

Dale Seagrass Stakeholder Meeting

Wednesday 15th December 7-8.30pm on Zoom

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of last meeting on 3rd March 2021 and actions
3. Seagrass growth/monitoring update from Richard
4. Seagrass buoyage – usage of visitor moorings and feedback arrangements
5. Visitor moorings – voluntary payment arrangements
6. Seagrass Ecosystem Responsible Fisher Award (SERF)
7. Signage / interpretation
8. Future potential seagrass work – Natur am Byth project
9. Any other business.

1. Welcome

Fil welcomed all to the meeting. Attendees were as below.

CHAIR and Moorings Officer	Fil	Marshall	Present
Dale Yacht Club Commodore	Kevin	Rogers	Apologies received
Dale Yacht Club (DYC)	John	Walmsley	Present
Community/users	John	Mecklenburgh	Present
Dale Yacht Club (DYC)	John	Bramley	Present
Dale Community Council (DCC)	Peter	Morgan	
Community	Fr Andrew	Johnson	Apologies received
Community	Tina	Rogers	Apologies received
Community/fishers	Wyn	Hopkins	Present
FSC Dale Fort	Fiona	Day	Fiona has left. Awaiting replacement rep.
Windswept	Sarah	Bagley	Ollie Willmot present
Celtic Watersports	Max	Barber	
Pembrokeshire Marine SAC	Sue	Burton	Present
Swansea University	Richard	Unsworth	Present
WWF	Ricardo	Zanre	Present
Port of Milford Haven	Brian	MacFarlane	Apologies received
NRW*	Adam	Cooper	Apologies received

*NRW is to be a corresponding member, unless specifically requested to join a meeting. Otherwise, representation for NRW will be via the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer (likewise National Park, County Council). Sue will keep the Relevant Authorities Group for the Special Area of Conservation informed on the work of the Dale Seagrass Stakeholder Group (DSSG).

2. Minutes of last meeting on 3rd March 2021 and actions

The minutes were accepted as a true record. Actions were picked up and reported on within the relevant agenda items.

3. Seagrass update (Dr Richard Unsworth, Swansea University)

Richard gave a brief presentation to summarise monitoring of the seagrass to date. (This would be forwarded with the meeting minutes).

ACTION: Sue

Monitoring in 2021 presented a much more positive picture of seagrass growth than in 2020. The number of shoots recorded in the September monitoring in 2020 was 1162 (<1 per m²) rising to 5550 in September 2021. Shoot density was still <1 per m² but plants were considerably bigger. Seagrass health was assessed as good as plants were not covered in algae and were very green (indicative of good light). Whilst originally the hope had been for 4-5 times the density, it was concluded that with expected additional germination over the winter and expansion of the existing plants, the seagrass was heading in a positive direction and expectation of a good meadow in time were realistic should conditions remain favourable. It could be possible to see some reproduction next year.

The conditions for monitoring in September were ideal with the best underwater visibility in the area that the team had ever experienced (near tropical!). It is possible that counts in 2020 could have been underestimated.

There were indications of some plants outside the plot. There was no detailed base-line data for this, but it was hoped to investigate this more next year and beyond.

Lessons had been learnt. For example, the second planting had utilised thinner rope which broke down sooner and was much better overall. Hand digging/planting was more successful than raking on the surface as a means of planting seeds by divers.

Richard mentioned that six active restoration projects were currently active in the UK, building on the Dale pilot. A seagrass restoration handbook had recently been published to which team members had input significantly. [Seagrass Restoration Handbook - CaBA \(catchmentbasedapproach.org\)](https://www.catchmentbasedapproach.org/)

Questions from members included:

Will the transient kelp species noted during monitoring smother/kill the seagrass? Answer from Richard – it is likely that given the amount noted, the area could well become a mix / mosaic of species.

Was there any sign of anchoring damage? Answer from Richard – there was undoubtedly impact from a snag/pile-up on the southern side in 2020, but no signs of damage attributable to anchoring in the last monitoring. More communication will aid this long-term.

4. Seagrass buoyage – usage of visitor moorings and feedback arrangements

Fil reported that he had been contacted almost daily in the summer by visitors uncertain about where exactly the seagrass area was in relation to the buoyage. However, he had been pleasantly surprised at the lack of anchoring within the zone.

It was clear that signage/interpretation would aid this (see later agenda item) but could it be an option to provide more buoyage? The need/desire for additional buoyage to better mark the zone boundary was discussed. It was concluded that additional buoys would be advantageous, with the advantages of further buoys outweighing the disadvantages. Wynn could see Mark, as local fisher, having no problem with additional buoys around the zone. Current members did not object to the idea of more (the temporary

buoyage had not been an issue) but it was agreed that Dale Yacht Club be approached for their opinion before pursuing any further (also Celtic Watersports). **ACTION: John M**

If agreeable, the pursuit of further buoys to better mark the area would be followed-up. **ACTION: Richard**

There was also discussion about the colour of the buoys and whether orange might stand out more? It was agreed to ask Brian MacFarlane the Water Ranger for advice and whether additional buoys would be acceptable from the Port's point of view. **ACTION: Jonathan**

Overall, it was estimated that visitor mooring use had been a huge success (at 70-80% for most of the main season). Fil commented that feedback had been overwhelmingly positive – with the main message being can we have more? Additionally, lots of users would have been happy to pay.

Practical feedback had been received from some users individually and through the Milford Harbour Users Association. This related to a desire for a bigger shackle on top of the visitor buoys to facilitate a more customer-friendly pick-up. It was agreed to try to follow this up for the coming season. **ACTION: Richard**

A 'fair-use policy' was supported to try to discourage those 'hogging' the visitor buoys for unacceptably long periods of time.

Fil reported that he had rescued an anchor just north of the zone for a user and when offered a reward had passed on Project Seagrass's details to encourage a donation. He wondered if one had been made. Richard responded that random donations were received, but details were not always provided.

5. Visitor moorings – voluntary payment arrangements

At the last meeting, it was agreed to investigate setting up a charity to accept payments for use of the soon to be installed seagrass moorings. Tina had agreed to look into this and report back. Tina liaised with Sue (secretary) and Fil (chair) to bounce some ideas around together with input from John Mecklenburgh who had kindly provided some charity information that he had received from PAVS. Conclusions (thanks to Tina for providing) were as follows:

- i). There was no need to set up a separate charity. Since we can justify treating donations for use of the moorings as a charitable activity, this means that an existing charity could hold the monies without jeopardising its own charitable status.
- ii). Monies could be accumulated in the Project Seagrass charity bank account. Project Seagrass is a natural partner since it has already referred to an involvement with the Dale seagrass project in its own public documents. Richard has had discussions with the other charity trustees, and they have agreed to this.
- iii). The stakeholder group has already decided that mooring monies would be used for maintenance of the moorings after the current funding has expired. Any surplus funds would be used for Dale community projects.
- iv). Richard has confirmed that monies would be treated as a restricted fund within Project Seagrass. This means that the funds will be ring-fenced for purposes agreed by the stakeholder group.

Sue also provided an update from Kevin who has contacted Localgiving to create a membership account. The annual fee for this was £90. Kevin suggested setting this up in time for the start of the boating season. He had received some text and images for the website and was keen to ensure that the information provided

was succinct and appropriate for mobile phone usage. He also suggested incorporation of a statement on 'fair use' to discourage overly long stays exceeding, say, 2 nights, which he was happy to draft and pass round the Group before finalising.

ACTION: Kevin

Fil extended the Group's thanks to Tina and Kevin for all their work to date. Richard commented that a similar payment set-up occurred on the Isles of Scilly with Project Seagrass, and it worked well. He was sure that Project Seagrass could cover the Localgiving fee and would liaise with Kevin to get the website and payment system up and running in time for the boating season.

ACTION: Richard

The topic of donation boxes was also discussed as a means of supplementing income via the daleseagrass.org website. Fil would be happy to service the boxes and had done similar before in an auditable and secure way. Richard offered donation boxes through Project Seagrass. It was agreed to email the Group to invite feedback on the idea of providing donation boxes and messaging in Dale to boost seagrass donations.

ACTION: Fil

6. Seagrass Ecosystem Responsible Fisher Award (SERF)

(For completeness, Sue has added the following update provided by Richard back in May 2021 to the minutes.)

Project Seagrass has presented local Dale fisher Mark Gainfort with a certificate of agreement to commence a pilot Sensitive Ecosystem Responsible Fisher (SERF) Award. Through agreement over specific fishing and boating activities the aim is that Mark and his licenced fishing boat M8 will be able to demonstrate compliance to responsible fisher behaviour with particular focus on activities that interact with habitats on the seabed. The scheme is a trial that will be a period of learning for all involved and help structure a long-term vision for the scheme. The scheme does not provide any form of certification for catch sustainability. That requires fisheries stock level management at a wider regional level. That is the role of the Welsh Government fisheries and requires verification by the Marine Stewardship Council. This instead allows an individual fisher to make a public and verified announcement of their individual responsible behaviour in order to assist with the marketing of their business. The aim is that good environmental behaviours can be financially rewarded. It is hoped that this pilot scheme will lead to benefits to seagrass and other habitats in other locations and that the hard work of those involved in Dale will lead to wider benefits to the marine environment.

Richard reported that there were also some fishers in Orkney who were interested to pursue such a scheme, but Project Seagrass were keen to see how the pilot progressed first in terms of its effectiveness and the ability to provide a meaningful two-way dialogue for mutual benefit. Demonstrating commitment was key, and it was good to see Mark on TV recently addressing sustainability. There is a lot of scope to be a great ambassador for seagrass and environmental sustainability; use of social media was a useful tool to achieve this too, spreading awareness, and logging good behaviours.

Wynn asked about signage for the boat as this had been promised to Mark. Richard apologised. He had got some quotes in but had then forgotten to follow-up. He would pick this back up. Richard had wanted to meet up with Mark in September, but they hadn't managed to catch-up then. Richard would contact Mark to have a chat before the start of next season.

ACTION: Richard

7. Signage/interpretation

After liaison with the Community Council, PCNPA and PCC, Project Seagrass funds had been used to replace the existing PCC notice boards at the starting hut and at the top of the slipway. Additional space had been

incorporated to contain seagrass information (which can be changed over time as required), importantly a map of the zone and link to the donation website with information on visitor moorings. This space had yet to be filled and Sue asked Richard for an update on where Project Seagrass were on finalising the information/design as it was important to get information in place for the start of the season. Richard agreed to check with Eve and let Sue know.

ACTION: Richard

There was scope to use this information/design for posters/fliers as appropriate to accompany donation boxes or be additional interpretation to raise awareness within local businesses.

8. Future potential seagrass work – Natur am Byth project

Sue informed the Group of a new NRW-led project Natur am Byth! [Natural Resources Wales / Natur am byth! Saving Wales’ threatened species](#)

She was working as the Pembrokeshire coordinator for the marine aspect of the project. This included seagrass and there was scope to support the work of the Group and seagrass recovery/restoration more generally over the next 14 months and, if successful in the next stage of lottery funding, 2023-27. Sue would keep the Group involved and update as appropriate.

9. AOB

Phil informed members of the good news that Pembrokeshire County Council had secured funding for a new pontoon at Dale to replace the current one which was in a state of some disrepair.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS:

Action	Who	When
Forward Richard’s seagrass update presentation with the meeting minutes	Sue	After meeting
Include a link to the Seagrass Restoration Handbook in the minutes	Sue	After meeting
Ask Kevin (DYC) for views on/process of pursuing additional seagrass buoyage.	John M	After meeting
Ask Celtic Watersports if additional buoyage would be acceptable/ cause any issues.	John M	After meeting
Ask Brian MacFarlane whether additional buoys would be acceptable from the Port’s point of view	Jonathan	In January
If more buoys (to better mark the seagrass zone) are acceptable to all, consider colouration, stickers etc. and	Richard/ Sue	By the end of March

follow-up installation for 2022 season.		
Follow-up visitor buoy modifications to facilitate a more customer-friendly pick-up for the coming season.	Richard to liaise with Rudders	By the end of March
Complete voluntary payment website	Richard / Kevin / Tina	By the end of March
Invite feedback from the Group on the idea of providing donation boxes and messaging in Dale to boost seagrass donations	Fil	After meeting
Finalise signage for the boat M8	Richard	Before start of next season
SERF pilot catch-up and discussion	Richard / Mark Gainfort	Before start of next season
Finalisation and installation of Project Seagrass seagrass signage to aid awareness raising	Richard / Eve / Sue	By the end of March
Include a link to Natur am Byth! and keep Group updated/involved regarding future seagrass work	Sue	Ongoing
Update https://www.pembrokeshirecoastalforum.org.uk/seagrassoceanrescue/ with latest update/ minutes from DSSG meeting	Sue to send to Jetske, PCF	When content agreed
Send round meeting actions, followed by minutes in the New Year. Make arrangements for the next meeting	Sue	Next meeting agreed for February 16 th 2022