



Studland Bay Anchorage Threat

A member of BORG, the Boat Owners' Response Group, has written to CQBHA asking us to get involved with this project. BORG exists to respond to the threats to boating interests posed by the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) programme, and I personally have been involved in challenging some very dodgy "science" claiming to justify restrictions on boating.

As you are no doubt aware, a key potential MCZ site is Studland Bay, valued as an anchorage by sailors from all over the South Coast and beyond, and we believe BORG's efforts have helped to make the decision-makers to re-think seriously about designating Studland as an MCZ - the site has been deferred from designation twice already. However, the end game, the third and final tranche, is approaching when decisions will be made, and the threat to Studland Bay remaining as an anchorage for recreational boating is real and serious. The outcome favoured by the conservationist lobby is ban anchoring and install mooring buoys for which a charge would be made.

A Dorset Wildlife Trust publication states that "Careful management of the site would also potentially open the bay up to more low impact recreational use such as kayaking and snorkelling which is currently limited by the unrestricted boating activity" – i.e. they hope to restrict boating activity in the Bay. I'm sure that many Cobbs Quay berth holders anchor in Studland Bay at varying times, and loss of that facility and its replacement by chargeable mooring buoys would not be welcome.

It is believed that anchoring is not damaging the eelgrass meadows in the Bay, nor is it harming the sea horses' habitat. Local knowledge, including from the Studland Bay Preservation Association, my own experiences of visiting the Bay over 20 years, and a host of technical data which we have gathered and published on our website (<http://boatownersresponse.org.uk/>), and see particularly <http://boatownersresponse.org.uk/Evidence-overview-Sept14.pdf> and also aerial photos at <http://boatownersresponse.org.uk/Aerial-1972-2011.pdf>)

- all confirm that the eelgrass beds are healthy and expanding, and other articles on the site point out the high resilience of eelgrass to minor physical damage. We would accept controls if there was a strong reason for them, but certainly not when there is no valid reason.

A recent email from Defra, the body who makes the final decisions, points to the high financial costs of designating Studland Bay as an MCZ, but says "It is important to note that Studland Bay has not been permanently removed from consideration. Ahead of consideration in the third tranche, we will work with all interested stakeholders to explore the scope for local solutions and gather additional sector information. *As with all MCZs, we will seek an appropriate balance between ecological benefits and*

the social and economic costs associated with designation, and which are supported by adequate evidence.” (BORG member's italics). So there is everything to play for. However, the conservationists are actively pursuing their case: the Sea Horse Trust recently ran a petition calling for designation of Studland Bay as an MCZ which attracted over 150,000 signatures (many from overseas, and most signatories would not have a clue about the actual issues, but 150,000 is still a lot of names).

See <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/en-gb/208/992/778/reverse-the-decision-on-the-studland-bay-mcz/>

We encourage members to get behind a campaign to oppose designation – evidence of potential loss of berth holders from Cobbs Quay in the event that anchoring at Studland was banned would be valuable (I imagine that some would choose to move their boats elsewhere if anchoring were banned at Studland) - and to let you know that there is a lot of material to support a No campaign on the BORG website which you are most welcome to use. If you could encourage MDL to use its influence that would be really helpful – Cobbs Quay is the marina most immediately affected, and MDL would surely not want to lose berth holders. If BORG can help, just ask us.

The small number of BORG members do it voluntarily, BORG has no funds and seeks no funds. They just want to keep boating free from unwelcome and unnecessary restrictions. Studland Bay is an important case, but it goes wider, the whole Solent coast of the Isle of Wight, in the very heart of yachting, is also up for consideration in the third and final MCZ tranche. Any moral or practical support your members could give in the campaign would of course be most welcome. The RYA is involved in defending boating interests, but in their view are not presenting as strong a case as the situation merits.

As far as time scales go, a critical time might be around Spring 2016, as they have the current Tranche 2 designations to get through after January, which will presumably be done first. That might make the coming Autumn a good time to think seriously about these issues, and it is hoped that our members will be able to do so.