



## **MAINTENANCE DREDGING PROTOCOL**

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The UK Government considers that maintenance dredging is classified as a 'plan or project' under the 1992 Habitats Directive. Poole Harbour qualifies under these Regulations as a Special Protection Area.

Ports, harbours and the maritime leisure industry, whilst not endorsing this view, have agreed to work closely with DEFRA, Department for Transport and Natural England to develop an approach which will allow the effect of maintenance dredging operations to be assessed, without placing a disproportionate burden on those who commission or execute these operations.

There will still be a requirement for the Marine & Fisheries Agency to issue dredge disposal (FEPA) and dredge extraction (CPA) consents. The proposals do not apply to capital dredging.

The proposed solution is a Protocol which in Poole's case will be harbour-wide, covering all dredging aspects, not only PHC's maintenance dredging, but that of the other operators in the harbour.

To provide a basis against which maintenance dredging applications can be assessed, this Protocol recommends preparation of a Baseline Document. This document will draw on existing and readily available information, and will describe the current and historical patterns of dredging in relation to the conservation status of the Harbour. The majority of data is available as a result of the Channel Deepening EIA. The first phase of consents issued under this Protocol will use the Baseline Document as the foundation for obtaining the necessary Habitats Regulation's clearances. Once established, the Baseline Document will be periodically updated for use as a reference document in seeking subsequent consents.

The Baseline Document will contain information to allow all conservation aspects relevant to the Harbour to be considered and the dredging approach, including the tolerance parameters, will be defined. Although preparation of a Baseline Document does not in itself mean there is no adverse effect, the presumption is that most maintenance dredging proposals as described in the Baseline Document are unlikely to have a significant effect, usually without the need for further detailed research or consideration. This streamlined approach will enable those proposals not likely to have a significant effect on the harbour to be quickly and easily approved.

At present there is a moratorium by Natural England allowing maintenance dredging to continue. PHC have two dumping at sea licences which are due for renewal in September this year, and Natural England have indicated that Poole Harbour is one of the first sites that will be subject to greater scrutiny at renewal of licences.

It is recommended that PHC, as a leading player in the development of the Protocol and with their recently acquired trial licence to disperse material in the Harbour, sign up to the Protocol in order to allow us to have a greater influence on how Baseline Documents are prepared and ensure as smooth a renewal of maintenance licences as possible.

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