

**Report by Liz Green, West Alvington Parish Council's representative on the
Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum (SKECF) – 05 May 2026
meeting**

REPORTING CHANNELS

Parishioners are reminded to report any pollution identified in the estuary immediately to the Environment Agency's 24-Hour Emergency number: - 0800 807060, or via their website <https://www.gov.uk/report-environmental-problem>. Good news sightings such as wildlife spotted in our waters can also be advised on this same telephone number.

South West Water's phone number for reporting blockages in a public sewer is 0344 346 2020 or use the Report a Problem page on the South West Water website.

Any diesel spills from local businesses that could find their way into the estuary's waters are to be reported to the Environment Agency's Pollution hotline 0800 807060. Diesel spills from boats must be reported to the Salcombe Harbour Authority on 01548 843791.

Incidences of illegal fishing can be reported anonymously to the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority by phoning 07740 175479 or via <https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk/reporting-illegal-fishing/>. For up-to-date information on angling byelaws and further information on permits please visit the Devon and Severn IFCA website at www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk.

If you are ever unsure which organisation to report to, report to the Environment Agency who can signpost to the right place. For information on the work that the Environment Agency does, visit <https://engageenvironmentagency.uk/engagementhq.com/hub-index>.

Since priority and focus of the South Devon National Landscape (SDNL) Estuaries Partnership has been directed at reviewing the **South Devon Estuaries Environmental Management Plan**, an important annex to the SDNL Management Plan, the recent meeting of the SKECF held on 05 May 2026 was the first to be convened since 01 October 2024.

The reviewed **South Devon Estuaries Environmental Management Plan** shall be a very wide-ranging document aiming to direct the activities of all public bodies as well as the farming sector in order to actively conserve our five unique and special estuaries. The timespan of the Plan's review has been expanded with certain key items still awaited. It is hoped that the Plan may be ready to be sent to SHDC and DCC for consultation during July 2026.

The purpose of the review of the South Devon Estuaries Environmental Management Plan is to create a strategic framework to protect and enhance the Yealm, Erme, Avon, Salcombe-Kingsbridge and Dart estuaries, recognising that their health depends on both upstream catchments and coastal processes ("source to sea"). **The core message from this review is that the estuary decline is driven mainly by cumulative small impacts such as pollution, disturbance, runoff etc. The solution is a coordinated, everyday action across all sectors and communities.**

Key issues can vary from estuary to estuary, therefore, in conjunction with the South Devon Catchments Partnership, the creation of Catchment Action Plans for each individual estuary will give the community a vested interest and pride.

Identified Key Issues are: -

- **Water quality (priority):** nutrients, sewage, chemicals such as flea treatment on dogs' fur, runoff filtering down off the land that leads to algal blooms and potential health risks.
- **Habitat damage** caused by boating, dredging, storm runoff, coastal squeeze and noise and light pollution. When developers build or extend properties, there needs to be a net benefit to the estuary.
- **Climate change:** rise in sea levels, storm runoff, coastal squeeze.
- **Invasive species:** expanding, hard to control. In addition to the known spread of pacific oysters within the estuary, concern exists over the spread of Worm Wart weed particularly at Tacketwood. This non-native red seaweed—often looking brownish, forms dense mats that smother native seagrasses and animals, fouls fishing nets and boat propellers, and can alter local habitats. It is hoped that an MSC student from Plymouth University shall shortly undertake a study on the impact of this weed.
- **Catchment pressures:** pollution and sediment flowing downstream.

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What's Working

- **Seagrass and saltmarsh recovery in places**
- **Improved monitoring and awareness**
- **Signs of the return of wildlife.** Some native oysters have been laid in Frogmore Creek. These oysters are good water filters, and it is hoped that they'll breed.

Priority Actions

- **Improve water quality:** reduce pollutants at source.
- **Catchment Action Plans:** manage water from “source to sea”.
- **Protect & restore habitats:** seagrass, saltmarsh, seabed, trees growing to the water's edge.
- **Sustainable use:** better boating, moorings, recreation – a priority in the Salcombe-Kingsbridge estuary
- **Prevent spread of invasive species:** Nigel Mortimer, Estuaries Officer for SDNL, hopes to organise parties of volunteers to reduce the number of pacific oysters that are affecting the dwarf seagrass meadows and creating reefs. If you wish to register your interest, please contact Nigel at nigel.mortimer@southdevon-nl.org.uk. If you pick up the red/brownish Worm Wart weed on your vessel, to avoid its spread please dispose of it in litter bins; don't throw it back into the water.
- **Engage communities:** shared responsibility (“wet footprint”)

Bottom Line

Small actions, multiplied across whole communities, will determine the future health of South Devon's estuaries. To this end, Salcombe Town Council has launched the “Salcombe Estuary Awareness Plan” whose aim is to help residents, businesses and visitors understand the estuary's importance and make small, everyday changes that together, will have a big, positive impact. To find out what small changes you can make to deliver a long-lasting change for the better, visit <https://www.salcombetowncouncil.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/114/2026/04/Salcombe-Estuary-Awareness-Plan.pdf>.

As we embark on a new season of leisure activities upon our estuary's waters, would all leisure participants please therefore be reminded to avoid disturbing natural habitats, especially seagrasses as much as possible by: -

- Familiarising oneself with the locations of the seagrass beds via the seagrass map included within the SKE Harbour Guide for 2026
- If aboard a deeper draught boat or any vessel having a propeller - stay within SHA's marked deep water channel
- Look out for, and utilise where possible, any sustainable mooring options provided by SHA.
- SU Paddleboarders, canoeists and kayakers - avoid disturbing seagrass areas with paddles.
- In shallow waters / low tides, avoid dragging any vessels across the mud.

To avoid transferring invasive non-native seaweed species into the estuary, please be mindful to CHECK – CLEAN – DRY! the bottom of your boat / trailer / paddle board / wellies etc.

<https://www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/check-clean-dry>.

Seasonal water quality testing commences on 15th May 2026. Several bathing water quality sources exist that are usually based on predictive modelling as much as data from outfalls. The Department for the Environment's “Swimfo,” a bathing water explorer, gives information concerning weather patterns, sewage spillages and water quality, though assessments are only made between May and September: <https://environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/>. Data on water quality is also available via the Surfers Against Sewage's “Safer Seas and Rivers” app: <https://www.sas.org.uk/safer-seas-service>, as well as South West Water's own “WaterFit Live interactive map” accessed via <https://www.southwestwater.co.uk/environment/waterfit/waterfitlive> that advises whether or not discharge pipes are operational. Rule of thumb – if it has rained, water quality may be lower.

Anglers – please be mindful to check out the Devon and Severn IFCA website to determine whether, according to bylaws, a permit is required for leisure fishing: <https://www.devonandsevernifca.gov.uk>. The Saltstone is recognised as a unique environment within the UK. Using it for angling and/or digging for bait is strongly discouraged.

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Salcombe Harbour Authority (SHA) update:

- SHA has an incident management system that's constantly reviewed.
- SHA is still looking at alternative mooring systems although being a tidal area is proving difficult.
- SHA is still looking at alternative fuels and electrifying systems in the harbour.
- SHA supports South West Water with monitoring water quality and acquiring more data.
- Stricter measures are being utilised to avoid "end of life vessels" coming into the estuary.
- SHA is working with many organisations to protect the estuary habitats and uses its staff to share information and educate people.

A reminder that 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.

Liz Green