

Report by Liz Green, West Alvington Parish Council's representative on the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary Conservation Forum – 03 November 2021

Parishioners are reminded to report any pollution identified in the estuary immediately to the Environment Agency's 24-Hour Emergency number:- 0800 80 70 60.

South West Water's phone number for reporting blockages in a public sewer is 0344 346 2020. Their phone number for General Enquiries is 03708 506 506.

It is well recognised that the presence of seagrasses within the estuary is hugely beneficial to the environment. As well as providing coastal protection, water filtration and biodiversity, they are a magnificent source for capturing and locking in carbon. Over the years, 92% of our seagrasses have been lost in the UK. Climate change, run off from agricultural land, algal blooms on mudflats, nautical sports, the encroachment of the invasive, non-native Pacific Oysters, coastal development and even the increase in numbers of grazing Brent geese within the estuary have all contributed to the reduction in our seagrasses. Recent trial studies conducted by several university students involving the transplanting of dwarf seagrasses in the Blanksmill creek vicinity this year have shown promise. The testing time shall be to determine whether or not these newly planted clumps of dwarf seagrasses survive the winter season.

Ways in which we can all protect the quality of the water in the estuary include not flushing food remnants down our household sinks that promotes algal blooms upon the mudflats, and vigilance when using personal vessels and watercraft equipment on the estuary's waters. People may not realise that the dragging of paddle boards or kayaks over the exposed mud flats results in the loosening and pulling out of the seagrasses. Dwarf seagrasses (*Zostera noltei*) are only 10-15 cm long and, when exposed, take on the appearance of a wet long lawn. Recreational water users should be especially careful not to damage any of this vegetation with their paddles, oars or engine motors. Stay within the deep water channel wherever possible.

A report about the feral, invasive, non-native Pacific Oysters (aka Rock Oysters) within the estuary has finally been published. These oysters are having a concerning impact within the protected site of the estuary since they can significantly alter the ecosystem processes, partly through displacing the dwarf seagrasses. Of particular concern is a small reef being created by these oysters off Rowden Point. During 2022, it is intended to recruit volunteers to assist in safely managing the numbers of these oysters.

Since the Salcombe and Kingsbridge Estuary has no rivers to flush out nutrients entering the water, local farmers are being encouraged to conserve water quality via Defra's "Farming in Protected Landscapes" programme running until March 2024. This programme supports nature recovery and nature-friendly, sustainable farm businesses. A new government "Farming Innovation Programme" is also encouraging landowners to look at, and develop, new unique ways to conduct their farming practices in order to reduce the sediment flushing into our estuaries and rivers.

Water quality is also a concern where local fishing is concerned. Parishioners need to be mindful of the effect the algal blooms and red tides have, at times, on the quality of the water and subsequently the health of the fish caught in its waters. By googling "Swimfo", information can be obtained concerning spillages and water quality.

Anyone wishing to construct or alter a property affecting the estuary bed is reminded that they shall need to apply to the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) Office for a Marine License. This is required for any work, even that conducted in an emergency.

Anyone interested in the ecology of the local estuaries may like to look at the South Devon AONB Channel on You Tube, onto which recent virtual talks have been uploaded.

On a final, cheery note, otters have been spotted in South Pool creek and there have even been sightings this summer of blue fin tuna off our coastline.

The next online Zoom meeting of the Estuary Forum's "Round-the-table" spring session will be on Tuesday 5th April 2022, by invitation.