

New £2.5 million project launched to restore fragile marine habitats

The future of England's most important underwater habitats have today (29 January) received an important boost after a marine restoration project received £2.5 million funding.

The LIFE Recreation ReMEDIES project, led by Natural England, will protect seagrass meadows – a critically endangered EU red listed habitat which are easily damaged and slow to recover. They are threatened by anchoring, mooring and launching of recreational boats, as well as trampling from walkers and bait collectors. The project will provide environmentally friendly moorings, voluntary codes, targeted training and habitat restoration, in five areas across southern England.

Seagrass meadows stabilise the seabed, clean surrounding seawater and absorb carbon, helping to prevent climate change. It has been estimated that seagrass around our shores can absorb and store at least as much carbon per hectare as trees in UK woodland. These plants are havens for many marine animals including rare seahorses, stalked jellyfish, and rare seaweeds. These habitats are also perfect for fish nurseries, including commercially valuable flatfish such as plaice and flounder.

The five Marine Protected Areas, set to benefit from the funded project are: the Isles of Scilly, Fal & Helford, Plymouth Sound & Estuaries, Solent Maritime and Essex Estuaries Special Areas of Conservation.

Natural England Interim Chief Executive Marian Spain said:

We want to make sure that everyone can enjoy England's rich coastal landscapes, and this £2.5 million funding boost will help protect and restore critically endangered species and habitats as well as tackling climate change.

This project is a win-win-win for the planet, for people who use the sea and for the marine environment by protecting the delicate sea bed and restoring sea grass meadow, a vital carbon sink, as well as providing new places for boats to moor.

The scheme has been awarded £1.5 million from the EU's LIFE fund and is the result of more than 12 months of working together with several partner organisations including the Ocean Conservation Trust, Marine Conservation Society, Royal Yachting Association and Plymouth City Council. The other £1 million has been match funded from Natural England and the other partner organisations.

The project, running from July 2019 to October 2023, will be publicly launched at a project workshop at the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth

tomorrow (30 January) looking at Advanced Mooring Systems that are more gentle on delicate underwater habitats, building on previous wildlife friendly mooring workshops run by the Royal Yachting Association.

The techniques and evidence drawn from Recreation ReMEDIES will be evaluated to measure the conservation benefit and assess how it could be repeated across Europe.

The programme will directly train nearly 2,000 recreational users, helping to:

- collect seed and replant seagrass (a first for England at this scale);
- inspire better care of the seagrass beds by recreational boat users;
- roll-out solutions including advanced mooring systems that are more gentle on delicate underwater habitats.

Phil Horton, Royal Yachting Association's Environmental and Sustainability Manager, said:

We are pleased to have the chance to show recreational boating and sensitive habitats coexisting. ReMEDIES is a great opportunity to exhibit Advanced Mooring Systems to recreational users.

Dr Jean-Luc Solandt, Principal Specialist, Marine Protected Areas, Marine Conservation Society, said:

Seagrass beds are massive carbon sinks, but have been severely reduced in English waters since the industrial revolution.

If – through this project – we are able to create new beds, and enhance existing ones, it will be of a huge benefit to fish and invertebrates. It will help secure and grow a habitat that is proven to absorb massive amounts of CO₂.

Mark Parry, Seagrass Specialist at the Ocean Conservation Trust, said:

We're delighted to be a part of this vitally important project to protect and restore seagrass habitats across the UK.

Seagrass meadows are amongst the most productive marine habitats in the U.K and offer a wide range of benefits to the coastal communities that live near them. With seagrasses in decline worldwide we're very excited to apply innovative techniques to seagrass ecosystem restoration to replace some of the lost benefits we see with decline of the habitat.

The project webpage and email address can be found below.

About Natural England

Natural England is the government's adviser for the natural environment in England, helping to protect England's nature and landscapes for people to enjoy and for the services they provide.

Within England, Natural England is responsible for:

- promoting nature conservation and protecting biodiversity
- conserving and enhancing the landscape
- securing the provision and improvement of facilities for the study, understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment
- promoting access to the countryside and open spaces and encouraging open-air recreation
- contributing in other ways to social and economic well-being through management of the natural environment
- find out more on [Natural England's website](#) and follow us on Twitter: @NaturalEngland

Natural England is the wildlife licensing authority for England's terrestrial environment under an agreement with the Secretary of State under section 78 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It took over responsibility for general licences in 2008.

About Royal Yachting Association (RYA)

- The RYA is the national body for dinghy, yacht and motor cruising, all forms of sail racing, RIBs and sports boats, windsurfing and personal watercraft and a leading representative for inland waterways cruising.
- The RYA is recognised by Government, the media and opinion formers as the representative body and voice for the activities that it represents. It continually fights for the rights and freedoms of its 112,000 personal members.
- The RYA has more than 1,500 affiliated clubs and classes, which represent some 350,000 boaters throughout the UK. It is estimated that 4 million people in the UK take part in boating activity annually.
- The RYA also sets and maintains recognised standards for training for both leisure and commercial boating through a network of more than 2,400 RYA Recognised Training Centres across 58 countries. More than 250,000 people per year complete RYA training courses.
- The RYA is responsible for one of the UK's most successful Olympic medal winning sports. Our coaching and development schemes actively support 800 of our country's top sailors, from talented juniors to Olympic and World champions.
- The RYA is committed to promoting all forms of boating and making them accessible to everyone. For more information please visit www.rya.org.uk.

About The Green Blue

- The Green Blue is the joint environment programme created by [British Marine](#) and the RYA. It was set up to encourage everyone who enjoys getting out on the water or whose livelihood depends on it, to do so as

sustainably as possible. Its main purpose is to enable the UK recreational boating sector to decrease its impact on the environment by raising awareness amongst industry and users; reducing harmful discharges; reducing environmental disturbance; and encouraging sustainable choices.

About the Ocean Conservation Trust

- The Ocean Conservation Trust is an Ocean conservation charity that focuses on two key areas: habitat restoration and behaviour change. Following a conservation pathway that has been proven to work, the charity's approach puts people at the centre, working hard to create meaningful connections between people and the Ocean as the first step to inspiring long-term behaviour change. This is done in tandem with more traditional conservation work surrounding the monitoring and restoration of crucial Ocean habitats, with a particular focus on seagrasses.
<https://www.oceanconservationtrust.org/>

About the Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum / Plymouth City Council.

- The Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum (TECF) is a collaborative partnership bringing together the key authorities responsible for the management of the tidal waters of Plymouth Sound and Estuaries European Marine Site. Under the chair of the Queen's Harbour Master, members consist of five local authorities, four harbour authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency, Marine Management Organisation, Duchy of Cornwall and both Devon and Severn, and Cornwall Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities. Plymouth City Council is a unitary authority and has hosted TECF since it was first established in the early 1990s. It has a vision for Plymouth to be Britain's Ocean City and one of Europe's most vibrant waterfront cities which is sustainable and cares about the environment and is currently working towards creating Britain's first National Marine Park.