

Dale Seagrass Stakeholder Meeting

Wednesday 9th March 2022 8.00pm on Zoom

AGENDA

1. Welcome
2. Minutes of last meeting on 15th December 2021 and actions
3. Updates to include reporting on monitoring and recent fishing activity.
4. Seagrass buoyage – additional buoys
5. Visitor moorings – voluntary payment arrangements
6. Signage / interpretation
7. 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	
Community	Tina	Rogers	Apologies received
Community/fishers	Wyn	Hopkins	
FSC Dale Fort			
Windswept	Sarah	Bagley	and 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 15 December 2021 and actions

The minutes were accepted as a true and full record. Actions were picked up and reported on within the relevant agenda items. Actions, if not completed, are taken forward as seen at the end of these minutes.

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

Richard has produced a technical report to cover the monitoring outcomes to date of the seagrass restoration project. This is just being finalised and will be shared with the Group when completed.

ACTION: Richard

The conclusions from this report were shared with members in the presentation at the last meeting and Richard's presentation was forwarded with the last meeting minutes.

As members have already been alerted to, unfortunately, on Friday 11th February we had a local (Milford) fishing boat trawl through the seagrass zone twice. The fisherman was within his rights to trawl here and was therefore acting legally as long as gear met requirements (we knew that this was a risk to the site, but it was one that we had no option at the time to avoid), but this was disappointing to see as we know the fisher was aware of the seagrass and has been in touch with Project Seagrass (Richard is a director) "Can you please tell me why all of a sudden were not allowed to fish most of the river down to this seagrass farce". It seems that the contact with Project Seagrass was likely triggered by new whelking management released by Welsh Government effective from 1st March [Guidance: Management of the Wales Whelk fishery 2022 to 2023 \(gov.wales\)](https://gov.wales/guidance-management-of-the-wales-whelk-fishery-2022-to-2023). The guidance document included small exclusion areas in the waterway. One small area over the maerl bed and no whelking *with use of anchors* in existing seagrass areas (as seen in the annex – the restoration site at Dale was not included in these). Sue emphasised that this did not exclude whelk pots from seagrass areas, only those using anchors and the seagrass areas are very small. Richard commented that whelks are not known to frequent seagrass areas anyway.

Fil watched the trawling and reported the sighting to Welsh Government local fisheries office who were able to follow up in so much as checking that the gear used was legal (there are requirements for net sizes etc.). Sue commented that Brian MacFarlane had received at least 4 emails reporting it and 3 phone calls, with further follow ups with Sue and Fil. The content of all the contact was "were you aware that this had happened? Is what he has done illegal? Can you do anything about it?" The Port can't do anything about it – this is fisheries jurisdiction. They are however very disappointed to see this happen.

Richard spoke to the fisher concerned by phone on 16th February. Conversation was civil and whilst it was confirmed that fishing in the Dale seagrass area was legal, Richard did stress that seagrass is sensitive to trawling and we'd rather he only netted and potted in the area (if he absolutely must).

Richard reported that we do not yet know how much damage this may have caused. This instance is in February when the seagrass is quite dormant, probably sparsest, and unlikely to be growing at all. Swansea University did a side scan survey of the Dale seagrass on 25 February (an image was shared with meeting participants) and found no evidence of any trawl marks. It is a fairly high-resolution system that has been used previously for finding some underwater experiments, so if there were remaining deep tracks or scars, they feel that they would have seen them. It shows nicely the weights used for the boat moorings which is good, but nothing trawl related. Richard commented that this was worth a try, but it looks like we won't know anything further until we dive it later in the year. We are also well aware that the survey was delayed by storms which may well have filled in any trawl marks. Fil witnessed 3-4 foot swell over the seagrass area at low tide during the recent storms.

Group members were all disappointed and upset that the actions of one individual could have such a negative effect on the seagrass following so much hard work (by the team, community and volunteers). After some discussion it was agreed that Fil and Sue draft a letter to Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales about the incident and the concern about future such activity and damage to the seagrass. This would be sent to members for comment before sending to multiple addresses in Welsh Government and NRW.

ACTION: Fil/Sue

It was noted that additional buoyage and targeted information/engagement with fishers would help.

4. Seagrass buoyage – additional buoys

At the last meeting it was concluded that additional buoys would be advantageous. This was seen to be even more advantageous and urgent following the recent trawling activity; additional buoyage would help to dissuade such activity within/through the zone. After feedback and support from the Dale Yacht Club Commodore, Celtic Watersports and Port of Milford Haven, we are currently pursuing at least 3 more information buoys to delineate the seagrass area more clearly to users.

Sue reported on feedback from Brian. He could see no reason why some additional marker buoys couldn't be deployed to better demarcate the planted area. Turning them to visitor mooring buoys at a later date (if desired) may well require discussion between the Port, NRW and the Seagrass Group with regards to licensing (check the current Marine Works Licence). Fil commented that visitor moorings should be exempt from marine licence (as all the Dale moorings are).

There was also a suggestion from Brian to aid visibility of current mooring buoys - some SOLAS tape would make them reflective in the hours of darkness.

Richard agreed to chase Rudders about extra buoyage and also modifications to buoys including reflective tape and additional bigger shackles on top of the visitor buoys to aid pick-up. **ACTION: Richard**

5. Visitor moorings – voluntary payment arrangements

Richard was tasked with liaising with Kevin to get the website and payment system up and running in time for the boating season, and Sue and Richard would liaise with Kevin to provide text and images for the website page. **ACTION: Richard**

Ill health and busyness had pushed this action on, but all were aware of and keen to ensure this was in place by the start of the boating season.

6. Signage/interpretation

Since the last meeting, Sue had asked Richard for an update on where Project Seagrass were on finalising the information/design for signage as it was important to get information in place on the new replacement PCC boards (top of slip and by the starting hut) for the start of the season. It was warned that the bottom section of these signs (space meant for seagrass information) would be overtaken by other notices otherwise. Richard reported that they had had problems with the designer who had been commissioned to complete the work and were considering cutting their losses and moving on. Richard agreed to follow up and let Sue know. **ACTION: Richard**

Sue emphasised the importance of having some information up, including a map of the seagrass area, and offered to do some temporary interpretation if needed. **ACTION: Sue**

Sue also agreed to ask PCC whether their beach map could include the seagrass area. **ACTION: Sue**

7. AOB

Richard noted that, regarding signage for Mark's boat M8, a plate has been ordered following a meeting with Mark in January to discuss the SERF pilot.

Sue was keen to ensure that Group members felt able to feed into seagrass work within the NRW-led project Natur am Byth! [Natural Resources Wales / Natur am byth! Saving Wales' threatened species](#) and wanted to encourage ideas from members of ways to raise awareness of and make improvements to the seagrass In Dale (funding could be available in the future for activities for instance). **ACTION: All**

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS:

Action	Who	When
Share the monitoring technical report with the Group	Richard	When the report is completed
Draft a letter to Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales about the trawling incident and send round the Group for comment before sending.	Fil / Sue	asap
Request 3 more signage buoys from Rudders, add reflective tape to all buoys to aid visibility, and add bigger shackles to visitor moorings.	Richard	By 17 April
Complete voluntary payment website	Richard / Kevin / Sue	By 7 April if possible
Invite feedback from the Group on the idea of providing donation boxes and messaging in Dale to boost seagrass donations	Fil	Carried forward from last meeting
Finalisation and installation of Project Seagrass seagrass signage (if only temporary) to aid awareness raising	Richard / Sue	By 7 April
Ask PCC whether their beach map can include the seagrass area.	Sue	asap
Members were encouraged to contact Sue regarding future potential seagrass work ideas within Natur am Byth!	All	Ongoing
Update PCF webpage with latest update/ minutes from DSSG meeting	Sue to send to Jetske, PCF	When content agreed
Send round minutes & meeting actions. Make arrangements for the next meeting around end of April.	Sue	By the end of April