

Dinghy/Tender/Kayak congestion at Yealm Steps : The Brook : Noss Foreshore

This communication addresses the topic of dinghy and kayak congestion at the harbour's main launching sites. It describes the impacts and outlines some of the steps the Authority is considering to more actively manage the issues

Many of you will have experienced the challenges this congestion causes. Dinghy and kayak congestion at the Yealm Steps pontoons, The Brook, and the Noss Foreshore is not a new problem. It has existed for several years but recently has become more acute. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the congestion will ease. Demand for space is expected to grow further with the near-term completion of local housing developments. The trend should be of concern to all of us.

Alone, the Authority cannot magic away the problems. The Authority believes that adopting and adhering to a range of mitigations will need to be a plan shared between the Authority and you all, as stakeholders. Overcrowding generates various negative impacts on all of us. They include:-

- **Damage and resulting financial costs.** The physical forces of 150+ dinghies moored on the Yealm Steps pontoons during the summer months are very significant. View the pontoons during spring-tide ebb and flood to appreciate the forces at work. These pontoons are the Authority's most expensive infrastructure assets. To give readers some sense of quantum, one section of the Yealm Steps pontoons, which are constructed to take the ground each tide, has a current replacement cost of c. £60,000. The operating life and material condition of the pontoons are seriously impacted by the weight of dinghies attached to them. Neglected and unattended dinghies that have not been bailed out compound the strains and impact.
- **Safety and personal injury.** With owners often needing to clamber over other dinghies and inflatables to reach their own vessels, the risks to safety and personal injury increase. These risks exist at all main launching sites, but are of particular concern at Yealm Steps, with significant cross-current streams during spring tides. These risks are regularly highlighted in the Authority's safety and risk assessments and need to be addressed.
- **Social, administrative and 'hassle'.** Whilst most dinghy owners are attentive and considerate in the way they look after their dinghies, regrettably there is a significant minority who do not. The lack of attention by absentee owners: heightens personal risk to others; increases damage to Authority assets; represents a real cost to the Authority from continuous intervention by staff and, finally, causes annoyance and anger among other dinghy owners.
- **Kayaks.** Without the need to attend to and bail out kayaks, it has become evident that a good proportion of kayaks left near Yealm Steps, and at the Brook and on Noss Foreshore are used infrequently and left unattended for extended periods. In effect, these launching sites have become handy 'free' long-term parking sites.

Dinghy/tender size at Yealm Steps. During recent times, it has become apparent that the Authority's regulation on the size of vessels that may be moored at the Yealm Steps pontoons is often not adhered to (maximum length of 11-foot 2inches and maximum beam of 4 foot 10 inches). As a first step towards alleviating the strain on the pontoons, these regulations will be enforced strictly from 2026.

The Authority is actively considering a few additional mitigations and actions and is also conducting certain specific reviews. These include:

- **Yealm Steps** - Making eligibility to moor at the Yealm Steps pontoons subject to the same residency criteria that the Authority applies for mooring licence eligibility. We are currently conducting a review of which stakeholder groups made most use of the Yealm Steps pontoons.
- **Yealm Steps** - Introducing an annual mooring charge for dinghies moored at the Yealm Steps pontoons. These pontoons provide the only 'all-states-of-the-tide' launching facility in the harbour. They are also the Authority's most significant medium-term replacement cost, which we need to provide for over time via harbour dues. The Authority is minded introducing a charge for access and all tide mooring at Yealm Steps to help cover the costs of pontoon maintenance and renewal.
- **Harbour Wide** - Introducing a similar maximum length and maximum beam limit on vessels moored on the harbour foreshores, with particular attention to the Brook and the Noss Foreshore.
- **Harbour Wide** The Authority is conducting a review of all vessels held on outhauls and harbour Authority moorings within the Harbour, with particular attention to Newton Creek, to map against current regulations.
- **Harbour Wide** - Restrict the period each year that kayaks may be kept on the Foreshore, near the Yealm Steps, and at the Brook and on Noss Foreshore to April to October.
- **Reducing the Risk of moored vessel collisions** - This review will inform what options will be considered to reduce the risk of vessel collisions (and resulting arguments over culpability and responsibility). The risk exists across all mooring categories, but due to size and weight is most acute for 'A' moorings. Whilst the Authority seeks to allocate moorings that can accommodate an owner's vessel, the Authority has always made it clear that it will not accept responsibility and cannot guarantee that adjacent berthed vessels may not collide and that suitable precautions by owners to protect their vessels may be necessary at times. Mooring Licensees accept this risk annually by signing their Mooring Form (New & Renewal) Regulation 17.3. With the harbour's topography, our often-strong tidal flows and the impact of stronger winds from different directions mean that eliminating the chance of collisions is extremely difficult without drastically reducing

the size and number of mooring licenses. The Authority will consider the repositioning of certain 'A' moorings and the removal or re-classification of certain 'A' moorings to 'B' and visa versa. All vessels behave differently when moored. It must be the responsibility of yacht owners to be aware of how their yachts behave in different wind and tide conditions and take sensible practical steps to minimise collision risks. For example, streaming a short drogue to maintain a vessel's heading (indeed some owners already do just this) and yachts with lifting keels on non-drying moorings ensuring their keels down to improve directional stability are obvious steps owners should take.

- **Maintaining Safe Fairways** – With the steady growth of traffic and the increasing size and diversity of vessels moored in the harbour, the relatively narrow deep water navigable passages in the river can prevent the safe passage of craft particularly during slack tides and wind against tide conditions. Allied with the observations on collisions, above, these considerations may require changes to moorings bounding the fairways.
- **Making Better Use of Finite Capacity** – The Authority is also looking at what options, ashore and afloat, there may be to improve available boat storage and mooring capacity whilst not impinging on the designated Clear Areas in Newton Creek and between Madge Point and the boundary of the Kitley Estate.

As ever, the Authority's aim is to work with stakeholders to improve, maintain, regulate and manage the harbour to ensure it remains a safe and enjoyable facility for all harbour users. We welcome all helpful constructive feedback, and suggestions and new ideas, as we work to settle a programme of steps to address congestion and improve harbour access.

Feedback can be sent to the harbour office at office@yealmharbourauthority.co.uk

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Chair

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