Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service

Birds in the Docks – Supporting habitat?

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The evidence need – drivers (1)

- Liverpool City Region positioning itself as a low carbon energy hub
- Significant regeneration proposals for Liverpool and Wirral docks
- Multiple coastal and marine designated sites with similar bird qualifying features
- Local knowledge that some docks were used as a foraging resource – where, how much, significance?? unknowns

Example of operational dock

Image courtesy of North West Strategic Coastal Monitoring Programme

The evidence need – drivers (2)

- No survey existed of the use of the docks by birds
- Demonstrated evidence of the interdependence of the birds across the coastal designated sites

Part of Mersey Waters Enterprise Zone

Image courtesy of North West Strategic Coastal Monitoring Programme

The evidence need - impacts

- Reliance on ‘precautionary principle’ – over reliance?
- Decision-taking timescales affected – while site specific evidence was collected
- Uncertainty regarding city region regeneration aspirations – delivery of the LCR Deal with Government
- Reputational risk to ‘conservation agencies’ – perception of holding up development

Approach to Data collection

- Based on evidence needs and impacts - successful business case for funding – accepted as priority action
- Agreement on survey scope with Natural England (meet more than a single organisation's requirements)
- Procurement process – open tender
- Updates to partners at set times
- Flexibility in survey brief – the unexpected

Survey Brief (1)

- Consultants are required to carry out bird survey of autumn and spring passage and overwintering birds (hereafter referred to as non-breeding bird survey) of the active and inactive dock systems in Liverpool and Birkenhead.
  - To undertake sufficient survey using Vantage Point methodology to ensure thorough coverage of the Docks and to provide count data, location maps and flight line recording at high and low tide;
  - To provide an assessment of the importance of the bird species and populations recorded set in context of the qualifying bird features of the Natura 2000 sites (SPA and Ramsar sites);
  - To provide a baseline area estimate and locations of suitable supporting habitat within the Dock system; and
  - To review existing bird survey information from a range of sources including BTO WeBS, EIA planning applications, and Natural England contract reports and assess it with relation to survey findings.

Survey area and Natura 2000 site within the vicinity

Source: TEP August 2015

Survey Brief (2)

- Consultants are required to set out a sound and robust methodology for undertaking above tasks, ensuring that an appropriate balance is achieved between the amount of fieldwork needed to produce robust results and cost.
- Consultants should ensure that all personnel are suitably qualified and experienced.

Challenges - Ecological

- Method refined through discussion e.g. infilled or dry docks were excluded
- Operational and inactive docks – access, health and safety
- Vast amounts of data generated
- Full 12 month survey – consistency of survey
- Presenting complex data simply

Example of flight line mapping

Source: TEP August 2015

Challenges – managing relationships

- Achieving ‘buy-in’ from operators to the outcomes
- Achieving ‘buy-in’ from decision-takers and advisors
- Provision of access to operational areas

Data storage and accessibility

- Data provided to Merseyside BioBank – uploaded to National Biodiversity Network
- Report hosted on-line and freely accessible
- No clear single repository for Reports - could be at MEDIN, Natural England evidence base

Future Challenges

- Work completed in 2013-14 – how long will it remain a viable evidence base?
- As incremental regeneration occurs will key areas used by birds change?
- Would it be possible to reduce the scope of additional survey based on the 2013-14 evidence

Brief outcomes - ecology

- Supporting habitat confirmed for:
  - Cormorant
  - Great crested grebe
  - Oystercatcher
  - Turnstone (as part of winter assemblage)

Perch – looks good to me!