

*Note: the **Studland Bay Preservation Association** has played a leading role in challenging the need for restrictions on the use of Studland Bay, and BORG and the SBPA have worked closely together. The Association's members are mainly local residents with invaluable practical experience and knowledge of the Bay.*

## **PRESENTATION TO THE MMO MEETING 26 NOVEMBER POOLE /SBPA**

**1.The Studland Bay Preservation Association** was formed a few years ago and stands for leaving the Bay free of unnecessary regulation and free for all to enjoy their recreational pursuits. If regulation of any activities, based on sound evidence, is found to be necessary then we would of course go along with it. I ended the last MMO meeting by rather angrily pointing out that we had not discussed recreation at all and that recreation was the most important activity in Studland Bay. There was no time left to expand on my outburst. I now have the opportunity to say a bit about recreation and give SBPA's viewpoint on the whole MCZ process to date.

**2.Recreation.** The well known activities of Boating, Kayaking, fishing – hobby and commercial, water skiing, jetskis, swimming, snorkelling, diving etc all take place in Studland bay. Take boating for example. There are some 6000 boats in the various marinas of Poole harbour and 1000 registered fishing boats. Many boats like to visit Studland bay- particularly the Southern bay because of its sheltered location and scenery. It is one of the busiest pleasure craft anchorages on the South coast and has been for many years. In Studland the local Pub, cafes, shop, restaurants, B&Bs and hotels all rely on these visiting boats. Marinas, chandlers etc in Poole depend on it. The Marine leisure sector is a significant factor in coastal economies. It earns over 3 billion a year and employs 34,000 people. Sunseeker of Poole a major contributor to the South coast leisure boating industry uses Studland Bay. The recreational activities are all part of the huge tourist industry on which the coastal communities depend. The recreational activity in the Bay must be equal to places like Torquay, Brighton and Blackpool. Do we really want to reduce this important industry by management restrictions? I would suggest we need to sustain the increase in growth in recreational activities not limit it by restricting growth.

**3. MCZ status for Studland Bay?** We all realise that the bay has considerable, healthy and expanding eelgrass beds and that this is a wonderful habitat for a variety of marine life. Because of this it is right that the Bay should be considered for MCZ status but this decision will be made later by the Government after the public consultation. Hopefully the huge Socio economic factors will come into play in the next few months and it will be realised that the Bay is not an automatic choice for MCZ status. We have studied the pros and cons and feel it would be unwise to select Studland bay as an MCZ due to its high recreational usage. MCZ status will inevitably mean the curtailment of some recreational pursuits and encourage the ongoing disagreement between career conservationists and users of the bay. The NE final report to Defra states that Studland Bay is only at high risk because it contains features (Eelgrass and Seahorses) which are subject to one or more pressures causing damage or deterioration (anchoring and mooring damage). This statement by NE is untrue and we strongly object as we don't believe Recovery is required. We will of course be accused of "not in my back yard" but there are plenty of other similar, less used areas of eelgrass which could be designated as MCZs to allow the Government to achieve its goal of a network of interlinking MPAs. Incidentally the best maps of eelgrass distribution along the South coast I've seen are produced by SIFCA who have done their own research into eelgrass distribution.

**4. MCZ Process to date.** It is increasingly clear to us that Natural England decided at the start of the Finding Sanctuary process that Studland bay should be an MCZ. Their staff influenced the Finding Sanctuary process on what to recommend, accepted the recommendations on the Scientific Advisory panel and ensured their final report to DEFRA supports the earlier made decision that Studland bay should be made an MCZ. The NE final report recommends that the bay should be an early designated MCZ because the eelgrass beds are subject to Anchoring and Mooring damage and need to recover. Unfortunately NE have failed to include the Seastar Survey results in their report so the report now before Defra is a misrepresentation of the facts and was out of date before it was signed off. We are suspicious and suggest that Seastar's findings were deliberately brushed aside until it was too late to include them in the NE report. The findings of the Seastar have far wider implications

concerning anchoring restrictions in other heavily used anchorages along the south coast particularly the IOW.

The Conservation objectives for Studland are yet to be decided. We understand will be decided by MMO after designation of MCZs by the Government. We at this stage of the proceedings can't see the need for any conservation objectives except maintain the current condition of the eelgrass beds which are generally healthy and expanding. Studland Bay does not deserve 'Recover' status. No consideration has yet been given to the important Recreational activities in the Bay. So now I will turn to our views on the topical issues in the MCZ process.

**5. Anchoring damage.** Anchors may cause slight superficial damage but this is quickly repaired. The Seastar survey Report clearly states that "there is no consistent evidence of boat anchoring impacting the eelgrass habitat". Anchoring has been intensive in the Bay for the last 50 years and still the eelgrass continues to increase and be reasonably healthy.

**6. Mooring damage.** Yes this occurs around some moorings which are now in the eelgrass beds. 51 moorings are registered with MMO, 30 were up and running at the last count but only about 20 of these are actually in the eelgrass beds. Some of these do cause scouring but it is static damage and involves a tiny fraction of the total eelgrass area- less than half an acre. The eelgrass has enveloped the area of some moorings. When they were put in 30 -40 years ago there was no eelgrass there. New photos produced in the MAIA report show this to be the case. Fear of fragmentation in the Moorings area is unfounded as over the last 50 years core density and stability has increased. The idea of additional moorings to those already in situ in the form of EFMs could be pursued but a trial will be necessary to see if they are viable. EFMs are costly and the maintenance charges will trigger fees for mooring which in turn will mean boats and crews to collect mooring fees. Who is going to finance that?

**7. Species .** The 3 species- Seahorse, Undulate Ray and Native oyster seem to have been added in to "beef up the dossier" on why Studland should become an MCZ. The facts are that Seahorses are found all around the coast of England and Wales not only in Studland. They must breed in those locations to support their widespread distribution. There is no such thing as a resident breeding population in Studland bay. They are summer visitors and there is no evidence

yet that the same seahorses return each year. Undulate Rays are widespread but particularly along the South coast and spawn in most bays. Native oyster ..now I think it is accepted that they do not feature in Studland Bay.

**8. Eelgrass.** The key factor in the whole MCZ process. The beds are increasing year on year. And there are at least 90 hectares of dense eelgrass and about 60 hectares of sparse bed- 150 hectares in all. The eelgrass beds as reported in MAIA are subject to storm and wave damage, disease, fertiliser run off, sedimentation etc but in spite of this are reasonably healthy and expanding over the Bay. The superficial damage caused by anchoring and half an acre of mooring damage is insignificant. We say leave the eelgrass as it is. Having said that we do believe that commercial bottom dragnet trawling should be banned. This we believe is in hand under fisheries voluntary or enforced legislation. It does not require MCZ cover.

So we object to the false reasoning behind NE's recommendation for Studland to be an MCZ. We do not see the need for regulation and some sort of costly bureaucratic management system. The cost of enforcing unnecessary regulation is huge and is unlikely to succeed. We have seen over the years the flouting of the 5 Knot marker regulations because there is little or no enforcement of the local byelaw. This is an indication of how difficult it is to enforce regulations at sea.

**9. Our local knowledge** to date has been, in the main, ignored although now with the publication of Seastar and MAIA reports there are signs that the tide is turning as more facts and evidence emerges. We are grateful to MMO for including us in the MCZ process but we suggest that there are far more important issues that should be dealt with in Studland Bay. In brief the spread of Japanese weed which is smothering the eelgrass beds along the Bay's Southern shore, secondly the spread of the Manilla clam into the Bay from Poole harbour. SIFCA legislation will hopefully prevent the clambers from Poole harbour arriving to rip out the seabed in their lucrative dredging for clams. Finally the rocks off Redend point (Blind rock and the 3 Sisters) need marking for the safety of pleasure craft.

To finish we believe that Eelgrass, Species and Full on recreational activities should continue as at present without further regulation. Leave the Bay as it is

free for all to enjoy. The bay is quite capable of managing itself as it has done for centuries. Finally we recommend that any future Steering group meetings on conservation objectives should include a representative from Recreation.

*Nicholas Warner (SBPA) 26 Nov 12*