



# Welsh MPA and Relevant Authority Groups 2021-22 Update

Report by the Welsh Partnership of MPA's



# Welsh MPA and Relevant Authority Groups

## 2021/22 Update

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### Introduction

The MPA Management Steering Group was set up to help provide a national steer for MPA management across the network of MPAs in Wales. The group has since produced an MPA Network Management Framework for Wales. The framework sets out the structure for improving the management and condition of the network of MPAs in Wales for the period 2018-23. Following this, an MPA Network Management Action Plan was produced for 2021-22. The plan sets out the priority actions identified by the MPA Management Steering Group to maintain and improve the management and condition of the MPA network across Wales.

It was agreed by the MPA Management Steering Group that maintaining links between the network and local level was important. Therefore, the following action was included in the action plan:

‘Maintain links between the Network Action Plan and locally agreed actions where they exist, and support exploration of funding opportunities.’

### MPAs and Relevant Authority Groups (RAGs)

This report covers five out of the 134 MPAs in Welsh waters, however they do represent the larger MPAs and as such cover a large portion of the Welsh MPA network. Many of the smaller MPAs such as SSSIs and RAMSARs fall within the boundaries of the five sites and help underpin them. Projects undertaken within the five MPAs will always consider the requirements of the smaller MPAs nestled within as well as other considerations e.g. Biodiversity Action Plans and the Water Framework Directive. Some of the projects will also help deliver management for the new Harbour Porpoise SACs as well as existing sites with no RAG e.g. Menai Strait and Conwy Bay SAC. Many of the projects outlined in this report are identified as local actions within the Network Action Plan 2021-22 Annex 1.

The RAGs included in this report:

- Pen Llŷn a’r Sarnau RAG
- Cardigan Bay RAG
- Pembrokeshire Marine RAG
- Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries RAG
- Association of Severn Estuary RAG

### Other work

This report focuses on the projects undertaken by the RAGs and site officers of the MPAs listed above, that will help improve or maintain site condition. However, there are many tasks undertaken by the RAGs and site officers that are essential to maintain site management that are not covered by individual projects. These include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining the RAG and Liaison Group
- Stakeholder engagement
- Raising awareness and education
- Sourcing and securing funding
- MPA contact point

- Providing advice and information
- Liaison and partnership working
- Working with other site officers to ensure consistency across the network
- Sitting on various groups to ensure MPAs are represented and promote joint working e.g. MPA Management Steering Group, Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group etc.
- Input into national work packages e.g. NRW MPA Condition Improvement Project, Clean Seas Wales Partnership, UK MPA liaison etc.

Funding for MPA site officers has varied greatly over the years. This is reflected in the number of days a week each site has a dedicated site officer. It varies from one to five days a week, see table 1. This in turn reflects the amount of work possible on site.

MPA	Number of days per week
Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC	5
Cardigan Bay SAC	3
Pembrokeshire Marine SAC	2.9
Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS	1
Severn Estuary EMS	2

**Table 1: Number of days per week each MPA has a dedicated site officer**

## Partnership working

The benefits of partnership working are well documented and the SAC Officers across Wales have worked together for many years. The Officers have regular meetings to share best practice, share resources and discuss ideas to solve common problems. The Officers also work collectively on a number of network level projects that deliver against actions in the MPA Network Management Action Plan. This year's joint work includes projects on:

- Reducing litter
- Reducing disturbance to marine mammals and birds
- Wales Coast Explorer App
- Wild Seas Wales

## Management principles

The MPA Management Steering Group developed five management principles to guide delivery of the vision and objectives for the management of the network. Each action included in this report contributes to at least one of the five management principles. Local actions contribute primarily to management principle 5, wider management. But many also contribute to other management principles.

<b>Management Principle</b>
<b>MP1:</b> Strategic Planning
<b>MP2:</b> Regulation, development consenting and assessment processes
<b>MP3:</b> Management advice and guidance
<b>MP4:</b> Understanding the condition of, and pressures and threats on, sites and their features to inform management
<b>MP5:</b> Wider management

**Table 2: Management principles**

## Tir a Môr Llŷn

Tir a Môr Llŷn, funded by the Sustainable Management Scheme, is a catchment scale project looking at managing land and sea together. This project brings together two long standing partnerships, the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC and the Llŷn Partnership. Work streams include:

- Habitat management along sections of the coast path
- Develop north / south Llŷn access link on the coast path
- Pilot a payment for outcomes farming model in partnership with the National Trust
- Catchment management of the Daron

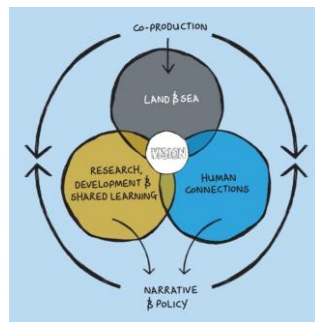


Options to restore crawfish (*Palinurus eleghos*) populations in Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC  
Author: Andrew Woodcock & Emma Woodcock  
March 2020

## Summit to Sea



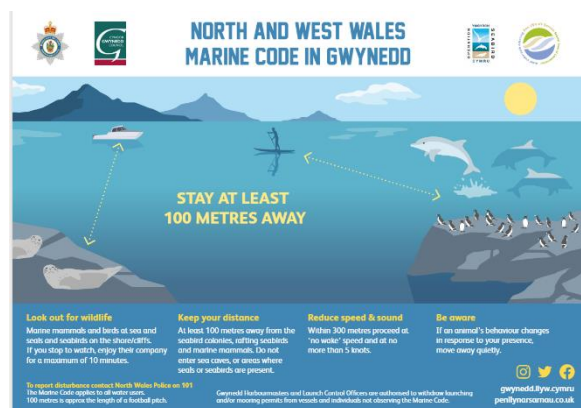
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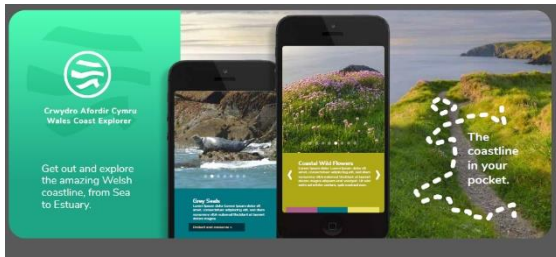


Summit to Sea covers the bottom third of the SAC and has secured funding through the Endangered Landscapes Fund to work with local communities to further develop the Summit to Sea project using a process called co-design. A blueprint that captures the co-design process has been produced. The blueprint has now been ratified by the Liaison Group and is now being used to further develop the project, building a new partnership and exploring funding opportunities.

## Marine Code

Work this year has focused on updating the Marine Codes for Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy. Extensive stakeholder engagement has been undertaken to inform this process including workshops, drop-ins and a stakeholder questionnaire. The SACs have also developed a new partnership with local police forces. This has resulted in North Wales Police conducting a number of Marine Code awareness days on local beaches at key locations across Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC and Anglesey. Police logos have also been included on the revised Marine Codes.





## Wales Coast Explorer

SAC Officers across Wales have been working with the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum to develop a new app to help promote Marine Codes across Wales. Input was given on branding, design and content. The app is now available on the App Store.

## PLAS Biosecurity Plan

The SAC Officer has been working with NRW to develop a biosecurity plan for PLAS to help prevent the spread of invasive non-natives. This work is funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. Work has included:

- Producing and distributing updates
- Report: Welsh Marine INNS Pathways Assessment
- Report: Assessing the impact of key INNS on Welsh MPA features, fisheries and aquaculture
- Stakeholder workshops
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement
- Drafting the biosecurity plan



Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau (PLAS) Biosecurity Plan Workshop- Report

## Seal Pup Disturbance

The seal pup panels were installed again this year using the network of contacts created over the last two years. More stakeholders are reporting disturbance and more landowners are requesting signs.

## Porthdinllaen Seagrass Project

This project looks at options to reduce a variety of impacts on the seagrass meadow in Porthdinllaen, one of the largest and densest seagrass meadows in Wales. Work this year has included:

- Local production of helical anchors
- Trialling helical anchors in the inner harbour
- Research into advanced mooring systems (AMS)
- Trialling of 4 AMS (Seaflex and Safemoor)
- Stakeholder mapping
- Engagement, education and awareness activities



## Seagrass Ocean Rescue

This is a partnership project between Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC, Project Seagrass, WWF, North Wales Wildlife Trust and Swansea University. It is funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and is currently in the development stage. The aim of this project is to re-seed 10ha of seagrass around Anglesey and Pen Llŷn. Habitat suitability modelling, seed planting trials and stakeholder engagement has narrowed the number of potential planting areas to seven. These will be further refined in the delivery phase if the funding bid is successful.



## Natur am Byth!

**Natur am Byth!** is Wales’ flagship project, a partnership of nine environmental charities with Natural Resources Wales that will protect endangered species and reconnect the public with their natural heritage. The project is currently in an 18-month development phase, culminating in submission of a funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in March 2023. If that bid is successful, a four-year delivery period will commence in September 2023.

Natur am Byth! follows similar lottery-funded work in England (**Back from the Brink**) but importantly also includes the marine environment. **Species on the Edge** in Scotland is also currently in its development phase. Natur am Byth! is made up of five integrated projects and six single species projects.

One of these is **The Welsh Marine Treasures** project led by the **Marine Conservation Society**. It will focus on preserving important and endangered marine species including Seagrass, the Pink Sea Fan, Crawfish and the Native Oyster. The project will also engage in a national campaign to improve water quality across the Welsh coast.

The marine work in the two main locations for Welsh Marine Treasures is being aided by:

- **Llŷn & Ynys Môn** regional coordinator Alison Palmer Hargrave (Pen Llŷn a’r Sarnau SAC Officer). Lead for the Seagrass, Crawfish and Water Quality work packages.
- **Pembrokeshire** regional coordinator Sue Burton (Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer). Lead for the Pink Sea Fan and Native Oyster work packages.

## Education Pack

Education is a key element of marine management. The SAC Officer has been leading a partnership to develop a bilingual education pack for primary schools. The pack covers marine, freshwater and terrestrial environments in line with the catchment approach to management. The pack, some ‘how to’ videos, equipment packs and posters are almost complete. The finished pack will be available to download on the PLAS website.



## Awareness and Education

Awareness and education play an essential role in marine management. In order to reach as many people as possible the SAC Officer has:



- Promoted the PLAS magazine O Dan y Don
- Been active on PLAS social media accounts and maintained the PLAS website
  - Written a number of articles
- Been on local radio discussing marine issues
  - Given a number of presentations
- Arranged and attended a number of online workshops
  - Visited local schools
  - Promoted PLAS films
- Met with a large number of groups and organisations to promote PLAS and encourage partnership working

## Input to National MPA work

AH worked with other MPA Officers in Wales to deliver outputs for two network level projects on species disturbance and litter, funded by the MPA Management Steering Group Action Plan. AH was the Project Manager for both projects, this included:

- Delegating work appropriately
- Managing the finances
- Reporting to Welsh Government
- Ensuring effective delivery of the outputs

Outputs included:

- Report: Using remote captured images to survey litter, seals and seagrass
- Report: Marine Code review
- 4 x revised Marine Codes
- Leaflets
- MPA branding and logo

The SAC Officer also worked closely with NRW to review the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC actions in the actions database. This information is then fed into the site management plan.

For further information about these projects or the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC please contact Alison Hargrave at [alisonpalmerhargrave@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:alisonpalmerhargrave@gwynedd.llyw.cymru) or visit the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau website and social media platforms using the links below.



# Cardigan Bay SAC RAG – 2021/22 Update

Melanie Heath

The MPA officer contacted all the Dolphin and Porpoise watch volunteers at the beginning of April, and distributed data sheets, maps and all other monitoring information needed for the season.

The MPA officer was then on sudden onset, long term sick leave from the 14<sup>th</sup> April 2021 until September 2021. The MPA officer returned to work in September and part of October and spent this time addressing disturbance issues, which had been significant over the summer while the officer was off sick, as no other Ceredigion Council had been able to cover the MPA officer's work.

The increase in visitor numbers since the Covid 19 pandemic exacerbated the disturbance issues further. Moreover, the three wildlife trip boat companies operating out of New Quay, who collectively run nine trip boats, were running one-hour trips only, rather than the usual mix of one and two hour trips; the two hour trips travelling further along the SAC coast. As a result, the highly sensitive wildlife area between New Quay Head and Bird's Rock was being subject to constant trip boat traffic, along with SUPs, canoes and recreational motor boats and ribs. This is a key feeding area for bottlenose dolphins, especially females with very young calves, contains one of Wales' most important seabird breeding colonies, and also contains a grey seal haul out area.

The MPA officer also put out seal pup awareness boards at ten locations along the coast of the SAC. September and October were spent dealing with disturbance issues by both wildlife trip boats and recreational water users, and also the disturbance of seal pups by water users and public access to seal pupping beaches.

The MPA officer was off sick for a second period, from mid-October and throughout November and December. The MPA officer returned to work in January 2022. The MPA officer's time from January to March was spent reviewing the Marine Codes for Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Conwy and Anglesey. This included the creation and distribution of a detailed questionnaire, to gain the thoughts and opinions of stakeholders and the public on changes to the Marine Code. The MPA officer also conducted

significant research, looking at disturbance issues both at a UK and worldwide level. The Marine Code for all these areas was then adapted with the aim of reducing disturbance to marine wildlife and also to make the Marine Code simpler and easier to understand for water users.



Above: Revised Marine Codes for Ceredigion, Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy.

For further information on the Cardigan Bay SAC please contact [ecology@ceredigion.gov.uk](mailto:ecology@ceredigion.gov.uk) or [biodiversity@ceredigion.gov.uk](mailto:biodiversity@ceredigion.gov.uk).

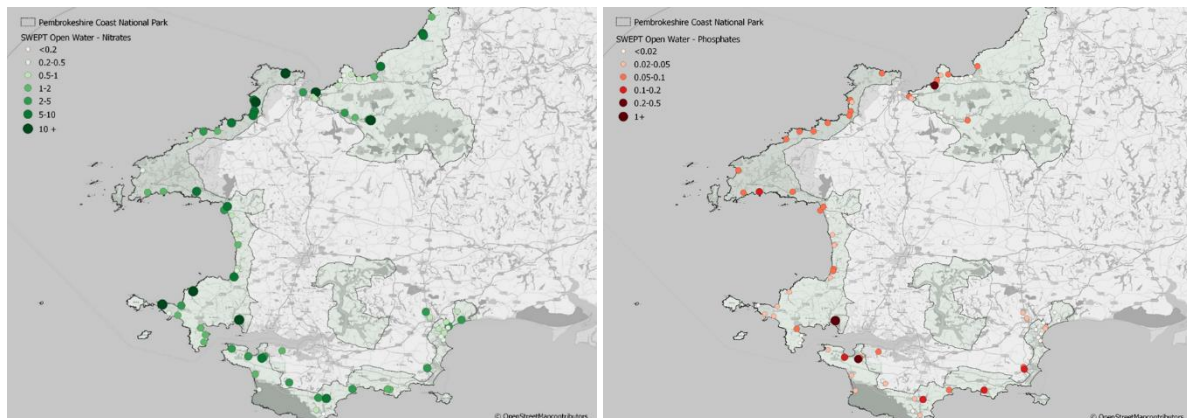


# Pembrokeshire Marine SAC RAG – 2021/22 update

Sue Burton

## Open coast water quality

The original SWEPT (Surveying the Waterway Environment for Pollution Threats) was an award-winning citizen science water quality project run in the Milford Haven Waterway in 2018-19. Funding from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) allowed a follow-on project, Surveying the Welsh Environment for Pollution Threats, that largely focused on the open coast of Pembrokeshire.



*Open coast nitrate and phosphate results, October 2020.*

Of the 81 samples taken around the coast in October 2020, aided by Park Rangers, 51 (63%) registered as polluted (>1ppm) for nitrate. 7 were highly polluted (10 + ppm N) (9% samples), 20 were above 5ppm N (25% samples), and 36 were above 2ppm N (44% samples). 8 locations registered as polluted (>0.1ppm) for phosphate. These results, the continuation of polluting levels of nutrients entering the marine SAC from diffuse agricultural run-off, and the potential to impact human health are briefly discussed in a short report, written up during the FY 2021-22.

The SAC Officer has continued to provide practical advice to the [CLEAN](#) project on the Nevern catchment which was also impacted by Covid, writing up results in 2021, and planning for further action.

## Seagrass work

The SAC Officer continued to support the Dale Seagrass Stakeholder Group (DSSG), helping to organise meetings with the Chair, providing minutes of meetings, and following up actions to aid ongoing management of the seagrass restoration area. Local support for the project was now more evident than any opposition. The fisher in Dale was now advertising his Seagrass Ecosystem Responsible Fisher Award (SERF) – a pilot scheme to ensure sustainable fisheries activity within the seagrass. New watersports activity providers in Dale were keen to incorporate seagrass awareness and education into their activities.

Swansea University monitored the site in autumn 2021 to assess overall germination success. Good seagrass growth was observed, and it was anticipated that, if undisturbed, the seagrass was clearly on a path to successfully cover the planned area.

Unfortunately, a local (Milford) fisher trawled through the seagrass restoration site in Dale in February 2022. It seems this was done with prior knowledge of the bed and perhaps was in response to the new

whelking guidance issued by Welsh Government which mentioned avoidance of areas of seagrass (if using pots with anchors). A lot of local people were upset by this. Welsh Government local fisheries office was immediately contacted but as this was a legal activity there wasn't much that could be done. It was a risk that the seagrass project knew they had to take when siting the seagrass where it ended up. DSSG wrote to Welsh Government and NRW to report the activity and raise awareness of the risk to seagrass restoration from damaging fisheries activity.

The SAC Officer has also been working with Project Seagrass to help facilitate future restoration plans across Wales including setting up a Welsh Seagrass Network, input to a statement on legislation/policy, and engagement materials including new signage on the seagrass in Dale.

The SAC Officer contracted a report for the RAG based on recent PhD research into the health of seagrass within the waterway. The report was a useful progression from the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group's seagrass report in 2017.

The SAC Officer contributed to two chapters within a new seagrass restoration handbook by the Zoological Society of London [Seagrass Restoration Handbook - CaBA \(catchmentbasedapproach.org\)](https://www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/)

## Natur am Byth! (Nature Forever) development phase

After tendering for the work, the SAC Officer secured the role of the Pembrokeshire Regional Coordinator (Marine) under contract to the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) who were leading the marine work "Welsh Marine Treasures" of [Natural Resources Wales / Natur am byth! Saving Wales' threatened species](https://www.naturalresources.wales/) (NaB) for NRW. A start-up meeting took place in November. The SAC Officer was leading work packages on the Native Oyster and Pink Sea Fan, working alongside and contributing to work packages on Crawfish, Seagrass and water quality led by the Llŷn & Ynys Môn Coordinator (PLAS Officer Alison Hargrave). Sub-contracts for both Native Oyster and Pink Sea Fan work had been let to gain further information to inform the project's development stage due to complete in February 2023. Natur am Byth! was due to take up half of the SAC Officer's time over the course of the development stage.

## Pembrokeshire Marine SAC updated website

The SAC website has been long overdue a considerable facelift, needing modernisation and updating. Project funding from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) enabled this in early 2022 although the time input needed meant that it was some months later that it was able to go live. The comprehensive website is now fully bilingual and the new simple design means that the SAC Officer will be able to make edits as and when needed. [www.PembrokeshireMarineSAC.org.uk](http://www.PembrokeshireMarineSAC.org.uk)

## Pembrokeshire Marine bilingual education pack



Species "top trumps" cards - a standalone resource from the bilingual marine education pack. ©Sue Burton

Standalone resources such as the spotters guide and beach bingos are being used and promoted. 'Top trump' style species cards have also been shared locally; 39 common species across Wales. Much content from these was being incorporated into the developing Wales Coast Explorer App. The SAC Officer reviewed and provided a lot of the rocky shore species content for the App including photographs. Completion of the Seashore Activity Pack was again delayed due to constraints on the SAC Officer's time, but enthusiasm for the resource remains and liaison has been expanding to facilitate sharing of the pack once finalised.

## Joint species disturbance work

The SAC Officer worked with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and other MPA Officers in Wales to develop the Wales Coast Explorer App (modelled on the successful Pembrokeshire Marine Code App) and progress design, branding and content. The App was due to launch in April 2022.

## Input to national MPA work

The SAC Officer continued to work with NRW on reviewing actions for the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC to help improve/maintain feature condition (91 actions were considered in total which included newly developed actions). Actions were flagged for other organisations as well as for RAG members and the Welsh Government. Many of these actions have national or multi-site relevance.

In early 2022 the SAC Officer helped to develop a proposal for inclusion in the MPA Network Management Action Plan 2022-2023 to take forward this work by providing capacity across the network to gather together the data required to inform targeted and effective project proposals designed to deliver improvement action.

The SAC Officer also wrote up some case studies to illustrate the types of work being done around the MPA network and input to NRW-led work on anchoring/mooring, bait digging, and eco structures. Unfortunately, an NRW shared outcomes grant proposal for an 18-month project to work with farmed bait producers and anglers to raise awareness of the potential for farmed bait as a substitute for wild bait was shelved due to the fund being impacted by Covid.

The SAC Officer input to the NRW-commissioned scoping study looking at Nature Networks funding, investigating actions that could be suitable to scale up into tangible projects.

Regular contact is maintained with MPA practitioners elsewhere in the UK; the network is a useful one for sharing of information and good practice.

## Additional work

As well as the above projects which filled the bulk of the SAC Officer's part-time hours during 2021-22, the SAC Officer also input to work including the following:

- Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee (CCERA) - gave evidence on blue carbon potential and developments in Wales and also on updating/pushing forward Marine Protected Area (MPA) management.
- Bait digging management work at The Gann, including new signage, led by NRW.
- Local marine recreation management – contributing to local recreation planning and also supporting the work of Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (Pembrokeshire Marine Code and Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter) including helping with rocky shore training.
- Building Resilience into Catchments (BRICs) led by PLANED and Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum.
- Local fisheries project work as part of the local Fishing Liaison Action Group.
- Awareness raising work including maintaining Twitter and Facebook accounts and responding to *ad hoc* enquiries. The SAC Officer had helped filming in Pembrokeshire for a new children's TV

programme *Meet The Experts* and contributed to a blog on wildlife for 4theRegion, hosts of the community rail network.

- Annual snorkel safari in July (a welcome return after the Covid break) with perfect conditions and a safe, enjoyable and memorable experience for the oldest two year classes in a local primary school. Organised by the SAC Officer and aided by Dale Fort FSC.



*Annual school snorkel safari 2021. ©Broadhaven School*

For further information about these projects or the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC please visit the (much improved!) SAC website [www.PembrokeshireMarineSAC.org.uk](http://www.PembrokeshireMarineSAC.org.uk) and/or contact Sue Burton at [sue.burton@mhpa.co.uk](mailto:sue.burton@mhpa.co.uk)



[@PembsMarineLife](https://twitter.com/PembsMarineLife)



[@PembrokeshireMarineWildlife](https://www.facebook.com/PembrokeshireMarineWildlife)

# Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS RAG – 2021/22 Update

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Judith Oakley

Currently, the Carmarthen Bay & Estuaries European Marine Site Officer is only employed for one day per week. This is due to availability of funding from the Relevant Authorities Group partners or other external funding. It is therefore difficult to undertake much project work in such limited time.

The main areas of work include:

- acting as Secretariat to the RAG
- attending external meetings, workshops and conferences and providing feedback to RAG
- responding to consultations
- liaison with other Welsh EMS Officers
- liaison with NRW officers responsible for different aspects of the site
- attending project planning meetings with NRW
- answering queries
- contributing to funding bids/projects
- participated in various joint projects with the other Welsh MPA Officers under the umbrella of the Welsh Partnership of MPAs.

## Input to national MPA work

The CBEEMS Officer has been working in partnership with the other MPA Officers in Wales to deliver outputs for two joint projects on disturbance and marine litter funded by the MPA Management Steering Group Action Plan. In addition, the site officer has been working with the other MPA officers and the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum to develop a new Wales Coast Explorer app, launched in April 2022, to help promote Marine Codes across Wales. Input was given on branding, design and content and the app was promoted via the RAG and other contacts.

### Other work:

The site officer has contributed to the Swansea Council Local Nature Recovery Action Plan, to ensure that the Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS, and marine and coastal species and habitats in general are covered throughout.

The CBEEMS website is currently being reviewed and re-designed.

The site officer drafted an all Wales Seashore/Coastal code which is under review.

The CBEEMS Officer attends the UK MPA Officer's Network meetings and keeps in regular contact with the group to share good practice and ideas.

The site officer continues to work from home (since March 2020). The RAG has held on-line quarterly meetings, which have been very successful, with good representation from partners.

For further information about Carmarthen Bay and Estuaries EMS please contact Judith Oakley at: [cbeems.officer@gmail.com](mailto:cbeems.officer@gmail.com).

# Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) – 2021/22 Update

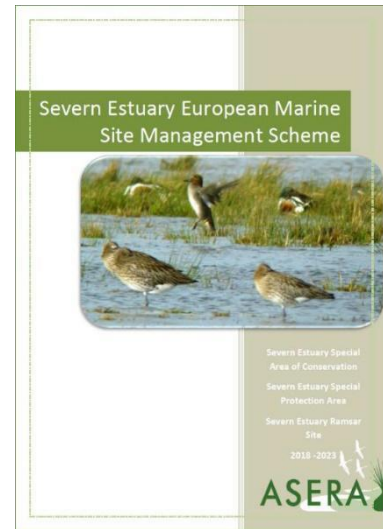
Katie Havard-Smith

## Severn Estuary European Marine Site Management Scheme & Relevant Authorities Action Plan

ASERA published a 2018-2023 Severn Estuary European Marine Site (EMS) Management Scheme & Relevant Authority (RA) Action Plans in May 2018. The ASERA Management Scheme provides a mechanism for Relevant Authorities to set the framework within which their activities will be managed, either voluntarily or through legislation, to achieve the nature conservation objectives of the site. It considers whether activities are causing adverse effects and, if so, how such activities can be regulated by Relevant Authorities to prevent damage to the features and sub-features of the site. The impact of an activity depends upon its scale, location and frequency, as well as the vulnerability of a feature.

Action Plans provide the mechanism for Relevant Authorities to address the following:

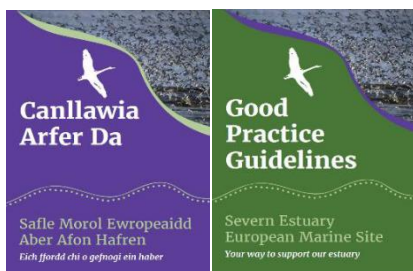
- Activities identified as likely to be causing deterioration or significant disturbance to the site;
- Activities of which the effects are unknown (i.e. there is insufficient evidence available at present to determine the level of deterioration or disturbance to the site);
- Specific plans and projects of an ongoing and repetitive nature for which ASERA may facilitate the production of guidance notes.



*The Severn Estuary European Marine Site Management Scheme 2018-2023*

The reporting year for the RA Action Plans is 1 April to 31 March. The 2020-21 report is available upon request and the 2021-22 report will be available later this year. The Management Scheme is due to expire at the end of next year. ASERA is currently in the process of updating the 2018-23 Scheme for the next 5 years (2024-29).

## Severn Estuary Good Practice Guidelines



Recreational disturbance has been identified by ASERA as one of the key issues affecting the conservation status of the Severn Estuary EMS. Disturbance is any activity or noise that could change behaviour of an animal (feeding, resting or breeding) or habitat structure. Repeated disturbance can threaten the survival of some of the key species and habitats designated under the Severn Estuary EMS.

*Severn Estuary Good Practice Guidelines in Welsh and English language*

Although produced in 2017, promotion of the guidelines remains a key component of ASERA's work to ensure they are actively supported by RAs and are respected by user groups. In 2021, the ASERA officer updated the guidelines to include new guidance on drone use and the potential disturbance they can cause in a protected area. The updated guidelines are being promoted through the SEP social media channels, on the ASERA and SEP websites, through RA's and at any in-person events. The guidelines are relevant across Wales and have been incorporated into the Wales Coast Explorer App and the Seashore Code resource which has been produced by the Welsh Partnership of MPAs.

## Recreation Studies

As mentioned above, recreational disturbance has been identified as a key issue for the Severn Estuary EMS. A key focus of the ASERA Officer has been to undertake a review of activities in order to understand the potential impact they may be having on the features of the EMS.

### *Land-based Recreation*

Phase 1 of this study aims to bring together existing data on a range of land-based recreational activities (e.g. bird watching), beach-based activities (e.g. kite surfing, sand bugging, motor cross) and coastal access. Data has been collected on the intensity, frequency and location of these activities alongside and adjacent to the Severn Estuary. The Phase 1 report, which presented the data collected, was reviewed by a sub-group of ASERA members and formed the basis for the summary report, which will be completed in 2022/23.



*Right: A busy Severn Way, taken at Oldbury-on-Severn ©Katie Havard-Smith*

### *Bait Digging & Recreational Angling*

This study includes both shore and boat-based angling, and bait digging for recreational purposes. Phase 1 of the study has involved collating and mapping existing information on these activities, in order to identify where there are gaps in data/evidence. Phase 2 is likely to involve site surveys. This evidence will inform whether there are any management actions required for RAs.



*Left: Recreational angling on the Severn Estuary ©Katie Havard-Smith*

### *Coastal Access*

This study includes coastal access using public rights of way around the EMS for recreational purposes, including the Wales Coast Path and the proposed England Coast Path routes. Phase 1 of the study has involved collating and mapping existing public rights of way around the EMS. Phase 2 is likely to involve meeting with coastal access leads and site surveys to understand concerns regarding specific locations and existing management measures. A summary report will be produced. This evidence will inform whether there are any management actions required for RAs.

*Public Rights of Way within the Severn Estuary EMS © Katie Havard-Smith*



## Responsible Beach Cleaning

In collaboration with Natural England and NRW advisors, ASERA has produced a guide to responsible beach cleaning for the Severn Estuary. This guide is intended to raise awareness of the sensitive features of the Severn Estuary EMS and the potential for disturbance to the site through beach cleaning, particularly through trampling, disruption of the strandline and disturbance to resting, feeding or breeding birds. The content of the guide is based on the 'Wildlife Friendly Beach Cleaning' resource produced this year by the Marine Conservation Society, Final Straw Foundation and Bird Aware Solent. The bulk of the resource is relevant across Wales, however the ASERA Officer is working with NE and NRW advisors to include a section on specific sensitive sites to avoid at certain times of year for the Severn Estuary. This resource has been published via social media to complement the existing work of the Severn Estuary Partnership in their annual litter picking events, the Severn Estuary Big Beach Clean and Spring Clean, and to combat potential disturbance to the site during these events which promote, and could result in, higher intensity activity on the coast.



*Above: Responsible Beach Cleaning resource for the Severn Estuary*

## Input to National MPA work

The ASERA Officer has been working in partnership with the other MPA Officers in Wales to deliver outputs for two joint projects on disturbance and marine litter funded by the MPA Management Steering Group Action Plan.

The ASERA Officer also continued to work with NRW on reviewing actions for the Severn Estuary EMS to help improve/maintain feature condition. Actions were flagged for other organisations as well as for RAG members and the Welsh Government. Many of these actions have national or multi-site relevance.

The ASERA Officer also contributed to the NRW-commissioned scoping study looking at Nature Networks funding, investigating actions that could be suitable to scale up into tangible projects.

The ASERA Officer worked with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and other MPA Officers in Wales to develop the Wales Coast Explorer App and progress design, branding and content. The App launched in April 2022.

The ASERA Officer attends meetings with other MPA officers across the UK through the MPA network. The network provides helpful resources and sharing of good practice.

## Awareness Raising, ASERA Meetings & External Engagement

The ASERA Officer continues to support the Relevant Authorities Group (RAG), facilitating meetings of both the ASERA Management and Working Group, and organising the Annual General Meeting (November 2022).



We have also had a presence at many events over the year, continuing to engage with groups virtually, promoting our recreational Good Practice Guidelines, raising awareness of INNS and communicating the work of ASERA.

ASERA have also been represented by the ASERA Officer on Welsh Government's Marine Planning Stakeholder Reference Group and the Wales Marine Advisory and Action Group (WMAAG), now the Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership, ensuring the cross-boundary Severn Estuary EMS has been considered in decision-making related to both Wales' and England's marine environment.

For further information on the activities of ASERA, please contact Katie Havard-Smith at [Havard-SmithK@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:Havard-SmithK@cardiff.ac.uk).