMEDIES project [commissioned a report](#) that mapped areas impacted by anchoring and mooring pressure, which revealed a cumulative 242,953m<sup>2</sup> of the intertidal habitats of Solent Maritime SAC affected.

In 2017, Defra published '[Recreational and commercial anchoring and mooring impacts in marine protected areas in Wales and England \(ME6003\)](#)'.

### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Anchoring and mooring pressures are one of the reasons for the unfavourable status of features including seagrass beds, within Solent Maritime SAC; therefore, Natural England consider this activity is having an impact on some features within SEMS.

### Management Measures

[Advanced Mooring Systems \(AMS\)](#), or eco moorings, are mooring systems designed to have less impact on the seabed than conventional swing moorings. They aim to minimise interaction with the seabed to prevent abrasion which damages sensitive habitats. Current locations of AMS' around the Solent include Osborne Bay, Cowes and Yarmouth.

The RYA Green Blue has '[Anchoring & Mooring with Care](#)' guidance for boat users on how to minimise their impacts on sensitive habitats.

Through LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES, [recreational activity surveys](#) monitored anchoring and mooring at Yarmouth West, Bouldnor, Osborne Bay, Kings Quay and West Hayling Island between July to September annually from 2021 to 2024 to inform potential management. Interpretation Panels have been installed as part of the project to inform people of the presence and location of seagrass beds and their importance. These are located at Norton Spit, Hayling Island ferry terminal, Lepe Country Park and Cowes. The activity surveys have highlighted Osborne Bay as an area with elevated levels of anchoring in seagrass. This has led to the installation of a Voluntary No Anchor Zone to reduce this pressure, which has resulted in a decrease in the number of boats anchoring inside the seagrass zone at this site, as evidenced by the recreational activity surveys

Further information and resources are available at: [Solentems - Mooring and Anchoring](#).

### 5.9.3 Action

(1) SEMS Management Group to use and share the available information and best practice on [Advanced Mooring Systems](#), the RYA Green Blue's [anchoring and mooring with care](#) guidance, and support the outputs of the [LIFE ReMEDIES project](#). There are now RYA Green Blue ReMEDIES project interpretation boards aimed at boaters located at 20 different marinas across the Solent, from Lymington to Portsmouth and on the Isle of Wight.

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

*Activity includes maintenance and operation of all port/harbour infrastructure including quay walls, jetties, slipways, navigation markers, coastal defence structures etc. Includes consideration of vessels/machinery/vehicles associated with activity. Also include the day-to-day operational use of these structures, lights, buoys, posts, towers, transit marks, supply of fuel/bunkering operations onshore /offshore, etc.*

### 5.10.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                 | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Operation of FCERM schemes                               | 5         | 1         | 11        | 3          | 20              |
| Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | Yes       | No        |           |            |                 |
|                                                          | 1         | 9         |           |            | 20              |

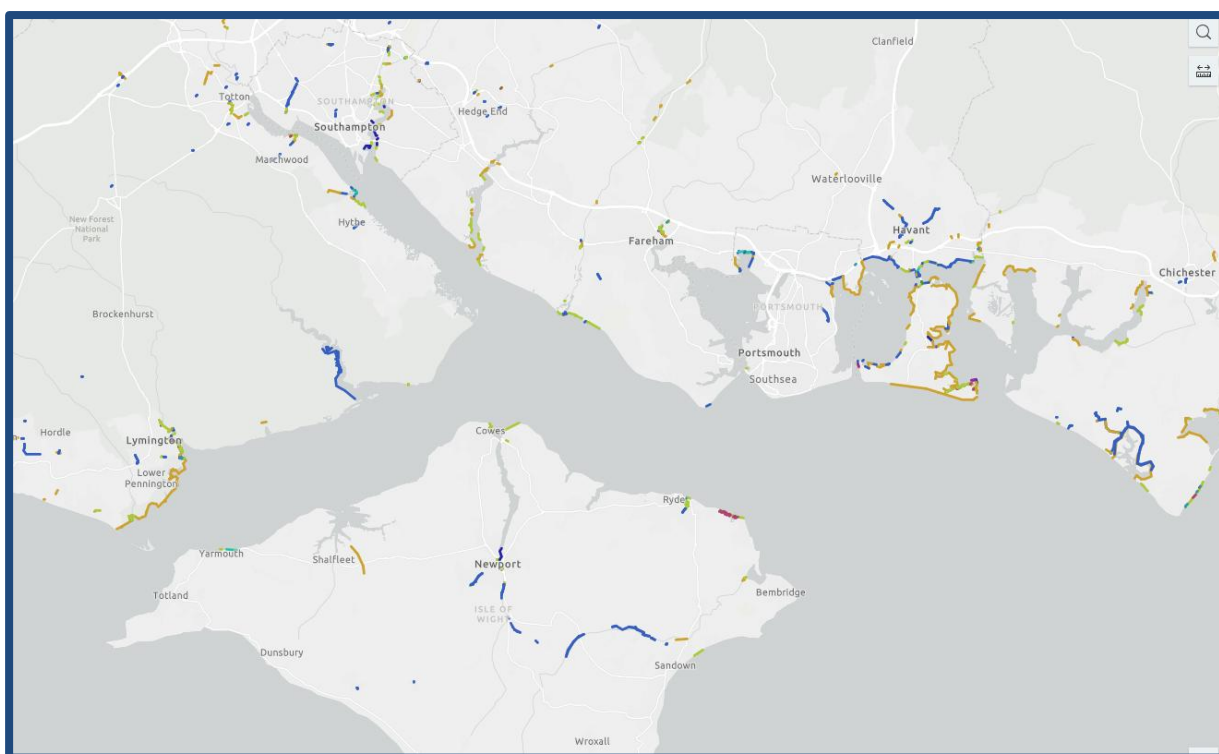
### 5.10.2 Evaluation and Discussion

The issue of coastal squeeze is well known and widespread across the Solent and there is good recognition of the need to progress more nature based solutions. There is support for beneficial use of dredgings work; a scheme at Boiler Marsh in Lymington is increasing the availability of intertidal habitat due to it being higher in the tidal frame. It is also providing protection to the saltmarsh behind against erosion caused by waves and tides.

The Isle of Wight has seen coastal erosion rates/landslips and breach of flood defences at an all-time high due to the impacts of climate change. This has significant implications for local communities and the designated sites.

The operation of the sluice through the sea wall at the Lower Pennington Stream on the New Forest coastline has become difficult due to it being blocked by sediment from heavy rainfall and tidal surges. This has resulted in flooding on part of the nature reserve impacting the Saline Lagoons SAC. The Environment Agency periodically clear the sluice but it is an ongoing problem. A high tide in Beaulieu due to a storm surge broke the sluice gate and flooded an SSSI. There are concerns that increased tidal heights from climate change will require the upgrading of infrastructure such as sluice gates to protect sensitive habitats and prevent flooding.

[Coastal Partners](#) lead on many of the FCERM schemes across the Solent and they have a team of environmental officers that carry out activities to enhance the natural environment.



*Spatial flood defences. © Environment Agency, sourced from [Solent Seascape Data Explorer](#).*

## Potential Impact

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies a range of pressures arising from coastal flood and erosion risk management schemes that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations of SPAs. These include above water noise, visual disturbance and barriers to species movement. Designated bird species within the SEMS are sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement. Similarly, flood and erosion risk management schemes may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features via pressures such as abrasion, penetration and physical change or loss of habitat.

## Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Whilst more recent FCERM schemes include provision of compensatory habitat for losses associated with their operation through the [Habitat Compensation and Restoration Programme](#) (HCRP) the

operation of legacy schemes and private defences are currently contributing to loss of designated habitats through rising sea levels and coastal squeeze impacts without compensatory habitat being identified. For example, the condition assessment of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA found that there was a 45.16% decline in the extent of saltmarsh from site designation (1987) to 2016 and attributed coastal squeeze as an adverse condition driver for the majority of supporting habitats.

Therefore, based on current understanding of the extent and magnitude of this activity it is Natural England's view that this activity as a whole is having an impact on some features e.g. saltmarsh of SEMS sites, although it is noted that several schemes will be compensating for these losses either within or outside of SEMS sites.

### **Management Measures**

In accordance with the [Habitats Regulations](#), all competent authorities must undertake a formal assessment of the implications of any new plans or projects that may be capable of affecting the designated interest features of European Sites before deciding whether to undertake, permit or authorise such a plan or project. The impacts from the operation of coastal flood and erosion risk management schemes will therefore be assessed at their time of construction or modification.

Each [Shoreline Management Plan](#) policy has a high-level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA), followed by an HRA for each specific defence works.

The [Regional Habitat Compensation Programme](#) (RHCP), is a strategic initiative led by the Environment Agency, to provide an agreed mechanism for delivering strategic habitat compensation for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management (FCERM) to ensure compliance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The compensatory requirement passed on to the RHCP from Shoreline Management Plans (SMPs) is the amount of habitat required to address the adverse impacts on European sites from the SMP policies due to coastal squeeze and saline inundation impacts.

The Solent Forum is working with partners to obtain a licence for a new disposal site for dredgings at Cockleshell Bay in Lymington, to restore saltmarsh and help to provide natural flood management.

### **5.10.3 Action**

No specific activity action required.

## 5.11 Operation of Ports and Harbours (maintenance of infrastructure)

*Activity includes maintenance and operation of all port/harbour infrastructure including quay walls, jetties, slipways, navigation markers, coastal defence structures etc. Includes consideration of vessels/machinery/vehicles associated with activity. Also include the day-to-day operational use of these structures, lights, buoys, posts, towers, transit marks, supply of fuel/bunkering operations onshore /offshore, etc.*

### 5.11.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                                  | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| <b>Operation of ports and harbours</b><br>(maintenance of infrastructure) | 2          | 0         | 14        | 1          | 17              |
| <b>Is the activity having an impact on the designated sites</b>           |            |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                                           | <b>Yes</b> | <b>No</b> |           |            |                 |
|                                                                           | 1          | 16        |           |            | 17              |

### 5.11.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Harbour authorities have a statutory duty to maintain navigational aids, pontoons, and public slipways in their harbour. As such, maintenance is ongoing throughout the year as needed. They do take account of times of the year to try and avoid disturbance to wildlife at key times. Respondents noted that more extreme weather conditions make the maintenance of infrastructure more important/expensive and can lead to assets having to change to cope with these conditions.

The ports have been investing in shore power to improve local air quality.

#### Potential Impacts

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies a range of pressures arising from the maintenance and operation of ports and harbours that may impact breeding and non-breeding bird populations of SPAs. These include above water noise and visual disturbance. A number of designated bird species within the SEMS are sensitive to these pressures, which can result in displacement and/or mortality. Similarly, the maintenance and operation of ports and harbours may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features via pressures such as abrasion/disturbance of the seabed, penetration/disturbance of the substratum below the seabed, smothering and siltation.

#### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Whilst Natural England do not consider this activity to currently be impacting on SEMS, it does have the potential to increase the presence and spread of Invasive Non-Native Species which has been listed as an adverse condition reason for Solent Maritime SAC. Natural England advises that ports and harbours should promote best practice and support the biosecurity planning work being coordinated by the Solent Forum.

#### Management Measures

The [UK Marine SAC project](#) produced guidance on this topic including good management practice.

The spread of marine invasive species has become more of a concern for their environmental, economic and social impact. Waterside infrastructure can be a pathway for such species and Natural England the Solent Forum have worked together to develop [biosecurity plans for the Solent](#).

Harbours are also beginning to look at ways to ecologically enhance their coastal infrastructure. This work will continue and grow over the coming years and the Solent Forum has a [Building Biodiversity in the Solent hub \(BBS hub\)](#) to promote and share best practice. The re-concreting of the River Hamble's sea wall involved inclusion of textured concrete plus pools and ledges to encourage biodiversity. There was replacement of pointed pile caps with flat top caps to allow birds to roost.

The Solent Forum sit on the national Marine Eco-Engineering Working Group to monitor and share new innovations.

Marine Plans require that port and harbour activities avoid or mitigate harm to designated sites, align with conservation objectives and consider cumulative impacts.

Further information on this topic is available on the [SEMS website](#).

### 5.11.3 Action

(1) SEMS Management Group members to utilise the resources and implement relevant actions in the [Solent Biosecurity action plans](#) to address the impacts from marine invasive species when maintaining infrastructure.

## 5.12 Aerial Recreation (light aircraft, paramotors, drones)

*Activity includes all types of craft used for recreation in the air e.g. small planes and helicopters, microlights, paramotors, hang gliding, parascending (on beach), parasailing (by boat), drones and model aircraft.*

### 5.12.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                              | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Aerial recreation                                     | 1         | 0         | 5         | 5          | 11              |
| Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites? |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                       | Yes       |           | No        |            | Total Responses |
|                                                       | 1         |           | 10        |            | 11              |

### 5.12.2 Evaluation and Discussion

For the purposes of this management scheme the main focus is on Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAVs) or drones. Some authorities do have powers to control the air space, for instance at commercial sites. Both those with control and those without will only consent for drones to be flown if the operator has appropriate qualifications, a risk assessment (including environmental risk) and complies with CAA regulations. Flights are not allowed over private commercial land or commercial airspace. Some issue drone pilots with advice on avoiding disturbance to bird species and liaise with Natural England on a case-by-case basis if they have concerns.

Natural England report that there is a perceived gradual increase in use of drones to undertake surveys, monitor projects and for comms purposes. It is difficult to ascertain the in-combination effects of drone use as frequency increases. Bird Aware Solent data shows that drones are not currently an issue in the Solent.

### **Potential Impacts**

Natural England's '[Marine recreation evidence briefing: drones \(EIN035\)](#)' reports that the pressure arising from participants (operating drones) walking across the shore has been considered to be negligible, compared to the larger numbers of people undertaking general beach leisure activities. The disturbance response of birds to drones is dependent on a range of factors, particularly flying altitude, the type (model) of drone and level of habituation to existing disturbance pressure. Existing research has not distinguished between disturbance from noise and visual cues. Repetitive disturbance events can result in possible long-term effects such as loss of weight, condition and a reduction in reproductive success, leading to population impacts.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

Based on current levels of reported activity, it is unlikely that drone use is having an adverse effect upon SEMS. However, study is required to determine whether or not this is accurate, and this activity should continue to be monitored as usage has increased as drones become more affordable.

### **Management Measures**

Natural England's '[Marine recreation evidence briefing: drones \(EIN035\)](#)' contains guidance on management options; including site management access, education and communication techniques and legal enforcement.

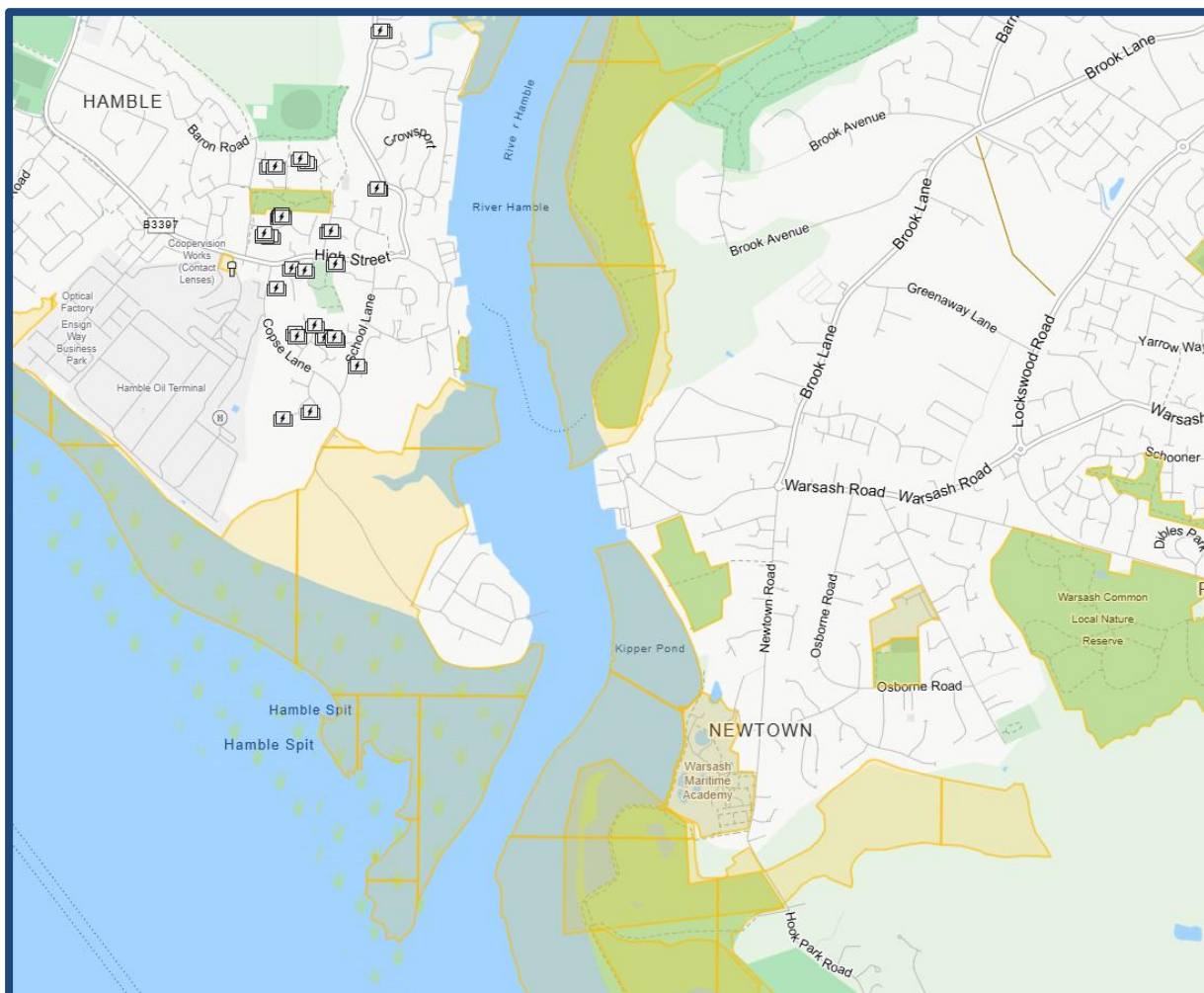
Bird Aware Solent rangers record if drones disturb birds when out on duty but sightings are rare.

Hampshire Constabulary provide information on the [legal aspects of flying drones](#).

The Crown Estate grants permission for UAV flights over Crown Estate foreshore (defined as the land between mean high water and mean low water). It seeks to encourage responsible use of the foreshore and estuaries that it owns. It has published guidelines at: [Metal detecting and drone flying | The Crown Estate](#).

The [Civil Aviation Authority](#) provides detailed information about drone use, regulations and best practice. It recommends that drone users seek advice from Natural England if flying over a SSSI. It tracks drone registration and pilot competency for commercial use.

[Altitude Angel](#) provide drone mapping and they have now included all SSSI layers on their Drone Safety [map](#). These are classified as a 'ground hazard'.



Example of SSSIs mapped on the River Hamble (yellow polygons) on the [Drone Safety Map](#).

Please see the [SEMS website](#) for further guidance and resources.

### 5.12.3 Action

No specific action required.

### 5.13 Recreation (non-motorised watercraft)

*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.*

#### 5.13.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                                     | Increased  | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------------------|
| <b>Recreation (non-motorised craft)</b>                      | 1          | 1         | 10        | 7          | 19                     |
| <b>Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites?</b> |            |           |           |            |                        |
|                                                              | <b>Yes</b> |           | <b>No</b> |            | <b>Total Responses</b> |
|                                                              | 10         |           | 9         |            | 19                     |

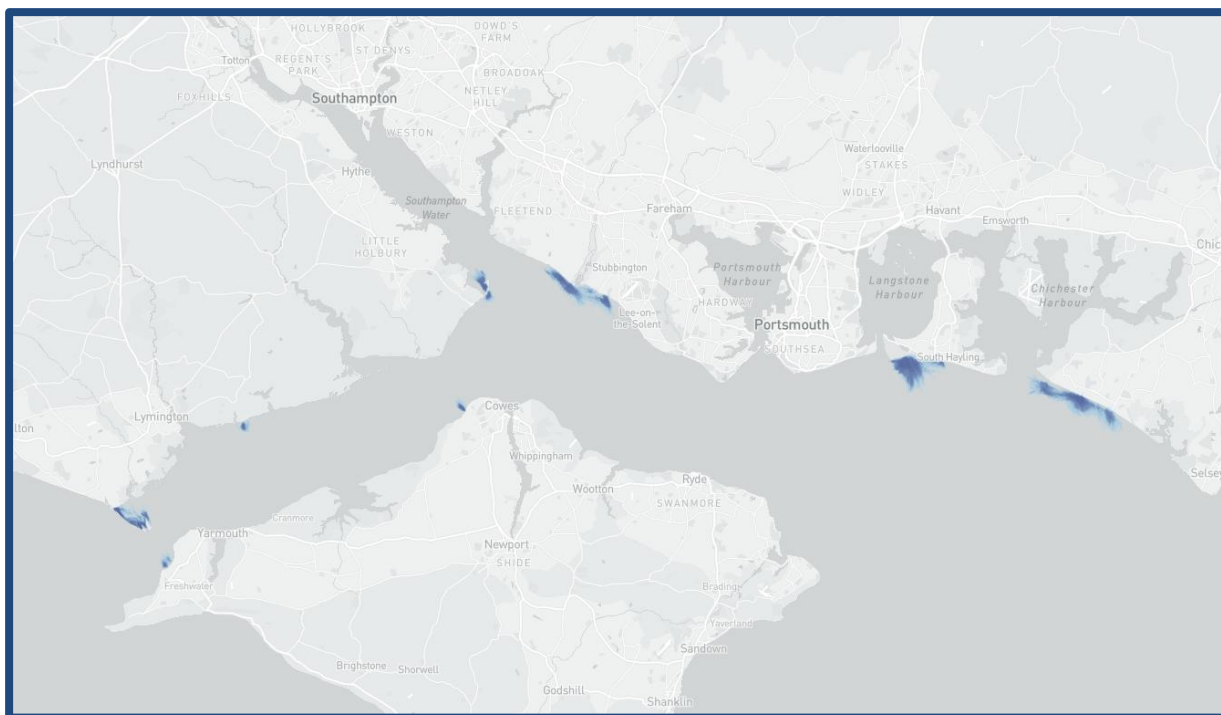
#### 5.13.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Although most Relevant authorities reported no change, levels of this activity are still thought to be significant and impacting on birds. Wind and kite surfing were observed flushing roosting and feeding birds with Hurst Spit identified as a hotspot area. Paddlesport craft are readily available to buy, and users can be inexperienced in how to avoid sensitive wildlife sites. People also seek out quiet areas that can bring them into locations that were not historically visited. Sport England data shows that four percent of the UK population took part in paddleboarding last year (two million people).

Concerns were raised about disturbance pressures due to paddle and wind sport craft being able to access shallow water, particularly at sensitive sites like offshore saltmarsh islands, and trampling from launch and recovery. The season is getting longer with better clothing and equipment and participants are seen from spring to autumn with a summer peak.

The harbour authorities note they have no jurisdiction to control activity outside of their statutory harbour authority area, managing marine recreational activity in these locations is the responsibility of the MMO. Where permits are required, this gives an opportunity for harbour staff to give educational messaging.

Natural England have had reports of disturbance in Ryde, Newtown Harbour, Thorness Bay and Western Yar on the Isle of Wight.



Kite surfing hotspots in the Solent. © Strava Global Heatmap, 2025



Paddlesports hotspots in the Solent. © Strava Global Heatmap, 2025.

## Potential Impacts

Natural England's '[Marine recreation evidence briefing: Non-motorised watercraft including paddlesports \(EIN028\)](#)' reports that the main impacts of this activity are through abrasion from trampling during launch/recovery of non-motorised watercraft, visual disturbance of birds, marine

mammals and fish related to the presence of both people and watercraft. Also above water noise disturbance of hauled out seals and birds related to people noise during launch or activity.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

An increase in this activity, particularly paddlesports, has been noted across SEMS. The condition assessment for both Portsmouth Harbour, and Chichester and Langstone Harbours Special Protection Areas have been completed, with disturbance caused by human activity being one of the drivers for the unfavourable status of all designated features within Portsmouth Harbour SPA and fourteen out of nineteen features of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA.

Whilst no formal condition assessment has yet been completed for the other Special Protection Areas within SEMS, a reduce target has been set for all features for the attribute 'disturbance' caused by human activity with a target to reduce the frequency, duration and/or intensity of disturbance affecting roosting, foraging, feeding, moulting and/or loafing birds so that they are not significantly disturbed.

In addition, there are numerous anecdotal reports about the level of disturbance from kite surfing at the base of Hurst Spit. This activity is already, or has the potential, to exclude SPA birds from their roosting areas in fall/winter and from their breeding sites in spring/summer.

Finally, this activity can lead to trampling and abrasion of sensitive habitats such as seagrass and saltmarsh as users are able to access the water via inappropriate routes due to the size of the vessel.

Therefore, Natural England consider that this activity is impacting the features of SEMS.

### **Management Measures**

Natural England's [EIN028 report](#) 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. Some user associations for the activities in this section also provide guidance to their members on how to minimise their environmental impact, for example, the RYA's Green Blue programme has the '[Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters](#)'.

Relevant authority management measures include charging a harbour due or permit, implementing car parking charges, slipway booking systems, erecting information signs at sensitive areas and conducting more water and roaming warden patrols. Harbour authorities put environmental educational material in harbour guides/websites.

Guidance on best practice for paddlesports users is available from the [British Canoe Union](#). There is also comprehensive information for paddlesports users on the [Go Paddling website](#); British Canoeing is also the national governing body for Stand Up Paddleboarding (SUP). Kite surfing comes under the remit of the [British Kite Sports Association](#).

Through LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES, recreational activity surveys monitored non-motorised watercraft at Yarmouth West, Bouldnor, Osborne Bay, Kings Quay Shore and West Hayling Island between July and September annually from 2021 to 2024 to inform potential management. Interpretation panels have been installed as part of the project to inform people of the presence and location of seagrass beds and their importance. These are located at Norton Spit, Hayling Island ferry terminal, Lepe Country Park and Cowes.

Bird Aware Solent have produced a [watersports with wildlife](#) map and guides to help paddle and wind sports enthusiasts coexist with nature. The [interactive map](#) is designed to help people reduce

any disturbance to protected birds and habitats and it maps wildlife sensitive sites. Educative signage has been installed at public launch/access points throughout some of the Solent's harbours.

The Solent Forum has developed [biosecurity action plans](#) to help prevent the spread of marine invasive species in the Solent, paddle and wind sports can be a vector for their spread.

A list of resources and information on this topic is available on the [SEMS website](#).

### 5.13.3 Action

(1) SEMS Management Group members to support Bird Aware Solent's [watersports with wildlife campaign](#), report disturbance from marine activities to the [MMO](#) and use the [Solent Biosecurity plan](#) information to help prevent marine invasives spread from paddlesports.

## 5.14 Recreation (powerboating or sailing with an engine)

*Activity includes any motorised boat activity, such as Personal Watercraft (PWC), hovercraft, powerboating and water-skiing. Includes launching and recovery of craft e.g. slipway or beach/shore launching and participation i.e. when activity is underway or making way. Please consider other novel uses of power boats such as flyboarding. The impacts of different craft will vary and should be considered on a case-by-case basis e.g. sailing boats with low power engines moving at slow speeds are less likely to have an impact.*

### 5.14.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                              | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Recreation (motorised craft)                          | 0         | 2         | 10        | 6          | 18              |
| Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites? |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                       | Yes       |           | No        |            | Total Responses |
|                                                       | 8         |           | 10        |            | 18              |

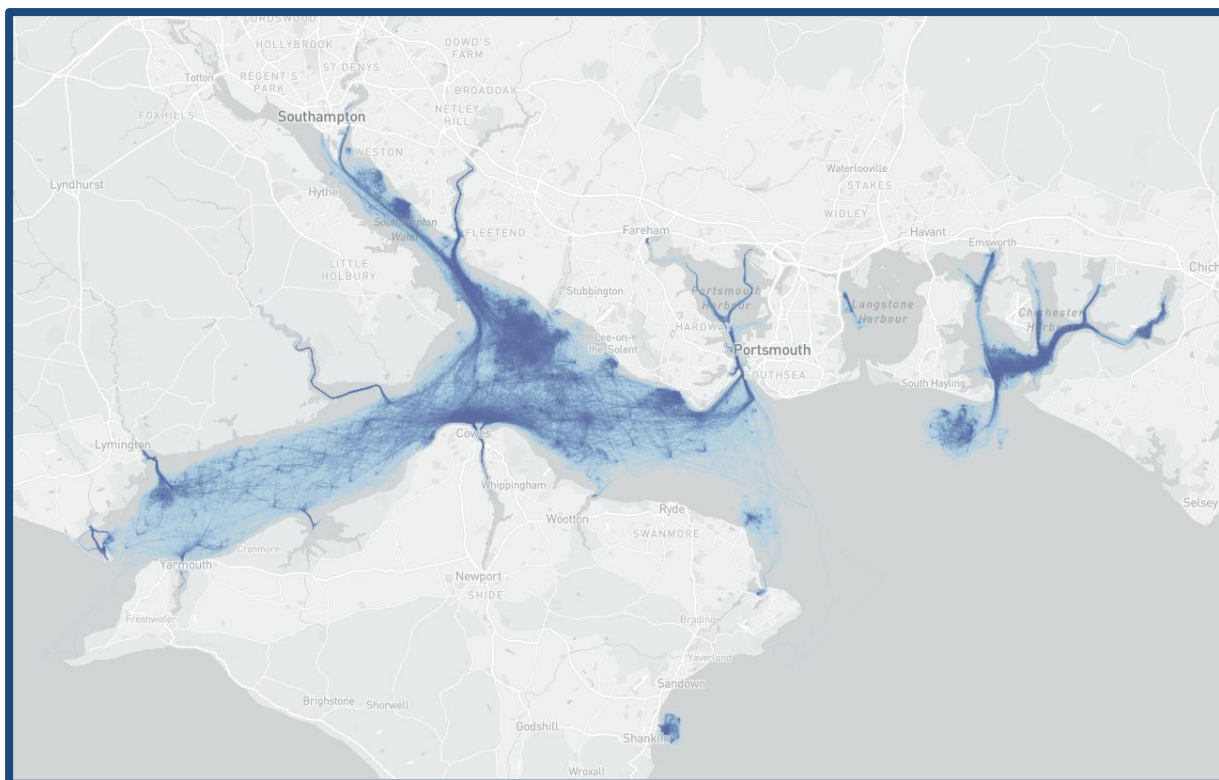
### 5.14.2 Evaluation and Discussion

The Solent is a popular area for all watersports and baseline activity levels of powerboating and sailing remain stable but high compared to the national picture. There was a decrease reported by two respondents mainly attributed to the expense of keeping a boat. Competitions and events remain extremely popular in the Solent with a growing interest in spectator boating, with people chartering vessels to watch races from the water.

Respondents noted that impacts will be higher at busy access points such as slipways and marina entrances. Poorer summer weather and the state of people's disposable income also impact on activity levels.

The main concern reported for this activity category is disturbance caused by the use of Personal Watercraft (PWCs). Their noise and manoeuvrability mean that they can disturb both wildlife and the amenity value of sites and they can access shallow water.

Electric outboard motors are becoming increasingly popular as a clean, quiet, and efficient alternative to traditional petrol outboard engines. They are particularly suitable for dinghies, tenders, and small boats. Their use will be expanded by the installation of electric charging stations such as those installed at Cowes Harbour and some of the Solent marinas. Their locations can be viewed on the RYA [Green Blue's environmental facilities map](#). Such craft will help to mitigate noise disturbance from boat use. Electric PWCs are becoming more popular and should drop in price as they become more mainstream.



*Sailing heatmap of the Solent. © Strava Global Heatmap, 2025*

### Potential Impacts

Natural England's publication '[Motorised watercraft \(powerboating and sailing with an engine\) \(EIN027\)](#)' reports that the main impacts are through abrasion/disturbance of the surface and sub-surface sediment, underwater noise disturbance of marine mammals and birds, related to engine operation during the activity, above water noise and visual disturbance, of hauled out seals and visual disturbance of marine mammals and birds.

Natural England noted that the use of small personal watercraft or powerboats allow access close to sensitive habitats that may be otherwise unreachable. The wake of these vessels when closer to shore can be detrimental to habitats such as seagrass.

### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Further study is required to determine whether the use of motorised watercraft is having an adverse effect upon SEMS as these vessels are less able to get close to shore and so may cause less disturbance to wildlife than smaller craft and are more likely to enter the water at defined access points, e.g. marinas.

It is important to note, however, that the condition assessment for both Portsmouth Harbour, and Chichester and Langstone Harbours Special Protection Areas have been completed with disturbance

being one of the drivers for the unfavourable status of all designated features within Portsmouth Harbour SPA and fourteen out of nineteen features of Chichester and Langstone Harbours SPA.

Whilst no formal condition assessment has yet been completed for the other Special Protection Areas within SEMS, a reduce target has been set for all features for the attribute 'disturbance' caused by human activity with a target to reduce the frequency, duration and/or intensity of disturbance affecting roosting, foraging, feeding, moulting and/or loafing birds so that they are not significantly disturbed.

Therefore, this activity should be monitored as usage has increased and will likely continue to do so. Please note, pressures associated specifically with anchoring and mooring are considered in section 5.9 and are therefore not included here.

### **Management Measures**

Harbour General Directions and byelaws, including speed restrictions, effectively manage this activity for navigational safety which also helps to reduce environmental impacts. For activities like waterskiing and PWC use, these commonly require permits and participants are educated to stay away from sensitive sites. Where a PWC permit is required, users must be able to evidence proof of a marine qualification, such as the [RYA's Personal Watercraft Proficiency Course](#), that shows they are aware of their responsibilities as a mariner (part of this includes their responsibilities to the natural environment). A maritime partnership has produced a '[Wash and Slow](#)' leaflet that shows Solent speed limits.

Events and competitions that require biosecurity measures are those that have participants arriving from outside the locality bringing in vessels or watercraft and external equipment. [Guidance](#) has been designed to help event organisers develop a simple biosecurity plan to explain what you may need to consider and simple actions that can be taken. The [NNSS has guidance and resources for waterside events](#) in a variety of different languages for paddling, angling and boating. The RYA Green Blue has produced a [sustainable boating event checklist](#) for event managers including information on biosecurity measures.

The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES [recreational activity surveys](#) monitored motorised watercraft at Yarmouth West, Bouldnor, Osborne Bay, Kings Quay and West Hayling Island between July-September annually from 2021 to 2024 to inform potential management. These have indicated Osborne Bay and Yarmouth West to have the highest level of sailing of the sites surveyed. Interpretation panels have been installed as part of the ReMEDIES project to inform people of the presence and location of seagrass beds and their importance. These are located at Norton Spit, Hayling Island ferry terminal, Lepe Country Park and Cowes. Additional RYA Green Blue ReMEDIES Project interpretation boards aimed at boaters, are located at 20 different marinas across the Solent, from Lyminster to Portsmouth and on the Isle of Wight.

Hampshire Police Marine Support Unit launched [Operation Wavebreaker](#) to address anti-social behaviour on the water. They work closely with local harbour masters, maritime rescue agencies and community groups to quantify the issue and look at effective ways of modifying the current behaviours, to ensure everyone can use the water in a safe and enjoyable environment. The Police ask that issues or concerns about anti-social behaviour, be reported to the Harbour Authority or to them via 101 or through the [Hampshire Constabulary website](#).

The user groups for the activities in this category provide advice to their members on how to minimise their environmental impact, for example, The RYA Green Blue has advice on [boating around wildlife](#). It also provides guidance on how to run [sustainable events](#).

In 2023, [new legislation](#) came into force which puts the responsibility on users, operators and owners of powered watercraft to make sure they protect not just themselves but other water users from harm. Although primarily designed for safety of navigation, the new legislation's curb on irresponsible behaviour should also benefit wildlife.

### 5.14.3 Action

(1) SEMS Management Group Members to feed information on disturbance arising from this activity to the [MMO](#), disseminate best practice produced by the recreational user groups and use the [Solent Biosecurity plan](#) information to help prevent marine invasives spread.

## 5.15 Slipway and Jetty Cleaning and Maintenance

*Activity includes the ongoing maintenance, such as washing down, clearing of mud or sediment, algal growth or similar of a slipway or jetty.*

### 5.15.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                              | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Slipway and jetty cleaning and maintenance            | 0         | 0         | 13        | 2          | 15              |
| Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites? |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                       | Yes       |           | No        |            | Total Responses |
|                                                       | 0         |           | 15        |            | 15              |

### 5.15.2 Evaluation and Discussion

The harbours note that they normally use water to undertake their cleaning; algal mats need to be removed to maintain access to slipways. They do try to keep this activity to a minimum, but it will need to be done on regular cycles for safety. None of the survey respondents had any concerns that this activity was impacting on the designated sites.

#### Potential Impacts

Maintenance wastes can enter harbours from the cleaning of jetties and slipways. Debris and wastes produced could contain a mixture of contaminants including oils, oil emulsifiers, paints, solvents, detergents, bleach and antifouling paint scrapings. The dilution of wastes in the harbour waters means that in most cases any possible adverse effects will be only localised and temporary.

The [Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) is the authority responsible for the approval of chemicals if they are biocidal products containing active substances with the intention of destroying the algae.

#### Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)

Whilst Natural England do not consider this activity to currently be impacting on SEMS it does have the potential to increase the presence and spread of Invasive Non-Native Species which has been listed as an adverse condition reason for Solent Maritime SAC. Solent Forum have prepared [biosecurity action plans for the Solent](#) to help address this issue. In addition, if inappropriate

chemicals are used it could increase the levels of contaminants entering the Solent, noting elevated contaminants in both sediment and water column are reasons for the unfavourable status of Solent Maritime SAC.

### Management Measures

Solent harbours reported that they try to avoid using harmful chemicals and use plain seawater or environmentally sound cleaning materials when undertaking cleaning operations. The RYA Green Blue recommend not using chemicals to remove weed and algae from slipways but use a stiff brush or a high-pressure hose instead.

The RYA provide guidance on [cleaning of slipways](#) and [guidance](#) is also published by the MMO.

### 5.15.3 Action

No specific action required.

## 5.16 Wildfowling

*Activity includes the use of firearms to shoot wild fowl. This category does not consider the use of dogs during these activities, please use 'Land recreation - dog walking' for any dog related activity.*

### 5.16.1 Survey Response

| Activity                                              | Increased | Decreased | No change | Don't know | Total Responses |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Wildfowling                                           | 0         | 0         | 6         | 1          | 7               |
| Do you think the activity is impacting on SEMS Sites? |           |           |           |            |                 |
|                                                       | Yes       |           | No        |            | Total Responses |
|                                                       | 1         |           | 6         |            | 7               |

### 5.16.2 Evaluation and Discussion

Wildfowling often takes place early in the morning or in the evening, typically using shotguns to take birds; dogs retrieve downed birds from the water. Wildfowling occurs at Keyhaven and Lymington and in Langstone and Chichester Harbours.

Wildfowling is a largely solitary activity which involves the hunting of specific species of ducks, geese and waders with a smooth bore shotgun. It is undertaken primarily on estuaries and coastal marshes. In England, the season runs from 1st September until 31st January above the high-water mark and extends until February 20th below the high-water mark. The majority of wildfowling is organised through a club structure, but it can also be undertaken independently, usually by landowners.

### Potential Impacts

Natural England's Advice on Operations identifies pressures arising from wildfowling that may impact SPA supporting habitats and designated SAC features. These include above water noise, removal of target species and visual disturbance. A number of designated features within the SEMS are considered to be sensitive to these pressures.

### **Impacts on SEMS (Natural England)**

Natural England do not consider wildfowling to be currently impacting on SEMS, however, in the long-term Natural England will seek to review all consents in place to ensure that these are fit for purpose.

### **Management Measures**

The relevant authorities that responded that wildfowling took place in their survey return all stated that licences and consents were in place to manage this activity. Landowners/occupiers, such as wildfowling clubs, need to apply to Natural England for consent to undertake wildfowling, this provision does not exist for third parties undertaking activities on these sites.

For all wildfowling activity which takes place under a [Crown Estate lease](#), annual returns are made, detailing the numbers of visits undertaken and number of birds shot. The [Joint Group for Wildfowling on Tidal Land](#) was set up to advise The Crown Estate on issues relating to wildfowling on designated inter-tidal land.

Information from the British Association for Shooting and Conservation is available at: <https://basc.org.uk/wildfowling/>.

For more information please see the [SEMS website](#).

### **5.16.3 Action**

No specific activity action required.

## 6 Generic Actions

1. SEMS Management Group members should use this Report and the [activity pages](#) on the SEMS website as a reference resource to help shape relevant plans and policies or management measures for activities in designated sites. This information can also be used to help inform Habitats Regulations Assessments on the potential impact of activities from new development. Management Group members are also encouraged to share these resources more widely and encourage the adoption of best practice by private landowners.
2. SEMS Management Group members to feed concerns on or new management measures that may have been introduced on non-licensable activities to the SEMS office throughout the year, ([info@solentforum.org](mailto:info@solentforum.org)) to enable the promotion and sharing of good practice throughout the Solent.
3. Trend data for activity change is showing that activities in the Solent are elevated but stable, we need to ascertain whether this is the case or people do not have sufficient data to make a judgement on change (increase/decrease). This year the SEMS Survey included a 'don't know' option for respondents when asked about activity changes. Table 4b shows the outcome and this will help NEG to prioritise projects for funding.
4. NEG to support the development of the Solent Seascapes project's Seascape Recovery Plan, that aims to better protect and manage existing Solent habitats.
5. All to use the [Solent Forum's Biosecurity plans](#) to help prevent the spread of marine invasives species from activities around the Solent.
6. All to report wildlife disturbance from marine non-licensable activities via email to the [MMO](#). The MMO are setting up an online reporting tool to assist with reporting in the future and we will share this once it has launched.

## 7 Summary of Specific Activity Actions

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### Accidental vessel discharges/emissions including oil spill and clean-up

- NEG to support further research on how highways run-off could affect the Solent's designated sites.
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### Boat Repair and Maintenance

- SEMS Management Group members to continue to promote and share best practice in [preventing marine invasive spread](#) by using the Solent Forum's biosecurity plans and record abandoned end of life boats on the RYA [Green Blue's register](#).
  - NEG to promote research into the impacts on designated sites of end-of-life abandoned GRP boats.
- 

### Fishing (including shellfisheries)

- SEMS Management Group members to report to the [Southern](#) and [Sussex](#) IFCA's or the MMO (24-hour incident hotline 0800 80 70 600) any suspected illegal fishing activity seen and raise awareness of the byelaws in place.
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### Fishing (shore-based activities)

- SEMS Management Group members 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 help record this activity.
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### General Beach Recreation

- SEMS Management Group members to consider including information on impacts on designated sites when updating local beach information and/or signs. Look to work with partners to protect sensitive sites like bird nesting sites in areas owned or managed. Sites are mapped on the [Solent Seascape Data Explorer](#) (baseline species layer).
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### Grazing and Foraging

- SEMS Management Group members to report any concerns regarding the foraging for wild plants or shellfish in designated sites to the local IFCA and help to promote local IFCA byelaws and codes of conduct.
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### Land Recreation - Walking (including dog walking)

1. SEMS Management Group to communicate with their own rangers, coastal staff, and comms teams on how they can support Bird Aware Solent and other partnership projects in the delivery of their work on recreational disturbance.

2. Local authorities to consider the use of Public Space Protection Orders and SANGS as measures to mitigate dogs disturbing birds, particularly disturbance to overwintering birds.

3. SEMS Management Group members to help publicise the [Countryside Code](#) and [Marine and Wildlife Coastal Code](#) through existing communications.

4. NEG to consider how to obtain greater evidence on coastal footfall across the Solent.

### **Littering and Removal of Litter**

- The Solent Forum will continue to maintain the [Solent Plastics Pollution Hub](#) until at least 2026 as a legacy output of the Environment Agency's Preventing Plastic Pollution Interegg funded project. This hub links closely with the Forum's work on [Clean Solent Shores and Seas](#) which includes a page on litter.

### **Mooring and Anchoring**

- SEMS Management Group to use and share the available information and best practice on [Advanced Mooring Systems](#), the RYA Green Blue's [anchoring and mooring with care](#) guidance, and support the outputs of the [LIFE ReMEDIES project](#).

### **Operation of Coastal Flood and Erosion Risk Management Schemes**

No specific activity action required.

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

- SEMS Management Group members to utilise the resources and implement relevant actions in the [Solent Biosecurity action plans](#) to address the impacts from marine invasive species when maintaining infrastructure.

### **Aerial Recreation (light aircraft, drones)**

No specific activity action required.

### **Recreation - Non-motorised Watercraft**

- SEMS Management Group members to support Bird Aware Solent's [watersports with wildlife campaign](#), report disturbance from marine activities to the [MMO](#) and use the [Solent Biosecurity plan](#) information to help prevent marine invasives spread from paddlesports.

### **Recreation - Powerboating or Sailing with an Engine**

- SEMS Management Group Members to feed information on disturbance arising from this activity to the [MMO](#), disseminate best practice produced by the recreational user groups and use the [Solent Biosecurity plan](#) information to help prevent marine invasives spread.

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**Slipway and Jetty Cleaning and Maintenance**

No specific activity action required.

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**Wildfowling**

No specific activity action required.

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**Generic cross cutting actions** - Please see [section 6.0](#).

## 8 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)

In 2020, the SEMS Annual Survey was adapted to include questions on the three MCZs that are designated in the Solent:

- [The Needles](#)
- [Yarmouth to Cowes](#)
- [Bembridge](#)

Relevant Authorities were asked whether they had an MCZ within their jurisdiction and whether they had any concerns about activities taking place within these sites, eight respondents confirmed that they had a MCZ in their area of jurisdiction.

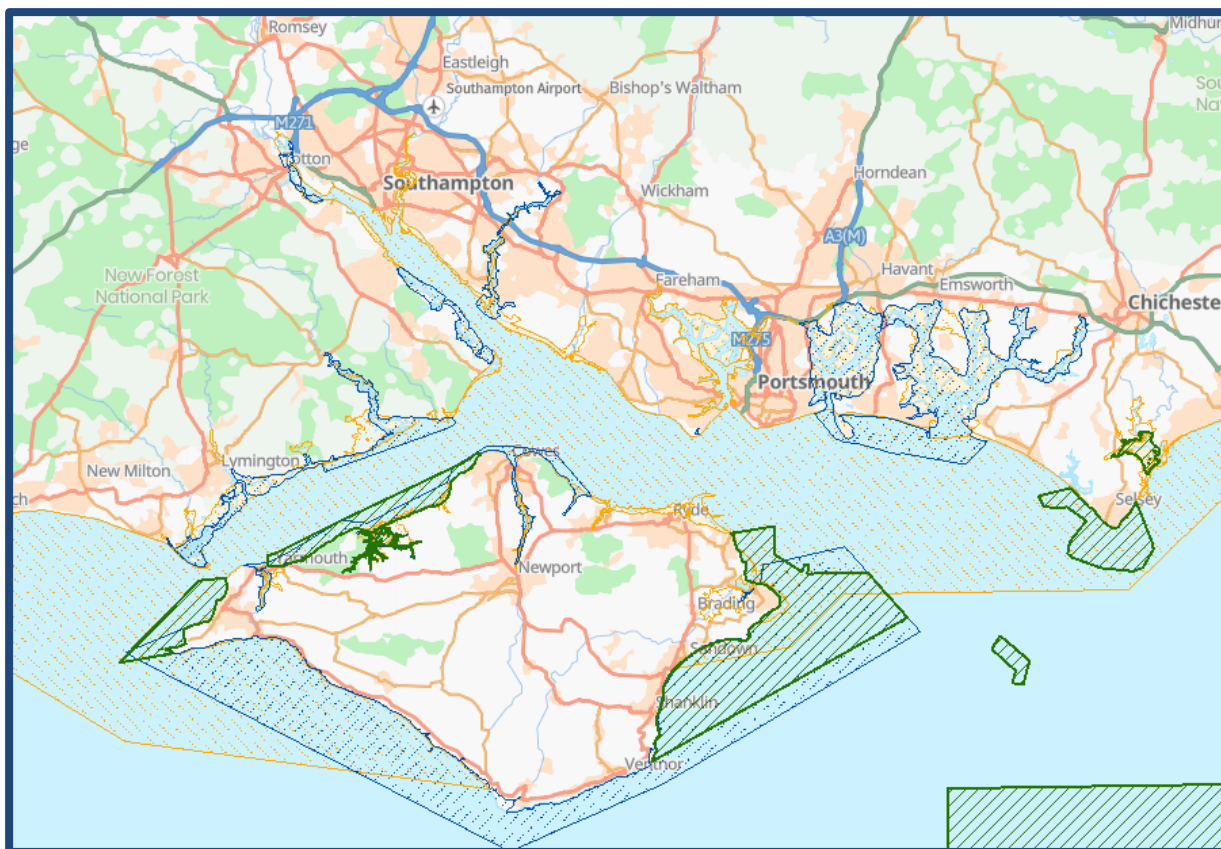
All fishing activities that take place inside an MPA are assessed by the IFCA to identify potential risks to the conservation objectives of the site. Evidence is gathered to inform assessments and management options, and appropriate management measures are introduced if an activity is deemed to pose a risk to the conservation objectives of a site. Fishing activity is continuously monitored across all MPAs to ensure changes in level of effort or types of activity are recognised.

Natural England noted that the Needles MCZ, Yarmouth to Cowes MCZ and Bembridge MCZ all sit within their jurisdiction and at all of these sites, walking, dog walking, beach recreation, non-motorised watercraft and motorised watercraft all occur.

Following designation, Natural England started a baseline monitoring programme across all Marine Protected Areas:

- Inshore benthic marine survey of [The Needles MCZ](#)
- [Yarmouth to Cowes MCZ intertidal baseline survey](#)
- [Bembridge MCZ](#) Factsheet

## 9 Map of Solent Marine Protected Areas



Solent Marine Protected Areas © MAGIC Map

Orange pattern is SPA

Blue pattern is SAC

Green diagonals are MCZ