

Devon and Severn IFCA News

Severn Estuary Ecological Research Forum – March 2020

D&S IFCA Senior Environmental Officer Runs Workshop to Discuss Current or Proposed Research & Monitoring to Better Understand the Ecology of the Severn Estuary Area.

On 12th March, Devon and Severn IFCA's Senior Environment Officer ran a workshop called the Severn Estuary Ecological Research Forum (SEERF). SEERF enables partnership working towards shared goals, which will support sustainable development and nature conservation and improve our understanding of the ecosystem of the Severn Estuary.

This meeting was attended by representatives from universities, D&S IFCA, the Environment Agency, Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Welsh Government, North Devon Marine Pioneer, Severn Estuary Partnership, Blue Marine Foundation and Ocean Ecology. This group meets twice per year on a non-commercial basis to discuss current or proposed research and monitoring to better understand the ecology of the Severn Estuary area.



The group heard presentations on tracking fish movement ([bass](#), shad and sea trout) using a technique called acoustic telemetry. This research aims to help us better understand fine-scale patterns of fish movement and the distribution of fish populations. The group also heard about research that is using genetics and other fish measurements to study herring stocks around the south west of England and the coast of Wales. Herring in the area are currently managed as a large 'Celtic Sea' stock, but this [research](#) supports what some local fishermen have said about the existence of smaller local stocks in some areas.



We also heard a presentation on [research](#) to document *Sabellaria* reef using acoustic cameras. *Sabellaria* (honeycomb worms) create reef structures from sediment in the Severn Estuary, which provide important habitats for other marine species. They are designated for protection in the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation, and this new technique using acoustic cameras (which use sound beams to help scientists to 'see' through the murky waters of the Severn Estuary) is an exciting advance that could help to protect this species and the reefs they create.

Results from all of this research could ensure better protection of fish stocks and important habitats by discouraging marine developments in areas that are sensitive or important to species that are either protected or are important for our fishing communities. A better understanding of fish distribution and movement could also allow fish stocks to be managed at a more appropriate spatial scale in the future, using more detailed information than is available in current stock assessments.

Over the course of the meeting there were interesting discussions that will help to increase ecological research in the Severn Estuary and surrounding waters, allowing a more scientifically-informed response to management. We look forward to the next meeting in Autumn 2020!

Interested in our Environment & Research Work?

If you're interested in our Environment and Research work, you can find some informative information in the [D&S IFCA Environment & Research website display pages](#)

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