

7.6 Seahorse – Lead Partner Seahorse Trust

Main Objectives & Key Actions:

- 1) **Increase knowledge of seahorse numbers and distribution in the Bay.**
 - Set up surveying programme of known sites by 2012.
- 2) **Increase communication between divers, members of the public, fishermen, TCCT and The Seahorse Trust and promote the need to report sightings.**
 - Ongoing.
- 3) **Conduct a status review of both species of seahorse in Torbay and seek further protection of their habitats by 2009.**

7.6.1 Background & Current Status

Seahorses are threatened worldwide and Torbay is known to hold good populations of two species, the Spiny Seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) and Short Snouted Seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*). Seahorses are very sensitive to their surrounding environmental conditions and are therefore a useful indicator for analysing the health of the environment. Population figures for both species of Seahorse in the UK are hugely underestimated and this has resulted in them being designated as Data Deficient by the IUCN.

Studies on seahorses have shown them to be characterised by their sparse distribution, low mobility, small home ranges, low fecundity, and lengthy parental care during pregnancy and mate fidelity. For more information regarding the distribution of British seahorses please consult the British Seahorse Survey Report (Garrick- Maidment & Jones, 2004).

Short Snouted Seahorse

The short snouted seahorse can measure between 12 and 15 centimetres in length when fully grown. Its habitat includes shallow, muddy waters, estuaries, inshore amongst algae and rocky areas and deep rocky areas especially off The Channel Islands in the English Channel There are two main habitats that it is thought to prefer; eelgrass beds and rocky areas.

Spiny Seahorse

The spiny seahorse is the larger of the two species, growing up to 20 centimetres. Its preferred habitat is eelgrass beds and weedy areas.

Current species and associated Habitat Protection

Protection already exists for both species from a number of sources: the Convention of the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn

Convention), the Convention of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and Appendix II of CITES, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. This protection from CITES has only allowed trade in the seahorse species subject to licensing. Both species are also recognised as Vulnerable by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, a factor that contributed to their recent submission for inclusion under the Wildlife and Countryside Act by The Seahorse Trust.

7.6.2 Current problems/threats to this species:

- Lack of awareness
- Habitat loss e.g. Seagrass beds - the spiny seahorse depends on this habitat to offer them protection against predators and camouflage against prey.
- Lack of information - Many seahorses around the world are recognised as Vulnerable and Data Deficient by IUCN.

Table 18: Seahorse Action Plan. Actions that require further funding are shaded in grey.

High priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 3 years (to end of 2009).

Medium priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 6 years (to end of 2012).

Low priority actions are proposed for completion within the next 10 years (to end 2016).

Actions for Seahorse Priority Action Plan	Priority (High, Medium and Low)	Objective	Partners	Ongoing Action
Policy & Legislation				
SH1 - Include protection policies in all relevant statutory and strategic plans.	H	1,2	SHT, TC, NE	✓
Species & Site Management				
SH2 - Establish protected zones in the Bay where seahorses are established.	M	3	SHT, TCCT, NE	✓ (where sites identified)
Communication & Publicity				
SH3 – Promote the work of the British Seahorse Survey and The Seahorse Trust in the Bay.	M	1,2	SHT, TCCT, NE	✓
SH4 - Increase an awareness of Seahorses with fishermen, divers, snorkellers and members of public.	M	1,2,3	SHT, TCCT, NE, Angling clubs, Dive clubs, Fishermen.	✓
SH5 - Encourage fishermen, divers, snorkellers and public to report all sightings to the British Seahorse	H	2,3	SHT, TCCT, NE, Angling Clubs, Dive	✓

Survey.			Clubs, DSFC	
Advisory				
SH6 - Advise fishermen on procedures if they discover a Seahorse.	H	2	SHT, NE, DSFC	✓
Research & Monitoring				
SH7 - Research and map key areas for Seahorses in the Bay and compare with known fishing zones to identify trouble hot-spots.	H	3	SHT, NE, TCCT, Dive Clubs	✓
SH8 - Establish a relationship with local dive groups to undertake survey work and report sightings.	M	2,3	SHT, NE, Dive Clubs	✓

Abbreviations: Torbay Coast & Countryside (TCCT), Torbay Council (TC), Natural England (NE), Seahorse Trust (SHT)