

Chapter 8 Fisheries

Guiding Principles:

Chapter 4 details all the guiding principles relevant to the overall management of the Harbour. Whilst all should be given some consideration the following are of particular relevance to fisheries.

Key Guiding Principle numbers: 1, 5, 11, and 12.

8.1 General

Poole Harbour is the base port for a commercial fishing fleet and provides landing and marketing facilities for boats from Mudeford and Swanage. There are approximately 100 registered fishing boats based in the port. The size of the vessels range from offshore potting and trawling boats operating in mid-English Channel, to small Poole canoes working within the Harbour. The Port benefits from its central position within the English Channel fishery coupled with good land and sea communications, particularly for the export trade of shellfish.

All registered vessels fishing within the Southern Sea Fisheries District must hold a permit issued by the Committee to fish commercially. Permits are only issued to vessels under 12 metres overall length. As the fisheries' managers this enables the Sea Fisheries District Committee (SSFDC) to monitor the fishing effort and to keep stocks at a sustainable level through local byelaws, and National and EU legislation enacted to protect coastal waters.

The Environment Agency manages fisheries on all freshwaters in England, which includes all freshwater rivers and streams running into Poole Harbour.

8.2 The Fishery

8.2.1 Within the Harbour

Around 35 species of adult finfish, 17 species of bivalve shellfish and 11 species of decapod crustaceans have been recorded in the Harbour. The conditions and productivity of the Harbour are such that shellfish, eels and some fish species are found in much greater quantities within the Harbour than on the open coast.

Wet fish, such as mullet, bass, flounder, sole and plaice are caught commercially using fixed, drift, seine and trawl nets, and hand lines, whilst eels are trapped using fyke nets.

In addition the Harbour is an important shellfish ground which is administered under the Poole Fishery Order 1985 by the Southern Sea Fisheries District Committee. This order allows the Committee to lease sections of the sea bed to companies or individuals for cultivation of shellfish and to regulate the fishing for oysters, clams and mussels in the remainder of the Harbour. Currently the leased beds are used to grow on and fatten stocks of mussels, clams, oysters and cockles, supplying fresh live shellfish to the market.



The Regulated clam fishery provides licensed fishermen with a winter fishery. It has a high monetary value which benefits the immediate community because each licensee provides employment for at least 2-3 employees per boat during the season. Concerns over the environmental effects of this activity on the bird interest of Poole Harbour SPA, through potential bird disturbance and effects on bird prey and on the Ramsar site through impacts on the birds and damage to eelgrass beds, led to the requirement under the Habitat Regulations for an Appropriate Assessment for this fishing activity in 2005. Insufficient

environmental information was provided on the impact of this activity on Poole Harbour SPA and Ramsar site. In order to demonstrate no adverse effect of this fishery on the SPA and Ramsar interests of the site, Natural England advised that the key areas for overwintering, roosting and feeding birds (bird sensitive areas) were excluded at key times in addition to the main eelgrass beds. A byelaw was subsequently introduced for fisheries management purposes which prohibits the use of carrying a dredge and clam and cockle fishing in certain areas of the harbour (a subset of the areas considered as bird sensitive areas).

There is one designated nursery area within the Harbour which is for bass. This comes under the Bass (Specified Areas) (Prohibition of Fishing) (Variation) Order 1999. However other fish species such as cockle, prawn, eel and clam are also protected throughout the Harbour by closed seasons.

In addition to fish and shellfish taken within the Harbour, commercial catches of lobsters, brown crab, spider and velvet crab, whelks, bass, sole, plaice, skate, ray and sand eels are also landed at Poole by boats operating in the English Channel.

8.2.2 Waters Feeding the Harbour

The Environment Agency has control of fish introductions (movements/transfers). Any person introducing fish (or fish eggs) to any inland water requires consent from the Agency. This control is in place primarily to prevent the spread of disease, and/or undesirable fish species. Removal of fish from the source water is dealt with under Agency byelaws. On the Frome and Piddle there is relatively little fish stocking, compared with, say, the Avon. Each year the Agency consents to the introduction of brown trout to various fisheries on the Frome and a limited number on the Piddle. Except for the removal of pike from one or two fisheries on the Frome, this is the extent of fish movements on the two rivers feeding Poole Harbour.



8.2.3 Fish Migration

There are a number of migratory species present in the Frome and Piddle. Some of these (most notably salmon, sea trout, eel and sea lamprey) also use Poole Harbour, passage through which forms an important phase of their migrations. Parts of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act, 1975 give the Environment Agency powers to ensure the free passage of migratory salmonids. This is done in the Harbour and lower rivers by regulation of the fisheries (e.g. prohibiting certain methods), which the Agency police particularly at vulnerable times. A Southern Sea Fisheries District byelaw also helps with this issue. In recent years there has been a slight reduction in the illegal fishery in Poole Harbour, but there is a need to remain vigilant, as fish are extremely vulnerable here. Within the rivers the Agency facilitates salmon and sea trout migration by maintaining fish passes, investigating and building new structures where the need is identified.

8.2.4 Facilities for the Industry

The existing facilities for the fishing fleet at Poole have been radically improved with the completion of the Poole Quay Boat Haven in 2001. pontoons provide permanent floating moorings with access by foot to each individual boat. Landing facilities have been placed alongside the Quay to improve accessibility when offloading or loading vessels is carried out. Also adequate car parking facilities have been granted for the sole use of berth holders.

8.2.5 Non-Commercial Fishing

The charter fishing fleet is one of the largest in the UK with around 35 boats in total. Trips are undertaken by commercial fishermen and by skippers specialising in the work, all of whom must be licensed by the local authority. Larger vessels are also required to have safety inspections carried out by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency with details held on the Register of Shipping and Seamen. Fishing takes place in all areas of the Harbour including the entrance and out into Poole Bay.

A large number of anglers also fish from the shoreline of the Harbour. Poole and District Sea Angling Association has 19 clubs as members in the Poole area alone and other local clubs from neighbouring towns and villages use the Harbour for sport fishing. The flounder fishery is one of the biggest in the country and a major attraction for anglers around the UK between October and January.

8.2.6 Bait Collection

Poole Harbour supports substantial populations of bait species, which form a valuable economic and ecological resource. Collecting bait for personal or recreational use is part of the public right to fish but there is no legal right to gather bait commercially for sale or reward without the landowner's permission.

Bait Digging and Bait Dragging

The main species that are targeted for collection by both anglers and commercial fishermen, are lugworm, catworm and king-ragworm with the majority of the activity taking place on the more accessible North shore. Garden forks are used to dig up the worms and if not done in a sensitive manner this has the potential to cause damage to the mudflats and wildlife of the Harbour. The Poole Harbour Steering Group has produced a code of conduct leaflet to raise awareness among bait diggers as to how they can avoid their activity conflicting with other users and wildlife.

Bait digging activity within the Harbour is of concern from an environmental standpoint. Depending on the location and intensity of bait digging this activity does have the potential to adversely affect the bird life of the Harbour through disturbance and affect bird prey availability. There is evidence that commercial bait digging may be having such an impact in some parts of the Harbour, including Holes Bay. Where this occurs, the Borough of Poole will investigate the possibility of introducing a bye law to control this activity. Overall more studies need to be carried out to understand the exact impacts of bait digging both to target and non-target species and existing bait collectors need to ensure that they carry out their activities in a responsible manner.



Responsible bait collection is not thought to have a significant impact on stocks but non-target invertebrates may be affected. The presence of bait diggers on the foreshore can disturb feeding birds and where it results in heavy perturbation of the sediment it appears to affect bird foraging behaviour.

Bait dragging primarily targets king-ragworm which are harvested using hooked metal drags towed from boats. This generally takes place in the south of the Harbour across shoals of soft mud that are inaccessible to bait diggers. As with bait digging depending on the location and intensity of this activity there is potential, where it results in heavy perturbation of the sediment, to affect bird foraging behaviour, whilst sediment disruption and increased turbidity may affect fish and shellfish. There are currently no statutory controls to regulate bait dragging in the Harbour and the boats are not subject to any licensing or inspections. However responsible bait draggers have expressed an interest in bringing in some form of regulation and also producing a code of conduct.

The recent European Marine Site Risk Review identified bait digging and bait dragging as activities that currently pose a high risk to the bird features of the European marine site (Section 5.15) due to the current low management of these activities, and level at which these activities take place in some of the sensitive parts of the Harbour. In order to reduce the risk to the site the following measures were deemed necessary:

- Monitoring of current levels and the locations of bait digging and bait dragging
- Introduction of a local bye-law to regulate the activity in Holes Bay, a location where there is particular concern as to how this activity may be affecting the European Marine Site.
- Preparatory work by Sea Fisheries Committee if further work deemed it necessary to put a byelaw in place to regulate these activities when Sea Fisheries Committees become Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities.

8.2.7 Shellfish Quality Control

In order to ensure that shellfish harvested from the waters of Poole Harbour are fit for human consumption continuous monitoring is undertaken. The Shellfish Waters Directive considers the quality of water in which the shellfish live, while the Shellfish Hygiene Directive relates to the quality of the flesh of shellfish.

Shellfish Waters Directive

Under the EC Shellfish Waters Directive, Poole Harbour (with the exception of Holes Bay) is designated as a shellfish water. As such the Environment Agency regularly monitors the quality of water around the Harbour. The Harbour is split into three designated shellfish waters: Poole Harbour North, South and West, and monitoring takes place at fixed points within these areas. In the past, waters within the Harbour have failed

the Shellfish Waters Directive standards due to contamination from bacteria and heavy metals, but improvements in water quality mean that the designated areas currently meet agreed standards.

Shellfish Hygiene Directive

Under the EC Shellfish Hygiene Directive, waters throughout the Harbour (except Wareham Channel, and Lytchett Bay) have been designated as Class B bivalve production areas for Pacific and native oysters, Manila clams, cockles and mussels. Wareham Channel (West) is classified Class C for production of Manila clams. Lytchett Bay is classified as a prohibited area for the collection of shellfish. Testing is the responsibility of Environmental Health Officers from the Borough of Poole with sample analysis generally being undertaken by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) who are the statutory advisers to government on such matters. If after testing an area is given a Prohibited Classification (PC) then this will normally stay in place for 2 years before shellfish production or collection can take place there again.

Table 2: The Classification Categories of Shellfish

Class	Description
A	Molluscs can be harvested for direct human consumption
B	Molluscs can be marketed for human consumption after purification in an approved plant or after relaying in an approved class A relaying area or after being subject to an EC approved heat treatment process.
C	Molluscs can be marketed for human consumption only after relaying for at least two months in an approved relaying area followed, where necessary, by treatment in a purification centre, or after an EC approved heat treatment process.
Prohibited	Molluscs must not be subject to production nor be collected.

8.2.8 Illegal Fishing

Illegal fishing of shellfish, eels and wetfish species is known to occur within the Harbour. This not only exposes the perpetrators to the risk of prosecution but it also poses a health risk, as members of the public could eat shellfish deemed unfit for human consumption.

Poaching activity within the Harbour is an issue. It is compounded by the fact that legislation is outdated and inadequate for the task which, when combined with resource issues, means that policing by all agencies is problematic.

Licensed shellfishermen operating in Class B shellfish areas use purification tanks to ensure their catch is fit for sale to merchants. However it is possible that shellfish collected from Class B, Class C or even Prohibited zones may be illegally sold on without undergoing the necessary purification procedures.

Under the Food Safety (Fishery Products and Live Shellfish) (Hygiene) Regulations, 1998, it is a requirement that a gatherer of shellfish ensures that completed Movement Documentation accompanies each batch of shellfish at all times. The Borough of Poole issue these documents which show where shellfish were caught and by whom and merchants should have sight of these before purchasing shellfish from private or commercial fishermen.

The recent European Marine Site Risk Review identified illegal fishing as an activity that currently posed a high risk to the bird features of the European marine site (Section 5.15 and Appendix?) due to the current low management of this activity, and level at which this activity took place in some of the sensitive parts of the Harbour. In order to reduce the risk to the site the following measures were deemed necessary:

- A survey of watercraft usage in the Harbour to help to monitor the levels and location of illegal fishing in the Harbour.
- A multi-agency agreed plan for enforcement of illegal fishing activities with the aim of reducing the level of illegal fishing significantly by the end of 2011.

8.2.9 Management and Regulation

As has already been mentioned both the shellfishery and wet fishery within the Harbour are regulated and policed by the Southern Sea Fisheries District Committee and the Environment Agency. Both agencies have the powers to make byelaws which are used to enforce sustainable fishing practices within the Harbour. Prosecutions are undertaken on those fishermen that breach legislation, which detail closed seasons, permitted fishing techniques and size of catch. Fishery Officers regularly carry out patrols around the Harbour and under byelaw legislation have the powers to stop, search and inspect a boat which is fishing at any time.

The Environment Agency also have the power to stop and search any vessel in the Harbour and out to 6 miles offshore, suspected of contravening the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Act 1975. Eel fishing is regulated by the Agency through licensing and there are strict fishery bylaws operating to prevent entrapment of otters in fyke nets.

The byelaws and catch size information used to regulate fishing activity within the Harbour can be obtained by contacting the Southern Sea Fisheries District Committee or the Environment Agency.

Management Objectives:

The following is a list of the management objectives identified. Whilst some are specific to the management of fisheries, others may relate to activities and issues discussed in other chapters of this plan. All management objectives can be found in the matrix contained within Section 2, which also lists proposed management actions.

- To identify effective mechanisms (eg codes of conduct, voluntary agreements, byelaws) to manage conflicts between, shellfishing, baitdigging/baitdragging and their impacts on interest features of the EMS.
- To understand further the extent and potential implications of bait collection.
- To ensure the sustainable management of fisheries so as to not significantly affect the interest features of the EMS.
- To continue enforcement & monitoring of fishing practices & awareness raising among fishermen.
- To ensure eel fishing is carried out in a sustainable way that complies with legislation and minimise impact on other wildlife.
- To eliminate all illegal fishing activity from the Harbour.