

**Report by Liz Green, West Alvington Parish Council's representative on the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum – 05 April 2022**

Parishioners are reminded to report any pollution identified in the estuary immediately to the Environment Agency's 24-Hour Emergency number:- 0800 80 70 60. Good news sightings such as wildlife spotted in our waters can also be advised on this same number.

South West Water's phone number for reporting blockages in a public sewer is 0344 346 2020. Their phone number for General Enquiries is 03708 506 506.

The importance of the types of seagrasses (*Zoster marina* and *Zoster noltii*) found within the estuary can never be understated. It is well recognised that the presence of seagrasses within the estuary is hugely beneficial to the environment. As well as providing coastal protection, sediment stabilisation and water filtration they are important reservoirs of coastal biodiversity, providing habitat, shelter, feeding grounds and nurseries for a wide range of species, including some commercial fish species. Just as important, they are a magnificent source for capturing and locking in carbon. It is known that the mud beneath seagrass beds is far more oxygenated than that in non-seagrass areas. Climate change, agricultural run-off, algal blooms on mudflats, nautical sports, the encroachment of the invasive non-native Pacific Oysters, coastal development and even the increase in numbers of grazing Brent geese within the estuary have all contributed to the reduction in our seagrasses. Threats to the seagrasses over the forthcoming summer months, in addition to damage caused by water sport users, include (1) the likely growth of algal mats that smother the mudflats and seagrass and block light and (2) "red tides" caused by blooming dinoflagellates that also affect the quality of light reaching the seagrass. Estuaries Officer Nigel Mortimer, would appreciate being notified of any "red tides" or wildlife issues spotted please; contact him at [Nigel.Mortimer@SouthDevonAONB.org.uk](mailto:Nigel.Mortimer@SouthDevonAONB.org.uk). Tel: 01803-861465. Over the winter it has been noted that, as expected, the dwarf seagrass died back. In the autumn, some species were noted to have branches break off when in seed. Consideration is being given to maybe gathering these break offs to replant them elsewhere. Anyone interested in learning more about the importance and different ecosystems of seagrasses can download an Environment Agency handbook dealing with their restoration via [www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/seagrass-restoration-handbook](http://www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/learn/seagrass-restoration-handbook).

Ways in which we can all protect the ecosystems and quality of the water in the estuary include not flushing food remnants down our drains to reduce nutrients entering the water that promote algal blooms upon the mudflats, and vigilance when using personal vessels and watercraft equipment on the estuary's waters. People may not realise that the dragging of paddle boards or kayaks over the exposed mud flats results in the loosening and pulling out of the seagrasses. Dwarf seagrasses (*Zostera nolteii*) are only 10-15 cm long and, when exposed, take on the appearance of a wet long lawn. Recreational water users should be especially careful not to damage any of this vegetation with their paddles, oars or engine motors. This is particularly applicable off Rowdens Point, at the mouth of Blanksmill Creek. Stay within the deep water channel wherever possible. Local harbour guides have recently been updated to advise water sport partakers of their possible impact. In addition, posters have been produced and erected around the local area educating readers of the importance of protecting the seagrasses.

The presence of non-native Pacific Oysters continues to have a concerning impact within the protected site of the estuary, particularly north of Collapit channel, since they can significantly alter the ecosystem processes, partly through displacing the dwarf seagrasses as well as displacing native foreshore species and communities. In addition, they can cause a loss of beach amenity, could cause damage to vessels and potential injury to humans and animals. New permits for trying to contain the number of these oysters are awaited from Natural England.

Since the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary has no rivers to flush out nutrients entering the water, local farmers are being encouraged to conserve water quality via Defra's "Farming in Protected Landscapes" programme running until March 2024. This programme supports nature recovery and nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. A new government "Farm Innovation Fund" is also encouraging landowners to look at, and develop, new unique ways to conduct their farming practices in order to reduce the sediment flushing into our estuaries and rivers by offering financial incentives to partner in pilot projects. [www.gov.uk/government/news/farming-innovation-programme-launched-to-boost-the-future-of-farming](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/farming-innovation-programme-launched-to-boost-the-future-of-farming). Local farmers should also check out the government's new "Landscape

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Recovery" scheme that opened recently. This scheme supports radical and ambitious land-use change and habitat restoration such as new nature reserves, restoring floodplains or creating woodland and wetlands. [www.gov.uk/government/news/applications-for-the-landscape-recovery-scheme-now-open](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/applications-for-the-landscape-recovery-scheme-now-open).

Water quality is also a concern where local fishing is concerned. Parishioners need to be mindful of the effect the algal blooms and red tides have, at times, on the quality of the water and subsequently the health of the fish caught in its waters. "Swimfo", a bathing water explorer, gives information concerning weather patterns, sewage spillages and water quality. Reassuringly, the Environment Agency's May-September 2021 sampling results of water quality rated all three areas tested in the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary as being Excellent. In South Devon as a whole, 31 sampled areas were rated Excellent; 4 were rated Good. It should of course be noted that the impact of storm events are usually short lived with the estuaries likely to cope. Recreational users of the local waters may be interested in the "Safer seas and rivers" app: <https://www.sas.org.uk/safer-seas-service>.

Projects conducted recently in the estuary by the Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority have discovered that a bass tagged in Salcombe last November has been noted to have journeyed as far away as Falmouth and that there appears to have been no decline in the catch per unit data for Salcombe scallops, which suggests that their population is doing quite well at the moment. For health reasons, since the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) has a duty to know where fish has been caught and by whom, parishioners are asked to report any incidents of recreational fishers trying to sell catch to local pubs and restaurants illegally. Call 01803-853383.

Anyone wishing to construct or alter a property/harbour wall etc in or extending over the Mean High Water Line is reminded that they shall need to apply to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) Office for a Marine License (Tel: 01803-853383). This includes the building of jetties, installation of scaffolding etc. A Marine License is required for any work, even that conducted in an emergency.

Opportunity to comment on the final draft stage of the River Basin Management Plan closes on 22 April 2022. <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/environment-and-business/draft-river-basin-management-plans>. The wider community is being encouraged to further protect streams that feed into main water bodies. This year, a project is planned to look at ways in which sediment flushed into the estuary from the Washbrook stream can be reduced.

Public consultation on the government's response to Defra's "Landscapes Review (National Parks and AONBs)" closes as soon as 09 April 2022. National Parks, the Broads and AONBs are all classed as protected landscapes. This review proposes legislative changes that contribute to the government's commitment to protect 30% of UK land for nature by 2030 and boost biodiversity. [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-implementing-the-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/landscapes-review-national-parks-and-aonbs-implementing-the-review).

Local communities are encouraged to get involved with Devon County Council's "Naturally Healthy" initiative focussing on an increased connection with nature. May shall be their Naturally Healthy Month. Several free webinars in late April are available to help identify local birds, trees, wildflowers etc. [www.devonlnp.org.uk/get-involved/naturally-healthy](http://www.devonlnp.org.uk/get-involved/naturally-healthy). Contact Kate Hind at [kate.hind@devon.gov.uk](mailto:kate.hind@devon.gov.uk) for support on event ideas, potential funding etc.

Anyone interested in the ecology of the local estuaries may like to look at the South Devon AONB Channel on You Tube, onto which recent virtual talks have been uploaded.

The next online Zoom meeting of the Estuary Forum's "Round-the-table" autumn session will be on Tuesday 11th October 2022, by invitation.