

# SEVERN ESTUARY EUROPEAN MARINE SITE

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## Communications Strategy

2007 – 2010

### Introduction

The Severn Estuary has one of the highest tidal ranges in the world. This leads to a never-ending cycle of exposure and concealment of its great banks of muds, sands and rocks. It is an important overwintering ground for a range of migratory wildfowl and waders, being a vital link in the route of bird migration that stretches from Siberia to South Africa.

It is designated as a **Special Area of Protection** (SPA) for the number of overwintering birds and the habitats that attract them. The estuary, and many of the Levels areas around its shores, are also **Sites of Special Scientific Interest** (SSSI) due to their significant biodiversity interest all year round. The estuary is also designated as a **Ramsar** site under the International Convention for Protection of Wetlands and is being considered as a **Special Area of Conservation** (SAC). It is part of a European network of nature conservation sites known as **Natura 2000**.

The Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) are the statutory bodies around the Severn Estuary who have come together in a co-ordinated inter-agency approach to fulfil their obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives (the legislation supporting some of the nature conservation designations on and around the Severn Estuary). Together, and with the help of user groups from around the estuary, they have produced a management scheme for the Severn Estuary European Marine Site, as a framework to manage ongoing 'activities', often changing in nature and location, so that they are compatible with the nature conservation objectives of the site. Within this management scheme there is an action to:

*'continue to raise awareness of the designation of the site and the implications for relevant authorities and users'.*

This communication strategy is concerned with helping to achieve this Management Scheme action.

### Purpose of the Strategy

To help the relevant authorities and user groups around the estuary provide a consistent message when raising awareness of the site's nature conservation designations, and the implications these designations have for relevant authorities and users.

### Objective

To raise awareness of the current European nature conservation designations of the Severn Estuary, improve understanding of the importance of the statutory designations for relevant authorities and the users of the site, in order to enable better protection of wildlife features and habitats.

### Target audiences

There are 3 main target audiences:

- a) Relevant authorities (local authorities, port and harbour authorities, water companies, internal drainage boards, EA, nature conservation agencies, sea fisheries committee – see appendix 5).
- b) People living and working close to the estuary (residents, landowners, farmers).
- c) User and interest groups (dog walkers, walkers, yachtsman, jet skiers, birdwatchers, anglers, gun clubs).

The ASERA membership consists of almost 30 relevant statutory bodies including local authorities, ports and harbours, drainage boards, the Environment Agency and nature conservation bodies. They have a wide range of statutory duties relating to ‘activities’ occurring around the estuary, are landowners and provide information to the public about the estuary and estuary related issues.

The Severn Estuary has a long shoreline with many communities living alongside and using the estuary for recreational purposes and it is likely that a significant proportion of the people living close to and using the estuary are not aware of its nature conservation importance, or how to minimise their impact on the wildlife that use the estuary.

The Severn Estuary European Marine Site (EMS) Advisory Group consists of user and interest groups who represent the main recreation and interest groups around the estuary. Members of the Advisory Group have wide networks of information exchange and influence.

#### **Interpretive artwork available**

The artwork commissioned by ASERA for leaflets and interpretive boards relating to nature conservation value of the Severn Estuary is now available on request from the SEP office to those wishing to promote this aspect of the estuary for non-profit projects, although the SEP will endeavour to put this on the ASERA web site as soon as possible. The artwork will complement the key messages outlined in this document.

Artwork commissioned by the Severn Estuary Partnership, which complements and is in addition to that commissioned by ASERA, will be available to SEP members once the new membership scheme is underway in the autumn of 2007.

#### **Key messages (see appendix 1 for complete list)**

There are some key messages that will need to be incorporated into all communications to help realise the objective. They are related to the specific audiences.

#### **Audience a – relevant authorities**

- The Severn Estuary is designated as a Special Protected Area, a Ramsar site and is being considered as a Special Area of Conservation. The estuary and many of the levels around its shores are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- The estuary regularly supports both internationally and nationally important numbers of migratory waterfowl and wading birds.
- Relevant authorities have a statutory duty to ensure they carry out their functions to comply with the Habitats Directive.
- A co-ordinated and inter-agency approach is the most practical and economic method of producing a management scheme for the site.
- Each relevant authority is responsible for implementing the management scheme, including raising awareness of the site designations.

- Each relevant authority is responsible for ensuring that they provide up to date information on how they manage ongoing ‘activities’, often changing in nature and location, within their area of jurisdiction.

#### **Audience b – people living and working close to the estuary**

- The Severn Estuary is an area with many nature conservation designations.
- The Severn Estuary has one of the highest tidal ranges in the world. This leads to a never-ending cycle of exposure and concealment of its great banks of muds, sands and rocks. Saltmarsh fringes the coast, backed by grazing marsh and freshwater ditches. The habitats and the species that rely on them are therefore in a constant state of flux due to the highly dynamic nature of the estuary.
- The Severn Estuary is part of a European network of conservation sites known as Natura 2000 – ‘your nature’ which is special in a European context.
- Natura 2000 sites try to put people at the heart of conservation and are about people and nature.
- The total overwintering wildfowl and wader population of the Severn Estuary is regularly over 60 000 individuals.
- The Severn Estuary is an important overwintering ground for a range of migratory wildfowl and waders, being a vital link in the route of bird migration that stretches from Siberia to South Africa.
- Birds from as far away as Russia, Scandinavia and Greenland are attracted to the estuary’s mudflats and saltmarshes each year.
- Enjoy and share the estuary in a considerate way with the visiting birds. It is vital for their survival.
- You can enjoy the estuary help protect the birds and the habitats they use by adhering to some basic codes of conduct.

#### **Audience c – user and interest groups**

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- The Severn Estuary is part of a European network of conservation sites known as Natura 2000 – ‘your nature’ which is special in a European context.
- Natura 2000 sites try to put people at the heart of conservation and are about people and nature.
- The total overwintering wildfowl and wader population of the Severn Estuary is regularly over 60 000 individuals.
- The Severn Estuary is an important overwintering ground for a range of migratory wildfowl and waders, being a vital link in the route of bird migration that stretches from Siberia to South Africa.
- Birds from as far away as Russia, Scandinavia and Greenland are attracted to the estuary’s mudflats and saltmarshes each year.
- Enjoy and share the estuary in a considerate way with the visiting birds. It is vital for their survival.
- You can enjoy the estuary and help protect the birds and the habitats they use by adhering to some basic codes of conduct.

## Delivery

Current communication activity	Target audiences		
	a. Relevant authorities	b. people living and working close to the estuary	c. user and interest groups
Face to face meetings			
Email			
Phone			
ASERA AGM, MG, WG			
Severn Estuary EMS AG			
Web site			
Severn Tidings newsletter			
Media – radio, newspapers			
Member RAs internal media			
Leaflets/posters			
Interpretation/information boards			
Management scheme (summary)			
Guidance notes			

### Main communication tools and actions to improve them

Face to face meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> </ul>
Email	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have catch line about ‘your nature in a European network’ in e-mail</li> </ul>
Phone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> </ul>
Mail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have catch line about ‘your nature in a European network’ in letter heading</li> </ul>
ASERA AGM, MG, WG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress awareness raising action required by all RAs</li> <li>Stress role ASERA is playing to ensure RAs comply with legislation.</li> </ul>
Severn Estuary EMS AG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress role members can play in getting key messages out to user groups.</li> </ul>
Web site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have catch line about ‘your nature in a European network’ on web site front page</li> </ul>
Severn Tidings newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> </ul>
Media – radio, newspapers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> </ul>
Member RAs internal media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> </ul>
Leaflets/posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> <li>Maintain similar design style</li> </ul>
Interpretation/information boards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> <li>Maintain similar design style</li> </ul>
Management scheme (summary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure updated should SAC be designated.</li> </ul>
Guidance notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure consistent key messages achieved.</li> <li>Maintain similar design style</li> </ul>

## References:

Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ("the habitats directive"), (<http://rod.eionet.europa.eu/show.jsv?id=560&mode=S>)

Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds ("the birds directive"), (<http://www.sdnxbd.org/sdi/treaty/biodiversity/ww47.htm>)

Management Scheme for the Severn Estuary European Marine Site, ASERA, 2004 (<http://www.severnestuary.net/asera/pubs.html>)

Foundation Document for the Severn Estuary European Marine Site, ASERA, 2003 (<http://www.severnestuary.net/asera/pubs.html>)

Life-Nature: Communicating with stakeholders and the general public. Best practice examples for Natura 2000. European Commission 2004.

Severn Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest. Views about management. CCW/NE 2006.

Sharing the Severn Estuary – its wildlife and you. ASERA 2006 (<http://www.severnestuary.net/asera/pubs.html>)

The habitats and species of the Severn Estuary. A basic introduction for developers and decision makers. SEP 2006. (<http://www.severnestuary.net/sep/pdfs/sephabitatsandspecies.pdf>)

## Appendix 1

### Key messages and sources of reference

Key message	Reference material
<b>Audience a – relevant authorities</b>	
Both the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive are part of a series of conservation instruments and conventions which have developed agreed international action for nature conservation. They require the designation of sites for conservation. In the case of the Habitats Directive these are Special Sites of Conservation, and in the Birds Directive, Special Protection Areas. These sites will form a network of conservation areas across Europe to be known as 'Natura 2000'.	Severn Estuary European Marine Site – Foundation Document for the Management Scheme (2003).
Where a Special Protection Area (SPA), such as the Severn Estuary, or Special Area of Conservation (SAC) incorporate subtidal and/or intertidal areas, they are referred to as European Marine Sites (EMS).	Severn Estuary European Marine Site – Foundation Document for the Management Scheme (2003).
The Severn Estuary is designated as a Special Protected Area, a Ramsar site, is being considered as a Special Area of Conservation and the estuary and many of the levels around its shores are Sites of Special Scientific Interest.	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).
The estuary regularly supports both internationally and nationally important numbers of migratory waterfowl and wading birds.	Severn Estuary European Marine Site – Foundation Document for the Management Scheme (2003).
Competent authorities are defined as 'any minister, government department, public or statutory undertaker, public body of any description, or person holding a public office'	Relevant authorities and a management scheme for the Severn Estuary EMS – 2 page summary (2002).
Relevant authorities are defined as certain specific types of competent authority with powers or functions which have, or could have, an impact on the marine area within or adjacent to a European Marine Site. All relevant authorities are also competent authorities.	Relevant authorities and a management scheme for the Severn Estuary EMS – 2 page summary (2002).
Relevant authorities have a statutory duty to ensure they carry out their functions to comply with the Habitats Directive.	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i>
A co-ordinated and inter-agency approach is the most practical and economic method of producing a management scheme for the site.	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i> (2004)
The management scheme sets the framework within which 'activities' will be managed in ways compatible with the nature conservation objectives of the site.	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i> (2004)
The management scheme is for the Special Protection Area in the context of the ongoing pSAC and Ramsar issues.	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i> (2004)
Each relevant authority is responsible for implementing the management scheme, including raising awareness of the site	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i> (2004)

Key message	Reference material
<b>Audience a – relevant authorities</b>	
designations.	
Each relevant authority is responsible for ensuring that they provide up to date information on how they manage ongoing ‘activities’, often changing in nature and location, within their area of jurisdiction.	Severn Estuary EMS Management Scheme <i>executive summary</i> (2004)
<b>Audiences b &amp; c – people living close to the estuary and user /interest groups</b>	
The Severn Estuary is an area with many nature conservation designations.	The habitats and species of the Severn Estuary: A basic introduction for developers and decision makers. Severn Estuary Partnership (2006).
The Severn Estuary has one of the highest tidal ranges in the world. This leads to a never-ending cycle of exposure and concealment of its great banks of muds, sands and rocks. Saltmarsh fringes the coast, backed by grazing marsh and freshwater ditches. The habitats and the species that rely on them are therefore in a constant state of flux due to the highly dynamic nature of the estuary.	Severn Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest: Views about management. Countryside Council for Wales & Natural England (2006).
The Severn Estuary is part of a European network of sites known as Natura 2000 – ‘your nature’ which is special in a European context.	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).
Natura 2000 sites try to put people at the heart of conservation and are about people and nature.	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).
The total overwintering wildfowl and wader population of the Severn Estuary is regularly over 60 000 individuals.	Severn Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest: Views about management. Countryside Council for Wales & Natural England (2006).
The Severn Estuary is an important overwintering ground for a range of migratory wildfowl and waders, being a vital link in the route of bird migration that stretches from Siberia to South Africa.	The habitats and species of the Severn Estuary: A basic introduction for developers and decision makers. Severn Estuary Partnership (2006).
Birds from as far away as Russia, Scandinavia and Greenland are attracted to the estuary’s mudflats and saltmarshes each year.	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).
Enjoy and share the estuary in a considerate way with the visiting birds. It is vital for their survival.	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).
<p>You can enjoy the estuary and help protect the birds and the habitats they use by adhering to some basic codes of conduct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping to public footpaths</li> <li>• Keeping your dogs under close control (especially on saltmarsh and coastal grazing marsh where birds are feeding)</li> <li>• Avoiding sites which you know are used by birds at certain times of year and states of tide</li> <li>• Taking your litter home</li> </ul>	Sharing the Severn Estuary, its wildlife and you. ASERA leaflet (2006).

Key message	Reference material
<b>Audience a – relevant authorities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keeping noise to a minimum, both on the shore and on the water (birds are very sensitive to noise disturbance)</li> <li>• Avoiding damage to saltmarsh</li> <li>• Always following your activity's national codes of conduct, where available.</li> </ul>	

## **Appendix 2 –Example of press article**

### **Severn Estuary SPA leaflet**

The Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) has produced a new leaflet and poster highlighting the 50,000 visitors that come to the estuary every winter. These visitors are in fact birds, and arrive from all over the world.

The leaflet shows how people can appreciate the migrating birds without having a negative impact on them or their habitat. It highlights what people, who live, work and play around the estuary, can do to help ensure the birds come back each year. The leaflet and poster will be distributed to libraries and visitor centres all around the estuary this autumn.

Birds fly to the Severn Estuary from as far away as Russia, Scandinavia and Greenland. They are attracted to its mudflats, sand flats, saltmarshes and coastal grazing marshes. As a result of the rich variety of birds, the Severn Estuary is designated as a Special Protection Area (SPA) and is part of a European network of sites known as Natura 2000. These sites try to put people at the heart of nature conservation and are about ‘people and nature’ not nature without people.

However, as these birds are generally shy and do not like being disturbed, impacts such as development and disturbance from recreation must be considered.

Charlotte Pagendam from English Nature said: “People using the Estuary, for recreational purposes, like walking, sailing or fishing, can help maintain the natural condition of the habitat, by keeping to some simple rules. These rules include keeping to public footpaths, keeping dogs under close control, taking litter home and keeping noise to a minimum, both on the shore and on the water.”

English and Welsh electronic copies of the leaflet and accompanying poster are available at:

<http://www.severnestuary.net/asera/pubs.html>

### **Notes to editors:**

- The Association of Severn Estuary Relevant Authorities (ASERA) are the statutory organisations around the Severn Estuary which have come together in a co-ordinated inter-agency approach to produce and implement a management scheme for the Severn Estuary Special Protection Area.
- Special Protection Area (SPA) - The Birds Directive 79/403/EEC (1979) is part of conservation instruments introduced in the European Union to promote the maintenance of biodiversity, whilst taking account of economic, social, cultural and regional requirements. The Directive requires the designation of SPAs.

## Appendix 3 Rationale behind Severn Estuary SPA leaflet

### Severn Estuary Special Protection Area Promotional leaflet

#### Outline thoughts to identify audience and main theme of EMS promotional leaflet

Problem behaviours	Audiences	Behavioural headaches	Behavioural outcomes	Interpretation methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General recreation activities causing noise and visual presence disturbance and damage to habitat</li> <li>• Dogs off leads – disturbance to birds and damage to habitat etc</li> <li>• Litter on saltmarsh = farmers won't put cattle out to graze (summer)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local dog walkers</li> <li>• Jet skiers</li> <li>• Walkers,</li> <li>• fishermen,</li> <li>• Sailing,</li> <li>• Birdwatchers</li> <li>• Local residents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dogs off leads</li> <li>• noisy jet skis and the wash from jet skis</li> <li>• littering of saltmarsh (estuary &amp; terrestrial litter)</li> <li>• accessing remoter areas (away from general public) thereby reducing disturbance free roosting &amp; feeding areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dogs under close control in certain areas in the winter</li> <li>• jet skiers avoiding certain areas in the winter</li> <li>• fishermen, walkers etc avoiding certain areas in the winter</li> <li>• reduced littering to saltmarsh</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotional leaflet (ASERA)</li> <li>• Interpretation panels (SEP access project)</li> <li>• Media (ASERA)</li> <li>• Workshops (ASERA)</li> <li>• Geographic topic groups (ASERA)</li> </ul>

#### Theme:

*The Severn Estuary has over 50000 winter visitors from all over the world – they are all birds.  
As hosts, let's help ensure they come back every year..*

#### Outline of EMS promotional leaflet

- What makes the Severn special (habitats, location, size) and relate to its importance on a European scale and that it is part of Natura 2000.
- designations
- Map showing the Severn and where certain species overwinter and where they have come from (Bridgwater Bay, Gwent levels, Slimbridge plus a couple more nearer population centres)
- Section with photos of species and what habitat type they rely on
- Section on the management scheme and that it has identified the issue of disturbance and how vulnerable birds are, especially in cold snaps during the winter
- Section on how land & water based recreation activities could minimise impact on overwintering birds and supporting habitats (simplistic code of conduct) – need to include for existing good management/recreation use and state some existing land managers are pro-actively managing the land for nature conservation – but sometimes hindered by litter i.e. grazing of saltmarsh.
- Contact details of responsible land & water based recreation clubs and other main contacts (EN/CCW).

#### Appendix 4 – ASERA members Summer 07

Associated British Ports	Monmouthshire County Council
Bridgwater Port Authority	Natural England
Bristol City Council	Newport City Council
British Waterways, Sharpness	Newport Harbour Commissioners
Caldicot & Wentlooge Internal Drainage Board	North Somerset Council
Cardiff Council	Parrett Internal Drainage Board
Cardiff Harbour Authority	Sedgemoor District Council
Countryside Council for Wales	Severn Trent Water
Dwr Cymru Welsh Water	Somerset County Council
Environment Agency	South Gloucestershire Council
Forest of Dean District Council	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Gloucestershire County Council	Stroud District Council
Gloucester Harbour Trustees	The Bristol Port Company
Lower Axe Internal Drainage Board	Trinity House Lighthouse Service
Lower Brue Internal Drainage Board	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Lower Severn Internal Drainage Board	West Mendip Internal Drainage Board