

## **Dale Seagrass Drop In 19 August – Community Feedback, updated with answers to concerns and questions**

### **Background:**

The following feedback was collected during the Drop-In event for the Seagrass Ocean Rescue project. Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, together with Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer facilitated this event for WWF. The project is funded by Sky Ocean Rescue and the research and technical work is delivered by Swansea University.

### **Summary of project**

The project 'Seagrass Ocean Rescue', led by Swansea University in partnership with WWF and Sky Ocean Rescue, aims to restore two hectares of seagrass meadow in collaboration with local people in Dale. The project is being helped locally by Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation Officer to ensure that local users and the community are properly involved, so that those who enjoy or work in the sea around Dale have an opportunity to share their views and help decide on the location for this exciting new project.

This demonstration project could show how conservation can co-exist with existing users and activities (such as fishers, recreational use, community), now and in the future.

### **Attendees:**

PCF arranged the event on behalf of WWF and Sky Ocean Rescue, with facilitators from the PCF team, Jetske Germing and Jessica Hooper, alongside Sue Burton SAC officer and Sam Rees from Swansea University, who provided technical support and brought a sample of seagrass. We estimate that approximately 50 people attended the event. However, it became very busy at one point, so it is likely some attendees were not asked to sign in. Where possible the facilitator team captured names of those we knew attended. If your name got missed, and you wish to be kept informed, please let us know.

### **Collated responses**

Attendees were asked to feed into the project via direct engagement with the facilitators and by adding their thoughts, feedback, concerns and questions to a series of boards which are collated below for transparency and to facilitate ongoing project communications. This is an evolving document. If participants identify that an issue has been omitted or overlooked please either visit our website: <https://www.pembrokeshirecoastalforum.org.uk/seagrassoceanrescue/> and fill in the "Have your say" section or get in touch with the team directly and we will update accordingly.

### **Answers following the drop in event**

The project team have answered the concerns and questions raised at the event, please note below, in **blue**.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

### 1. What do you like about this project?

- a. Great project to investigate whether seagrass interferes with other users.
- b. Great opportunity for the local school to be involved
- c. Wonderful plan. We should support it.
- d. All the positive environmental aspects
- e. I think it is a fantastic idea, that in the long run will benefit our sea environment, fishing, tourism, livelihoods.  
It is great that it is the first in the UK – to set an example of how we can find ways to work together positively and constructively.
- f. It's great to be talking about a positive action for the marine environment
- g. A good opportunity to learn how to co-exist; how can everybody's needs be met, for the sake of the environment, eco-systems, livelihoods, not just for NOW but for generations.
- h. It will be a very good opportunity for education – for everyone, no matter what age.
- i. If the planting of sea grass is successful in Dale we will have put something back into the sea from which we humans continually take.
- j. It will be an interesting place to do SUP trips and provide information to the public about the project

### 2. What concerns you about the project?

- a. Lack of proper research – why did you not know it overlapped with the moorings.  
**We don't want to alter or change any moorings, we only want to plant it in areas where the seabed is bare. A larger than needed nominal zone was used for licensing purposes prior to engagement with local information sources. This is because licensing can take a very long time and also because the project was going to be working closely with local interests to agree the exact area to be used anyway. Both the project and the yacht club now have accurate maps that are informing continuing talks regarding the project area.**
- b. I wouldn't want the livelihood of local fishermen to be affected.  
**Neither would we. The project seeks to demonstrate how a conservation area such as this can actually support local livelihoods and we feel that fisher livelihoods can only be bolstered by having a habitat supporting fish nurseries and so greater fish and prawn abundance.**
- c. Engagement happened too late on – very negative sentiment rising. **The project team is working with the community to address any concern raised. We acknowledge that earlier engagement would have been beneficial but were restricted at the time due to project set-up paperwork.**
- d. What evidence is there seagrass ever grew in Dale Bay? Active waterway from Tudor times. Many never have had seagrass at all.
- e. Wording of the FAQ:
  - October seeding **Swansea University are currently collecting seed, and will need to plant out this Autumn/Winter to match with the plants' natural lifecycle, as the colder winter temperatures help with germination.**
  - Rugby pitches. 2ha is more than 2 rugby pitches.  
**The area of a rugby pitch varies with respect to local regional and international games. We wish to plant a total of 2ha. The reference to "about 2 x rugby pitches" was provided to help aid visualisation.**

- f. How will it affect those working and using the areas for the first few years? Can Government help re. subsidies?  
**The project will not negatively affect those working in the area and will not lead to any negative change to incomes. The project is working closely with local interests to ensure this. Welsh Government Marine and Fisheries Division are aware of the project and supportive, but this is very unlikely to lead to any financial assistance.**
- g. It is a very good opportunity for discussions and finding a way forward for the seagrass and fishers/ boaters/local community. However it is going to be, and is tricky – listening, positivity, supporting each other... good luck
- h. It's going to interfere with the boat moorings. **Please refer to point a)**
- i. We'd rather you go in Castle Bay. **Castle Bay is mostly too deep for seagrass and although there's some soft sediment in shallow water its small in area and it has quite an incline. It is also more exposed than Dale.**
- j. Why can't it go further by jetty of Dale Fort?  
**The project team are looking at proposals to move it further along in the direction of the fort but much of that area is too deep and in places too rocky.**
- k. Size of seagrass (length of grass), spread of seagrass, it is an area of significant magnitude. **Given the seabed conditions and light levels in Dale it is expected to grow to no more than 70cm. The project will plant 2 hectares of seagrass, over time this may spread. Its spread will be limited by water depth, as it only grows where light levels are high enough. We expect this to be up to 3m depth. If it does spread, it will clearly demonstrate how boating, fishing and conservation can successfully co-exist. The project will impose no formal restrictions on users such as mooring holders, commercial users or fishers. The team hope to work with a community group 'managing' the seagrass area.**
- l. Future restrictions – what if it is a big success. What guarantee that there won't be restrictions?  
**The area is already in the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC). Additional protection is brought in to areas if something is perceived to require protection due to threats that are there. The project is working with users to ensure that existing use is part of the project and so will not be regarded as a negative or 'threat'. Swansea University and WWF would like this project to be an example of how users such as fishers, mooring holders, commercial and recreational users can co-exist in an area, without a need for specific protection. The project team is seeking assurances from the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs.**

### 3. What further questions need answering?

- a. Whether you have chosen the right area. Could be moved amongst moorings where fishermen not effected. 'A mooring holder'.  
**The project team are currently looking at revised options for planting the seagrass so that neither fishers or mooring holders are affected. They have just completed further in-water surveys to support this, and look to discuss the revised areas with the community as soon as possible. Please attend the meetings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept to find out the latest.**
- b. Can we establish hazards for navigation (will it foul propellers) – evidence.  
**Seagrass exists in thousands of harbours and ports around the world and does not clog engines, block intakes, or prevent their safe navigation. Poole Harbour, the Solent, Plymouth Sound and Falmouth Harbour are all places where boat traffic is high yet seagrass is abundant.**
- c. Does seagrass help with sewage outflow/ capturing pollutants?

**Seagrass is well known to trap pollutants and help ameliorate any poor conditions.**

- d. Does seagrass 'trap' heavy metals (i.e. antifoul)

**Seagrass is known to trap heavy metals locking them away into sediments.**

- e. What if there are seahorses – will it become a higher protected area?

**It is a fallacy that seahorses only live in seagrass. Because seahorses tend to have a brown like complexion, they are clearer to see in seagrass, but in fact the gross majority of seahorse observations in the UK are from areas of seaweed. Essentially seahorses have a curly 'prehensile tail' that likes to wrap around any structure, and anecdotal observations suggest that they have been recorded on fishing pots by fishermen in the haven previously. Seahorses aren't a specifically protected species in Wales therefore no conservation action would be targeted around their presence.**

- f. No conservation area – reassurance

**As mentioned previously, the area is already in the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC). See answer to (f) above.**

#### **4. What would you expect from a community group managing a seagrass meadow?**

##### **Who should be involved?**

- a. Commitment to scientific research. Listening to concerns of local people.
- b. Commitment to 'thinking outside the box'. Trial and error. Learning from mistakes.
- c. Members of all bodies locally:
  - DYC
  - Community Council
  - Residents

#### **5. Next Steps for the project – What else should happen? Please make suggestions**

- a. Evidence of tests across other areas – to build a more robust evidence base for Why Dale.
- b. Why the moorings? No real clear examples of other options.
- c. 'Block' of area is a little daunting (the 4ha). Be clear about siting/ how big 2ha is.

##### **Next steps for this feedback:**

In the interests of transparency and to ensure that all concerns can be addressed we have released this feedback collation for interested parties to review and highlight feedback that has not been captured above, prior to responding to the queries raised. If you have further comment please either visit our website <https://www.pembrokeshirecoastalforum.org.uk/seagrassoceanrescue/> and fill in the "Have your say" section or get in touch with the team directly and we will update accordingly. PCF will then work with WWF, Sky Ocean Rescue and Swansea University to find answers and solutions to any questions posed.