

# North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme: Where have we got to and where are we going?

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## Introduction

The term ‘North East Kent European marine sites’ (NEKEMS) refers to an area of the coast covered by a number of designated marine areas. The NEKEMS has a landward boundary of the Highest Astronomical Tide and a variable seaward boundary which extends up to 2km offshore, to include intertidal and subtidal chalk reef.

All or parts of the following sites are included within the boundary of the NEKEMS:

- **Thanet Coast Special Area of Conservation (SAC).** Designated for its chalk reefs and caves.
- **Sandwich Bay SAC.** Designated for its dune habitats, but these are not included in the Management Scheme as they are above high water. Coastal mudflats within this area are included.
- **Thanet Coast & Sandwich Bay Special Protection Area and Ramsar Site.** Designated for its wintering turnstone and golden plover populations. Summer breeding little terns were on the citation until recently but have been removed as they have not bred here for several years.



Turnstones in flight

Other important nature conservation features in the area include:

- **Thanet Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI):** geological features, coastal shingle, cliff top grassland, wintering ringed plover, grey plover, sanderling and Lapland bunting.
- **Sandwich Bay to Hacklinge Marshes SSSI:** geology, saltmarsh, mudflats.
- **Sandwich & Pegwell Bay National Nature Reserve:** this includes parts of all of the above designations and is managed by Kent Wildlife Trust.



Thanet's chalk cliffs and reefs

## Why are North East Kent's marine chalk habitats so important?

Coastal chalk is an uncommon habitat in the UK and Europe. At 23km, north east Kent (the area known as Thanet) has the UK's longest continuous stretch of coastal chalk, forming 20% of the UK's coastal chalk and 12% of Europe's. Thanet also has 250 hectares of intertidal chalk reef, which is the largest such area in UK. The UK has 75% of all chalk reefs in Europe. Thanet's chalk sea caves are the second most extensive in the UK, after Flamborough Head in Yorkshire.

Thanet is a densely urbanised area and, as a result, only 25% of the chalk cliff face at Thanet remains unprotected by sea defences and promenades. Most of the biological interest lies in the areas which remain unprotected, although all of the cliffs are of considerable geological importance.

## Conservation Objectives for the North East Kent European marine sites

English Nature has a statutory responsibility under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (known as 'The Habitats Regulations') to advise all the relevant authorities involved in management of the area, of the conservation objectives for the site. The relevant authorities for this site are English Nature, Environment Agency, Kent County Council, Dover District Council, Thanet District Council, Canterbury City Council, Southern Water, Kent & Essex Sea Fisheries Committee and Sandwich Port & Haven Commissioners.

The conservation objectives are as follows:  
Subject to natural change:

- maintain **reefs** in favourable condition,
- maintain **sea caves** in favourable condition,
- maintain in favourable condition the **habitats for the internationally important population of regularly occurring species**, in particular:
  - sand and shingle shores,
  - intertidal mudflats and sandflats,
  - chalk shores,
  - shingle shores,
  - shallow coastal waters.

## Setting up the Management Scheme and the Thanet Coast Project

All the relevant authorities in the North East Kent European marine sites area worked together to produce a Management Scheme for the area, under the co-ordination of English Nature. This was launched in summer 2001 and runs until April 2006. The Scheme sets out guidelines and an action plan for the management of a wide range of ongoing activities within the site, such as fishing, recreation, ports activities, shoreline management and scientific research. The Management Scheme enables these activities to take place within parameters that ensure that the Conservation Objectives for the site are being met as far as possible. Where they are not being fully met, the Scheme proposes appropriate remedial action.

The Management Scheme was produced using a process known as ‘stakeholder dialogue’, which starts with the premise that those likely to be affected by a decision or course of action should be involved in making that decision. North East Kent was one of the few Management Schemes for European marine sites written in this way, and it is now seen as a model of good practice in participative working.

During the process, a series of independently facilitated workshops was held, attended by stakeholders from 67 different organisations. The key question under consideration at these workshops was: “Do any of the human uses of the coast cause harm to the internationally important wildlife and, if so, how can they be managed?”

Many issues were raised in the workshops, with some of the key concerns relating to management of different kinds of recreation and other unregulated activities. Some positive suggestions were made for improving the management of the area, including voluntary codes of conduct and setting up a new project to work with local people.



As a result of this, funding was sought and the Thanet Coast Project was set up in summer 2001, when a Project Officer was appointed, and in 2004 a new Education Officer joined the team. The Project’s achievements include setting up a voluntary Coastal Wardening Scheme, including monitoring of human activities; running a very successful events programme; and developing, promoting and reviewing the Thanet Coastal Codes – voluntary codes of conduct for a range of coastal activities, which were written and are monitored by local users.

Thanet Coastal Codes leaflet

## **Who manages the Management Scheme?**

A Management Group is in place, chaired by English Nature. This group is composed of representatives of the relevant authorities, meets twice a year and undertakes an annual review of the Management Scheme. The Thanet Coast Project reports its progress to the Group.

The North East Kent Coastal Scientific Advisory Group (NEKCSAG) is a scientists' forum which provides technical advice to the Management Group and was formed in August 2003. It runs its own projects in liaison with the Management Group, and is currently working to set up a database of research for North East Kent.

Stakeholder meetings are held at 6-monthly intervals to allow stakeholders representing a wide range of local interests to contribute to Management Group activities, such as reviewing codes of conduct and commenting on the action plan.

## **Some of the key issues and achievements of the North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme since the last conference in October 2002**

### **Shoreline management**

- The Environment Agency and English Nature have worked together on shingle management between Reculver and Minnis Bay, in particular trying to improve the sustainability of the shingle ridge in front of the Coldharbour saline lagoon.
- Thanet District Council have commissioned a study of reef erosion in front of sea walls, to see whether the walls are contributing to scouring of the reef and, if so, what is the extent of the issue.
- The North Kent Shoreline Management Plan review started September 2004 and will involve relevant authorities from north east Kent.

### **Fishing and harvesting**

- The North East Kent Coastal Scientific Advisory Group is investigating the sustainability of shellfish harvesting on the Thanet coast.
- Fixed netting: concerns over 'abandoned' nets and a need for management of this activity is being investigated by NEKCSAG.
- The possible importance of the chalk reefs as a bass spawning area has been raised and will be investigated.

### **Recreation**

The North East Kent Coast is an extremely busy urbanised area, with a range of recreational activities taking place along all parts of the coast and a high potential for conflict with wildlife.

As part of the Management Scheme, English Nature funded a 3 year study into the effects of human activities on wintering birds, particularly the turnstone, which concluded in 2003. This found that different activities caused different levels of disturbance, with dog walking and

kite surfing/buggying being the most disturbing. Voluntary codes of conduct were drawn up by local people working with the Thanet Coast Project, and these have helped to reduce disturbance. Winter bird wardening has also helped to reduce disturbance from dog walking, and interested dog walkers are helping to spread the word to others.

### **Research and education**

The first North East Kent coastal science conference was held in October 2002. As a result of this, the North East Kent Coastal Scientific Advisory Group (NEKCSAG) was formed in August 2003, with information-gathering and research as one of its' key remits. The following Statement of Intent has been agreed by the group:

The North East Kent Coastal Scientific Advisory Group will:

- act as a focus for coastal & information gathering and dissemination, to include a research database;
- investigate scientific problems and issues affecting the coast & act as a springboard for future coastal research;
- work to influence coastal policy decisions;
- advise the North East Kent European Marine Sites Management Group;
- maintain appropriate contact with local stakeholders.



Seashore safari with Thanet Coast Project

The Thanet Coast Project has always had a strong educational remit, but particularly since the appointment of an Education Officer in August 2004. The Project is now looking to reach sectors of the local community which it has not previously engaged with, such as disadvantaged groups and teenagers.

### **Water quality**

A Water Quality Group convened to discuss issues around eutrophication on the North East Kent coast in 2001-2. Site characterisation work is now being undertaken by the Environment Agency as a result of this, which will inform future management of the area. This group is now subsumed within NEKCSAG.

### **Species management**

**Japweed *Sargassum muticum*.** Advice has been provided to Thanet District Council on management of the sea bathing pools, where this non-native species is often found. In 2004, a summer survey was undertaken by a university student, to help inform management.



**Wakame *Undaria pinnatifida*.** This non-native seaweed was found for first time in 2004 on pontoons in Ramsgate Harbour by NEKCSAG members; a Kent-wide survey is proposed

**Wakame is discovered in Ramsgate Harbour**

Seaweed removal from beaches: English Nature has worked with Thanet District Council to draw up a Site Management Statement with Thanet DC, giving permission to remove washed up seaweed from beaches in the summer, but prohibiting it in the wintering bird season (October to mid April), when it provides an important food source, especially for turnstones. The Statement also covers many other routine activities undertaken by the Council, and provides conditional permission to undertake these, so that features of nature conservation importance are not affected.

### **The future: Management Scheme review**

The current Management Scheme expires in April 2006, and stakeholders and relevant authorities will be involved in a full review process during 2005.

The intention is to undertake the review according to the principles of the Ecosystem Approach, which can be defined as:

**“A strategy for the integrated management of land, water and living resources that promotes conservation and sustainable use in an equitable way”** (Convention on Biological Diversity).

The current scheme already fits well with many of the guiding principles of the Ecosystem Approach, and it is a challenge for all the relevant authorities over the coming year to ensure that the review leads to an even better fit.

# Making links with local people – The Thanet Coast Project

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## Introduction

The Thanet Coast Project was set up in July 2001 to take forward many of the wildlife related actions in the North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme (2001-6) that were not being dealt with by other organisations. Originally, it was anticipated that there would be three project staff – manager, education and arts officers. However, initial funding would only allow for one Project Officer, who started in post in July 2001. Further funding was secured for an Education Officer, who started in post in August 2004.

The Thanet Coast Project's remit is to:

- **Make people more aware of the importance of the bird & marine life** and how to avoid damage to it.
- **Implement Management Scheme actions**, eg 'Help local users produce, follow and monitor codes of conduct'.
- **Encourage or run wildlife related events** and make links with wildlife and green tourism, coastscape and the arts.
- **Be a focal point for enquiries** and gathering information.
- **Keep people informed**, eg newsletters, articles and stakeholder meetings to keep everyone up to date with progress.

## Engaging with people: methods

The Thanet Coast Project's work can be viewed on three distinct levels, according to the way that it engages with the local community and visitors to the coast. The gradient of awareness, interest and involvement increases along a scale, but in essence, these are:

Level 1: Raising awareness	Level 2: Raising interest & concern	Level 3: Public participation & action
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Examples of the various ways that the Thanet Coast Project has raised public awareness of this European marine site and coastline include:

- **Communications**
  - media: news releases; articles; radio interviews;
  - project representation: presentations; site visits; meetings;
  - networking: within local authority; with project partners and coastal user groups;
  - responding to public enquiries and requests for information;
  - keeping people informed: newsletters; leaflets; website; stakeholder meetings.

- **Implementing action - specific management scheme action: including awareness posters, signs, coastal bird wardens, volunteers and monitoring.**
- **Workshops - stakeholder meetings; writing the coastal codes.**
- **Public events & activities.**



Figure 1. Engaging with people: Examples of Thanet Coast newsletters and posters

## All our activities have an effect: voluntary codes of conduct

The *North East Kent European marine sites Management Scheme* was produced by the relevant authorities in conjunction with coastal stakeholders using consensus-building (stakeholder dialogue) workshops. The documents produced from the Management Scheme illustrate the important nature conservation and geological features of the coastline, to show that the Thanet coast really is an asset for all. However, all our coastal and marine activities have the potential to affect these features, and the main focus of the *action plan* is to consider what needs to be done to keep the geology and plant and animal life in good condition.

Whilst many of the actions needed are within the remit of the relevant authorities, and are often covered by their statutory duties, there were some recreational activities that local individuals and groups could act upon. The stakeholders agreed that a series of voluntary codes of conduct could help safeguard wildlife, while allowing locals and visitors to enjoy their coastal activities.



**Figure 2.** Examples of relevant authority statutory duty activities Statutory activities – from coastal defences, water quality testing, sea fisheries, and port authority dredging - are the responsibility of the relevant authorities.

The guidelines agreed with local stakeholders for producing these new voluntary codes of conduct were:

- to include information about how to avoid harming the bird & marine life,
- to encourage responsible use of the coast,
- and to include safety issues relating to the activity.

It was also agreed that:

- the codes would be written by stakeholders deciding together, and should encourage self-regulation by user groups, and
- the codes would be kept under review and monitored to check they are working.

The process for achieving this was carried out in three main steps:

- Step 1:** **Collate information** about codes from previous Management Scheme workshop information supplied by the stakeholders;
- Step 2:** **draft the codes** - using stakeholder information and incorporating advice from wider user contacts for this activity, using the guidelines above;
- Step 3:** **consensus building workshops** - with the relevant local stakeholders to agree on detailed content of the codes.

The workshops took place during 2001-2, and the Thanet Coastal Codes were launched in November 2002. This is the first time that a set of specific codes has been drawn up by local

users for a protected marine site in the UK. They include a general code to cover all beach users, plus codes for specific activities. Stakeholders from local interest groups, as well as individuals, were invited to participate in the workshops, and this was easier to organise where groups already existed. Most of the shellfish collectors and fixed netters were not willing to meet up with others at a workshop, but were willing to liaise in the field. The schools code was a late addition to complete the series, and was agreed by representative stakeholders through written comments. Some specific recreational activities were excluded from these codes. For example, surfers, where the effect was deemed to be minimal, or small recreational hovercraft where participatory numbers are low and advice can be given directly to the users concerned.

### **The Thanet Coastal Codes (2002)**

#### Shore-based recreation:

- seashore (general beach code),
- horse riding,
- dog walking,
- school (organised group) trips.

#### Water-based recreation:

- powercraft activities,
- wind-powered activities.

#### Fishing & harvesting:

- bait digging and collecting,
- shore angling,
- harvesting shellfish & fixed netting.



**Figure 3.** Thanet Coastal Codes workshop sheet in progress.

Some impressive results from the introduction of the coastal code have been recorded already. The level of disturbance to turnstones by coastal activities was reduced by as much

as 40% in this first year (The effects of human activity on turnstones and other wading birds within the Thanet and Sandwich Bay SPA, Kevin Webb). However, the codes were produced alongside other actions, such as turnstone posters, information signs and temporary coastal bird wardens and these all played their part. We cannot be complacent, as this initial success may be much more difficult to achieve over a longer period of time without developing new initiatives and relying on the continued support of the majority of coastal users. A downside to the voluntary codes is that despite goodwill by the majority of responsible users, it only takes one irresponsible person to let the others down.

Most of the information about the location of coastal activities in the Management Scheme was provided by word of mouth by various stakeholders. However, a more accurate account of the number of participants involved is required to form a baseline for these activities. Trial monitoring of the different coastal activities was carried out by Thanet Coast Project volunteers in 2003, and the information and technique is an important precursor to the new Thanet Coastal Warden Scheme.

### Specific actions and issues arising

Reference has been made to some of the specific projects that have come from the Management Scheme. For example, the turnstone signs, posters and temporary coastal bird wardens. The concept of the original codes of conduct has been streamlined to one set of voluntary coastal codes for recreational users, and one new *Research Code* for academic researchers (produced by the North East Kent Scientific Coastal Advisory Group).



Figure 4. Turnstone signs

However, there were numerous issues of local importance that were not included in the 2001-2006 Management Scheme. It is likely that these will be discussed during the imminent review of the scheme (2005-6), especially if this takes into account the principles of the wider ecosystem approach that is currently being advocated. These issues include:

- **Seaweed management:** driftweed management was recently included in a Site Management Statement agreed with the local authority. A new non-indigenous species, Wakame also requires adding to this list;
- **algae blooms** and better public awareness;
- **coastal litter** and practical action and links to Beachwatch/Adopt-a-Beach with Marine Conservation Society;
- **offshore seal colonies** and green tourism links as well as potential disturbance included within the codes. The Project acted as the local contact for the Phocine Distemper Virus in 2002-3;
- **cetacean bycatch** - records.

Two other issues that get extensive local publicity are **dogs on beaches** (environmental health issues), and **seagulls** (nesting, juveniles and protective parent seagulls). There are also potential links with national and regional recording schemes such as Jellyfish (Marine Conservation Society), eggcases of skates and rays (Shark Trust), MarLIN's signpost indicator species and Kent Shoresearch schemes.

In addition, there have been notable exclusions such as the impact of future climatic changes, and also the prospect of the chalk reef disappearing (or dissolving) before our eyes as three quarters of the Thanet chalk coast has sea defences preventing the natural dynamic process of retreat.

Other issues, such as the establishment of a coastal park suggested by stakeholders have not been taken forward by the local authority. However, a coastal park is mentioned within the Thanet Local Plan. One older initiative that was established before the Project was formed, the Thanet Coastal Path is in need of rejuvenating and the maintenance of the old panels have found their way into the work remit of the Project.

## **Thanet Coast's events and activities**

The Thanet Coast Project's diverse events programme has gone from strength to strength since it started in 2002. This approach to raising awareness, interest and engaging with people has followed a distinctive style to promote links between local marine and coastal wildlife and green tourism, the local marine environment, coastscape and, more recently, the arts. At first this could seem in quite a stark contrast to many other protected marine sites, where similar project officers do not run such extensive events programme.



**Figure 5.** Rockpool recording at Birchington.

Examples of the Thanet Coast events:

- ‘Seashore safaris’ - aimed at families over the schools holidays,
- ‘Chalk Walks’ with the Rock Doc - bringing the history of the rocks to life,
- ‘Wildlife Sailing’ excursions - to the seals and sandbanks,
- ‘Secrets of seaweeds’ - with expert help from Dr Ian Tittley, Natural History Museum,
- ‘Rocky Shore Discovery Tour’ - with Ian Humpheryes, to see what lurks between the tides,
- beach cleans.

The main focus for events has been centred around regional and national awareness initiatives, such as Marine Week (with the Wildlife Trusts-South East); Low Tide Day (River Oceans); Beachwatch (Marine Conservation Society) and World Ocean Day. The most popular activities have been the Seashore Safaris that take place around various different bays each year. These have been run in conjunction with the Kent Wildlife Trust, and over the last summer involved trial rockpool recording forms to help focus attention on the life found on the shore. There have also been links with the work of other county initiatives such as Kent Shoresearch (intertidal) and Kent Seasearch (subtidal) volunteer recording projects.



**Figure 6.** From top-left to right: Seashore safari (Stone Bay, Broadstairs), Chalk walk with the Rock Doc, , Marine Week (with Wildlife Trusts) – Whale & Dolphin roadshow, Sea cave – ‘Seaweeds and their secrets’.

In addition, there have been new links with artists during 2004, leading to further events, such as:

- ‘Life’s-A-Beach’ exhibition - with local 12 artists on display for a month;
- Sand art, Angela Molloy and Lauren Sebastian;
- Thanet Coast’s Big Draw, involving 20 different artists, co-ordinated by Paul Goodrick;
- Sand wind-barriers, Paul Goodrick working with a very amenable JCB driver/local authority;
- Beach clean collage, Ruth Cutler, Low Tide Day and beach clean.

There are a few projects which involve direct practical action each year, such as the beach cleans in the spring and autumn. These concentrate on the sections of coastline between Birchington and Reculver - where no authorities arrange for coastal litter to be collected. Pegwell Bay, the only National Nature Reserve in the Thanet Coast area, always seems to need volunteer help to keep the beach clean.



**Figure 8.** From top-left to right: Thanet Coast's Big Draw , Sand plaice by Angela Molloy, Life's a Beach art exhibition, Shellfish art (fish) by Angela Molloy.

The level of public 'engagement', as discussed earlier, varies depending on the type of public event. However, the number of these events and people participating has been steadily increasing.

Year	Number of public events	Participants
2002	25 events	600
2003	40 events	942
2004	53 events	2126

Whilst these are the Coast Project's public events, these figures exclude all the stakeholder workshop participants, other organisation events attended (eg Community Fairs), organised group events and presentations given to local organisations.

### **Brief analysis, 2004 achievements and the future**

Looking at the first three years of the Thanet Coast Project, my personal analysis of the Project's work would include the following.

The **strengths** include dramatically raising the profile of coastal nature conservation in Thanet, by raising awareness of issues of concern, and encouraging positive action by coastal users and visitors to the area. Much new work has been forged through new partnerships with organisations such as the Kent Wildlife Trust, which has enabled both our organisations to work more effectively within the area. The Thanet Coast Project has also developed a reputation of quality and a distinctive style (eg newsletters and leaflets) and has demonstrated that it can help to resolve potential conflicts and promote good practice in conjunction with the coastal users.

The **weaknesses** are that the project has very limited financial resources, and staff numbers. Consequently, methods have often relied on voluntary help (development of codes, wardens, leaders, and experts on events giving their time for free). The Sandwich and Pegwell National Nature Reserve within the North East Kent European marine sites has recently received many complaints about incompatible activities. For example, speeding powercraft and kite-surfing etc.

However, the **opportunities** are there. A recent successful Heritage Lottery Fund application has enabled a second member of staff, an Education Officer, to start (31 August 2004). The new post is focusing on running the new voluntary Thanet Coastal Warden Scheme to further engage people with their own local sections of coastline. The officer will also develop new links with community groups, and run more regular coastal stakeholder meetings.

There are also **lessons to be learnt** so that the project can improve. For example, in areas such as the recent monitoring trials and brand new work with artists. There are opportunities to explore new and inspiring ways of raising public awareness about the importance of their coastline - so there are still plenty of things to do!

**Threats** include the uncertainty of future support from funding partners. The Project needs to be seen as independent from any one of the partner organisations and so requires a Memorandum of Agreement which will enable it to seek extra funds. There is a continual need to establish where future funding is coming from, to keep the work going! The current project funding is due to end in 2006.

The Thanet Coast Project has achieved much over the last year. In particular,

- a new set of four display panels,
- a web-site: [www.thanetcoast.org.uk](http://www.thanetcoast.org.uk),
- its most extensive coastal events programme,
- a successful Heritage Lottery Fund application,
- Thanet Coast Education Officer started,
- educational/community liaison links (eg whale and dolphin roadshow school visits),
- new Thanet Coast Warden Scheme (launch: 25 Nov 2004, Community Pharmacy Gallery, Margate),
- more regular stakeholder events, every six months.

In 2005 we hope to do more of the same with:

- Thanet Coastal Warden volunteer training – core and optional modules,
- more links to local community groups (Millennium Volunteers; WI; 16+ Youth Forum),
- revision/reprint: Management Scheme - Summary (booklet),
- update/reprint: Thanet Coastal Codes and revised (booklet),
- starting the revision of the Management Scheme process,
- and a more extensive events programme!



**Figure 10.** Beach clean volunteers

As long as funding can be found to secure the Project's future then prospects to build on past achievements look bright! The most exciting future prospect is the work to develop new links beyond our current local stakeholder input to the Project and Management Scheme. By encouraging local people to volunteer as Coastal Wardens, where they will act as the 'eyes & ears' of their local stretch of coastline, they will be able to contribute directly by helping to monitor coastal activities and wildlife, report incidents and champion the importance of our local coast and marine environment. This will be the second coastal warden scheme in the country and will trial new methods of working, such as a Volunteers' Agreement. The coastal volunteer approach could be one of the best ways to build greater links between the natural asset of the north east Kent coastline and the local community and coastal users.

# **An anthropological study of Kent Fishing communities – research objectives and methodology**

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## **Introduction**

From October 2003, a team of four anthropologists have been conducting research on fishing communities on the North Kent coast. The project, 'A Study of small-scale fishing, Thanet Coast, Kent', has been funded for 18 months by the Economics and Social Science Research Council (ESRC). The research team consists of Roger Just, Glenn Bowman, Cecilia Busby and Yoshitaka Ota. Roger Just is the project leader, and Yoshitaka Ota has carried out most of the field research. Glen Bowman and Cecilia Busby focus on specific aspects of the topic, such as its visual documentation and gender relations within the communities.

The outcome of this research will be presented as an academic report to the Economics and Social Science Research Council in late March 2005. We will also give two presentations at the 2005 Marine Studies Conference in Amsterdam in early July 2005. Those presentations will subsequently be published in anthropological journals. The project has been specifically designed as a pilot study, and a further project proposal has now been submitted to the ESRC. If it is successful, then the same team will conduct a multi-sited study of small-scale sea fishing communities in four locations in both in Europe (Dover Strait) and Africa (Indian Ocean).

## **Background**

The common assumption is that the present demise of UK fisheries is a direct result of over-fishing and of declining fish stocks. The press has regularly reported that stocks of such staple fish as cod and skate are falling below sustainable levels, and in some cases are already locally extinct.<sup>1</sup> This severity of the crisis, claimed by both the media and statutory bodies, has prompted a political action: the EU Commission's drastic overhauling of its Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). Consequently, UK fisheries now face a dilemma; if something is not done to reduce the over-exploitation of fish-stocks, the industry will collapse; if something is done, then it would appear to be at the expense of local fishers who must pay the price of conservation measures.

## **Research objectives**

We hope to provide through our research a better understanding of UK small-scale fisheries, and thus to contribute to the industry's future support.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*, 17 December 2001; *The Guardian*, 21 March 2002; *The Guardian*, 22 March 2002; *The Guardian*, 28 March 2002; *The Guardian*, 1 June 2002; *Financial Times*, 18 July 2002.

We have allowed 12 months for field research, and 6 months for data handling and analysis. We have limited the study to two fishing communities on the North Kent coast: Whitstable and Ramsgate.

In order to gain a comprehensive picture of these communities, three types of research data are being collected:

1. Quantitative data to ascertain the real scale of the communities' activities, including the number of boats and fishers engaged in small-scale fishing;
2. Qualitative data concerning human relationships with the marine environment, eg fishers' own perceptions of the seascapes with which they engage, and their narrative accounts of the operation of different fishing methods;
3. Qualitative and quantitative data concerning the social context of small-scale fisheries, eg the life histories of fishers, and the pattern of their everyday social interaction.

By amalgamating and analysing all three types of data, we hope in the end to be able to determine (amongst other things):

- i. The economic viability of the local fishing industry;
- ii. The social and cultural impact on local communities of the (possible) demise of fishing;
- iii. The possibility (and acceptability) of alternative employment opportunities for local fishers.

## **Theoretical framework**

There have been two notable anthropological studies of contemporary British fishing communities. Theoretically, they both focused on the construction of community, and on fishing as a source of social identity. Anthony Cohen (1987) studied the community of Whalsay in the Shetland Isles from the mid 1970s to the mid 1980s, a period during which fishing was undergoing a significant social and economic transformation from a subsistence and/or part-time activity to a capital-intensive industry. Through his extensive field research, Cohen observed that the people in Whalsay retained their sense of cultural difference between 'inside' and 'outside' of the community despite social and economic changes. For them, Cohen argues, the increase in their contact with the outside world did not result in 'blurring of the community's boundary', but, rather, they persistently reasserted the distinctiveness of 'Whalsay life' by the 'subtle use of community symbols' (or 'ideas behind words'), which was engaged with both communal and individual interests.<sup>2</sup>

More recently, Jane Nadel-Klein (2003) has published an account of a fishing village on the coast of Scotland that was undergoing severe economic decline. Economic pressures and the struggle to make a living from the sea were causes of constant anxiety, not only in relation to the survival of fishing as an economically viable occupation, but also in connection to the loss of a particular way of life, a 'culture', that the villagers saw as inextricably linked to fishing. The villagers' solution was to self-consciously promote their fishing heritage as a

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<sup>2</sup> Cohen, A. 1987. *Whalsay – Symbol, segment and boundary in a Shetland island community*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

tourist attraction and to present themselves to others as authentic, living ‘fishfolk’. Their cultural heritage became itself a commodity able to sustain the local economy. But as Nadel-Klein argues, this act of ‘(cultural) heritage making’ was not merely a pragmatic choice for a community trying to survive in what had become an economic cul-de-sac; it was also genuinely an ‘act of telling...an argument for their worth and their right to place’. People were able, collectively and individually, to retain their identity, but as a form of ‘heritage’ rather than an economic practice<sup>3</sup>.

Like these two studies, our research in Kent focuses on the construction of community and on the forms of social identity created within the local fishery. We consider fishing as an encompassing ‘way of life’, thought both by fishers themselves and by outsiders to imbue its practitioners with a particular ethos or character. However, we have also been able to participate in, and to take much fuller account of, the actual technical practice of fishing on a day-to-day basis, rather than having to concentrate solely on questions of discourse and ‘heritage’. Consequently, we hope to be able to show in a much more direct way the versatile nature of small-scale fishing gives rise to different forms of social identity.

## **Research method**

In this study we have employed the two standard research methods of social anthropology: ‘participant observation’ and long-term interviews.

Our use of participant observation stems from a desire to observe and interact with our subjects on a day-to-day basis in order to come to know and to understand fishing as it is actually practised by fishers. Long-term semi-structured interviews are conducted in order to allow fishers themselves to take the initiative in describing their lives and practices. Through this combination of methods we are able to experience fishing ‘from the inside’ and to learn in a quite practical way through daily interaction and participation what it is to be a fisherman, and also to identify specific issues that concern individual fishers as they describe and comment on their own lives.

Thus far, we have recorded interviews with 27 of the 36 men currently working as a full-time fishers. Through participant observation (including the time I have spent just ‘hanging around’ at the harbour) I have come to know 94 individuals who are in some ways linked to the local fishery, including part-time crew, fish traders, boat owners and retired fishers. I have also acquired a knowledge of three different fishing methods - trawling, netting and potting - and the different techniques involved in each, by having participated in more than 25 fishing trips on 14 different boats.

## **Some findings**

We are currently reviewing the data collected over the 12 months’ field research period. What I list below are just a few observations perhaps of interest to those who know little or nothing about fishing along the North Kent coast. A detailed account of our findings will be written up over the next six months.

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<sup>3</sup> Nadel-Klein, J. 2003. *Fishing for Heritage – modernity and loss along the Scottish coast*. London: Berg

- i. There is a significant difference in the scale of fishing between Ramsgate and Whitstable. Ramsgate has approximately three times as many fishing vessels and fishers operating from its harbour as Whitstable does.
- ii. Most fishing vessels and fishermen now based in Ramsgate are originally from other harbours along the North Kent coast including Margate, Deal and Broadstairs, and those who fish from Ramsgate actually reside in three different towns. Fishing vessels and fishers based in Whitstable use only the Whitstable harbour, and are resident in Whitstable. Whitstable fishers thus constitute a much more cohesive local community than do fishers from Ramsgate.
- iii. Perhaps as a consequence of their not constituting a long-term local community, fishers based in Ramsgate have organised themselves into a well-run formal union, the Ramsgate Fishers Association. Whitstable fishers have no such organisation, and perhaps need none, since their cohesion is based on long-term familiarity - although it must be admitted that one company, the Cardinum Shell Fishery, employs half of the fishing population from the harbour.
- iv. There is also a distinctive difference between Ramsgate and Whitstable fishers in terms of their fishing methods: fishing in Ramsgate is dominated by netting, whereas fishing in Whitstable is dominated by trawling. These different methods may relate to the different constitutions of the fishing populations, for it is easier to move into netting than into trawling, and Ramsgate's fishing community is a less stable one than Whitstable's.
- v. The decline of North Kent fishing may not necessarily have been caused solely by over-fishing. Certainly fishers claim that other factors including sewage pollution and climate change must be taken into account.
- vi. Many fishers claim that they have suffered as a result of external pressures coming from both statutory bodies and the private sector. Some see that there will be more unrecognised socio-economic and environmental pressures on the industry, including disturbance to their fishing grounds caused by new off-shore developments such as wind farm.
- vii. Fishers in North Kent show a collective sense of camaraderie in their everyday practice of fishing, and they have always maintained a sense of being a 'community' of fishers, despite their strong sense of independence, competitiveness and territoriality - factors which, to some extent, have weakened their ability to negotiate with external bodies.

# **The Kent Coastal Network**

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## **Introduction - why a Network?**

Kent has one of the longest and most varied coastlines in England. The coastline to some is just a backdrop to their lives but to more it is a source of pleasure, providing leisure opportunities and points of historical interest. To others it is a commercial resource that provides resources for exploitation and passage to other countries. In addition, to some, Kent's coastline is a barrier to the encroaching sea and the potential for flooding that this brings. Kent's coast is also of national and international importance, being home to a number of exceptional natural habitats.

All of these interests put pressures on the coast, which need to be effectively and responsibly managed, and any management decisions need to be based on sound advice and research. Within Kent there are a multitude of different bodies, partnerships and projects that are concerned with delivering or assisting in the delivery of the sustainable management and use of the coast.

The challenge, with such a diverse range of stakeholders, is disseminating this work out to all the relevant organisations. Without effective communication, duplication of work can occur and opportunities for partnership working, and therefore sharing of resources and costs, can be missed.

Whilst there are a number of partnership bodies which enabled discussion and working between different organisations, these are largely regional and there is little opportunity for a county-wide exchange of information.

In response to this, the Kent Coastal Network was established. This paper outlines the development of the Network, its aims and activities and the benefits of a coastal network for Kent.

## **The development of the Network**

The need for a forum or network that linked the coastal stakeholders of Kent was identified through consultation with various bodies. The initiative was taken forward by Kent County Council, and assisted by funding from SAIL (Interreg IIIB).

Kent County Council was keen that any subsequent development of a network should be taken forward in partnership with those who would potentially benefit from a coastal forum of some sort. A workshop was established to discuss the establishment of a network and to agree that there was a need for its development. By developing the structure and workings of the Network with potential members, it was ensured that the resulting Network was one that stakeholders would be willing to contribute to, want to be engaged in and hence ensure that it would be effective.

One of the main considerations during the Network's development was how it could deliver benefits to members, such as improving communication and facilitating the exchange of information, without putting increased pressures on member's already constrained time and resources. It was agreed the best way to address this would be to use communication methods, such as emails, bulletins and a website, to keep members in touch with each others activities, removing the need to meet on a regular basis. However the value of networking with members was recognised and the convening of the Network once a year was recommended.

As a result of the workshop and discussions, the Kent Coastal Network was established in late spring 2004. The membership of the Network has grown steadily and to date the Network has attracted over one hundred members, representing over sixty-five different organisations.

## **Network aims**

The main aims of the Network are to improve communication and increase awareness of the activities taking place along Kent's coast. This helps to reduce duplication of effort and enables members to identify opportunities for working together and to also identify where experience and knowledge lies and hence where advice and learning can be sought.

In addition the Network also aims to facilitate working in partnership and to provide a platform for discussion of common issues. The Network represents a wealth of knowledge and experience and provides opportunities to share this to tackle common issues facing the coast.

## **Network activities**

The Network undertakes a number of various activities in order to achieve the aforementioned aims. These are detailed below.

### **Bulletin**

The bulletin is distributed quarterly and to date three editions have been published (all bulletins are available from the Kent Coastal Network website <http://coastalkent.net/bulletins.php>). The bulletin has a distribution number of over 600 to Network members, national organisations and non-members. The aim of the bulletin is to promote the valuable work being undertaken in Kent and reports on member news and Network activities. It also features articles looking at issues for the Kent coast and details events and research taking place within the county. The bulletin is open to all Network members for the promotion of their activities.

### **Email updates**

The purpose of the email update is to keep members informed of activities in between bulletins and goes out once or twice a month depending on the level of news. As with the bulletin, it updates on member and Network news and events and also highlights any points of interest from the UK. The email update also provides members with the facility to request information from other members or to consult with them.

## **Website**

The Network also has a website at [www.coastalkent.net](http://www.coastalkent.net). As the Network represents many of Kent's coastal stakeholders, the website's member database provides a vital information portal on the key organisations working for Kent's coast. The database can be viewed either by sector category or by an A-Z listing. However, visitors to the website may not always know the organisation they are looking for, so a useful search function has been included that will allow users to identify which organisation is associated with the particular issue they are concerned with. The database provides a summary of the member's roles and responsibilities, contact details and an outline of their current activities.

In addition to information on the Network and its members, the website also lists for the Network, members and other relevant UK organisations events and news and any member can use these pages to promote their activities. Members are informed of new articles and events through the monthly email update.

The website also has the facility to download the current and past editions of the Kent Coast Bulletin and to register as a member of the Network. It is anticipated that the website will assist in the wider promotion of the Network and will help to attract new members in order to expand and develop the already strong member base. In addition, each member will also be promoted and will have the opportunity to promote their work further by submitting news articles and events to be featured on the website. The website will also act as a one stop shop for information on the activities taking place in Kent and the organisations carrying them out.

## **Working groups**

As previously mentioned, the Network represents many different stakeholders and therefore can act as a facilitator in getting people together to discuss common issues. These form the Network working groups. Such working groups provide an opportunity to not only discuss the issue but share and learn from the wealth of experience and knowledge within the Network. Working groups are set up to address issues which are common to the coastline of Kent, with the aim of identifying ways to improve the situation.

The first Network working group was held in October 2004 to look at the management of Personal Water Craft (PWCs), which had previously been identified as an issue.

### **PWC Working Group results**

Personal Water Craft (PWC) management is an issue facing many coastal managers around the coast of Kent and the PWC Working Group was established to bring together all relevant stakeholders to discuss this pertinent issue. The first meeting was held on 15th October with the aim of providing a platform for the sharing of experience and knowledge and the discussion of effective PWC management. A further aim of the Group was to identify actions to be taken forward in partnership to address the management of PWCs in Kent.

The meeting was attended by all major stakeholders, offering a valuable opportunity to discuss the management of PWCs in a fully integrated and holistic way. Stakeholder groups represented at the meeting included:

- local authorities,
- regulators and safety authorities
- yachting and recreation clubs,
- PWC riders.
- coastal partnerships,
- environmental bodies,
- ports.

The wide representation at the meeting meant that contacts were established that might not have been otherwise and the different sectors were able to hear the concerns of others, helping to address any previously held misconceptions.

To set the context before discussions commenced, a number of members of the group provided viewpoints and experiences of management, safety, environmental impact and the sport itself. Presentations were provided by:

- Captain Peter White (Medway Ports) on experiences with PWC activity and control in the Medway and Swale;
- John Hawkins (Canterbury City Council) on the highly successful PWC management scheme at Whitstable and Herne Bay;
- Guy Addinton (RNLI) on safety issues relating to PWC use;
- Susannah Peckham (English Nature) on the environmental impacts of PWCs and management to minimise this;
- Chris Neville-Parry (Personal Watercraft Partnership) on experiences of PWC use and management in the UK;
- John Biggar (JAWS) providing the PWC rider's perspective.

The conclusions of the Group's discussions are summarised below:

- majority of problems are caused by a limited number of individuals, unregulated by management schemes or clubs;
- controlled launch sites and management schemes have proven success, however they are neither easy nor cheap to establish, therefore self-regulation through clubs is seen as the best way to proceed in the first instance;
- clubs have an important role to play, not only in regulation but also in training and education;
- information provided at launch sites needs to be maintained to ensure users of the water are fully aware of restrictions. However, this is made difficult by vandalism of signs;
- education of all parties is key;
- the extent of the problem in Kent is not fully understood.

In order to address the above points, the Group identified a number of actions as summarised below:

- production of a map of launch sites and designated PWC areas in Kent;
- development of a Kent wide code of conduct for PWC use;

- more interaction between PWC clubs and other water user clubs to improve communication and reduce conflict;
- development of a database of contacts who can provide help and advice on PWC management;
- awareness raising activities, such as articles in the press and seminars;
- establishment of an intelligence profile of PWC activity in Kent to identify problem areas and prioritise issues for attention;
- production of an information leaflet on environmental impacts and considerations for Kent.

Over the course of the next few months these actions will be taken forward by members of the working group and progress will be reported through the Kent Coastal Network website and this Bulletin. The Working Group report, with full details of the presentations and discussion, is available to download from the Kent Coastal Network website at [www.coastalkent.net/news.php?id=19](http://www.coastalkent.net/news.php?id=19)

## **Conference**

The final activity of the Network will be the hosting of an annual conference, which will provide the opportunity for members to discuss their work of the past year and their aspirations for the next. The conference and its resulting proceedings would therefore act as a showcase for the valuable work and activities taking place along the Kent coast. It is anticipated that the first conference will be held early summer 2005.

## **Benefits of Network**

Network membership is open to anyone with an interest in Kent's coast and is free of charge. As a member, there are a number of benefits to be gained:

- improved awareness of coastal activities in Kent;
- the opportunity to promote work to a wide range of coastal stakeholders;
- the opportunity to work with others to address Kent's coastal issues;
- exchange of knowledge and experience;
- reduced duplication of effort;
- opportunities for partnership working and funding;
- shared resources and costs.

## **Further information**

For further information on the Network see [www.coastalkent.net](http://www.coastalkent.net) or contact [kent.coasts@kent.gov.uk](mailto:kent.coasts@kent.gov.uk)