

Report by Liz Green, West Alvington Parish Council's representative on the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum – 19 October 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.

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.

Recent studies undertaken by Plymouth University students have looked at the types of marine life inhabiting our dwarf seagrass meadows (shore crabs and Common Goby being the most active) as well as the success rate of transplanting bare roots and "plugs" of seagrass into bare patches of mud. The transplanting of "plugs" identified as being the most successful. South Devon AONB 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. Tel: 01803-861465. It is anticipated that the dwarf seagrasses shall die back this autumn; however, through their network of rhizomes beneath the mud's surface, new growth is expected to be seen next spring. 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.

Sadly, the effects of avian influenza (bird "flu") are still being identified within our estuary. This mainly affects birds but can also affect humans and other mammals. Parishioners are reminded, on coming across any dead wild birds, not to touch them (or allow their animals to come into contact with them) but to report their findings to the Defra helpline on 03459 33 55 77.

If you suspect any type of avian influenza in poultry or captive birds, you must report it immediately by calling the Defra Rural Services Helpline on 03000 200 301. Failure to do so is an offence.

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 remnants down our drains and vigilance when using personal vessels and watercraft equipment on the estuary's waters. Parishioners may be interested to view South Devon AONB unit's informative and entertaining short, animated film entitled "The Drip a watery tale" that can be viewed via YouTube.

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 awaited from Natural England and surrounding landowners. In addition, further concern exists over the high number of slipper limpets being discovered, particularly 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.

Recreational leisure users of the estuary and coastal waters are reminded that "Swimfo", a bathing water explorer, gives information concerning weather patterns, sewage spillages and water quality. They can also access the "Safer seas and rivers" app: <https://www.sas.org.uk/safer-seas-service>. It should of course be noted that the impact of storm events is usually short lived with the estuaries likely to cope.

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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.

Local farmers are hopefully aware of the government's Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) initiative that is led by Natural England in conjunction with the Environment Agency and Defra. Currently, 14 officers within Devon and Cornwall are available to work with local farmers and partners to produce food in a way that protects water, air and soil. Being locally based, your CSF adviser (CSFA) has an understanding of the challenges local farmers face. They will work with you to take the latest advice and tailor it to best benefit your business.

CSF provides locally informed, confidential, on-farm advice to help you make decisions on:

- soil management
- nutrient, slurry, and manure management
- ammonia emission reduction
- farm infrastructure and machinery set-up
- pesticide handling
- water resources and natural flood management
- local environmental priorities
- land management
- agricultural transition
- help with accessing grants such as Countryside Stewardship grants

If interested, please contact the CSF via www.gov.uk.

Although the opportunity to comment on the final draft stage of the River Basin Management Plan has passed, a project is still being planned locally (funding dependant) to look at ways in which sediment flushed into the estuary from the Washbrook stream can be reduced.

Devon and Severn Association of Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority (IFCA) published its "Assessment completed for the Salcombe Estuary Scallop Fishery 1998-2020" in July 2022. Access to view this report is via www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk. Click on "Resource Library" at the top of the page and search for the report under "Scallops".

2023 shall be 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; details to follow next spring. The CPA has acquired £85,000 additional funding this year for improvements to the coast path. They're 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 Environment Agency has appointed a new member of staff as Catchment Officer for South Devon. Emma Magee 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.

The next Estuary Forum's "Round-the-table" session is scheduled for 18th April 2023, by invitation.