
Management Group

1000 Monday 22 June 2009



Attendees:

Stuart Roberts (Chair) – Hampshire County Council, Tina Cuss – Fareham Borough Council, Dave Moore – IOW Council, Sarah Wiggins – Natural England, Ed Rowsell – Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Lindsay McCulloch – Southampton City Council, Alison Fowler- River Hamble Harbour Authority, Nigel Jardine – Langstone Harbour, Katherine Rowberry – Langstone Harbour, Jason Grygiel – Gosport Borough Council, Karen Eastleigh – Test Valley District Council, Ian Barker – New Forest National Park Authority, Ron Hancock – ABP, Rupert Taylor – Portsmouth Ports, David Bone – Southern Water, Steve Mountain – Havant Borough Council, Ryan Willegers – Lymington Harbour Office, Simon Pengelli – Southern Sea Fisheries, Ciaran Roe – Student Placement with Solent Forum, Katie Pike – Student Placement with River Hamble Harbour Authority, Rhian Edwards – SEMS secretariat (Solent Forum)

1.0 Apologies

Rachael Pearson – Beaulieu Harbour Authority, Tony Clatworthy – River Hamble Harbour Authority, Caroline Price – Environment Agency, Rachael Hardy – Eastleigh Borough Council, Rachael Gallagher – Hampshire County Council, Stephen Trotter – New Forest National Park Authority, Tim Sykes – Environment Agency,

The chairman Stuart Roberts welcomed everyone to the meeting. Stuart explained that as we only meet once a year there will be a short presentation to recap over exactly why SEMS is in existing and remind everyone of their responsibilities as relevant and competent authorities.

2.0 Minutes and matters arising from the last MG meeting

The Solent Forum Officer went through matters arising and actions from the last meeting. Those relating to bait digging will be dealt with later on in the agenda.

i) SEMS Website

This has been set up as requested and currently stands alone from the Solent Forum site. This will be useful in the future in case the Solent Forum are no longer carrying out the secretariat duties.

Previously there was talk of an open forum for the site which would require _ days work from Geodata. The management group did not see the value in this open forum and would prefer to communicate via email. In order for this to be achieved a contacts list of the management group members will be circulated.

Action 1) – SFO to circulate contact list for the SEMS MG.

All other actions have been completed.

3.0 Progress with Scheme Implementation

3.a Natural England Review of the Sites

Sarah Wiggins gave feedback on the condition of the sites. There is 5500 hectares that are currently unfavourable within the SSSI designation which is mainly due to lack of nutrients, and coastal squeeze, in addition grazing management/scrub control, inappropriate dredging and disturbance are also factors causing unfavourable condition. By the end of 2009 it is estimated that 446 hectares will be made favourable through the South Downs Diffuse Pollution Project, but there is still increasing high risk activities occurring such as bait digging and disturbance from recreational sports. There is around 5 -10 sites considered in unfavourable condition through out the Solent and disturbance is highlights as one of the causing factors. SSSI condition assessment for birds is normally assessed by bird population data (Wetland Bird Survey Data (WeBS Data)).

It was noted that if disturbance was already being linked to causing deterioration in the condition of the SSSI sites then why was there a need for the work of the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project. Sarah Wiggins was not sure what evidence was used in these cases to link disturbance to condition, it may only be what was seen on site and anecdotal, but would check and get back to the management group. Sarah Wiggins informed the group that there was no report on this but that majority of the relevant information was on the Natural England website.

Action 2) – Sarah Wiggins to look into evidence used to link disturbance to deterioration of the sites.

3b Bait Collection Topic Group

Solent Forum Officer updated the management group on the outcome of the Bait Collection Topic Group. The recent proformas indicate that bait collection is still an issue. Although there is little that can be done about those who carry out bait collection for personal use, it is the commercial diggers which is most concerning and the potential damage to the EMS sites.

A great deal of work has recently been done at Fareham Creek exploring the possibility of amending the Special Nature Conservation Order but any amendment will take 6 months to implement. New signs have been put and the police are getting calls daily regarding bait collectors and are having difficulty dealing with these calls due to limited resources. Natural England are keen to see a limit created for 'personal use' and do not believe an outright ban on all bait digging including personal use is the way forward. Any outright ban at Fareham would only disperse the activity elsewhere.

Sarah Wiggins informed the group of various schemes elsewhere which included a local agreement between the bait collectors in Thanet and anyone who did not comply received pressure from the bait diggers that had signed up as if the approach didn't work there would be an outright ban. This might be something the topic group might wish to investigate.

The main difficulty is proof and the need for any evidence to be scientific and unambiguous. Members of the subgroup offered to keep a closer watch for bait collectors and to note down numbers of people, location, car registration etc. The main purpose of this is to establish a pattern for various areas. One of the key actions from the group is to carry out a literature review of existing information about the area regarding the impacts of bait digging. The management group asked that Bait Collection Topic Group to report back to the SEMS group after it has done more work and gathered more evidence.

Natural England unfortunately do not have the resource to solely carry out any scientific research into the impact of bait collection but that it could be considered for a future project possibly under the Solent Forum Nature Conservation Group.

Such activities will need to be considered during the review.

Action 3) – Natural England to look at assessment of SSSIs to see how bait collection is included in the assessment.
Action 4) – Bait Collection Topic Group to carry out literature review, investigate the scheme at Thanet and gather more evidence and report back at next meeting.

4 – Annual Monitoring Report 2009.

Solent Forum Officer highlighted some of the key points of interest from the recent report before the report was discussed page by page.

Several additions/ amendments were suggested by the group and these will be included in the report and circulated once completed.

Action 5) – Management Group to suggest any further comments by the end of July.
Action 6) - Amendments made to report and Solent Forum Officer to disseminate the report once finalised.

5 – Natural England Review of Activities in European Marine Sites.

Natural England have recently carried out a review of the activities that occur within the European Marine Sites. These have been assessed and given high, medium or low risk levels to the sites. Sarah Wiggins briefly went through the spreadsheet to give an overview of the work done. Sarah Wiggins wished for the group to make comments on the spreadsheet and if the scoring is appropriate and if any activities have been missed

Nigel Jardine asked for definition between sites and features at risk. Sarah Wiggins to get this confirmed as to what exactly is meant and will get back to the group.

Action 7) – Comments to Sarah Wiggins by the end of July.
Action 8) – Sarah Wiggins to confirm difference between sites and features at risk.

6 – Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project

Solent Forum Officer briefed the group on the Solent Disturbance and Mitigation Project which is ongoing through the Solent Forum Nature Conservation Group. The project began back in August 2008 and phase 1 has already been completed. This was a literature review looking at disturbance from recreational activities to all features of European Marine Sites. Phase 2 of the project has just begun looking specifically at the impacts to the SPA bird species with the first year of bird surveys having just been completed. The aim for the future is to carry out additional bird surveys along with visitor and household surveys. All this information will then be inputted into a model which will help assess various scenarios including the potential impact of 80,000 new homes in the South Hampshire area.

Disturbance from recreational activities is one of the key aspects that need to be addressed as part of the HRA for LDFs. Funding for this project has been received from PUSH partnership, EA, NE, Chichester District Council. New Forest National Park Authority, RSPB with in kind support from

Chichester Harbour Conservancy and Hampshire Wildlife Trust. For further information please contact Solent Forum Officer.

7 – Review of management scheme

Solent Forum Officer presented a paper that had various suggestions for reviewing the SEMS management scheme. The review of all management schemes are meant to take place 5 years after implementation, with the aim of taking into consideration improved scientific knowledge and practical experience.

As the SEMS management scheme does not have an action plan the review will need to concentrate on the activities included in the scheme. As the management group have requested previously only a light touch the Solent Forum Officer recommended that the information within the scheme be assessed regarding its current relevancy. Any specific updating will only be carried out as and when sections are in need of revision or if additional information needs to be added. There are several sections of the management plan that requires updating including list of activities, plans, key principles and conservation objectives. There is also scope to see if an action plan is required and how best to monitor on an annual basis. The original management scheme only took into consideration high risk operations, therefore there is potential to included medium and low operations as well but this would require a significant amount of work.

In order to carry out the review the Solent Forum Officer recommends that either a project officer is hired or an appropriate consultant. There is no resource within the current arrangements with the Solent Forum for the review to be carried out in this way using existing staff. It is hoped that majority of the information could be gathered through workshops with the relevant authorities with significant guidance and involvement from Natural England. Natural England highlighted the benefits of an action plan and achievements of other EMS management groups. Sarah Wiggins recommended that an action plan should be developed.

Dave Moore suggested that although all the points in the paper are relevant there is a need for a report prior to this assessment, setting out the pros and cons of current management plan and lessons learnt over the past 6 years. The group agreed that this was a good idea as there is a need to assess the current plans before being able to agree on a way forward with a review.

With regards to resource Dave Moore highlighted that although previously the relevant authorities paid a lot more into SEMS, once the plan was completed the funds were diverted into the Solent Forum's Nature Conservation Group. Due to the current economic climate there is potential to draw on the resources available in the NC group to help pay for the SEMS review as the NC group has been able to build up a substantial fund over time. This will be need to be discussed further with both the NC group and the Solent Forum Steering Group.

The group discussed if there was a need to carry out the review now or if there was an advantage in waiting a while in order to incorporate any new items that will come out of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, specifically from a marine conservation zone aspect which might have an impact on the EMS. Sarah Wiggins recommended that work should be carried out now because of the risks of delay. This will be investigated by the Solent Forum Officer.

The group agreed to meet again in the Autumn to discuss specifically the review and the various options available.

Action 9 – Solent Forum Officer to investigate option for delaying the review until marine plans and conservation zones are in place.

Action 10 – Solent Forum Officer to investigate use of NC Group resource for the SEMS review
Action 11 – Solent Forum Officer to arrange another meeting for Autumn to discuss the review and new plan development specifically.
Action 12 – Solent Forum Officer to investigate review of existing document prior to autumn meeting.

8 – Recreational Hovercraft in European Marine Sites.

Nigel Jardine advised the management group that the Hovercraft Club of Great Britain had asked for permission to use recreational hovercraft in Langstone. In view of the environmental sensitivity of Langstone Harbour consent had not been granted. Nigel Jardine sought the wider view of the Management Group regarding his course of action.

There was wide-ranging discussion about the operational characteristics of hovercraft, the sensitivity of the environmental features of the harbour and the obligations of Relevant Authorities to protect and conserve the European Marine Site. The management group concluded that the activity would have a significant negative effect on the EMS and were unanimously opposed to recreational hovercraft activity in and around the Solent European Marine Site.

9 – Review of Key Principles

Covered in general management scheme review

10 – Any other business

It was highlighted that there were several data gaps in existence, which if filled could help understand the potential impacts on the SEMS area and assist with implementing appropriate management if required e.g. gaps within impacts of bait collection. These data gaps should be made a priority if potential projects are discussed within the Solent Forum NC group or any other groups. The more information available to inform the review, the more appropriate the next management scheme will be and could highlight the need for an action plan.

The management group were asked to keep in mind the requirements of the management scheme when proposing any future projects as part of the SF sub groups or as individual organisation. The impact of some of the more recent activities are unknown and these need to be address in the review of the management scheme.

Action 13 – All of the management group to identify information gaps and inform the Solent Forum Officer so that a comprehensive list can be produced.
Action 14 – Possible projects to be discussed in Autumn meeting.

11 – Date of next meeting

Meeting will be set up for Autumn

Annual meeting will still remain in May – 2010.