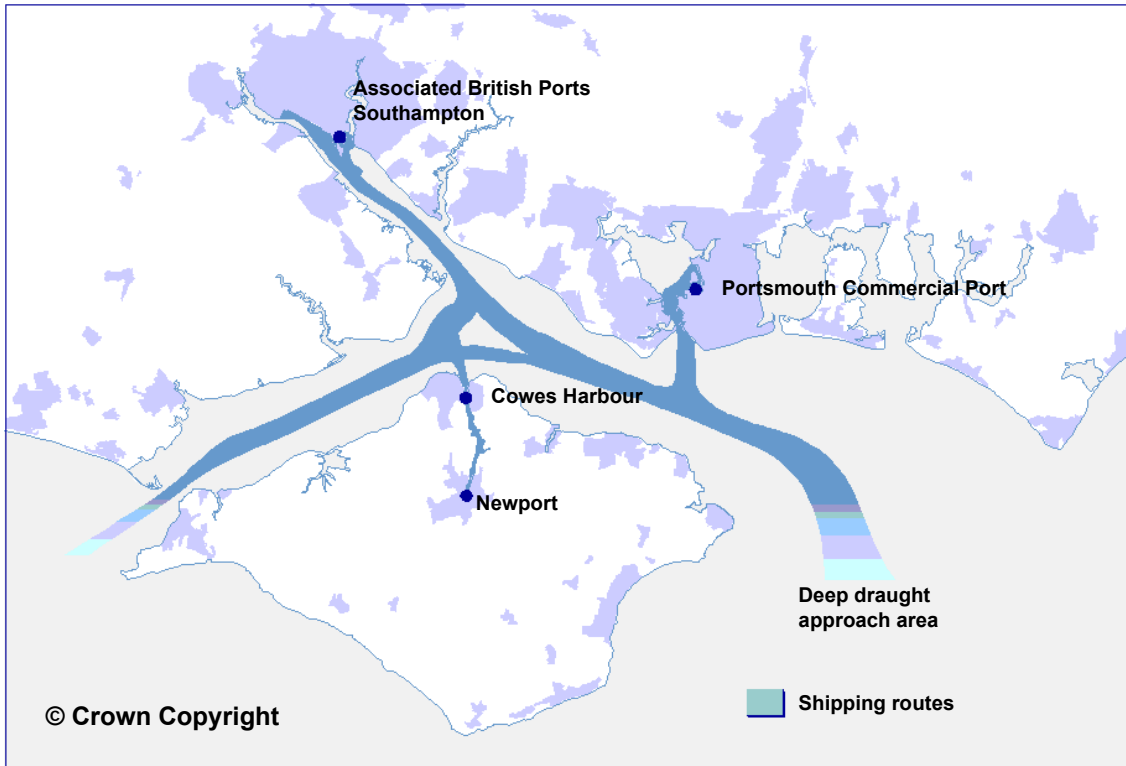


PORTS AND SHIPPING

Long-term aim: 'to support a viable long-term future for the ports industry in the Solent'.



KEY FACTS:

- An estimated 14,000 full-time jobs are dependant on ports activity in the Solent.
- Over 30,000,000 tonnes of goods are exported and imported through the Solent ports each year.
- There are over 100,000 shipping movements in the Solent every year.

The Solent's sheltered natural harbours and inshore waters made it an ideal location for a ports industry to develop. Activity centres on the privately-owned Associated British Ports (ABP): Port of Southampton and Portsmouth Commercial Port, which is owned and managed by Portsmouth City Council. Cowes Harbour is the main port for the Isle of Wight, and the only location on the Island with deep-water channels capable of handling bulk-cargo carrying ships.

The ports industry is of great commercial significance within the Solent and is a major contributor to the regional and national economy. Total goods imports and exports through Southampton (such as cars and grain) for 1995 was 31,422,700 tonnes (of which 23,377,900 was oil), with 634,574 tonnes through Portsmouth. The level of employment associated with ports has declined, but is still extremely significant, with an estimated 10,000 permanent jobs dependant on activity in Southampton, and 3,800 similarly dependant on the activity within Portsmouth Commercial Port. Bulk imports to the Isle of Wight through Cowes consist mainly of timber, stone, petrol oil and aggregates and are typically around 300,000 tonnes per annum, whilst annual exports of grains and pulses are estimated at 25,000 tonnes. Goods imports to the Island via the ferry services to Yarmouth, Cowes and Fishbourne are also significant.

The mainland ports are providers of services within a competitive market of international trade, and the requirements for port activity are a product of the demands of the ports' customers, and the ports' commercial choices and decisions. The main requirements can be broken down into the following categories:

- adequate coastal land to provide sufficient quay length, loading/unloading facilities, onshore storage of goods, and administration of the port. Processing of goods may also take place at the quayside, although this is declining;
- maintained depths of water within the port's berths;
- safe, clearly marked, deep-water approach channels of sufficient dimensions to accommodate the customer's shipping. Creation of these channels requires capital dredging, and there is a requirement that their dimensions are assured through a programme of survey and maintenance dredging. Dredging requires suitable sites for the deposition of dredged spoil;
- adequate arrangements to ensure safety of navigation, including appropriate pilotage, radio and radar coverage, and a system of enforceable bye-laws;
- a transport infrastructure to provide adequate passage of goods and passengers to and from the port.

The Port of Southampton differs from Portsmouth Commercial Port in the extent of its harbour authority powers within the Solent. ABP is the statutory harbour authority for the port of Southampton, whereas the harbour authority for Portsmouth Harbour and the Eastern Solent is the Queen's Harbour Master (QHM). ABP and the QHM co-operate in administering shipping movements within the Eastern Solent with ABP taking a co-ordinating role. The harbour authority role encompasses responsibility for the navigational safety of all vessels, including the maintenance dredging of channels to advertised depths, navigation marks, hydrographic data, and control of developments which would affect hydrography by issuing harbour licences.

ABP, Portsmouth Commercial Port and Cowes Harbour Commissioners are the designated Competent Harbour Authorities (CHA) for the Solent. All pilotage of commercial ships is undertaken by pilots licensed by the respective CHA. There are close liaison arrangements between the three CHAs and QHM Portsmouth over pilotage and navigational safety matters. The smaller harbour authorities within the Solent carry similar responsibilities for ensuring navigational safety and close working relationships exist between them and the larger authorities.

The twentieth century has seen a progressive growth in the scale of port operations in both Portsmouth and Southampton, associated in many cases with reclamation of intertidal land. With the recent completion of their 'Phase VII' development, Portsmouth Commercial Port consider that they have reached the maximum limit of possible expansion, given current constraints of Naval activities and environmental concerns. The Port of Southampton have a programme of expansion underway with the development of Berth 207 at the head of Southampton Water, and the deepening of the main channel of Southampton Water to improve access for the new generation of larger container shipping.

They also have intentions to develop the reclaimed land at Dibden Bay in order to meet demand for containerised trade. These proposals will be subject to study and discussion during and beyond the period of the Strategic Guidance project. Dibden Bay represents the last area of land within the Port of Southampton's ownership which would allow space for the long-term development of the Port within the foreseeable future.

The expansion of the ports industry is driven by trends in the world market for shipping, which are essentially governed by market forces, the demands of the ship operators, and the supply within the ports. Competition within the UK ports industry and with Northern European ports is intense. The main trend driving the development of the Port of Southampton is the buoyant market in containerised goods - particularly from the Far East, and the recent increase in the maximum size of the container ships (the post-Panamax vessels). Other significant trends include:

- growth in car imports and exports through Southampton, coupled with the demand from importers for dockside car parking, allowing distribution straight to retailers;
- stability in the volume of oil traffic;
- changing patterns of ferry traffic to France and Spain, with a tendency to larger and more luxurious ferries and the possibility of faster craft. The long-term effects of the channel tunnel on ferry business have yet to be established;
- consolidation of fruit and fresh produce imports at Portsmouth;
- a growth in the market for cruise shipping, and increased competition for this business within UK ports.

The growth in shipping traffic has been accompanied by an increase in the volume of recreational activity. This has led to concerns about navigational safety, and to the creation of bye-laws and regulations to reduce conflict. The two most notable examples are the small craft channel at the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour, and the 'moving prohibited zone' at the Brambles Turn at the mouth of Southampton Water. These arrangements have become widely accepted within the sailing community, and whilst more restrictive measures have been proposed in Southampton Water in the past, there are no proposals for change at present. It would be a source of widespread concern if the proposals for port expansion led to increased restrictions on recreational activity.

The extent of port-related development has led to a range of environmental concerns about the impact of ports activity on the nature conservation interest within the Solent. These relate primarily to the impacts of development on coastal and intertidal areas, and in particular sites of acknowledged national and international importance. There are also concerns about the impacts of capital and maintenance navigational dredging in terms of its effects on the sea-bed, its potential to cause erosion of adjacent saltmarshes and its possible impact on fisheries. The main concerns relate to the long-term expansion plans of the Port of Southampton, and dialogue between the Port and environmental interests is still developing.

Responsibility for safety of navigation within the eastern Solent rests with the QHM, and by custom and practice traffic flow is regulated by ABP. There is no equivalent harbour authority coverage within the Western Solent. ABP has recently promoted a Harbour Revision Order to extend their powers throughout the Western Solent, in order to ensure safety of navigation. Following a public inquiry the order was refused by the Secretary of State, who considered that alternative measures were available to ABP to address the concerns which they had identified. The further development of the position within the Western Solent remains an issue for discussion.

What do we need to do?

1. Address the needs for port expansion & development

The contribution of the Ports industry to the regional and national economy, and to the positive management of the Solent is very significant. It is desirable, in principle, to support port development

provided it does not cause unacceptable or long-term damage to the environment, and is in balance with recreational and other uses.

Dibden Bay: The possible expansion of ABP Port of Southampton at Dibden Bay is probably the most significant strategic issue facing the Solent. It would be a substantial development with national implications for the ports industry and the economy, as well as of regional strategic significance for the economy and employment, and raises a range of understandable concerns about its impact on the environment and local communities. The development proposal is for an operational port facility with deep water berths, hardstanding for cargo handling and storage, a rail terminal and new road and rail access to the A326 and Fawley branch line respectively. A scoping study has been prepared following wide consultation and identifies all the impacts to be assessed as part of a full Environmental Statement for the project. This is being undertaken in parallel with detailed design development and is being discussed by a consultative group, the Dibden Forum.

A decision on whether to permit development at Dibden Bay will be subject to a statutory process, which will need to take full account of the impact of development on the environment, recreation and other uses in reaching a decision. It is likely that there will be a package of applications for the proposal including, for example, a planning application, Transport & Works Act Order and Harbour Revision Order. It is anticipated that these will be consolidated into a single public inquiry reporting to the Secretary of State.

In addition to meeting statutory requirements, it will be particularly important that effective consultation and liaison is achieved during the process of bringing forward proposals, backed with good information on the impacts of the development. ABP have set up the Dibden Forum to facilitate consultation on their proposals and have conducted a series of environmental impact studies for the proposed development. Proposals for Dibden Bay will have a national profile in relation to the implementation of the Habitats Directive, which could be similar to that for the Cardiff Bay Barrage or Lappel Bank on the Medway. It is desirable that strenuous efforts are made to ensure that decisions taken by local authorities and the Government seek to avoid an unduly protracted process, whilst ensuring that the requirements of national and European Law are met.

LEAD ROLE: Associated British Ports, New Forest District Council, English Nature, Environment Agency, Hampshire County Council and the DETR.

Cowes Harbour: Although not of the scale of the Port of Southampton, Cowes has a particular strategic significance for the Isle of Wight. Cowes Harbour Commissioners have prepared a harbour plan, which makes proposals for reconfiguration of shipping activity within the Harbour, to increase the safety of navigation, and provide a basis for economic regeneration within the town. The proposals represent a positive contribution to improving the quality of the Solent, and their implementation will need to be subject to detailed assessment and permissions, taking into account their impacts on the environment and the various uses.

LEAD ROLE: Cowes Harbour Commissioners.

Portsmouth Commercial Port: Port expansion at Portsmouth Commercial Port is complete for the foreseeable future. The proposed Port Development Plan will be a valuable means of communicating the future activities of the Port to the wider community. In due course, the plan could provide an effective means of integrating environmental objectives with the achievement of the Port's commercial goals.

LEAD ROLE: Portsmouth Commercial Port

2. Maintain the navigable channels

The established navigable shipping channels are the lifeblood of maritime trade within the Solent, and their continued maintenance has the highest priority. Maintenance dredging involves the removal of recently accumulated material within channels, and is required to conserve water depths in significant lengths of the Solent's navigation channels. It is essential to maintaining safety of navigation and is a legal duty of harbour authorities.

LEAD ROLE: Harbour authorities.

Whilst the current pattern of maintenance dredging has altered the sediment regime and environment, there is no evidence that it is leading to long-term damage. However, information about the extent of maintenance dredging is limited, and its lack of monitoring is a legitimate source of concern. It would be desirable for harbour authorities to provide information to English Nature and the Environment Agency when maintenance dredging is proposed, in order for the level of activity to be understood, and for comments on the timing, or proposals to be given. Where maintenance dredging may affect

an SSSI, there is a legal requirement to inform English Nature of proposals to dredge. It is desirable, for both economic and environmental reasons, to consider whether new techniques for channel maintenance could be developed which promote re-use of dredged materials from harbour maintenance operations within the Solent's sediment systems, and/or which reduce the overall need for maintenance dredging where possible.

LEAD ROLE: Harbour authorities, English Nature and the Environment Agency.

New capital dredging increases the interference with natural systems operating within the Solent. Increased capital dredging within the Solent should normally be avoided, although there may be circumstances where it is judged to be necessary for over-riding socio-economic reasons, such as the main channel dredge in Southampton Water. Such activity should be regarded as exceptional, and be subject to rigorous assessment and monitoring of impacts on all aspects of the environment. The long-term impacts of maintenance dredging arising from any new dredging should be assessed as part of the application.

LEAD ROLE: Harbour authorities.

The disposal of material from navigation dredging is regulated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) through the issuing of licences under the Food and Environment Protection Act. MAFF's policy is to permit disposal at sea only where there are no suitable options for disposal on land. In reality the majority of dredgings are currently dumped at sea, at the Nab disposal ground to the east of the Isle of Wight. It is desirable to secure, reuse or redistribute dredged materials within the system from which they were removed wherever possible, and to ensure that economically valuable materials resulting from navigational dredging are not wasted. The option of redistributing maintenance dredgings within the system as a response to saltmarsh erosion and coastal squeeze needs to be more fully investigated, and implemented if feasible.

LEAD ROLE: MAFF, Harbour Authorities, Coast Protection Authorities, Environment Agency, English Nature and SCOPAC.

3. Ports and environmental planning and management

There is a need to respond to the general increase in the role of harbour authorities in conservation and environmental management during recent years. The signs are that national legislation will continue to promote these responsibilities. The ports and harbours have an important role to play in securing positive environmental management within the Solent, and they could have a key position as relevant authorities with regard to European Wildlife Sites. A number of harbour authorities have already taken a lead role within estuary management plans in the Solent. These plans provide a useful framework for evaluating the harbour's environmental role, in conjunction with other interests and agreeing a way forward, and for seeking common solutions to issues wherever possible. Harbour authorities will not always be in the best position to act in response to environmental concerns, and there is a need to recognise where others have a role to play, and to strengthen contacts and dialogue between the harbour authorities and environmental interests.

LEAD ROLE: Environmental organisations, harbour authorities

In 1996, the Department of Transport published '*New Measures to Reduce Discharges of Wastes from Ships*'. This details a range of proposals including a scheme for comprehensive waste management plans for ports and oil terminals which will become a statutory duty, together with advice and financial measures to encourage the use of facilities. This scheme, together with the response to recommendations of Lord Donaldson's inquiry into the *Braer*, provide a range of opportunities to improve environmental management which the Ports and Shipping Industry will need to consider. The Government, through the Marine Safety Agency, and other agencies will need to ensure that adequate advice and priority is given to ensure implementation of the proposals.

LEAD ROLE: Port and harbour authorities.

4. Regulation of the Western Solent

In 1995, a three week public inquiry was held into ABP's proposals to extend their harbour jurisdiction into the Western Solent. The Inspector's conclusion was that the extension was not necessary as none of the concerns argued in favour of the application was of overriding importance or incapable of resolution by current practices or regulations. This was supported by the Secretary of State in the rejection of the revised Harbour Revision Order. He did, however, make it clear that ABP were the correct authority to have promoted the Order. There have been some recent calls to reopen discussion about shipping management issues in the Western Solent but any proposals for change or regulation would have to be supported, and should properly be initiated, by ABP.

LEAD ROLE: ABP

5. Maintain and develop liaison and consultation arrangements between the ports and other interests

The maintenance of good communication and consultation arrangements between the Ports Authorities and other interests - particularly recreation and conservation - is a high priority. A number of different liaison arrangements exist with regard to ports activity in the Solent, including the Southampton Port Consultative Committee, Southampton Water Recreational Users' Group, Portsmouth Harbour Information Exchange Group/Portsmouth Harbour Plan and the Medina Estuary Management Plan. They appear to be working well, and their memberships and terms of reference will be kept under review and amended as and when appropriate. Ad hoc committees may be useful to examine particular issues as they arise.

LEAD ROLE: ABP, QHM and Cowes Harbour Commissioners.

KEY ORGANISATIONS: PORTS AND SHIPPING

Lead organisations

Associated British Ports
 Portsmouth Commercial Port (Portsmouth City Council)
 Queen's Harbour Master
 Cowes Harbour Commissioners

Other key organisations

Department of the Environment, Transport and Regions
 Environment Agency
 Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
 Hampshire County Council
 Southampton City Council
 Portsmouth City Council
 New Forest District Council
 Yarmouth Harbour Commissioners
 Trinity House
 Industry Associations, e.g. Southampton Shipowners' Association, British Industrial Freight Association.
 Commercial Companies, e.g. Southampton Container Terminals, P&O, Brittany Ferries, Maersk