



Natural Environment Group

Via Microsoft Teams

17th November 2021

Minutes

1. Welcome and introductions

Jess Taylor (JT) welcomed everyone to the online meeting and thanked Karen McHugh for all the meeting preparatory work.

2. Actions Arising from the Last Meeting 17/04/21

Karen McHugh (KM) went through the actions from the last meeting.

The Bird Aware mapping item is covered later in the agenda (item 6 in minutes), but KM has been informed this is not currently progressing. Bird Aware are doing communication work with recreational users, this will be presented at a later meeting.

The two main actions of focus for NEG this year are the Impacts and Management of Paddlesports (IMP Solent) project and the Solent Mudflat Disturbance (SMD) group work, these are covered in the NEG update actions from SEMS item (Paper 1).

Two projects were funded last year. The tackling microplastics in Chichester Harbour project has commenced but there are no updates yet. KM will report on the saltmarsh project at Bursledon later in the meeting.

3. Update on NEG actions from SEMS

KM presented paper 1, which highlights the actions that are tasked to NEG by the annual Solent Marine Sites (SEMS) management group meeting, they are revised every year. Full details of the actions are held in the SEMS Annual Management Report - www.solentems.org.uk/sems/AMR/2021_SEMS_AMR_Final.pdf.

Fishing (shore-based activities)

Gordon Watson (GW) presented on the Solent Mudflat Disturbance strategy later in the meeting and the work that they have been doing for the Sussex IFCA on mudflat disturbance.

Land recreation – walking, incl. with dogs

In 2022, NEG will look at the Bird Aware mitigation data once their five year review is published.

Littering and removal of litter

Solent Forum staff continue to work on the Clean Solent Shores and Seas resource hub ([Solent Forum - Clean Solent Shores and Seas](#)). A new project commenced in August 2021 called Solent Plastics Pollution hub (SPP) which is funded as part of the Environment Agency's Intereg funded Preventing Plastics Pollution Project. There are two key strands of work, a web directory of useful information and a facebook page to capture latest news and events - [Solent Plastics Pollution Hub | Facebook](#).

Action: KA to present on Solent Plastics Pollution hub at April 2022 meeting.

Mooring and anchoring

This action is to support and promote information on the LIFE ReMEDIES information project. The project is trialling Advanced Mooring Systems. Natural England is also producing Recreational Activity Survey reports that will be circulated when published.

Action: JT to send KM a revised summary of LIFE ReMEDIES outputs.

Recreation - light aircraft

The use of drones in the summer disturbing birds has been raised by SEMS, for the potential impact on nesting birds. See discussion in item 4.

Non-motorised watercraft

The incidence of disturbance on designated sites from paddlesports is the current focus of work, with a pilot in Chichester Harbour. See: [Solentems - Impacts and Management of Paddlesports in the Solent \(IMP Solent\)](#).

Julie Sims from Bird Aware noted that they are surveying for watersports disturbance when rangers are out on site, so this will generate useful data.

Generic Actions

One common factor across all activities is knowing where to focus efforts; it is proposed to pilot mapping hotspot areas that are sensitive to recreational activities. KM will speak about the proposals to map areas sensitive for bird disturbance (see item 6).

4. Drones and Summer Disturbance – A Discussion

KM asked for a discussion about summer drones and whether NEG felt there was sufficient indicators of possible adverse affect to birds from the use of summer drones, particularly given that it was not evidenced in the 2021 SEMS monitoring by many relevant authorities.

Alison Fowler asked what is NE's current view on when RAs get requests for drone flights over/near designated sites? Should we only consult/get pilot to consult NE when it's close to a feeding/nesting site? JT replied that drone use is tricky in terms of Natural England consent, if access is via an SSSI they should be coming to NE for SSSI consent. Drone use is not captured in marine licences, but most places in Solent coast are SSSI. Non-licensable activities such as drones are a grey area for management. NE have had recent conversations with the CAA. AF concluded that if the pilot is not accessing the site via the SSSI, but flying over the SSSI, then this will need to be looked at case by case.

KA noted that work has been done on Humber to address drone use and provided a link to useful CAA guidance notes - [List of Unmanned Aircraft \(caa.co.uk\)](#).

Julie Sims added that Bird Aware have no anecdotal reports on this matter, she could ask site managers to monitor.

Action: JS to ask site managers whether they could report on summer bird disturbance from drone use.

Gordon Watson (GW) added that the University of Portsmouth has a paper that looks at the impacts of drone surveys versus walkover surveys, it also looks at permissions needed. GW will share once available.

Action: GW to share University of Portsmouth drone paper.

JT noted that the ReMEDIES surveys would include drone use if it took place when they were happening, but that the surveyors would not necessarily report on disturbance.

Action: JT to share any data from ReMEDIES surveys on drones.

The group agreed that at this point no further evidence would be sought unless future SEMS annual monitoring raises this as an issue.

5. Bait collection and Hand Gathering in Chichester Harbour and Discussion on how it can be rolled-out to wider Solent

Gordon Watson presented on the University of Portsmouth's work on bait collection and hand gathering in Chichester Harbour and a paper they have prepared for the Sussex IFCA.

Presentation:

solentsems.org.uk/natural_environment_group/NEG_Meetings/GW_bait_collection_hand_gathering.pdf

Paper: [UoP_Deimos_Space_UK_Sediment_disturbance_project_Part1-4_Aug_2021.pdf](#).

The data available can start to be used for management by organisations such as the IFCAs. Two MSc projects are looking at hand gathering in Chichester Harbour, what, where, extent and frequency, they are starting just after Christmas. Reports to police on the matter unfortunately don't give enough scientific evidence.

GW asked what data format is most useful for people for the project outputs. Please let him know.

Action: All to feed comments to GW on the most useful data outputs.

AF noted that the harbours have reports that they pass on to IFCA, but what about areas outside of Chichester in the Southern IFCA area? GW would like to apply the work more widely for anywhere that has satellite imagery. It's a case of funding and staff resources.

Peter Hughes added that it would be worth contacting district councils for hand gathering evidence as many of the reports of hand gathering will go to them rather than IFCA or police. GW noted that such reports lack scientific the information on what people are gathering and the quantities. KM added that this information should also be gathered via the SEMS annual survey which includes all councils.

Patrick Cooper reported that Southern IFCA are reviewing MPA management measures and will look at hand gathering in the future, they will be looking for information sources – activity and impact

data. Current work has focused on bottom towed fishing gear. He asked GW how did they identify bait digging areas initially? GW replied that evidence of digging from analysis was overlain on known digging areas. GW will use existing known hotspot areas for MSc students in the future.

KM asked how this work can be rolled out to the wider Solent and reminded the group that NEG still have £1k of NE funding that needs to be allocated.

KM and GW to liaise together to see how the Solent Mudflat Disturbance Strategy can be progressed, using the £1k money. GW summarised that the Chichester Models work well for wider use but people will require training on how to interpret, and that money resources may become available through their IFRAMS bid with DEIMOS and with their MSc Projects (mentioned above) involving Chichester Harbour.

Action: KM to liaise with GW about progressing the Solent Mudflat Disturbance Strategy and using the £1k funding.

6. Solent Bird Sensitivity Mapping – A discussion Paper (Paper 2)

KM presented paper 2 on bird sensitivity mapping, see:

solentems.org.uk/natural_environment_group/NEG_Meetings/Bird_Sensitivity_Mapping.pdf.

Peter Hughes said that the five year low tide data from BTO will give an understanding of the most abundant birds, it's in small sectors so the data has reasonable resolution, what birds are present and where they feed. Can we compare most heavily and least heavily disturbed sites? It's hard to know what the baseline should be in heavily disturbed areas. Can we survey at night when people aren't around?

JT added that NE use and collect BTO data to update the abundance targets. There is always the option and the possibility, if there if there is any funding, then she can request it to be made into GIS data layers.

Lucy Sheffield added that she has have spoken to Ed Rowsell (Coastal Partners) and he would very much like to be involved in the group, so he can add his expertise. He has recently discovered birds using sites at night that we were previously unaware of, as Peter described.

Louise McCallum noted that the Solent and Brent goose wading strategy uses Google mapping, she finds its useful, we should look at this option. [Strategy, Maps and Data – Solent Waders and Brent Goose Strategy \(wordpress.com\)](https://solentems.org.uk/strategy-maps-and-data-solent-waders-and-brent-goose-strategy-wordpress-com/).

Jasmin Godbold (JG) added that this mapping might be something they can also do at Southampton with students. She is happy to send out feelers and circulate.

Action: KM to write a short mapping brief for students and circulate to the Universities.

Action: KM to set up a bird sensitivity mapping working group.

7. Solent Forum update on NEG funded projects

KM updated the group on the three active projects that have allocated NEG funding from the 2020/21 and 2021/22 NEG budgets:

- Using height markers on lamp columns to raise flood awareness and encourage climate action in Portsmouth. This is on hold and may not progress, so no funding given. We may need to reallocate this money.
- Saltmarsh proposal at Bursledon – delayed due to Covid, hoping that March 2022 will be finish date. Presentation on completion.
solentems.org.uk/natural_environment_group/NEG_Projects/Saltmarsh.pdf
- Tackling the microplastic pollution – testing a new biocomposite material as artificial filtration device, in Chichester Harbour - [CC NEG Biocomposite proposal.docx \(solentems.org.uk\)](#). Progress will be presented at the next NEG meeting.

8. Historical Investigation of Solent Saltmarsh project (Presentation)

Dominic Parry (DP), a Research Associate from the University of Portsmouth, presented the work that he has been doing investigating historical saltmarsh as a key coastal nursery habitat area around the Solent. The presentation is available at: [A Historical Investigation of Solent Saltmarsh as Key Coastal Nursery Habitat Areas \(solentems.org.uk\)](#).

KM asked if he has been analysing any water quality data as part of the work to see if there's any correlation for water quality driving saltmarsh losses. DP replied that unfortunately they didn't have time or funds to start looking at deeper reasons for saltmarsh loss, the focus was on sea level rise and storm surges; but it would be great to start investigating deeper and further other issues and use ground truthing too. KM added that she is working on the BUDS project, (beneficial use of dredgings in the Solent) and it will be interesting to understand to what extent interventions like that may influence the loss of saltmarsh.

GW noted that the RansTrans project aims to use the historical data from water quality to look at long term changes across the Solent and the channel more broadly. It will look at changes in nutrient conditions which are linked to algal mats and the smothering of saltmarsh by mats.

KA asked that DP provide an article for Solent News on the project. She also noted that when we look at habitat restoration, we consider targets and whether it is possible to look at each of the harbours and have some kind of target for the amount of saltmarsh that its realistic to restore. DP replied that if you had higher detailed Lidar you could get out more accurate saltmarsh levels then as the projection of the sea level is increased you can look at where would be the best place to start developing saltmarsh restoration.

Sue Hawley (SH) commented that she has access to lots of data for the Isle of Wight that she can share, does it need to be specific data? DP replied he would welcome this as he would like to extend the Isle of Wight datasets.

Action: SH to liaise with DP on saltmarsh data for the Isle of Wight.

AF added that 5 years ago a saltmarsh study was done on the Hamble. See: <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/Hamble/RiverHambleSaltmarshandSoftSedimentHabitatRetentionFeasibilityStudy2016.pdf>

JT reported that Natural England will be doing a similar study for Seagrass. Please could all share seagrass data with JT. She also noted that it is important to understand the balance between the active restoration of habitats versus passive management.

Action: All to share any seagrass data with JT.

9. Finance (Paper 3)

KM presented paper 3 on finance and showed the published 2020/21 accounts and forecast accounts for this year.

The forecast accounts show may be a carry forward forecast of approximately £10,000; as approximately £6,000, needs to be retained for contingency there will be approximately £4000 to spend on projects.

A call for ideas for project funding will be sent out Feb 2022 for funding allocation at the NEG meeting in April 2022.

10. AOB

JT reported that NE have now got the methodology agreed for SPA condition assessments and they will test this in Portsmouth Harbour as it's a discrete unit.

Action: JT and KM to use the Solent Forum and NEG as a vehicle to call for evidence for the SPA condition assessment of Portsmouth Harbour.

KA noted that the Forum's newsletter, Solent News, is going out soon. Deadline for articles is 17th of December. If anybody has any work that they want to share, please send details to the Forum office. See: [Solent Forum - Solent News](#).

KM reported that the MMO have produced a report on the impacts of non-licensable activities on priority MPA's. See: [Non-licensable impacts on priority MPAs \(MMO1243\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#). It maps activities taking place in MPAs and you can look at the Solent specifically.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The group will next meet on **27th April 2022**

12. Attendees

Karen McHugh (Secretary) – Solent Forum
Jess Taylor (Chair) – Natural England
Kate Ansell – Solent Forum
Dominic Parry – University of Portsmouth
Grace Booth – IoW Council
Chris Hodsman – New Forest DC
Ben Edmonds – Portsmouth CC
Alison Fowler – River Hamble Harbour Authority
Gordon Watson – University of Portsmouth
Vicki Gravestock – Southern IFCA

Sue Hawley – Isle of Wight Estuaries
Paul Howe – Eastleigh BC
Jackie Mellan – Environment Agency
Jasmin Godbold – Southampton University
Louise McCallum – Langstone Harbour Board
Zoe McKie – IoW Council
Patrick Cooper – Southern IFCA
Ricardo Zanre - WWF
Lucy Sheffield – Coastal Partners
Julie Sims – Bird Aware
Harriet Rushton – MoD
Ian Barker – New Forest NPA
Andrew Davidson - HCC
Gill Glover – Havant BC
Peter Hughes – Chichester Harbour Conservancy
Charlie Mountain – PhD UoP Oysters/Saltmarsh Restoration

Apologies from Organisations not present

Wightlink Ferries
RSPB
Environment Agency
Southern Water
MMO
Sussex IFCA