

# Personal Watercraft Workshop

18<sup>th</sup> May 2007

## Workshop Report



Photo © Jetman [www.jetmanuk.com](http://www.jetmanuk.com)

# Contents

1. **Attendance list**
  
2. **Introduction to the workshop**  
*Katherine Harris, Port of London Authority*
  
3. **Presentations**
  - 3.1 **Recreational use of personal watercraft**  
*Gary Slater, Clacton Watercraft Club*
  
  - 3.2 **Nature conservation and environmental issues associated with personal watercraft activity**  
*Neil Fuller, Natural England*
  
  - 3.3 **Marine mammal activity in the Thames Estuary**  
*Renata Kowalik, Zoological Society of London*
  
  - 3.4 **Regulation and management of personal watercraft on the River Thames**  
*Roy Stanbrook, Port of London Authority*
  
4. **Discussion Sessions**  
Summary of the topics discussed during the three sessions
  
5. **Conclusions of the workshop**
  
6. **List of action points**
  
7. **Useful links and publications**

## 1. Attendance List

### Present:

Paula Bootle	Benfleet Yacht Club
Jan Brooke	Environmental Consultant Ltd.
Claire Cadman	Essex Wildlife Trust
Nicola Clay	Port of London Authority
Gareth Davies	Thurrock Borough Council
Mike Edwards	Island Yacht Club
Jim Fry	Datatag ID Ltd.
Neil Fuller	Natural England
Jill Goddard	Thames Estuary Partnership
Andy Gosnold	Chapman Sands Sailing Club
Mark Gregory	British Divers Marine Life Rescue
Katherine Harris	Port of London Authority
Dave Hedges	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Andy Hutchison	Thorpe Bay Marine
Lynn Jones	Southend-on-Sea Borough Council
Renata Kowalik	Zoological Society of London
Jason Lane	Essex Police Marine Unit
Gus Lewis	Royal Yachting Association
Chris Moran	Castle Point Borough Council
Andrew Norton	Royal Yachting Association
Bernie Parsons	Thurrock Yacht Club
Roy Peirse	Southend Marine Activities Centre
Steve Prewer	Basildon District Council
Kevin Pullen	Clacton Watercraft Club
Colin Sedgewick	RNLI
Gary Slater	Clacton Watercraft Club
Roy Stanbrook	Port of London Authority
Kim Thirlby	Environment Agency
Richard Turner	Watt Tyler Country Park
Keith Webster	Canvey Wildfowlers & Conservation Association
John Window	Port of London Authority

### Apologies:

John Biggar	Herne Bay & Whitstable Jetski & Watercraft Society (JAWS)
David Boughton	Maritime Coastguard Agency
Liz Holliday	Kent Coastal Network

## 2. Introduction to the workshop

*Katherine Harris, Environmental Assessor, Port of London Authority*

Personal watercraft (PW) are fun, fast and manoeuvrable. However like any high speed vehicle they have the potential to be dangerous, and also to have a significant impact on the environment in which they operate.

The Port of London Authority (PLA) has received several complaints of irresponsible use of PW on the Thames in Essex, ranging from general reckless behaviour such as speeding and passing close to other river users, to more specific environmental damage such as disturbance of the sensitive intertidal mudflats and harassment of harbour porpoises. As is so often the case, it is likely to be an irresponsible few giving all PW riders a bad name, but even so it is still an issue that needs to be addressed. The PLA intends to implement a Code of Conduct for PW using the Essex side of the Thames and its tributaries, which will effectively be a list of *dos and don'ts* for using a PW. The code will be accompanied by a Guidance Leaflet which will explain the background behind the code plus any other relevant information.

Kent County Council has implemented similar guidance with great success and has generously agreed for the Kent leaflet to be used as a basic template for the Essex Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet. It is likely that some PW riders use both the Essex and Kent sides of the Thames, so consistency between the two sets of guidance will be beneficial.

The majority of stakeholders were represented at the workshop, including:

- Local authorities;
- PW users and clubs;
- The harbour authority (PLA) and other regulators;
- Environmental organisations;
- Yachting, sailing and rowing clubs.

The aims of the workshop were:

- To bring together all stakeholders who have an interest in PW;
- To discuss the issues associated with PW and ways to resolve any conflicts;
- To discuss the general content of the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet;
- To produce a list of action points for future initiatives.



**Figure 1.1: Port of London Authority's area of jurisdiction**

### 3. Presentations

A series of presentations provided a general overview of the various issues associated with PW. The presentations are summarised below.

#### 3.1 Recreational use of personal watercraft

*Gary Slater, Founder and Chairman, Clacton Watercraft Club*

The stand-up solo model PW first came to the UK in the late 1970s. They are commonly referred to as 'jetskis', although this term is a registered trademark of Kawasaki. They were followed by the sit-down two or three seater PW, which are more stable and 'family friendly' craft, and represent approximately 80-90 % of PW sold in the UK. These craft cost up to £11,000.

Around 1400 PW are sold every year, and around 14,000 are in use in the UK. They are not a youngster's toy; most PW owners are over 30 years old.

The latest PW have four-stroke engines, which are more environmentally friendly (low exhaust emissions, very low sound levels). They have a cruising range of approximately 75 to 100 miles on a tank of fuel.

#### Royal Yachting Association (RYA) and Training

The one-day Royal Yachting Association (RYA) PW course has been operating for approximately seven years, during which time over 9200 certificates have been issued.

The RYA also offers legal and cruising advice to affiliated clubs on issues such as planning, management and liability.

#### Why are PW so popular?

PW can be easily stored, transported and launched. They are very stable, manoeuvrable, and have good control at low speeds. Every craft sold in the last 10 years has a safety lanyard/engine cut-out fitted as standard. PW do not have propellers so can operate in shallow waters.

#### Authorities that use PW

- Kent Police;
- Poole Police;
- Queens Harbour Master, Portsmouth; and
- RNLI.

They are used as rescue craft and for policing and patrolling.

#### Example: Portsmouth Volunteer Harbour Patrol

The Portsmouth Volunteer Harbour Patrol (VHP) was formed three years ago, with the aim to 'Educate and Assist'. The VHP has no powers other than the authority to stop and give direction to any vessel under 20 metres in length. It provides guidance and assistance to users of the Port of Portsmouth, in an area covering 50 square miles including most of the Eastern Solent.

The VHP is operated under the guidance of the Queen's Harbour Master Portsmouth. It includes two PW, which can tow sailing vessels up to 30ft in length and motor boats up to 20ft in length. They have an advantage over larger boats as they can operate in small confined spaces and poor weather conditions, fit under low bridges at high tide, and operate in shallow water over mud.

The newest PW, 'Volunteer 5', is based on the Yamaha VX 110 HP four-stroke, which is not only fast, powerful and stable, but also very quiet allowing riders to communicate easily without having to shout over engine noise. The craft is also very manoeuvrable and has an excellent control in reverse, allowing riders to operate it with confidence in enclosed areas such as marinas.

#### Benefits of PW clubs to local authorities

Clubs are self policing. They can ensure that any person launching from the club's slipway has valid insurance and Datatag ID, and agrees to abide by the clubs rules.

Clacton Watercraft Club (CWC) has two committee members who are trained PW RYA instructors. The club is in talks with the council regarding the use of its premises for training purposes. The club has a tractor to launch PW, allowing safe and slow access over the beach.

Most weekends throughout the summer there are committee members or club marshals on the beach, who liaise with the local authority shorefront patrols if any issues arise.

#### Benefits of clubs to members

If a PW novice joins a club, the committee or club members will show them how to make sure the craft is sea worthy, and inform them of the club rules and local byelaws. New members will see existing members abiding by the rules and, in theory, will do the same (thereby nipping bad habits in the bud).

#### Conflicts

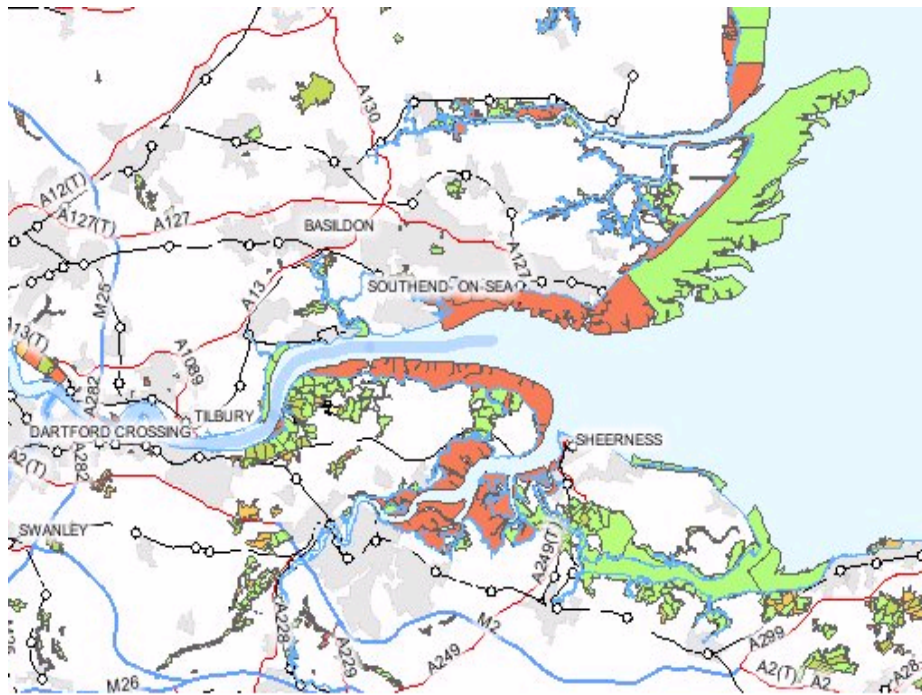
Unfortunately from time to time conflicts and issues do arise. If the issue is a minor one it can usually be dealt with internally by the club.

CWC works closely with the local authorities and the Essex Police Marine Unit. If the club gets a complaint from the local authority, a representative will reply immediately and advise the local authority what action has been taken. An incident occurred recently involving two club members and a small craft. These members have now been expelled from the club and CWC is working with the authorities to assist them in bringing the incident to court. This was the first negative event at the club since it was formed in 2003.

### **3.2 Nature conservation and environmental issues associated with personal watercraft activity**

*Neil Fuller, Conservation Officer, Natural England*

The Thames Estuary is an area of outstanding importance for wildlife. People have exerted an influence on the landscape of the estuary since prehistoric times. Today, much of the south-eastern population of England lives with the Thames Estuary on its doorstep. Amongst the activities of human settlement, the area supports wetlands, bird populations and scarce invertebrates and plants, many of which are of national or even international significance.



**Figure 3.2: Current condition of SSSIs in and around the Thames Estuary**  
**Green = favourable/recovering**  
**Red = unfavourable/declining**

There are a number of sites within the Thames Estuary that have been afforded legal protection, on account of their (i) national, (ii) European, or (iii) international importance. The respective designations are (i) Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), (ii) Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and (iii) Ramsar site.

The government has a Public Service Agreement target to ensure that SSSIs are maintained in favourable condition (the aim is 95% by 2010). In the outer estuary the principal reason for unfavourable condition is coastal squeeze (rising sea levels and hard sea defences preventing inland migration and causing intertidal habitat loss and change) but some areas, such as Benfleet and Southend Marshes, have significant usage and recreational pressures that may be contributing to an adverse affect on bird numbers and habitat quality.

Making judgments about sustainable thresholds for usage is complex, but in the first instance there is a need to better understand the natural resource and consider whether current practices are adequate to manage the resource.

Key habitats and species within the Thames Estuary

The Creeks (Deptford, Bow, Barking, Cliffe, Mucking, Holehaven and Benfleet) provide sheltered intertidal habitats, which are potentially significant during harsh winter conditions. Tidal creeks often have slightly different sediment and water qualities to the main river and estuary, often providing more sheltered conditions that support vital habitats for fish and their fry, important refuge areas for overwintering birds during severe weather periods, and habitats for breeding birds.

Saltmarsh comprises the upper, vegetated portions of intertidal mudflats, lying approximately between mean high water neap tides and mean high water spring tides. Saltmarsh vegetation consists of a limited number of halophytic (salt tolerant) species adapted to regular immersion by the tides. Saltmarsh is an important resource for wading birds and wildfowl, acting as a high tide refuge for birds feeding

on adjacent mudflats, as breeding sites for waders (e.g. redshank) and as a source of food for migratory birds, particularly in the autumn and winter. In addition, there are a number of rare invertebrates associated with the plants and habitat qualities of these areas. Furthermore, recent studies have shown the significance of saltmarsh areas as nursery grounds for fish species.

Intertidal mudflats are formed by sediment, usually silts and clays, being deposited in low energy coastal environments such as estuaries. Towards the mouth of the Thames Estuary coarser deposits of marine origin, usually as sandflats, become more frequent. Mudflats play an important role in reducing wave energy and helping to reduce the erosion of saltmarsh and damage to coastal defences and land. In the Thames Estuary, mudflats support an internationally important assemblage of waterfowl. Watercraft activity has the capacity to affect the value of the mudflats as a feeding resource for the waterfowl, principally through disturbance but also through inappropriate slipways and moorings.

Seagrass or eelgrass (*Zostera* spp.) are marine flowering plants found in shallow coastal areas, typically on sheltered sandy or muddy intertidal areas. They often grow in dense, extensive beds that provide shelter and food for a wide range of plant and animal species. Previous surveys have indicated that the extent of the resource at Maplin Sands and Southend is of international importance. The eelgrass is vulnerable to watercraft activities such as physical disturbance through trampling, mobile bottom fishing equipment, and boats moored within the beds. In addition, the birds feeding in these areas are vulnerable to disturbance (physical, noise, erratic movements).

Redshank are waders, their habit showing off their 'red' legs well. They feed on invertebrates by probing the soft sediments of the mudflats and saltmarsh with their beaks. They form part of the over-wintering waterfowl assemblage of the designated sites and also breed on saltmarsh in significant numbers. Recent surveys seem to indicate that breeding numbers have declined on the Essex side of the outer Thames, which is likely to be linked with habitat loss and disturbance of key breeding areas. Any physical disturbance of the saltmarsh areas, and/or activities that create regular noisy and erratic movements, have the potential to reduce breeding success.

Black tailed godwits are also waders, and feed in a similar way to redshank. The outer Thames Estuary supports particularly significant numbers (sometimes up to 10%) of the international population. Although found as far upstream as the QEII Bridge, these birds principally congregate on the Essex side around Holehaven Creek, feeding in the finer sediments and roosting on the larger saltmarsh areas, such as Lower Horse island. They are currently over-wintering visitors with significant numbers between October and March. Any watercraft activities that adversely affect the supporting habitats (e.g. direct contact, pollution) or disturb their behaviour (e.g. physical disturbance, noise) have the potential to alter the value of the resource for these birds.

Natural England's aim is to conserve the habitats and species outlined above through ongoing investigation, innovative solutions and actions, and effective partnerships.

PW activity shares the Thames Estuary with commercial usage including fisheries activities. When Natural England provides advice about development proposals and activities, it considers the 'in-combination' effects of the plans. Where designated sites are demonstrating declines in quality, it is important that current activities are appropriately managed and there is sufficient confidence that new submitted plans and projects will not exacerbate declines.

### Possible effects of PW on habitats and species:

- Physical impact on intertidal habitats (e.g. reclamation for infrastructure can alter hydrodynamics & sediment regimes)
- Physical disturbance to wildlife (e.g. overwintering and breeding birds);
- Non-physical disturbance to wildlife, principally through noise and undesirable movement (e.g. within or close to ecologically sensitive areas);
- Pollution (e.g. watercraft repairs and maintenance, waste and refuse).

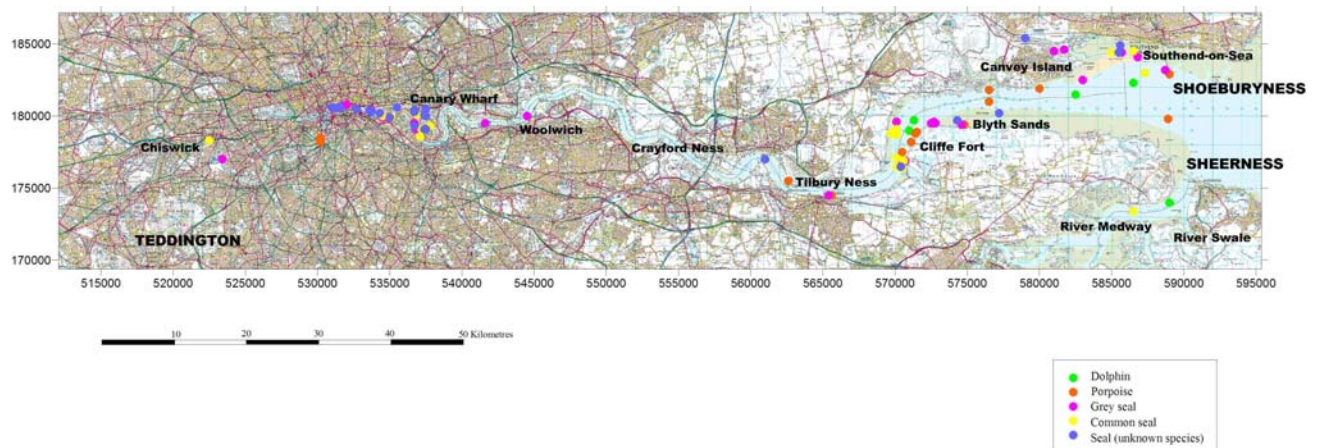
### Ways to minimise the effects of PW:

- During sensitive periods avoid disturbing waterfowl by physical impact, noise and movement in the following ecologically sensitive areas: bird breeding sites (e.g. saltmarsh), key feeding sites (e.g. eelgrass beds, some areas of mudflats) and high tide roosts;
- Avoid key habitats when launching, mooring and landing (saltmarsh and eelgrass beds particularly);
- Avoid pollution to habitats and adjacent areas, particularly watercourses when dealing with fuels, chemical treatments, waste, refuse. Comply with Environment Agency Pollution Prevention Guidelines and other best practice pollution control measures.
- Infrastructure-related construction repairs – check if a PLA river works licence, a FEPA licence and/or planning permission is required. Early consultation with PLA is advisable before significant money is spent on plans.

### **3.3 Marine mammal activity in the Thames Estuary**

*Renata Kowalik, Conservation Biologist Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programmes, Zoological Society of London*

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) operates the Thames Marine Mammal Sightings Survey for people who spot dolphins, porpoises and seals in the Thames. Marine mammals are known to visit the Thames Estuary but, until now, sightings have not been formally recorded. This survey is ongoing and will address this information gap. Data collected will help to develop patterns and trends in species distribution, behaviour and habitat use. Findings will also be fed into national databases. The survey operates in the tidal Thames area, between Teddington to Shoeburyness and Sheerness in the outer estuary.



**Figure 2.3.1: Marine mammal sightings 2004-2005**

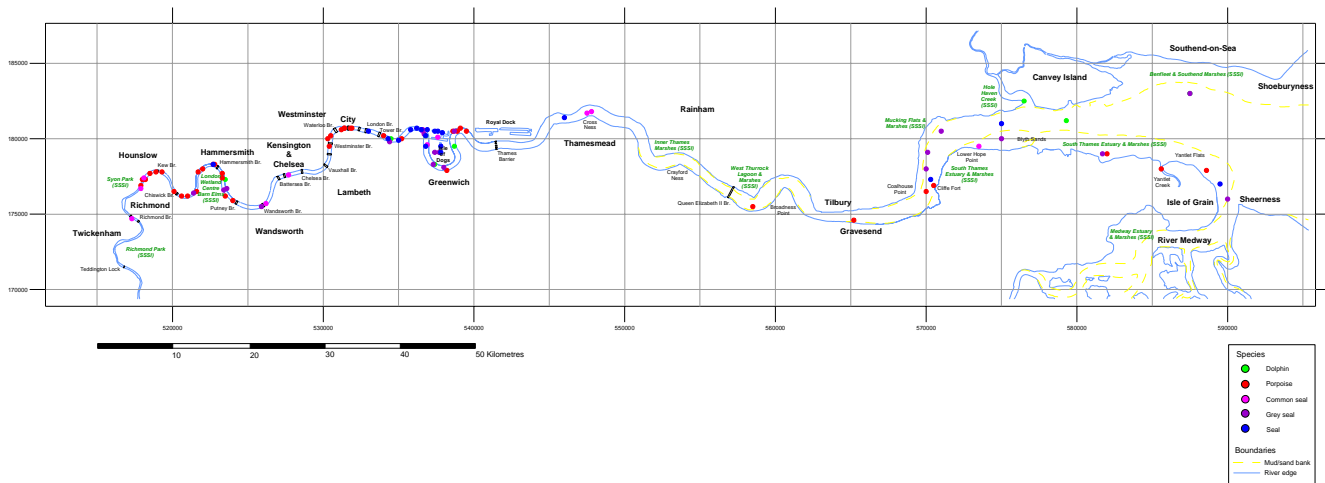


Figure 2.3.2: Marine mammal sightings 2005-2006

There have been several instances of marine mammals in the Thames Estuary being struck and killed by small watercraft (but not necessarily PW) and propellers.

PW riders are asked to observe the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) Cetacean Watching Code of Conduct:

**When watching marine mammals please follow these simple guidelines:**

**KEEP** your distance. Never go closer than 100m (200m if another boat is present)

- **NEVER** drive head on to, or move between, scatter or separate dolphins. If unsure of their movements, simply stop and put the engine into neutral.
- **PLEASE** spend no longer than 15 minutes near the animals
- **SPECIAL** care must be taken with mothers and young
- **MAINTAIN** a steady direction and slow 'no wake' speed
- **NEVER** try to swim with cetaceans for your safety and theirs
- **DO NOT** dispose of any rubbish, litter or contaminants at sea

**MAXIMUM TIME 15 MINUTES**

### **3.4 Regulation and management of personal watercraft on the River Thames**

*Roy Stanbrook, Harbour Master (Lower), Port of London Authority*

The PLA is a self-financing public trust. Its responsibilities include:

- ensuring navigational safety along the Tidal Thames;
- promoting use of the River;
- safeguarding the environment.

The PLA works in partnership with commercial, recreational, community and amenity groups and organisations to ensure that the Thames continues to be a safe and enjoyable environment for trade, recreation and tourism.

The only two authorised launch sites for PW on the Essex side of the Thames are West Shoebury Beach and Watt Tyler Country Park.

The Port of London Act 1968 (as amended) governs the PLA's activities. Section 108 of this Act states that a master who navigates his vessel on the Thames -

(a) without due care and attention; or

(b) in a manner liable to injure or endanger persons, other vessels, the banks of the Thames (whether above or below mean high water level) or any structure or installation in or beside the Thames;

shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding [the statutory maximum and on conviction on indictment to a fine].

In addition, Byelaw 51 states that:

- (1) No person shall engage or take part in water-skiing, aqua-planing, parakiting, water-biking or any similar activity -
  - (a) in a fairway; or
  - (b) within 200 metres of a wharf, jetty, public beach, bathing place or residential property except in an area authorised for that purpose by the Port Authority.
- (2) A person engaging in an activity referred to in paragraph (1) above shall wear an efficient life-jacket.

The PLA adopts a three-stage approach to enforcing these regulations:

- 1) Educate river users of the rules that are in force;
- 2) Issue a formal warning the first time an individual breaks the rules;
- 3) Prosecute persistent offenders. The PLA publicises successful prosecutions in an attempt to deter other river users from breaking the rules.

## 4. Discussion Sessions

The discussion sessions provided an opportunity for all workshop attendees to identify what they considered to be the main issues associated with PW use on the Thames in Essex; to share ideas about ways to manage the current problems; to discuss the concept of a Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet for PW riders; and to establish any other partnership initiatives that can be implemented by the organisations represented.

The titles of the discussion sessions were:

1. Recreational use of personal watercraft on the River Thames  
Chairperson: Gus Lewis, Royal Yachting Association
2. Nature conservation and environmental issues associated with the use of personal watercraft on the River Thames  
Chairperson: Neil Fuller, Natural England
3. Regulation and management of personal watercraft on the River Thames  
Chairperson: Roy Stanbrook, Port of London Authority

This section provides a summary of the topics discussed during the three sessions.

### Launching sites

It was suggested that one of the most effective ways to manage watercraft activity on the water is to control the access points. Public slipways are the biggest challenge because they are rarely manned and therefore difficult to monitor.

Peer pressure plays an important role in the use of launching sites by PW riders – the threat of losing a facility if it is abused may encourage users to act more responsibly and abide by the rules of the facility.

Launching sites in Essex are few and far between, and some are only accessible at certain states of the tide. A launching site can be made more attractive to users by providing good land-side facilities such as car parking, changing and showering areas, and refreshments. However in order to provide these facilities, the space and infrastructure must be available on land, which is less likely in built-up areas.

Benfleet Creek slipway is a public slipway owned by Castle Point Borough Council. It is not currently authorised by the PLA as a PW launching site. Castle Point Borough Council confirmed that they were happy to discuss the management of the slipway with local PW clubs and other river users.

<b>Action: Castle Point Borough Council to commence discussions with local PW clubs, the PLA and other river users to decide on acceptable terms of use of the Benfleet Creek slipway.</b>
--

Wat Tyler Country Park slipway is manned, and users of the slipway are made aware of the *dos and don'ts* of using the creek.

Southend-on-Sea slipway is manned by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council Pier and Foreshore department. Access to the slipway is controlled.

**Action: Suggest alternative launching sites for PW on the Essex side of the Thames and its tributaries, for further investigation by the relevant authorities. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

Chapman Sands Sailing Club confirmed that they are keen to discuss the possibility of creating a new PW launching site at the sailing club.

**Action: Chapman Sands Sailing Club to meet with local PW clubs and users, PLA and the local authority to discuss the possibility of creating a new PW launching site at the sailing club.**

Thorney Bay was identified as a possible new launching site, but Castle Point Borough Council confirmed that they had trialled it for 6 months and decided it was unsuitable because of its proximity to bathers in the river.

**Action: PLA to review its list of authorised PW launching sites, and amend the list if appropriate.**

### **PW clubs**

PW clubs are fundamental to the education of PW riders. Local authorities benefit from having a point of contact within each club with whom to discuss any problems that arise with PW riders. PW riders who belong to clubs can be contacted more easily, for example, to distribute the new Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet.

There are several areas on the Thames in Essex from which PW are launched where there is no club influence, e.g. public slipways and beaches. Not all workshop attendees agreed that membership of a PW club should be mandatory to allow access to the water.

PW riders who are not from the area must be able to obtain information about local rules and regulations without needing to join a local club. It was suggested that there could be a club mechanism for informing and supporting non-club members and those visiting from other areas.

**Action: PW clubs in Essex to suggest ways in which non-club members can obtain information about local rules and regulations. Ideas to Katherine Harris, PLA**

### **Education and training (competency)**

It was suggested that PW riders be required to produce a competence certificate/qualification before being allowed to launch from manned sites on the Thames. This was not considered a good idea, because lack of competence is not necessarily the issue. A person who is very capable on a PW may still choose to act irresponsibly. In addition it disadvantages people who have been using PW for several years and are very competent without requiring a qualification to prove it. It may also encourage PW riders without a competency certificate to launch from unauthorised, inappropriate sites to avoid detection.

It was considered useful to publish places where PW training can be undertaken, both in the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet, and in any other relevant PW publications.

**Action: Identify places in Essex that offer PW training.  
Ideas to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

During the discussion session on nature conservation and environmental issues associated with the use of PW, Neil Fuller showed an image of PW riders moored on an area of saltmarsh on Lower Horse, Holehaven Creek and explained that this disturbance can be very detrimental to the habitat. Upper and Lower Horse were identified as two rare high tide bird roosts on the Thames. It was argued that these individuals probably did not realise that the saltmarsh is a sensitive and valuable habitat. More information must be available to PW riders about the importance of certain habitats so that they know which areas to avoid. This will be an important aspect of the Guidance Leaflet to be produced. The majority of PW riders are responsible and will respect the environment once they are aware of the sensitivities.

**Action: Identify the most important environmental information relating to the Essex side of the Thames to be included in the Guidance Leaflet.  
Information to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

### **Communication of information**

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council has its own set of rules and regulations that it hands out to PW riders launching from the Southend-on-Sea slipway. A similar initiative could be implemented at other manned launching sites on the Thames in Essex.

It was suggested that better use be made of the Thames Estuary Partnership networks.

**Action: Jill Goddard to suggest ways in which better use can be made of Thames Estuary Partnership networks.  
Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA**

The Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet should be distributed to local PW manufacturers and repairers, with a request that the documents are handed out with every new purchase. It was appreciated that this approach will not reach every PW rider (e.g. those who buy their PW elsewhere in the country or second hand).

**Action: Identify all PW distributors and repairers in Essex.  
Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

**Action: Contact all identified PW distributors and repairers in Essex and request that they hand out the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet with every new purchase or repair.**

It was suggested that a website be set up (or a new section of an existing website such as the Thames Estuary Partnership) to communicate and share information relating to PW. The Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet could feature prominently on this website. There could also be a 'question and answer'/message board section – see BDMLR website for an example. Opinion was split over whether PW riders would be proactive enough to use such a website.

**Action on all: Suggest existing websites on which a new page(s) could be set up for PW riders using the Thames in Essex. Suggest ideas on the content of such a page(s).  
Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

**Action on all: identify any information that may be relevant for inclusion in the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet (e.g. contact details of relevant organisations, website links, PW publications).  
Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

It was recommended that a representative Essex County Council be included on the distribution list for this project.

**Action: PLA to contact Essex County Council to establish a contact person to be included on the distribution list for documentation relating to the project.**

### **Speed restrictions**

Speed restrictions are currently enforced by Essex Police Marine Unit patrols and PLA Harbour Service patrols. It was suggested that the introduction of voluntary harbour patrols could improve the effectiveness of speed restriction enforcement.

**Action: PLA to investigate the feasibility of introducing voluntary harbour patrols.**

Speed restrictions were also discussed in relation to environmental damage caused by wash. See 'Environmental issues' below for further details.

### **Fixed penalty fines**

It was suggested that fixed penalty fines be introduced on the Thames, to be issued to operators of PW and other craft for committing well-defined offences. Opinion was split on this subject but it was accepted that fixed penalty fines would be difficult to enforce, and that the offences to which they relate would need to be very clearly defined.

### **Signage**

The importance of clear and consistent signage was emphasised. Signage should be in place at all PW launching sites, indicating:

- Speed limit in knots and miles per hour;
- Exclusion zones for PW and other craft;
- Emergency contact details;
- More general information about the environment.

It is possible that the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet will be adapted into a poster format for displaying at launching sites, as has been done in Kent.

**Action: carry out a survey to identify current signage at launching sites on the Essex side of the Thames.**

**Action: suggest ways in which the current signage can be improved and streamlined.  
Ideas to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

### **Reporting irresponsible PW use**

If a member of the public witnesses a PW rider acting irresponsibly, they should report it to the PLA Harbour Master (Lower) in the first instance, having obtained the following information:

- Precise location and time of incident;
- Nature of incident;
- Photographic or video evidence if possible.

Without this evidence the Harbour Master would find it difficult to take further action. It should therefore be publicised that this information is required when reporting an incident.

**Action: PLA to investigate ways in which the process for reporting irresponsible use of PW can be better publicised.**

The Harbour Master will liaise with the Essex Police Marine Unit if required.

### **Legislation**

It was suggested that the reference to PW in the PLA's Byelaw 51 be removed, although agreement was not reached on this issue. A discussion also took place about whether the terminology 'engage or take part in' covers all possible uses of PW.

It was suggested that the reference to 'public beaches' in Byelaw 51 is ambiguous. One solution would be to mark all public beaches on a map and reference this map in the byelaw.

It was noted that the term 'life jacket' should be changed to 'buoyancy aid' in keeping with other legislation.

**Action on all: Suggest amendments to Byelaw 51.  
Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

### **Environmental issues**

Launching of PW: the action of launching PW and other craft can compress the ground underneath the craft, which may be a sensitive habitat. This effect can be minimised by specifying designated launch sites for PW and other craft that are outside of particularly sensitive areas for nature conservation. This is not necessarily practical – there is a lack of adequate launch sites in Essex already without adding further restrictions.

PW movement: PW are very manoeuvrable compared to other craft, so they can access areas other craft may not be able to reach, i.e. very shallow water. These are often valuable habitats for birds and fish because they are less frequently disturbed.

Education seems to be the key factor in informing PW riders of the potential damage they can cause.

Wash from PW: wash from PW and other craft can disturb and erode sensitive intertidal areas. To minimise wash, it is important that speed restrictions are observed, although it was acknowledged that they can be difficult to enforce. It was suggested that seasonal variable speed limits could be introduced in certain areas of the Thames, to tie in with sensitive periods for nature conservation. The sensitive period for overwintering birds is October to March inclusive: it was noted that the majority of PW activity occurs outside of this time period, in the summer months. However saltmarsh is also an important habitat for breeding birds during the summer months.

It was suggested that the speed restriction could be relaxed in areas that are less important for nature conservation. If this suggestion is implemented it may be necessary to monitor wash effects in these areas.

**Action: PLA and Natural England to discuss the feasibility of setting up trials in which speed restrictions may be varied in certain areas on the Thames.**

Any area with a speed restriction that is different from the rest of the river must be clearly marked so that river users can identify the areas, e.g. by installing buoys or referencing existing features such as moorings.

It was noted that it would be useful to know more about the patterns of PW use on the Thames in Essex (e.g. popular locations and times).

**Action: Conduct a survey to establish patterns of PW use on the Thames in Essex.**

Environmental champion: it was suggested that each PW club could appoint an environmental champion who would be responsible for obtaining information on the environmental issues in their particular area, and disseminating this information to all other club members.

**Action: PW clubs to speak to club members about the introduction of an environmental champion at the club, and provide feedback to Katherine Harris, PLA.**

## **5. Conclusions of the workshop**

A summary of the main topics discussed during the workshop is presented below:

### Launching sites

There is a general lack of launching sites for PW on the Thames in Essex. New launching sites will be identified, and their possible use will be investigated by the relevant authorities.

### PW clubs

PW clubs are fundamental to the education of PW riders. However they only represent a proportion of PW riders using the Thames in Essex. There must be a mechanism in place to reach PW riders who are not members of local clubs.

### Education and training (competency)

PW riders may not be aware of the local rules and regulations, or of the local environmental sensitivities. The majority of PW riders are responsible and will respect the rules once they know what they are.

Publications should make PW riders aware of places where PW training can be undertaken.

### Communication of information

Copies of local PW rules and regulations should be handed out at manned PW launching sites on the Thames in Essex, and to local PW manufacturers and repairers. A website could be set up to communicate and share information relating to PW use on the Thames in Essex.

### Speed restrictions

Speed restrictions are difficult to enforce. The introduction of voluntary harbour patrols could improve the effectiveness of speed restriction enforcement.

### Fixed penalty fines

Fixed penalty fines could be introduced and issued to operators of PW and other craft committing clearly defined offences.

### Signage

Clear and consistent signage for PW riders is important. Signage should be present at all PW launching sites.

### Reporting irresponsible PW use

If a member of the public witnesses a PW acting irresponsibly, they should report it to the PLA Harbour Master. The reporting process should be well publicised.

### Legislation

Section 108 of the Port of London Act 1968 (as amended) and Byelaw 51 relate to PW use on the Thames. It may be necessary to amend this legislation.

### General environmental issues

Launching of, and wash from, PW can all have a significant effect on sensitive habitats and species on the Thames in Essex. Education of PW riders is vital to ensuring that they respect the environment in which they operate.

As a result of this workshop, Katherine Harris at the PLA will produce a draft version of the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet in consultation with workshop attendees. It is intended that this document will be complete by April 2008, in time to circulate widely throughout the Essex Thames PW community by the start of the 2008 season.

In addition to the code and leaflet, a number of wider initiatives were identified. Workshop attendees are asked to read the list of action points and inform Katherine Harris of any that they are able to assist with. Katherine will be responsible for coordinating these initiatives and providing feedback to workshop attendees.

## 6. List of action points

Number	Action	Responsibility
<b>Launching sites</b>		
1	Commence discussions with river users to decide on acceptable terms of use of the Benfleet Creek slipway.	Castle Point Borough Council (lead) Local PW clubs PLA
2	Suggest alternative launching sites for PW on the Essex side of the Thames and its tributaries, for further investigation by the relevant authorities. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
3	Meet with local PW clubs and users, PLA and local authority to discuss the possibility of creating a new PW launching site at Chapman Sands Sailing Club.	Chapman Sands Sailing Club
4	Review list of authorised PW launching sites, and amend the list if appropriate.	PLA
<b>PW clubs</b>		
5	Suggest ways in which non-club members can obtain information about local rules and regulations. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	Local PW clubs
<b>Education and training (competency)</b>		
6	Identify places in Essex that offer PW training. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
7	Identify the most important environmental information relating to the Essex side of the Thames to be included in the Guidance Leaflet. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
<b>Communication of information</b>		
8	Suggest ways in which better use can be made of Thames Estuary Partnership networks. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	Thames Estuary Partnership
9	Identify all PW distributors and repairers in Essex. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
10	Contact all identified PW distributors and repairers in Essex and request that they hand out the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet with every new purchase or repair.	PLA
11	Suggest existing websites on which a new page(s) could be set up for PW riders using the Thames in Essex. Suggest ideas on the content of such a page(s). Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	All
12	Identify any information that may be relevant for inclusion in the Code of Conduct and Guidance Leaflet (e.g. contact details of relevant organisations, website links, PW publications). Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	All

13	Contact Essex County Council to establish a contact person to be included on the distribution list for documentation relating to the project.	PLA
Speed restrictions		
14	Investigate the feasibility of introducing voluntary harbour patrols.	PLA
Signage		
15	Carry out a survey to identify current signage at launching sites on the Essex side of the Thames.	
16	Suggest ways in which the current signage can be improved and streamlined. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
Reporting irresponsible PW use		
17	Investigate ways in which the process for reporting irresponsible use of PW can be better publicised.	PLA
Legislation		
18	Suggest amendments to Byelaw 51. Suggestions to Katherine Harris, PLA.	
Environmental issues		
19	Discuss the feasibility of setting up trials in which speed restrictions may be varied in certain areas on the Thames.	PLA Natural England
20	Conduct a survey to establish patterns of PW use on the Thames in Essex.	
21	Speak to club members about the introduction of an environmental champion at the club, and provide feedback to Katherine Harris, PLA.	Local PW clubs

## 7. Useful links and publications

### Useful website links

[www.portoflondon.co.uk](http://www.portoflondon.co.uk)

[www.rya.org.uk](http://www.rya.org.uk)

[www.britishmarine.co.uk](http://www.britishmarine.co.uk)

[www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

[www.bdmlr.org.uk](http://www.bdmlr.org.uk)

[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)

[www.thamesweb.com](http://www.thamesweb.com)

[www.mcga.gov.uk](http://www.mcga.gov.uk)

[www.rnli.org.uk](http://www.rnli.org.uk)

[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

[www.essex.police.uk](http://www.essex.police.uk)

[www.coastalkent.net](http://www.coastalkent.net)

[www.southendmarineactivitiescentre.co.uk](http://www.southendmarineactivitiescentre.co.uk)

[www.essexwt.org.uk](http://www.essexwt.org.uk)

[www.zsl.org](http://www.zsl.org)

### Useful publications

'Where to launch and train 2006/7'

Sponsored by Personal Watercraft Partnership, and Jet Skier & PW Magazine

'Managing Personal Watercraft: a guide for local harbour authorities'

British Marine Federation and Royal Yachting Association