

**Environment Agency**  
**Environment Programme Update**  
**Port of Plymouth Marine Liaison Committee**  
**8<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

### **Monitoring Marine Protected Areas**

In recent years it has become clear, both in the UK and globally, that interventions are urgently needed to protect our precious marine wildlife and safeguard the resources provided to us by the sea. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are tools used by marine managers to conserve areas of the most vulnerable or 'valuable' species and habitats.



In UK waters our [extensive MPA network](#) has expanded over the last decade to include 377 MPAs, with a [coverage of 38%](#) of our waters. Surpassing the 30% designation target is an enormously positive achievement. MPAs are unlikely to succeed unless they are carefully managed, and their performance evaluated. Monitoring (where information is regularly collected through time) is a critical part of this evaluation process to help scientists understand whether management is leading to positive environmental outcomes. More information can be found on the [Defra Marine Science Blog](#).

### **Bathing Waters**



Our local designated bathing waters (Kingsand, Cawsand, Firestone Bay, Plymouth Hoe West, Plymouth Hoe East, Bovisand and Wembury) have all achieved an overall status of 'excellent' for the 2023 bathing season. For every designated bathing water in England, the Environment Agency monitors *Escherichia coli* and *Intestinal enterococci* in the water, throughout the bathing season (15 May to 30 September). Values can vary depending on the weather, pollution from agricultural and urban sources, storm water overflows, amongst other factors. More information on each of the bathing waters can be found on our [Swimfo](#) website.

### **Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund**

A 3<sup>rd</sup> round of funding has been announced to support farmers in accessing nature markets and the develop of nature projects that:

- help farmers achieve one or more natural environmental outcomes from the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#)
- have the ability to help farmers produce revenue from ecosystem services to attract and repay investment
- produce an investment model that can be scaled up and reproduced by farmers



It is expected that proposals focus on generating revenue from ecosystem services alongside food production, such as:

- selling carbon units from woodland creation or peatland restoration, using the [Woodland Carbon Code](#) or [Peatland Code](#)
- selling biodiversity units from a habitat bank, using the Natural England [biodiversity offsetting metric](#)
- selling 'catchment services' (such as improved water quality and natural flood management benefits) resulting from natural environment improvements

## National Drought Group

The [National Drought Group](#), chaired by Environment Agency Executive Director John Leyland, came together in December to discuss the proactive steps being taken to ensure water resilience ahead of future droughts. The Group explored how all sectors can better collaborate to join up how we communicate drought, plan for future droughts, and explore quicker delivery on larger and more strategic resource options. Key points from the meeting included:

- England has experienced the third wettest autumn this century, which has helped to improve the water resources outlook. Despite the improved position, the Group continues to prepare for future droughts in light of increasingly volatile weather patterns due to climate change.
- The EA is taking action to get ahead of drought, including updating its operational area drought plans, updating water company drought plan guidance, and working on longer term improvements with drought resilience.
- Water companies are undertaking winter communication campaigns and focusing on reducing leakage – and to halve it by 2050.
- The National Farmers Union explained the work to support the agriculture sector improve its resilience to droughts.
- The Consumer Council for Water shared an update on its work on drought messages.



## Tamar Catchment Partnership



Our Winter Catchment Partnership meeting was held in Lifton Community Centre in the Upper Tamar's River Lyd Catchment. Over 65 active stakeholder partners attended to hear keynote presentations from Environment Agency, South West Water, Plymouth Marine Laboratory and Plymouth City Council. The presentations covered topics on water transformation, climate resilience and adaptation, overall water quality of the Tamar from source to sea, reduction in point source pollution, securing future water resources and Biodiversity Net Gain. Following a Q&A session partners presented updates on the many [projects](#) being undertaken to improve the Tamar water environment. For further information on the Catchment Partnership and future partnership events please contact [jenny@wrt.org.uk](mailto:jenny@wrt.org.uk).

## Environment Programme

Our Environment Programme continues to deliver a wide range of partnership programmes and projects in the Tamar Management Catchment. Some of the new projects recently initiated during 2023/24 include:

**Haye Marsh Feasibility Study** – led by the National Trust, this study will look at various options to create a further 17 Ha of important inter tidal habitat in the Tamar Estuary water body.

**River Meavy Improvements** – led by South West Lakes Trust, this 2 year project will design and implement a range of natural process interventions to the Meavy, Narrator and Newley Combe Lakes to help improve the quality of the water environment.

**The Walkham Valley Landscape Recovery Project** – led by the Dartmoor National Park Authority, this project has been successful in securing a share of a £25M fund that is focused on delivering benefits to the environment in harmony with food production.

**Upper Tamar Beaver Readiness** – is a partnership project led by Devon Wildlife Trust and will develop Green Finance Funded interventions that support Beaver Habitats. Work is taking place with landowners in the River Derril, Deer, Claw, Carey and Upper Tamar which are all water bodies in the Upper Tamar Focus Area.

**Kingsand, Cawsand and Mill Brook Natural Flood Management** - led by West Country Rivers Trust, a bid has been submitted into the £25M Natural Flood Management Programme fund to design and deliver a range of interventions across three catchments that discharge into the Plymouth Sound and Tamar Estuary water bodies. We expect to hear if the bid has been successful later this month.

**Yealm Saltmarsh Survey** – led by South Devon National Landscapes, this project will ground truth existing evidence with an objective of developing interventions to protect and where appropriate expand this important habitat.

In addition to the new projects the following multi-year projects include:

**Upper Tavy Fish Assessment** – led by the Environment Agency, our sampling for the presence of protected species in the Upper Tavy using Environmental DNA (eDNA) techniques has been completed and the results are expected to be available by end of March 2024.

**Tory Brook and Long Brook Improvements** – we have previously reported that we have undertaken an assessment of these water bodies that both have their confluence with the Plym Estuary. We are now preparing the next stages of the project to improve their overall climate resilience.

**Tamara Landscape Partnership** – we are working in partnership with Tamar Valley AONB to identify and implement interventions to improve water quality on the Luckett Stream, focusing on pressures from land management and wastewater from abandoned metal mines.

**Yealm Working Group** – comprising Environment Agency, Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England, South Devon AONB, Westcountry Rivers Trust and Yealm Management Group with a view to coordinate programmes of work being undertaken in the Yealm Catchment. Specific focus was given to opportunity mapping to capture work being undertaken and where key gaps exist.

**Fish Barrier Programme** - Our Environment Programme facilitates quarterly workshops with Westcountry Rivers Trust to identify, prioritise and assess action required for informal, formal and debris dam fish barriers; the output is used to bid for funding to address those barriers that present issues.

**Upper Tamar Working Group** – coordinates several established programmes to target those water bodies in the Upper Tamar that are at poor ecological status. The work has been strengthened with the new Agriculture Regulatory Team and increased Environment Management resources to target non-compliances in the agricultural, water industry and domestic private sewage systems.

**Upper Tavy Working Group** – has held its 5<sup>th</sup> meeting in which partners looked at existing work and opportunities in the Tavy Catchment. Partners include Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Tamar Valley AONB and Westcountry Rivers Trust to coordinate programmes of work being undertaken in the Tavy Catchment.

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