

Notes of River Users Consultative Forum (Estuary) Meeting
22nd May 2009

Present:-

Captain Roy Stanbrook	RS	HM(L) - PLA
Captain Chris McQueen	CM	DHM(L) – PLA
Lisa Cockerill	LC	Asst to HM(L)
Martin Garside	MG	Corporate Affairs Manager - PLA
Katherine Harris	KH	Environment Manager
Rod Owen	RO	Pilot – PLA
Gary Jones	GJ	Joint Marine Unit (Essex & Kent)
Bryan Hopkins	BH	MCA
Archie Turnbull	AT	MCA
Simon Hiscock	SH	Kent Police SB Frontier Operations
Chris Edwards	CE	RYA East
Tom Sims	TS	RYA SE
Ken Waller	KW	Medway Yacht Assoc

1. Apologies

Julian Parkes, HMSMS, Michael Shefras ATYC, Louise Martin Castle Point Borough Council, Andy Rudge Harwich, John Greenleaf RAFT, Roger Barker Trinity House.

2. Minutes of River Users Consultative Forum Meeting 14th November 2008

Accepted.

3 Matters arising.

BH stated there is no information yet available on the re-categorisation of Walton Backwaters.

No further information regarding the Swale synchronised light trials is yet available. RS reported that Trinity House will be looking at putting synchronised pairs in the Knock John Channel.

RS reported that a Notice to Mariners has just been published on the Southend Airshow and is now available on the PLA website.

CE asked if RS had received a report from Roger Barker on resolving the issue of the aero lights on the Kentish Flats wind farm. Plans have been foiled at the very last moment by developers and the Civil Aviation Authority and resolution still being sought.

4. PLA Sitrep

i. Safety Management System

RS reported in Julian Parkes' absence. Hazards to Safe Navigation list. Two new hazards have been added to the list in recent months. i) Operation of High Speed craft in the upper district ii) Hazards in Sunk area – this has now been re-incorporated following cessation of Sunk VTS.

The PLA consulted last summer on the proposed new Thames Byelaws 2009 which will replace the existing River Byelaws. The consultation went very well and 55 responses had been received and reviewed, with changes being incorporated in the byelaws. The byelaws will go to PLA Board for approval. Following this, the next stage of the process will be for the byelaws to go to DfT and the formal part of the consultation process, which can take a long time. The Byelaws are advertised for a month in local maritime and journals to seek any further comments.

Once the consultation process is complete, the Byelaws are confirmed by the Secretary of State and made into law. The new byelaws should be in place by the end of 2009 or beginning of next year, depending on length of the consultation process.

One of the main issues being addressed through the Byelaws is the establishment of 12 knot speed limit through Central London due to increased usage and congestion i.e. commuter/passenger services. The bulk of the byelaws have not changed, but there some amendments to existing Byelaws.

Three yearly review of General Directions is underway. A number of changes have been proposed. The PLA has had feedback from the consultation process and will shortly be publishing responses to that, showing comments. Formal approval is then needed from the Chamber of Shipping and the PLA Board. This will probably be by September.

CE RYA East raised a concern regarding General Direction 23 requirement for vessels with draft less than 6 metres not to navigate along the Black Deep channel unless permission given by the HM, It was commented that many yachts need to cross the Black deep and proceed along it to access various Gats and there is not much water to navigate outside the buoy line.

PLA Pilotage Directions are also under review a consultation will start in a new few months time, but no major changes are anticipated except to PEC's certification requirements.

RS is in the process of reviewing the Ship Towing Code. RS stated the review is required because there is a perception that tug requirements are too onerous and it is also recognised that since the last review of the code, technology has improved and there is wider use of bow, stern thrusters and azipod drive systems are becoming common place on ships. The cost of towing in Thames is perceived to be high due to the number of tugs required normally by the code and manoeuvres such as berthing ships stern to tide required to be undertaken by certain berth operators. As a result the science behind tug allocation tables is being inspected in more detail on a berth by berth basis. The PLA now have a project team working on it. It is a very extensive review.

RS stated that the PLA continues to work closely with London Gateway Port on their safety management system. The aim is for this to dovetail with PLA safety Management system.

Portwide Notice to Mariners 10 of 2009 about the publication of new PLA A2 charts has been issued. They are digital charts in paper form, there are 3 folios and will be published by end of the year, the first available shortly. There will be a charge for them, but the new charts will be an important step to enhancing safety. The cost is £45 per folio which consists of 10 – 11 charts in each folio. Plus annual charge for amendments which will be sent electronically through Hydrographic department.

Also, MT PLA DHM(SMS) has been working with the Hydrographic Department in concluding work for the Bridges Guide for Navigators. It is in A4 landscape format. It is a reference and practical guide and will be available within the next 2 months.

Action: MT

MG showed the 'new Recreational Users Guide'. This has been put in map format, as opposed to booklet form so it should be more 'user friendly'. It will be semi-waterproof. (A sample proof was passed around the table) There are contact details of the various marinas / clubs etc. Safety advice and guidance is set out for different parts of the river. The aim is for this to be out within next few weeks – in time for the summer season. A Notice to Mariners will be distributed to inform people of this. There will be no charge for the new Guide.

ii Port Security and ISPS Code

ISPS level remains at level 1. No change to UK Ports threat level. Port Security Directive – Transec wants the Directive incorporated into UK law. This could happen by July. Transec will then go to consultation on a separate designation order. Port Security will change structure and remit on what will be the requirements of the Directive, but not anticipated until early part of next year.

ii. Environmental Matters

KH began by asking the meeting if there any issues people would like discussed at future RUCF(E) meetings.

KH also reported on the issue of sea horses at Sudland Bay - a very popular recreational anchoring area! CE requested that KH inform of issues such as this.

KH discussed the Eastern Channel Marine Conservation Zone, in the context of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill to see if there are any areas in this large identified zone which require additional protection for conservation purposes. KH is hoping that Defra will recognise the existing designations that the PLA has.

There were no specific new developments to report on the legislation side. Consultations on the Water Framework Directive have laid out plans for which the Thames are expected to do within the next 5 years. The main issues relate to dredging but the PLA already has systems in place for dredging matters. CE asked question on maintenance dredging re. Licence to dredge. It was emphasised that the PLA already have a dredge licence system.

KH discussed the new Personal Watercraft Guide for the Thames Estuary which has just been published and asked for any suggestions on where to distribute. CE listed places to distribute but said the problem is uncontrolled sites. Fits in with proposed new byelaws. PWCs will be allowed on the river to Margaretness subject to them being registered with HM and having third party insurance etc. The red dots on the guide indicate authorised launch spots. **Action:** MT to check why Isle of Sheppey launch site is not in the guide.

TS RYA stated that Swale Borough Council had gone to a lot of trouble to make a safe area for PWCs to launch on the north coast of Isle of Sheppey and it was not on the new leaflet. **Action:** KH will update the next version and will be flagged up on the website.

iii. General

RS discussed the current downturn in world trade and how it has had an effect on many, including the PLA. E.g. Containerships are being laid up and has affected port trade. The PLA is looking at 17-18% downturn of Port of London trade, although there is still have a baseline trade that will keep London trade going. But to meet this downturn the PLA has to be careful with finances and are seeking ways to reduce costs.

RS also reported that the PLA is to shortly take delivery of new patrol launch. It is catamaran design are very speedy with hardly any wash, good build quality. The aim is to replace the existing middle and lower

district harbour service patrol boats which are old and not particularly efficient. It is planned for there to be a fleet of five craft of the same design. The new boat will be going to the middle district first.

Richard Carr – Pilotage Manager has now retired and Peter Steen has taken over that role. Geoff Buckby has taken over from Peter as Marine Services Manager and now looking to appoint a Deputy MSM at Denton.

5. Navigational Safety and Consultancy Matters

i. River Incidents

27/04/09	FALCON	The FALCON and the RANINE were both heading outward bound through the Princes Channel. The FALCON gave qualified permission for the RANINE to overtake on her south side advising the RANINE that once clear of the Deep water channel they would increase speed, and on reaching the Princes South buoy, would be altering course to the south to head down to the NE SPIT pilot station. On reaching Princes South the RANINE was just slightly ahead of the FALCON on her south side tending to impede the passage of the FALCON and a close quarter situation arose. Vessels were within 0.15m of each other
03/04/09	CLEMENTINE	A near miss incident. The STOLT KITE had cleared CTN1 to proceed outward bound keeping to the north side of the channel to pass the TRANS EXETER outward bound off Coryton. There were two inward bound vessels SIGAS CENTURION heading for CTN1 with the CLEMENTINE overtaking to the south approaching Calor. STOLT KITE ended up passing very close between SIGAS CENTURION and the CLEMENTINE.
25/01/09	CELENDINE	Dragged anchor in Z5 anchorage in high wind conditions and change of tide direction and

		grounded on the Shoebury flats. Vessel was refloated with tug assistance with no apparent damage.
20/01/09	BIRCH	BIRCH cleared SR1 outward bound for the Princes Channel. The vessel left the channel between East Cant buoy and Red Sand Towers whilst using its autopilot. The vessel, despite warnings from VTS, contacted with the Red Sand Towers whilst trying to return to the channel. The vessels speed was around nine knots and no attempt was made to reduce the speed during incident. The vessel suffered only minor paint damage on its port quarter. The damage to RST appeared to be superficial.
22/12/08	SAFMARINE NOMAZWE	SAFMARINE NOMAZWE suffered a main engine failure whilst transiting the Knock John Channel. The vessel was able to clear the channel and anchor in Oaze Deep. Svitzer tug MORAG was dispatched to standby vessel. Probs with fuel system, control system.
09/12/08	ALFA BRITANNIA	ALFA BRITANNIA sailed in ballast from Coryton 4 at 2046 and proceeded outwards with a declared draft of 8.6m. Once the Berthing Pilot landed, the Sea Pilot outlined his passage plan with the Master and intention to use the Mouse and Barrow Deep channels. It was agreed that a final decision on whether to use this route would be taken at SR4 having assessed the vessels speed and capability to reach Barrow 14 buoy, the critical point by 2240. At SR4 it was agreed to use the Mouse and Barrow Deep channels. At the South Shoebury the Master, who had left the bridge, returned and informed the pilot that the ship was ballasting and the vessels mean draft was

		now 10 metres and 11 metres by the stern. The passage via the Barrows was aborted avoiding a serious grounding incident and the vessel proceeded out via the Knock John and Black Deep channels.
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RS commented on the recent Safmarine incident. The Pilot had prepared a Passage Plan and noted the tugs allocated to do the job on it. When the pilot boarded the ship, two different tugs had been allocated so he scribbled out original names of tugs and put in the new tugs names, but unfortunately put them on his plan in the wrong position. As there was a slight delay in sailing, the pilot on sailing referred to his passage plan again to get the names of the tugs. As the vessel started to break away from the berth a slight swing of bow towards the berth developed, so asked the tug which he thought was forward, to pull the bow off more and the bow swung very rapidly towards the berth. Realising his error he swiftly recovered the situation but the bow came very close to contacting the shore crane gantries. RO Pilot commented if clearer tug instructions had been used by pilot and tugs skippers such as including tugs name and tug location, this incident could have been avoided.

ii **Sunk VTS**

AT (MCA) reported no change. Dover are still monitoring Sunk VTS but there will be an announcement in the very near future. Dover are short staffed at present which makes it difficult. RS – Sunk VTS Users Group to be set up before it goes live. AT stated that if the stations are manned correctly, MCA could take over the S&R.

iii **Inland Waterways – national standards**

RS asked BH MCA if there was anything to report to the forum, but has had no feedback.

6. **Other Updates**

i. **MCA**

AT reported that incidents are up. For the period up to April for the area Canvey to Southwold up to April there had been 281 for the year so far.

Industrial action regarding pay and staffing is still ongoing and the management and unions are meeting on a regular basis but no feed back as yet.

CE RYE commended the MCA on how they help people in distress or who get lost.

AT reported that MCA had a very successful live exercise of Gunfleet Sands sub station, involved RAF, RNLI and the windfarm. A lot of lessons learned.

BH reported that a confidential draft MAIB report on HMS Westminster man overboard incident that occurred last year for persons and agencies involved to comment before final publication. Follow up on drink drive incident involving the Ukranian Master of a chemical tanker bound for Dagenham was jailed for 5 weeks and then deported. His prison sentence was reduced because he was already being held on remand in prison and was to be deported after he had completed his sentence.

New boat 'Hunter' out and about and will be around at weekends.

Regulations regarding PWCs not happening anytime soon.

Number of ships down – the number of ship inspections carried out has reduced. BH commented that ship owners are looking at ways to cut costs which could include reducing maintenance of ships and other measures which may impact on safety in longer term

MCA are working closely with Police in Kent and Essex and cooperation is getting better.

ii Medway

KW MYA reported that a meeting had been held recently confirming that Cathryn Spain has been appointed as Harbour Master. New buoys have been placed in the Swale. There is sunken yacht in Swale. Proposal for a small windfarm on Lappel bank which is in planning stages, are proceeding, including an environmental input study. A new mooring buoy PA3 has been established for use by new police launch (Princess Alexandra). New buoy placed in Swale near Faversham Creek. Greenpeace are being prosecuted following an incident last year of a Greenpeace vessel entering the Medway without a pilot during the protests at Kingsnorth power station.

iii RYA Kent

TS – nothing to report as far as RYA in the Thames Estuary is concerned, apart from commenting on the new Pleasure Users Guide chartlet that recommended small vessel route marks approaching Medway should be on the chartlet. KW commented recommended crossings points for small craft should be shown on chartlet. RS stated are still on the chart. MG stated chartlet was a first attempt and

priority was to get it published by June. The chartlet would be refined and updated in future editions.

iv Police Kent

GJ - Greenpeace vessel incident - may go to court for not taking a pilot by Medway Ports

There was an armed forces and Veterans Day. Notice to Mariners will be out shortly regarding river closures 26th June and on Saturday 27th June for roll display which is to do with aircraft. K & E Police now have a joint marine unit in an attempt to cost save. A heavy review on every aspect at the moment, hoping will not result in too many cuts and operational effectiveness can be maintained. We are working towards a counter-terrorist agenda and to that end have run a number of operations in Estuary and Kent where will be stopping and boarding leisure and commercial craft. A concern was raised at the meeting regarding the police rib boats being black in colour and occupants all dressed in black can be very daunting and intimidating when you see one approaching and have no idea who it is, GJ replied that their police procedure was to talk and give reassurance with boat owners before closing in on the boat.

SH – distributed a poster advertising ‘Project Kraken’. This initiative started in Hampshire to help protect the waters of the Solent which has now been adopted by Kent police. The poster has been distributed to marinas, yacht clubs, Talk of Thames website and covers the Kent Coast and rivers. The aim is to gather intelligence and respond to incidents occurring in the maritime community around the Kent coast. Recent trials regarding importation of drugs. Maritime community is urged to report incidents and/or suspicious activity using the numbers on the poster.

Kent and Essex Police launch ‘Princess Alexandra’, covers a large area from Port of Harwich along Essex coast to Dartford Bridge and along the Kent coast to Rye and Sussex.

A concern was raised by members regarding reporting incidents or suspicious activity over the radio as it was thought the call could be heard by suspect vessel. The Police view is it is a very remote possibility that any suspects would react in such a situation against the caller. Calls can be made by mobile phone or message passed to Coastguard or VTS and duplex channel can be requested.

RS asked if they have the same idea as Essex police re. outboard engines covers/bags with the Police sign on. Where the owner of the engine removes the existing cowling from the engine which stored securely elsewhere and replaced with the police plastic version when engine is not in use. The engine if stolen the thief would then need to obtain replacement cowling which are expensive and only available

from outboard engine dealers. SH replied that Kent Police are looking at a similar scheme.

Covers are available through Essex Marine Watch website and local Essex clubs

The cost of bags are £11 for 20hp, £14 for 50hp, £17 for 90hp.

7. River Events

Southend Airshow	24 th /25 th May
Thames Sailing Barge Match	13 th June

RS asked TS he could pass on Medway Cruising Clubs dates, race course details for this year's regatta.

8. River Works

- i. London Gateway construction, work has started on new oil jetty, but work is proceeding very slowly. Dredging has not yet commenced. Spoil from the dredge will be used in the construction of the LGP. Monitoring buoys have been placed in Sea Reach and D Godbold who is acting as Fisheries Liaison with DP world has produced diagrams of there positions for use by local fishermen and the diagrams will be updated as buoys are moved. The diagrams are of use to other river and estuary users and copies are available from him if requested.

Dubai Ports examining future of project – they need to reduce costs as much as possible. Tidal Works Application 2 still to be approved and work is on going, LGP local management is awaiting final decision and outcome of strategic business review by its parent company on whether project is to proceed.

- ii. Wind farm proposals. London Array has committed to placing the order for wind turbines. Onshore works will be starting soon. Offshore works will commence approx end of March 2011. Gunfleet Sands has a lot of work going on. 5 fan turbines are now in place encountering few problems. The contractor dealing with Gunfleet WF and Britned Cable - Ocean Team Ltd has ceased trading and a new contractor has needed to be appointed which has slowed the project. Kentish Flats - The issue of dimming red aviation lights, still subject to much discussion between PLA, Trinity House and the developers. Thanet Windfarm construction has commenced.

Britned Cable – Contractor company responsible for laying the cable have now ceased trading. New contractor Global Marine has been appointed for installation of the cable. Global Marine will be using Team Oman which is a cable laying ship which will used to lay the cable. Disturbance to vessels transiting caused in laying the cable across the Oaze is much reduced from the original contractors plan. Survey and initial works pre-lay grapnel run to ensure route is clear of hazards will take place next month with installation starting mid to late July. Notice to Mariners will be issued shortly.

9. Any Other Business

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10. Time/Date of Next Meeting

Friday 20th November 2009 1030hrs – London River House