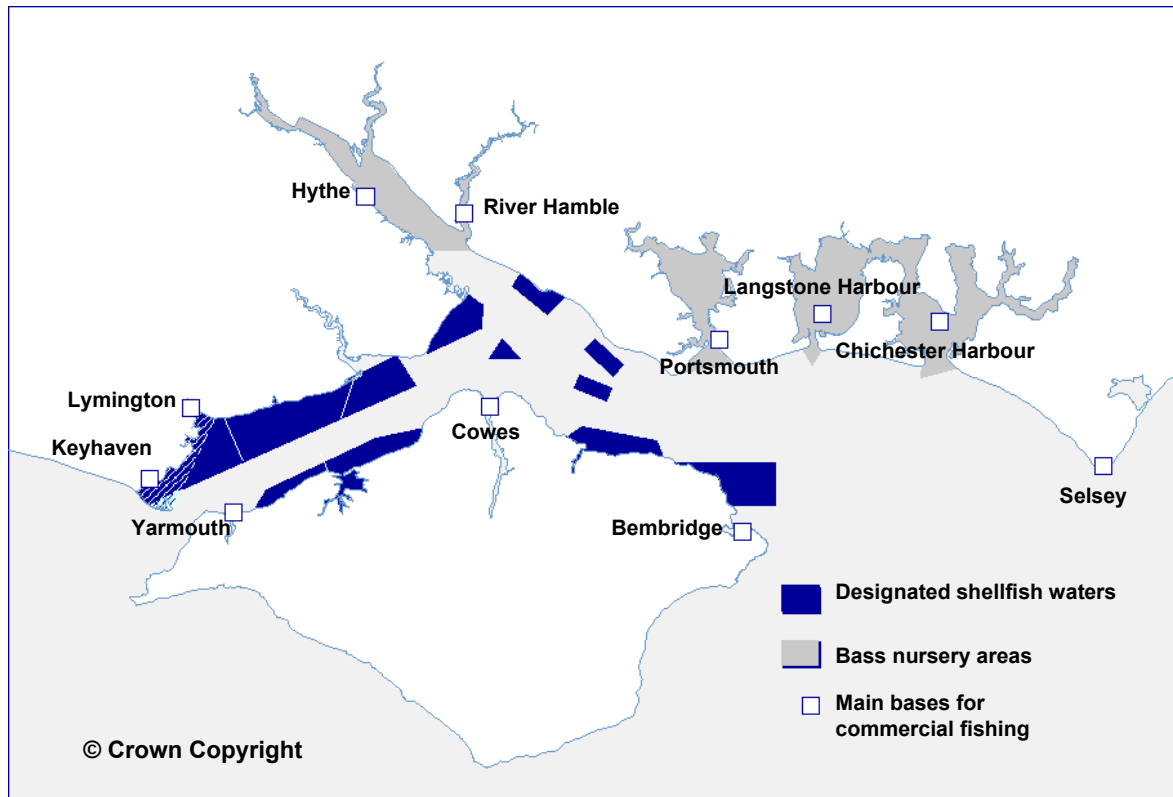


FISHERIES

Long-term aim: 'to support the continued development of a sustainable fishing industry within the Solent'.



KEY FACTS:

- The Solent fishery supports 250 boats.
- The Solent's oyster fishery is the largest self-sustaining population in Europe.
- The Solent is an important nursery area for young bass and other fin fish.

The Position

The key features of the Solent fishery are as follows:

- the Solent is a mixed sea fishery, with fishing effort which varies between a number of different commercial species throughout the year;
- the inshore waters have an important role as a nursery area for bass, with specific areas identified for protection, and for a range of other fin-fish;
- the most significant shellfishery is for native oyster (*Ostrea edulis*), which represents the largest self-sustaining stock in Europe and is of international conservation importance. There is a non-native fishery for hard-shelled clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*), which is greatly reduced from previous levels;
- important, and threatened runs of migratory salmon and sea trout make use of the Solent on their way to and from spawning grounds in the Rivers Test, Itchen, Meon, Hamble, and the New Forest streams, whilst eels migrate from the rivers to spawn at sea.

The key organisations with responsibilities for the fishery are:

- the Southern Sea Fisheries Committee (SSFC) (and their Sussex equivalent for Chichester Harbour) who have the lead responsibility for the management of the fishery to the six mile limit. The Sea Fisheries Committees (SFC) have powers to enforce EU and national legislation, and their own bye-laws and regulations (which are subject to approval by MAFF). These regulations include setting of maximum vessel sizes (twelve metres in the Southern District), registration of commercial fishing vessels, the fixing of closed seasons, the enforcement of minimum landing sizes, and restrictions on fishing methods. The Southern SFC District includes Hampshire, Isle of Wight and Dorset;
- the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF), who have the national responsibility for fisheries matters, including the implementation of the EC common fisheries policy. MAFF have an operational role with regard to licensing of fishing vessels, the issuing of Food and Environment Protection Act (FEPA) licences for development and dumping affecting the sea-bed (excluding navigational dredging). They are also a statutory consultee on proposals for aggregate dredging and discharges to sea. Local fisheries inspectors carry out inspections of catches on the quayside, and enforcement of national and European regulations;
- the Centre for Environmental Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) an Executive Agency of MAFF who have the lead responsibility for fisheries research, including the identification of bass nursery areas;
- the Environment Agency, who have responsibilities for the protection and regulation of migratory salmonid and eel fisheries, and for water quality matters;
- local and port health authorities who have responsibilities under health and food hygiene legislation regarding the quality of fish caught for human consumption;
- fishermen's co-operatives who have responsibilities for the management of specific shellfish fisheries, regulated by Several Orders. At present there are two such fisheries within the Solent District at Calshot and Stanswood Bay.

The fishery supports around 250 boats, based in a number of small harbours. The fish landing facilities within the Solent are limited, with the Portsmouth Camber being the best developed.

There is a general consensus that the amount of objective information about most aspects of the fishery is very limited. A fundamental reason for this is that the majority of the inshore fleet are under ten metres in length and, therefore, are exempt from the requirement to make full catch returns. Research on the fishery is limited, although annual surveys of the stock levels within the oyster fisheries are made, and there has been extensive work on the populations of salmon and sea trout within the Test and Itchen. The SSFC and MAFF are the only public bodies with detailed knowledge

on the sea-fish and shellfish industry, and hold considerable intelligence borne of long-term and regular contact with the industry.

The general lack of information about fisheries means that establishing trends is difficult, and to some extent subject to opinion. The main factors for consideration are as follows:

- the health of different seafish stocks within the inshore fisheries is felt by MAFF and the SFCs to be satisfactory, with none in serious decline. There are specific concerns about the stocks of mobile species such as sole and plaice, although it is the impact of large-scale deep-sea fishing beyond the Solent which is the main issue of concern. There are also concerns expressed by some nature conservation interests about the level of fish exploitation and the suggested general depression of populations which is said to have resulted. The elasmobranch fishery (rays, dogfish etc.) is suggested as particularly vulnerable. In the absence of relevant data, it is difficult to reach any conclusive view on concerns about fish stocks at this stage;
- there has been a well documented decline in the stocks of salmon returning to the region's rivers, with the populations on the Test and Itchen now very low. The Environment Agency and game fishing interests have invested significant resources in researching the decline, and implementing a restocking programme. The impacts on the populations of deep-sea fishing in the Atlantic and Irish Seas are implicated as the main cause of decline. Little is known about the populations of sea trout and eel, although there is anecdotal evidence of decline in sea trout stocks;
- much fisheries legislation is felt to be complicated, cumbersome, or difficult to enforce and there are problems with loopholes. A reviewed and simplified legislative framework would provide a more effective basis for the management of the fishery;
- the level of resources available to the SSFC for policing the fishery is static, and the SFC is generally considered to perform its role effectively within current budgets. The Environment Agency have faced cutbacks within the fisheries budget, and their main efforts are directed to stocks within rivers, although policing of netting within estuaries is carried out. The option of cross-warranting between the SSFC and Environment Agency is under discussion. The resources available to local authorities with regard to shellfish hygiene are extremely limited, and inadequate to the task involved;
- the level of public concern about the sustainability of the fishing industry has been a particular feature of the last few years, with high profile media coverage of incidents within the deep-sea industry. Recent changes in legislation have given the SFCs wider powers for nature conservation, and they will be competent and relevant authorities within the management groups for maritime Special Areas of Conservation. The level of contact between fisheries organisations and specific nature conservation interests has been relatively limited, but is now improving;
- the number of fishing vessels has declined progressively in the last ten years, although the SSFC consider that the majority of contraction has been within the part-timers, and that the overall fishing effort has remained constant;
- there has been a progressive growth in the extent of recreational angling, and the total catch to recreational fisherman is believed to be significant, but has not been quantified;
- the provision of landing sites has remained fairly static, although the landing facilities have been improved at the Camber. The possibility of a fish auction at the Camber has been studied in detail, but concluded that the industry is not at a level where an economic case could be made;
- the profile of the fishing industry is of a large number of small-scale and independent, self employed fishermen, and only a few larger and more organised firms. This remains the case, despite the long-term trend for part-time fishermen to leave the business. There are no producer organisations within the District, and the national fishermen's bodies are weakly represented within the region;
- the long-term trend in water quality for fisheries has been for a gradual improvement, although concerns remain in a number of specific locations. There are two European Directives related to shellfish quality. The Shellfish Waters Directive prescribes water quality standards within Shellfish

Waters which are identified by the Environment Agency, and the Shellfish Hygiene Directive prescribes standards for the quality of shellfish flesh sold to the public, and shellfish may only be taken from MAFF approved and classified harvesting areas. Within the Solent, the identified harvesting areas are more extensive than the identified Shellfish Waters. This is a source of concern, because only the Shellfish Waters Directive is considered as a statutory 'driver' for water quality investment;

- the impacts of aggregates dredging on fisheries are a source of concern, both in terms of environmental impacts, and interference with fishing effort. The South Coast Aggregates and Fisheries Liaison Committee provides a forum for discussion of concerns between the different interests.

What do we need to do?

1. Ensure that fishing effort affecting fish stocks within the Solent is at a sustainable level

The fishing effort of the inshore fleet within the Solent is believed to be exploiting resources within acceptable limits at present, although accurate information to confirm this view is not available and there are some concerns about elasmobranch fisheries. There are greater concerns about the impacts of fishing impacts on migratory fish which use the Solent, including both salmonids and some seafish. There are some localised impacts of commercial and recreational fishing on the intertidal and marine environment.

LEAD ROLE: MAFF, Environment Agency and the Sea Fisheries Committees.

The Southern Sea Fisheries Committee and the Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee have a lead role with regard to the inshore fisheries, in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. There is a need to ensure that the resources available to the committees are sufficient for them to perform their regulatory role effectively, particularly with regard to their new environmental duties incumbent on the committees as a result of the *Sea Fisheries (Wildlife Conservation) Act, 1992* and the Habitats Regulations. The case for increasing the level of resources available for monitoring catches and the health of stocks requires review.

LEAD ROLE: Southern and Sussex Sea Fisheries Committees

2. Support a greater local input into fisheries management within the Common Fisheries Policy

There is a need to seek improvements in the wider regime of fishery management which will both address the impacts on Solent fisheries from activities beyond the region, and enable an effective input from local fisheries to influence management policy. The Common Fisheries Policy will be reviewed in 2002, and this provides opportunities to improve the current regime, but also has significant threats to the inshore fisheries. In January 1995, MAFF formed a CFP review group, which reviewed the CFP. It reported on the options available with the aim of producing recommendations for more effective fisheries management. The following proposals from the review group appear to be particularly appropriate to the future of the Solent fishery and are endorsed:

- the Government should secure from the Council of Ministers a declaration offering explicit support for continued restrictions on foreign access to inshore waters (the six and twelve mile derogations from the principle of equal conditions of access by all Member States to each others' waters) (para 1.6.1);
- the Government should aim to secure the permanent embodiment in the basic CFP regulation of the six and twelve mile limits (para 1.8.1);
- in liaison with relevant agencies and local bodies, the Government should provide further systematic monitoring (initially in inshore waters) of the impact of fishing on the environment and the impact of other activities on the fisheries sector (para 1.6.20);
- the Government should encourage greater local management of inshore fisheries through the existing variety of UK institutions (as by the provision of secure funding for the Sea Fisheries Committees, the development of suitable emergency powers, greater use of Regulating Orders, and a review (and possible consolidation) of existing inshore fisheries legislation) (para 1.6.22);
- by way of institutional change, we see substantive benefit in promoting some degree of decentralisation and greater industry participation in the management of the CFP, for example to reduce the sense of remoteness felt by most fishing communities. We therefore conclude that ...

the Government should promote the development of Regional Consultative Committees before 2002 (as for the North Sea, Western Waters, the Baltic and the Mediterranean).

LEAD ROLE: HM Government.

ArcManche is a recently-formed English Channel network of local authorities, with a potential lobbying role on channel-scale issues. The organisation includes a fisheries working group which currently has no UK input. It would be beneficial to consider how the SFCs, as the local democratic fisheries management organisations, should have a greater role within ArcManche as possible members of the fisheries group.

LEAD ROLE: ArcManche.

3. Ensure that fisheries interests are protected from damaging development

The licensing system under the Food and Environment Protection Act (FEPA), administered by MAFF, provides the vehicle to ensure that account is taken of fishery concerns for most proposals which may affect the sea bed or marine environment. The Ministry ensures that fisheries interests are consulted, and impacts on fisheries considered within the consents and conditions imposed on development. It would be valuable for greater awareness of the FEPA system and the applications and decisions being made to be promoted.

LEAD ROLE: MAFF.

The exception is the regulation of aggregates dredging, which is currently administered by the Crown Estate under the Government View procedure. Here an environmental assessment regime is also in place which considers the impacts of proposed extraction on fisheries. A new licensing procedure administered by the Department of the Environment Transport and Regions (Minerals Division) will be brought forward shortly, and will provide an opportunity to review the treatment of fisheries concerns within licence applications.

LEAD ROLE: Department of the Environment Transport and Regions (Minerals Division).

4. Support improvements in fisheries legislation

Enforcement of fisheries regulations is constrained by the quality of legislation available, practical difficulties with regard to gathering evidence, and the significant resources required to both monitor activity and take legal action where necessary. These problems face the SFCs (who feel particularly constrained by overlapping and complicated legislation), local and port health authorities (whose surveillance resources are very limited), and the Environment Agency. Co-operative intelligence and enforcement arrangements should be developed and maintained between the different statutory bodies, where feasible, but the practical difficulties in cross-warranting to allow the different enforcement agencies to enforce each other's legislation remain to be overcome. Given the growing national concern about fisheries issues, a comprehensive review of the fisheries legislation followed by a re-examination of the enforcement arrangements should be undertaken.

LEAD ROLE: MAFF.

5. Improve the information base on the Solent fisheries

The lack of information about the ecology or exploitation of the Solent fisheries is a significant obstacle to confidence in their long-term management. A useful starting point would be a position statement on the extent of knowledge about the nature and health of the various fisheries and identification of significant gaps in information, followed by delivery of necessary further research.

LEAD ROLE: MAFF.

6. Promote more cohesion within the fishing industry wherever possible

There is little doubt that more cohesion within the fishing industry could be achieved, and it is likely that this would be to the great benefit of the industry in lobbying for appropriate, workable legislation and better facilities. There are also possible economic benefits through improved marketing, and added value to products. The drive for more cohesion has to come from the industry and cannot be imposed upon it.

LEAD ROLE: The fishing industry.

KEY ORGANISATIONS: FISHERIES

Lead organisations

European Community
Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Southern Sea Fisheries Committee
Sussex Sea Fisheries Committee
Environment Agency

Other key organisations

Department of the Environment, Transport and
Regions
Department of Health
English Nature
Hampshire County Council
Southampton City Council
Portsmouth City Council
Isle of Wight Council
Chichester District Council
New Forest District Council

Eastleigh Borough Council
Fareham Borough Council
Gosport Borough Council
Havant Borough Council
Lymington Harbour Commissioners
Beaulieu River Management
Associated British Ports
Queen's Harbour Master
Langstone Harbour Board
Chichester Harbour Conservancy
Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
Cowes Harbour Commissioners
Bembridge Harbour Company
Several Order co-operatives (Calshot
Oystermen Ltd, Stanswood Bay Oystermen
Ltd.)
Fishermen's Associations
Southern Shellfish Liaison Group
National Federation of Sea Anglers.