

Seagrass Ocean Rescue FAQs

Why here?

Dale Bay offers a number of key features that seagrass requires to grow. It is a sheltered bay, with the right seabed conditions and water depth and sufficient light levels for the meadows to grow. The area identified has also undergone high level constraints mapping indicating that there is room here for both new seagrass and existing activity. This is unlike alternative areas with more pressures and less available space. Historically the Milford Haven waterway has lost seagrass. In Dale the Bay is highly likely to have naturally been home to a large seagrass meadow and all the creatures that live in them. We don't actually have evidence to conclusively prove a large historic bed in Dale Bay and would welcome any community input to help answer this. A very small patch of seagrass was found here 2 years ago.

Why isn't it still here in abundance if it was here before? Why won't it naturalise the area by itself?

Due to intensive activity in the waterway, particularly through war time and in the 1950's a lot of the meadow areas were damaged beyond repair resulting in fragmented areas where damage has been sustained through time. The individual plants need a critical mass to enable recovery, and that just isn't here at the moment; they need a little helping hand with extra seeds.

Why now?

Swansea University have recently demonstrated that up to 92% of the UK's seagrass has disappeared. To promote the resilience of our coasts to climate change and to enhance our local fisheries we need to consider the potential for coastal habitat restoration. Swansea University have been conducting sea trials to propagate seagrass seeds to seedlings in various ways and have reached a point where they are having consistent successes. Some of these trials have been in Dale proving that seagrass can survive here and thrive. Combined with the urgent action required to address the significant issues the planet faces with climate change and finding ways to address the human impact of carbon release, there is no better time than now. Importantly, Sky Ocean Rescue and WWF have stepped in to offer to help resource the restoration trial which is allowing faster progress to be made, and for the project to be properly inclusive of user and community interests.

Where exactly?

The approximate area is to the south of Dale Bay, in the sheltered area close to the shore towards Dale Fort and nearby the line of moorings that follows the coastline. Seagrass and boat moorings both need shallow but sheltered areas and so it is not surprising that they are often seen to compete for space. The exact area has not yet been chosen as we need to work with users of the area to establish the optimum project area that will enable existing activity to continue, not constrain future activity, and also be good for the seagrass. We are targeting depths between 0.5m and 3m.

What will it entail?

Planting the seagrass will entail laying lines of small hessian bags onto the seabed. All materials are natural fibres that rapidly degrade over a 6 to 12 month period. This will be done initially using a small boat and then divers will tend to the lines once laid to ensure they are well placed. Each of the hessian bags will contain a small amount of sand and some seeds. The lines will be well anchored so as not to cause any concerns. These will be laid in late autumn 2019.

We will be collecting over 1 million seeds

Swansea University in conjunction with a range of partner organisations around the UK are collecting seeding shoots of *Zostera marina*. We have been very lucky to benefit from the support of lots of volunteers to make this happen. Once these shoots have been collected they are taken to the aquaria facilities at Swansea where they are processed to separate the seeds from the leaf tissue.

Will we be able to swim, sail, motorboat, snorkel over it?

Once the seagrass seed bags have been laid, there will be no hinderance to snorkellers, swimmers or boats. All we ask is that people take care not to disturb the bags, however we anticipate that all boats going over will be travelling slowly due to the moorings and the shallow depth.

Will the area be restricted in any way?

There will be no formal or legal restrictions on the site, however we hope to work closely with local fishers to prevent gear being placed directly on the young shoots during the initial period of development.

What is the benefit to the local community?

Creating a seagrass meadow in Dale will enhance the biodiversity and help to increase fish, crab and shrimp numbers with some benefits to recreational and commercial fishers. We also anticipate that the area containing the seagrass will benefit from improved water clarity enhancing local watersports activities (for snorkelling and SUP). In the long-term as the seagrass grows and develops it will also help spread and reduce water movement and wave energy, improving coastal defence.

Why is this an opportunity for Dale?

This project to restore seagrass is the first of its kind in the UK, placing Dale in the limelight and promoting its image as a community working towards a positive environmental future. We see this project as an opportunity for enhancing biodiversity, fisheries and improving tourism appeal.

What will we be stopped from doing?

We wish this project to be a collaboration with the local community and to demonstrate how seagrass restoration and conservation can work alongside local people and not in conflict. This project will not result in people being stopped to do any of their daily activities.

How do we know you won't cover the whole bay?

We will plant 2 hectares of seagrass, over time this might spread, but we don't know. If it does spread it will clearly demonstrate how boating, fishing and marine conservation can successfully work together and hopefully benefit all.

How long will the demonstration project last?

The planting phase will last 2 years. First planting will occur in October and November 2019 with further planting throughout 2020. Beyond those dates work will focus on monitoring and hopefully observing the meadow develop into maturity over a 5 year period.

How long will the seagrass be here for?

We hope that as the environment is right for the seagrass it will last into perpetuity. Seagrasses are more resilient than many habitats to some of the impacts of a changing climate, therefore we anticipate that seagrass will be here for the long-term.