

Dart Estuary MCZ ... what does that mean to me?

The Upper Dart Estuary was finally designated as a Marine Conservation Zone in May 2019 following its proposal by the wider local community discussions of the Finding Sanctuary project.

Full details of the Upper Dart Estuary MCZ, it's Protected Features, map and facts are available to download from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-conservation-zones-dart-estuary>

For most of us, the MCZ is not an area where we need to overly concern ourselves with restrictions but an area to very much continue to celebrate, use and enjoy. Indeed, most of us will not notice any difference either side of the MCZ designation, nor should we really behave any differently – see below.

The Dart Estuary is a typical Southwest ria or drowned-river type estuary, supporting a number of specialised estuarine habitats and wildlife communities that are able to survive and thrive the ever changing salinity and tidal exposure conditions. Whilst estuaries don't always support the greatest diversity of wildlife due to their challenging conditions, their productivity and the biomass of the animals and plants that do thrive here are seriously mind boggling. Their importance in terms of carbon lockup, nature conservation and our wider health and enjoyment, make them collectively globally important. The Dart Estuary, with its significant water catchment and rainfall, is particularly freshwater dominated.

Due to their wider importance, all of our estuaries deserve our respect and a degree of active care – whether we are on or in their waters, living/visiting, working/playing within their water catchments or tidal waters. Not just the bits that may or may not be formally designated. The Dart Estuary itself mostly falls within the South Devon AONB, its conservation management encouraged by the AONB's Estuaries Management Plan – prepared in partnership, for and with the local community.

The ethos of the Estuaries Management Plan is to encourage the understanding and sustainable use and enjoyment of our estuaries – the plan is available to download <https://www.southdevonaonb.org.uk/estuaries-management-plan/>

Whilst the coordination of the Estuaries Management Plan and associated local Estuary community Forum is carried out by the South Devon AONB Estuaries Partnership with a dedicated Estuaries Officer, there is no one single organisation that manages every aspect of the Estuary's management. Rather that all appropriate and relevant Public Bodies and Authorities have a statutory duty of regard within their normal areas of jurisdiction, responsibility, etc. – from the Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority to Dart Harbour & Navigation Authority, South Hams District Council to local Parish Councils.

Beyond the usual and everyday activities of those of us that use and enjoy the Upper Dart Estuary, the MCZ designation really kicks in if and when any project, development or activity might (or indeed will) affect the health etc. of the MCZ

Protected Features. Absolutely not written as a general guide or bedtime read, Natural England have prepared 'supplementary advice' <https://bit.ly/2TgolYa> with case specific advice for each Protected Feature to assess against their conservation objectives. The Protected Features for the Dart's MCZ are;

- Coastal saltmarshes and saline [tidal] reedbeds
- Estuarine rocky habitats – rocky shores and estuary bed
- Intertidal mud - mudflats
- Low [wave] energy intertidal rock
- Tentacled lagoon-worm (*Alkmaria romijni*)

Any proposals or operations which may affect the site or its features should be designed so they do not adversely affect any of the attributes in the SACO [Supplementary Advice on Conservation Objectives] or achievement of the conservation objectives.

[Note – the mouth of the Dart Estuary and local coast is designated as a Special Area of Conservation – the Lyme Bay and Torbay SAC - <https://bit.ly/3ISyFK8>]

So, in everyday language, what should I do to help celebrate and care for the Dart Estuary?

There is no single heavy industry on or immediately by the Dart Estuary and the majority of issues affecting the Estuary directly are the cumulative impact of frequent and/or numerous small impacts. Most of these such as littering, wildlife disturbance and boating pollutants are easily overcome with a little consideration, thought and care – the more of us that do, the greater the positive impact – we have it in all of us to make a difference. A common sense guide is attached over.

Some of our priority issues include;

- Water quality
- Wildlife disturbance
- Litter & waste
- Habitat loss and erosion
- Biosecurity - <https://bit.ly/343kUcw>

Summed up in our animation The Drip <https://youtu.be/bSrgPLkvP8Q>

A Catchment Based Approach – by definition, most of the water that falls within the Dart Estuary's water catchment area will eventually flow down into and through the estuary. That water will also carry many pollutants and debris etc. that we might allow to enter it, again affecting the water quality and health of the estuary through its cumulative impact. We raise awareness on this and encourage actions and projects etc. to protect and improve the water quality flowing down from the catchment through the Catchment Based Approach – CaBA. For the Dart Estuary this is promoted by the South Devon Catchments Partnership <http://south-devon.org/catchment-plan/>

Your Harbour, Your Estuary Needs You!

While you may have a small impact
on our planet ... there are a lot of us!

Here are some simple things that will
make a massive difference when we all try.



Your estuary needs you!

Avoid
saltmarshes
where possible
- paddlers should
take care when
launching over or
from sensitive
shores

Only ever
the 4p's down
the Loo - Pee,
Poo, Puke &
Paper

Keep
wake to a
minimum ...
on the slow
side!

Reduce >
Refuse > Reuse
> Recycle

Be aware
of sensitive
shore and seabed
communities - these
are our carbon sinks
- cross, paddle,
motor and anchor
carefully

Anti-foul
may be a
necessary evil but
make sure it's in a
tin, on your hull or
being disposed of
appropriately

Dog parents
- dispose
of all dog poo
appropriately - in the
sea it can pose a risk
to bathers and
water quality

Cigarette
butts are
plastic & toxic to
aquatic life - Bin
the Butt!

Leave
nothing
but ripples and
footprints - take
only photos &
good memories

Prevent
Fat-Bergs
- reduce Food,
Fats, Oils or
Grease down
the sink

Only Rain
Down road
Drains, they lead
to natural water
courses

Litter
matters -
collect your
5-a-day

Be
part of
the BioSecurity
solution "CHECK
- CLEAN -
DRY"

Be
wildlife
disturbance
sensitive - give it
space & respect,
it may be the
law

Every
fuel/oil drop
counts - refuel
/ top up with
care

Fit a holding
tank and use local
pump-out facilities -
if you must pump-out,
only pump out on the
ebbing tide or out
to sea

This
is a soft
water region -
dose detergent
for 'soft
water'



Dart Harbour

South Devon
**AONB Estuaries
Partnership**
Encouraging sustainable use and enjoyment
www.SouthDevonAONB.org.uk



Catchment
Based Approach
Partnerships for Action



WORKING
TOGETHER
TOWARDS
SUSTAINABLE
BOATING

A joint Royal Yachting Association and British Marine Initiative