

**Report by Liz Green, West Alvington Parish Council's representative on the
Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum – 18 April 2023**

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.

As previously notified, the importance of the variants of seagrasses (*Zoster marina* (subtidal and intertidal) and *Zoster noltii* (dwarf)) 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 (that starve the grasses of light), "red tides" in the summer months caused by blooming dinoflagellates, 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. Of some concern also is a newly identified wasting disease that is affecting the *Zoster marina* variant. 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. Our AONB Estuaries Officer, Nigel Mortimer, would appreciate being notified of the spotting of any "red tides" or wildlife issues during the forthcoming summer months please; contact him at Nigel.Mortimer@SouthDevonAONB.org.uk. Tel: 01803-861465.

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 noltii*) 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. The latest Harbour Guide for 2023 that offers guidance to local water sports enthusiasts, is now available from the Salcombe Harbour office.

Water quality within the estuary continues to be monitored. Of particular interest is the presence of nutrients and phosphates. A greater understanding is sought of where the nutrients come from as well as how they can be reduced and dispersed.

The Environment Agency's Event Duration Monitoring data for 2022 has recently been released. This data records the performance of storm overflows. Data is provided by Water and Sewerage Companies (WaSCs) to the Environment Agency each year as part of their regulatory Annual Return, to fulfil their permitted conditions to discharge from these storm overflows under the Environmental Permitting Regulations. The data can be accessed and downloaded via <https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/19f6064d-7356-466f-844e-d20ea10ae9fd/event-duration-monitoring-storm-overflows-annual-returns>.

A project is still being pursued locally (funding dependant) to look at ways of reducing the flushing of sediment into the estuary from the Washabrook stream.

In an effort to reduce the volume of nutrients entering the estuary from agricultural run-off, local farmers are reminded to check out the availability of farming grants via your local Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) adviser.

Any diesel spills from local businesses that could find their way into the estuary's waters are to be reported to the Environment Agency. Diesel spills from boats must be reported to the Salcombe Harbour Authority.

Recreational leisure users of the estuary and coastal waters are reminded that "Swimfo", a bathing water explorer, gives information concerning weather patterns, sewerage spillages and water quality. Data on water quality is also available via the "Safer seas and rivers" app: <https://www.sas.org.uk/safer-seas-service>, as well as South West Water's own "WaterFit interactive map" accessed via <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/waterfit/waterfitlive>. It should of course be noted that the impact of storm events is usually short lived with the estuaries likely to cope.

Ways in which we can all protect the ecosystems and quality of the water in the estuary by reducing nutrients entering the water that promote algal blooms upon the mudflats, include not flushing food

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remnants down our drains and vigilance when using personal vessels and watercraft equipment on the estuary's waters.

As we look forward to long, summer days on and beside our estuary's waters, users of engine-propelled vessels should be aware that the Harbour Authority shall have additional members of staff policing the estuary and its creeks to ensure that vessels stay within the designated speed limits. This is in the interests of protecting local wildlife as well as other users of the water.

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 and their sharp shells can cause damage to vessels and potential injury to humans and animals. New permits for trying to contain the number of these oysters are still awaited from Natural England and surrounding landowners. In addition, further concern exists over the high number of slipper limpets creating reefs within the troughs of seabed under "the Bag". Such non-native marine life appears to be being transferred, presumably via human activity, from one water body to another.

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.

A reminder that the Environment Agency's Catchment Officer for South Devon is Emma Magee who is keen to promote projects that improve the environment for us all. She can provide information on funding streams as well as access to technical abilities, all of which are usually based around water quality. Contact emma.magee@environment-agency.co.uk

Devon and Severn Inshore Fishing and Conservation Authority (IFCA) regulates most inshore commercial and recreational fishing activity in its District including all the estuaries and typically out to the six nautical mile limit. Devon and Severn IFCA has introduced activity-based byelaws and you may need a permit to fish. An increase in the number of anglers visiting the Saltstone to fish has been noted. This is in fact in breach of a byelaw since the Saltstone supports a particularly rare biotope. For up-to-date information on these byelaws and further information on permits please visit the Devon and Severn IFCA website at www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk. Any suspected illegal fishing can be reported to an enforcement officer via Devon and Severn IFCA's out of hours phone number. Phone or text: 07740 175479 or email: intel@devonandsevernifca.gov.uk. Any personal data that you provide will be held securely and not shared. The bass tagging exercise is continuing in the estuary in conjunction with European organisations. 84 bass were tagged in January 2022 and January 2023. The information is fed into Defra's Management Plan network. The tags last for two years and are recording that many bass return to the estuary.

Finally, 2023 is the 50th anniversary of the Coast Path Association (CPA). A number of events to commemorate this are planned, including a walk through our area between 8th – 14th June; look out for details in the local press and social media. The CPA is working with South Devon AONB to manage and improve species as well as Heritage England to create a corridor and wild belt around the country.

The next Estuary Forum's "Round-the-table" session is scheduled for 3rd October 2023, by invitation.

Liz Green