



WATER USERS GUIDE

2025

PLYMOUTH SOUND AND ESTUARIES

Plymouth Sound and Estuaries is the perfect place for adventure, fun, relaxation, and connecting with nature.



With a rich maritime heritage, 11 bustling marinas and the largest naval base in Western Europe, this area is not only a busy commercial port but a great place to explore. It's full of life - both on the water and beneath it offering incredible opportunities for recreation and home to a vibrant and diverse marine environment .

Thanks to its unique natural and cultural value, the Plymouth Sound and Estuaries has been designated a Marine Protected Area (MPA) and declared the UK's first National Marine Park.

As you explore, please enjoy it safely and responsibly. Be mindful of the environment as well as ongoing commercial and naval operations .

This guide and map offer helpful advice on navigational and water safety, and local nature and wildlife, so you can make the most of your visit while protecting this special place.

Funded by the Marine Recreational Mitigation and Management Scheme (MRMMS) and the Tamar Estuaries Consultative Forum (TECF), a coastal partnership of statutory organisations responsible for managing the MPA. Produced in collaboration from the members of the Port of Plymouth Marine Liaison Committee (PPMLC) which is made up of different water user representatives.

Discover
more on the
MPA website





STAYING SAFE IN THE PORT OF PLYMOUTH

Within this port there are military, commercial and recreational vessels and activities. Be aware of other water users.

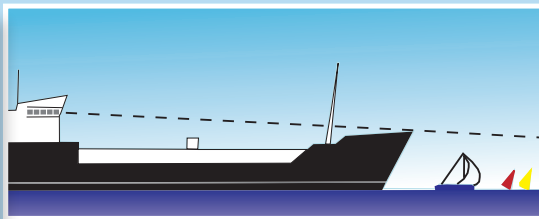
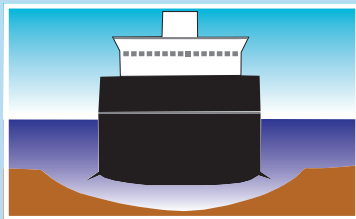
Large vessels primarily use the deep narrow navigational channels marked by buoys and lights but may also travel outside these areas within the port.

STAY INFORMED

Keep your radio tuned to VHF channel 14 - Port Control

Ten ways to navigate safely...

- 1 Keep well clear of the main shipping channels or cross at right angles and navigate to the starboard (right) of the channel.
- 2 Avoid crossing the bows of oncoming traffic
- 3 **Keep clear of larger vessels** – you may not be visible to them, and they often can't change course



- 4 Don't underestimate the speed of ships – they move faster than you think.
- 5 **Follow rule 9 International Regulations for the Prevention of Collisions at Sea in all areas of the port**
 - Sailing vessels or those under 20m follow preplanned tracks avoiding shipping
 - Keep at least 50m from walls, slipways or boundaries of Naval Base, 50m clear of military vessels and 100m from submarines while moving, anchored or as directed by KHM www.royalnavy.mod.uk/khm/plymouth for more information

6 Keep your distance; if diving, fishing or swimming stay 150m away from military ships, 100m away from walls, slipways or boundaries of Naval Base and 125m away from shipping lanes.

7 Be alert and ALWAYS follow:

- Collision Regulations
- Dockyard Port of Plymouth Orders
- Commercial Port By-laws
- Local Notices to Mariners
- Codes of Conduct and Best Practice



8 Be visible - Just because you can see a vessel doesn't mean they can see you! Display clear navigation lights; wear something bright and carry a torch if paddling or swimming.

9 Know your lights, shapes, flags and sounds to understand how vessels are moving

10 Report any damage, incidents or near misses in the Port of Plymouth to the King's Harbour Master immediately www.royalnavy.mod.uk/khm/plymouth/safety-and-regulations/report-an-incident

SPEED LIMITS

10

Inside the Breakwater
10 Knots*

4

Sutton Channel
4 Knots and no wake

8

The Cattewater
8 Knots, no wake

10

River Tamar north of Cargreen
10 Knots, no wake

DEAD SLOW

Sutton Harbour
Dead Slow

4

Swimming areas
4 Knots

*Vessels under 15m long overall, may exceed the speed limit outside 400m from the shore or in designated high speed areas.



Observe swimming and high speed areas



STAYING SAFE

- Wear a buoyancy aid or a lifejacket.
- Check the tides and the weather – be aware, conditions can change.
- SOS (channel 14) - stay in contact carry a phone in a waterproof pouch or a VHF radio keep them in reach.
- Stay visible - make sure you can be seen by others.
- Go with a buddy and always let someone know where you are going.
- Know your limits and abilities – make sure you can get back to shore safely.
- If you get in trouble in the water - remember - **Float to Live**.

IN AN EMERGENCY call 999 and ask for the Coastguard or use VHF Channel 16

For more advice visit www.rnli.org/safety/respect-the-water



Check Tide Times and Weather

Tide times www.royalnavy.mod.uk/khm/plymouth

Weather www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/specialist-forecasts/coast-and-sea

Hear a Horn? Know the signals

1 short blast

Vessel moving starboard (right)

2 short blasts

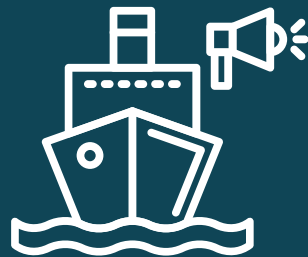
Vessel moving port (left)

3 short blasts

Vessel moving astern (backwards)

5 short blasts

DANGER – if it is for you **MOVE AWAY FAST** if safe to do so





BE NATURE AWARE AROUND OUR MPA

Our coast and waters are home to some fascinating, rare and internationally important marine habitats and species. That's why Plymouth Sound and its estuaries have been designated as a Marine Protected Area (MPA).

By following some simple guidance, you can help protect this incredible environment so we can all continue to enjoy, respect and sustain it, now and for the future.

Sensitive Habitats

Habitats like seagrass meadows, rocky reefs, kelp forests, estuaries, sandbanks, saltmarsh and mudflats are all important for providing nature services like food and shelter. They also support commercial fish stocks and rare species.

These can be negatively impacted by pollution and physical disturbance like anchoring, trampling and erosion.

What can I do

- Take care not to damage the seabed or seagrass meadows – they are vulnerable to boats, anchoring, fishing gear and recreational water users.
- Respect voluntary no anchor zones and use advanced mooring systems where possible
- Avoid creating large wakes
- Plan your route - use dedicated entry and exit points like slipways

What is an MPA

A Marine Protected Area (MPA) is an area of ocean that has legal protections for its marine life and habitats. It can be made up of several different designations that help protect from negative environmental impacts from human activity.

Our MPA is made up of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a Special Protection Area (SPA), a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) and seven Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)!

It is recognised as one of the best examples of estuarine habitats in the UK.



PRESERVE VITAL HABITATS

Avoid anchoring in seagrass
or hauling out in the
intertidal zone

- Stick to marked paths, walkways and main channels where possible
- Carry or float equipment in and out to avoid causing damage



Sensitive Wildlife - Birds and Marine Mammals

The MPA is home to many incredible and rare birds and marine animals. They use this area to rest, feed and breed, often during migrations. However, the presence of people, dogs, watercraft and drones can unsettle and threaten wildlife, causing stress and to waste valuable energy.

Noticed a change in behaviour? – You might be too close.

Give wildlife space:

- Don't get too close or follow animals – stay at least 100m away
- Move away if they come towards you
- Stay clear if animals are resting on land or pontoons
- Use binoculars for a better look

Move quietly and slowly – avoid noise and sudden movements (engines, equipment/sails flapping, paddles) and keep paddles low.

Plan your entry and exit – avoiding feeding and roosting areas.

In a boat

- Reduce your speed (6 knots or below) – avoid mammal collision risks and noise stay 300m away where possible, or 100m at least.
- If you must move near don't approach from the front or behind – move at a side angle
- If they come near your vessel keep a steady course and speed keep an eye out.

It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb, harass or endanger protected wildlife or damage/obstruct areas they use for shelter or protection.



Clean Water

Our marine environment relies on clean water to stay healthy and productive. Recreational activities can be a source of pollution from litter and animal waste to fuel spills and harmful chemicals.

There are ways that you can help reduce your impact.

What can I do



Dockyard Port of Plymouth Order 2020: it is illegal for any polluting substance to be permitted to enter the waters of the Dockyard Port of Plymouth

The Green Blue Code of Conduct (see page 11) provides guidance on good environmental practice for sailors and other small craft users.

www.thegreenblue.org.uk





Non-Native Species

www.nonnativespecies.org/what-can-i-do/check-clean-dry

What can I do

Report any sightings of concern on the iNaturalist App www.inaturalist.org

Learn more at www.plymouth-mpa.uk/discover-the-mpa

CHECK – look over your equipment, boat, and clothing for mud, aquatic animals and plant material after leaving the water. Remove anything you find.

CLEAN – wash everything as soon as you can with fresh (hot) water if possible.

DRY – Let everything dry as much as possible before visiting another area.

Historic Wrecks

In the area there are 100's of historic ship and plane wrecks from different periods throughout history. These are important for wildlife and popular diving spots; however, some are protected from unauthorised activity e.g. diving, fishing and depositing anything near the wreck.

- Protected wreck locations are available on admiralty charts
- Be aware – unauthorised activity at these sites may lead to prosecution

Find out more about wrecks in the area www.shipsproject.org

Follow the Marine and Coastal Code

Advice for visitors www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-and-coastal-wildlife-code



BOATS AND SMALL CRAFT

Entering and travelling around Plymouth by water

Plymouth Sound provides excellent shelter due to the Breakwater. It can be entered by the Western or Eastern Channels; both are well buoyed and lit. There are no real hazards and no shoals with less than 3.7 metres at low water, but take care to the west of Drakes Island.

STAY INFORMED

Keep your radio tuned to VHF channel 14 - Port Control

Be Aware

- No mooring or landing on the Plymouth Breakwater. it is dangerous
- Yachts should stay clear of deep-water channels used by large vessels, crossing channels at right angles
- Designated swimming areas are marked by yellow buoys – please avoid or stay below 4 knots
- Look out for divers - if you see vessels flying a blue and white 'A' flag or bright surface marker buoys (SMBs) in the water- Keep well clear and reduce speed.
- For speed limits and other safety information go to page 4.



Harbours and Marinas

- Approaching Sutton Harbour, Queen Anne's Battery and Plymouth Yacht Haven, keep an eye out for tankers and bulk carriers manoeuvring
- No Anchoring in Cattewater Harbour
 - Visitor moorings bookable online
 - Numerous moorings and wall onshore berthing available - contact Cattewater Harbour, 4 hour max stay
- Free, lock entrance to Sutton Harbour Marina (VHF Channel 12)
 - Traffic light controlled - 44m x 12m - 24hrs per day
 - Operates free flow mode 3hrs either side of high water.
- Approaching Mayflower Marina and King Point Marina



DIVERS

A marker buoy or A-flag means divers down - keep clear



- Be aware of ferries turning at Millbay docks
- Be aware of naval vessel movement at Devonport Naval Base – especially at 'The Narrows' due to strong currents
- Traffic light controls are in place at King Point Marina

Navigating the Estuaries

- **Torpoint to Devonport** - avoid disrupting operation of Floating Chain Bridge Ferry
- **River Lynher** – reachable to St Germans Quay (no mooring) on flood tide – dries out on a low tide.
- **River Tamar** – passable to Calstock on rising tide, 12 miles above Tamar Road and rail bridges
- **River Tavy** – accessible to unmasted craft only up to Bere Ferrers.



STAY SAFE

- **Training:** Knowledge of your activity is essential
- **Engine and fuel check:** Have you sufficient fuel and spares?
- **ALWAYS WEAR YOUR KILL CORD**

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

IN AN EMERGENCY call 999 and ask for the Coastguard or use VHF Channel 16



THE GREEN BLUE CODE OF CONDUCT

Follow these boating top tips to help safeguard our marine environment:

- Never allow rubbish to go overboard.
- Ensure oil and fuel do not enter the water. Install a bilge filter and keep a spill kit on-board to clean up any accidental spills.
- Use onshore toilets where possible.
- Keep your distance from wildlife, get hold of 'The Green Wildlife Guide for Boaters'.
- Choose anchoring sites carefully and avoid areas of Seagrass (shown on map).
- Use low phosphate, environmentally friendly cleaning products.
- Safely dispose of waste from maintenance, e.g. antifoul scrapings into hazardous waste bins.

For more environmental best practice visit www.thegreenblue.org.uk



WIND SURFING AND WIND FOILING

There are some great spots in the Port of Plymouth to enjoy your water sport. Here is some guidance to help balance the wide range of activities safely and minimise any impact on the environment.

Be Aware:

- High speed area for water skiing in the River Plym, north of Laira Bridge can only be used 2 hours either side of high tide.
- North of Laira Bridge users should stay within the buoyed areas on the east of the river.
- Towing of inflatable rings or similar equipment is not allowed within Plymouth Sound
- Kite surfing is not allowed within Plymouth Sound.

Be Nature Aware

- Minimise noise and sudden changes in direction in wildlife sensitive areas
- Plan entry and exist – avoid trampling on sensitive areas, launch from slipways and other suitable points
- Float out your equipment in and out, don't drag it.



STAY SAFE

- Wear a buoyancy aid and a helmet
- Avoid extreme weather conditions
- Stay clear of navigational channels and other craft

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

**IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for the
Coastguard or use VHF
Channel 16**



DIVING, FREEDIVING AND SNORKELLING

This area is fantastic for exploring beneath the waves – home to captivating marine life and historic wrecks. It's a favourite for divers, snorkelers and freedivers alike. Whether you're heading out from shore or by boat, follow this advice to have fun, stay safe and protect this special place.

All divers contact Plymouth VTS (Longroom) prior to diving for any dangers or hazards. VHF Ch 14 or call 01752 663225

No diving:

- Within 150 metres of HM ships or any other military vessel.
- Within 100 metres of Naval base or Crown Establishments.
- Within the navigational and shipping channels
- Within channels and prohibited anchorages unless consented by KHM.

Be Nature Aware

- Take care not to damage sensitive habitats, species or fragile wrecks
- Take photographs not souvenirs
- Check your buoyancy – this protects the seabed and other habitats
- Enjoy watching wildlife underwater but if you do forage see page 16 for guidance on fish and shellfish limits.

www.bsac.com/advice-and-support/protect-our-seas/diver-snorkeller-guidelines/



DIVERS

Use SMBs or ensure your vessel is flying an A flag



STAY SAFE

- **Check your equipment** – is your gear in good condition.
- **Stay alert**, be aware of what is around and above you.
- **Diving emergency** – suspected decompression illness call DDRC – 01752 209999

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for the Coastguard or use VHF Channel 16



PADDLE SPORTS

The Plymouth Sound and Estuaries is full of stunning bays, inlets and winding upper estuaries perfect for exploring and connecting with nature. These are also sensitive wildlife areas - here is some guidance when visiting;

- No kayaking, canoeing or stand-up paddle boarding in the main shipping channel
- Stay to the edges of the shipping channel and cross at right angles if you need to.
- **Move away from larger vessels** – you may see them, but they might not be able to see you. They may not be able to change course.
- Be aware - follow advice in navigational safety (page 4) and for small craft (page 5).
- Paddlesports are not permitted within Millbay Harbour
- Be aware of strong currents within the port which may flow faster than you can paddle.

Be Nature Aware

- Reduce disturbance – stay quiet around wading birds, avoid wildlife refuges.
- Keep your paddles low near birds and other wildlife
- SUP users keep low, go to your knees
- Plan entry and exits – avoid trampling on sensitive areas, launch from slipways and other suitable points
- Float out your equipment in and out, don't drag it



STAY SAFE

- Wear your leash if on a SUP
- Avoid offshore winds make sure you can make it back safely
- Dress for the season and weather

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

**IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for the
Coastguard or use VHF
Channel 16**



PERSONAL WATERCRAFT (PWC)

The Port of Plymouth has areas for all activities to enjoy time on the water. PWC's can cause disturbance to wildlife and swimmers so here is some guidance when using your PWC:

Be aware of other water users:

- Keeping within the speed limits and remembering your wake can affect others
- Avoiding anchorages and moorings
- Check your distance - keep 400m from the shore
- Keeping out of swimming areas; if you must enter keep speed below 4 kn and proceed with caution
- Be aware - follow advice in navigational safety (pages 4 and 5) and small craft (pages 10 and 11)

Please register your PWC, and ensure all dues are paid where required.

More information can be found at www.royalnavy.mod.uk/khm/plymouth/using-the-port-for-recreation/personal-watercraft-use

Be Nature Aware

- Avoid disturbing wildlife – keep your distance and reduce your speed
- Keep noise to a minimum – think about wind direction – sound travels more upwind
- Keep your wake small
- Follow the Green Blue Code of Conduct



Register your PWC, or jetski, it is free and covers the whole Port of Plymouth



STAY SAFE

- Always wear your kill cord
- Carry a towline, flare and torch
- For more information visit www.pwp.org.uk/training-safety

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

**IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for the
Coastguard or use VHF
Channel 16**



RECREATIONAL FISHING AND ANGLING

Plymouth Sound and Estuaries, offers a wonderful range of opportunities for different types of recreational fishing due to the incredibly diverse marine habitats. Whether from the shore, a boat or underwater here is some key things to know.

Catch and release – help future stocks, record what you find and release it. app.seaangling.org/signup

Be aware

- Catch permitted for personal consumption or use.
- Fishing is not permitted in Sutton Harbour, Millbay Harbour Cattewater Harbour north of the charted line
- **Bass angling** – Minimum size and bag limits apply, with further restrictions in the Bass Nursery Areas – fishing for bass or the use of sandeels as bait is not allowed:
 - **Rivers Tamar and Plym:** by boat is prohibited all year.
 - **River Yealm:** prohibited 30 April to 1 January.
- Bait digging is restricted in the Special Protected Areas (Lyhner Estuary, St Johns Lake and Tamar and Tavy Estuaries)
- **Salmon and Trout** – Rod licences required from Environment Agency.
- **Protected species** – Allis and Twaite Shad, and 'Freshwater' Eels must be returned alive immediately if caught. Also return Smelt this is the only known UK breeding site.

Any animals caught and removed should be for personal consumption or use only

STAY UP TO DATE

Regulations, byelaws and size limits can be confusing and often change. Keep up to date via the IFCA's site or: www.plymouth-mpa.uk/fishing-and-angling



STAY SAFE

- Carry a rope or throwline
- Wear suitable clothing and footwear
- Be visible – carry a torch or use a DSMB if diving
- Be aware of traveling boats avoid casting out in to them

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

IN AN EMERGENCY call 999 and ask for the Coastguard or use VHF Channel 16

**If you suspect
illegal fishing
activity report it to
IFCA:
Devon
07740 175479
Cornwall
01872 324284**

Be Nature Aware

Avoid wildlife refuges and sensitive habitats and use the right gear.

- Follow best practices, like angling and bait digging codes) and regulations
- Dispose of fishing line responsibly – use angling bins and follow tips to avoid gear loss
- Backfill any holes you dig

For more detailed information visit www.plymouth-mpa.uk/fishing-and-angling





SWIMMING

There are fantastic swimming locations for you to enjoy a dip. Swimming areas are marked with yellow buoys for your safety. There are also several bathing areas in the port, these do not have yellow buoys but the water quality is monitored.



- Cawsand Bay
- East Tinside Cove - beware of strong currents
- Firestone Bay – beware of strong currents particularly sound side the yellow markers
- West Hoe - beware of strong currents
- Bovisand
- Wembury

Be aware of other activities in marked swimming areas. Whilst discouraged, vessels can enter yellow buoys at a max speed of 4 knots.

No swimming - Cattewater, Sutton and Millbay Harbours this is for your own safety and is a high traffic area



Water Quality

- Pollution forecast - Swiminfo environment.data.gov.uk/bwq/profiles/
- Storm outflows - Waterfit Live southwestwater.co.uk

Be Nature Aware

- Use nature safe sun protection
- Avoid marine mammals and birds – move away – even if they approach you
- Take away all that you bring



STAY SAFE

- **Stay visible** - wear a bright swim hat or a bright tow float..
- If you get in trouble in the water – remember – **Float to Live**

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for
the Coastguard or
use VHF Channel 16



OTHER ACTIVITIES

Visiting the Beach and Coast

Spending time at the coast and the beach is the perfect way to relax and have fun. Exploring rockpools is a great way to connect with nature and discover our marine life.

What can you do:

- Get to know your local spot – read local guidance
- Fires and BBQ's be considerate, extinguish and dispose of responsibly.

Be Nature Aware

Coastal walks and beach days:

- Stick to paths and walkways to avoid trampling
- Keep your dogs beside you or on a lead when in areas with sensitive habitat and animals
- When it comes to poo - bag it and bin it.



Rockpooling – Follow the Seashore Code:

- Watch your step
- If you lift rock of seaweed, put it back how you found it.
- Leave animals where you find them.
- Avoid nets use reusable containers to take a closer look
- Take photographs, not souvenirs
- If foraging for seaweed, never take it all, leave the holdfast



STAY SAFE

- Check the tides and weather – don't risk getting cut off by changing tides or caught by waves
- Watch your step – rocks can be jagged and slippery
- Stay in contact – carry a phone and let someone know where you are going.
- Beware of the edges of cliffs it is easy to slip and fall.
- If you get in trouble in the water – remember - Float to Live

See Page 5 for full safety advice.

**IN AN EMERGENCY
call 999 and ask for
the Coastguard or
use VHF Channel 16**

STAY IN CONTACT

IN AN EMERGENCY

Call 999 and ask for the Coastguard or VHF Channel 16

VHF RADIO CHANNELS

DISTRESS, SAFETY and CALLING Channel Only - or only to establish contact before going to a recognised channel.	16
Ship to ship channels	6, 8, 72 and 77
Port operation channels - not for ship-to-ship communications	
Tug control	11
Sutton Lock working channel	12
King's Harbour Master Naval and Commercial Port Control	14
Plymouth Pilots calling channel	14
Rame Head - National Coastwatch	65
HM Coastguard working channel	67 or 73
Marina working channels	37 and 80
Yacht Clubs	37

MOD BOAT WATCH

Register your boat and help MOD police reduce crime, and the police return lost/ found/stolen property. www.royalnavy.mod.uk/khm/plymouth/safety-and-regulations/harbour-patrols

OPERATION KRAKEN

Report anything suspicious or unusual behaviour at sea anonymously to police on 101 or crime stoppers on 0800 555 111 - quote Kraken

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Safety and Ports

Coastguard	999
Cattewater Harbour Master	01752 665934
National Coastwatch Institute (NCI) Rame Head	01752 823706
Coastguard Falmouth	01326 317575
HM Customs Hotline	0800 59 50 00
MoD Police Marine Unit	01752 553384
Police (non emergencies)	101
KHM Plymouth Vessel Traffic Service (Longroom)	01752 663225

Environmental

Environment Agency Incident Hotline	0800 807060
Natural England	0300 060 3900
Live Marine Animal Strandings	01825 765546
Dead Marine Animal Strandings (MSN)	Devon 07719 086531 Cornwall 03452 012626
Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authorities (IFCA) Report illegal fishing number	Devon 07740 175479 Cornwall 01872 324284

Marinas and Other

Mayflower Marina	01752 556633
Millbay Docks (ABP Ltd)	01752 662191
Plymouth City Council	01752 668000
Plymouth City Council Marine Services Manager	07771 663560
Plymouth Tourist Information	01752 306330
Plymouth Yacht Haven Marina	01752 404231
King Point Marina	01752 424297
Queen Anne's Battery Marina	01752 671142
Sutton Harbour Lock Gate	01752 204732







IN AN EMERGENCY

Call 999 and ask for
the Coastguard or
VHF Channel