



SOUTH EAST DEVON
HABITAT REGULATIONS
PARTNERSHIP

South East Devon Habitat Regulations Executive Committee

Exe Estuary Patrol Boat – proposed pilot scheme.

July 2025

Legal comment/advice:

EDDC Legal Services are advising on the terms of the Agreement attached to this report as Appendix 1, including the identity of the correct parties to this Agreement so that it is legally binding. As currently drafted, the Agreement is also light on detail in a number of areas.

DEM.1-0007/July2025/RAH

Finance comment/advice:

As detailed in the report, the proposal offers financial savings against the anticipated increase to current annual costs and offers additional benefits over and above current arrangements.

Public Document: Yes
Exemption: None
Review date for release: None

Recommendations

It is proposed that the Executive Committee:

1. Notes the proposed 12-month pilot arrangements for the shared use of the Exeter Port Authority (EPA) rigid inflatable boat (RIB), workboat, associated training provision and plan for the existing Patrol Boat, commencing 1 August 2025, as detailed in Appendix 1.
2. Approves expenditure of £9,500¹ as set out in Section 3, to cover the use of EPA vessels, fuel, personal protective equipment, and associated boat cramage and cradle costs.
3. Receives a follow-up report following completion of the 12-month pilot to review outcomes and inform future decision-making.

Equalities impact: Low

Risk: Low

This report summarises the remit and intended function of the South East Devon Wildlife Patrol Boat and makes recommendations about a pilot scheme sharing use of two of the Exeter Port Authority's vessels. Appendix 1 is attached, which details the service level agreement and sets out the parameters of the agreement.

1. Summary

1.1 Purchase of the existing Patrol Boat was approved by the Executive Committee at their inaugural meeting in July 2016. A budget of approximately £30,000 was identified for an "up to date, fast and well-equipped" patrol boat with an appropriate level of staff resources.

1.2 The mitigation strategy identified the remit of the Patrol Boat, focusing on these key areas:

- Operational through the winter and be responsive to weather conditions (i.e. able to go out when the estuary is likely to be busy or particular activities are taking place).
- Able to patrol the entire estuary, have the power to enforce, and in particular be able to focus on:
- Ensuring all craft within the estuary remain within the speed limit.
- Personal watercraft users, kitesurfers and windsurfers are following agreed codes of conduct.
- Particular activities which are taking place within designated zones

¹ Less any monies refunded from Exmouth Marina, see 2.7 and 3.2.

- Providing a clear presence that may deter particularly anti-social or unusual events that may have particular disturbance implications, such as hovercraft use, testing of model planes, etc.

1.3 The opportunity to collaborate on the procurement of a new patrol vessel was initially explored, as Exeter City Council was undertaking a review of its role as Harbour Authority and had identified the need for new vessels to support harbour duties. It was noted that acquiring a single vessel capable of fulfilling multiple functions year-round would offer operational and cost efficiencies.

1.4 The timescales for the Harbour Authority's strategic review did not align with the Habitat Regulations Partnership's requirement to implement mitigation measures within a set timeframe. As outlined in the July 2016 report, a cut-off date of 31 August 2016 was agreed to ensure timely delivery. Following this date, it was confirmed that a vessel would be procured independently using developer contributions allocated for mitigation.

1.5 Following this decision, detailed research into suitable vessels was undertaken in consultation with the newly appointed Habitat Mitigation Officers (Wildlife Wardens). Key operational requirements included all-weather capability, ease of use, adequate on-board storage, and shelter for year-round use. The Quicksilver Pilothouse 605 was selected as the most appropriate model to meet these needs.

1.6 After a lead-in time to allow for the boat's construction and delivery, the patrol vessel was brought into service on the Exe Estuary in August 2018. It is currently berthed at Exmouth Marina when not in active use.

1.7 The 2024–25 Annual Business Plan highlighted several operational problems with the current mitigation patrol vessel. These included difficulties navigating in windy conditions due to the cabin, a hard hull that is easily damaged, and limited adaptability to the changing conditions of the estuary. To address these issues, £10,000 was approved by the Executive Committee to part-exchange the existing vessel for a Highfield 540 Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB), a model similar to the one used by the EPA.

2. Review of approach

2.1 Since the review of Exeter Port Authority's (EPA) functions, work boats have been procured to support the delivery of harbour-related duties. Due to differing timelines, remits and funding arrangements, South East Devon Wildlife (SEDW) and the EPA have each owned and operated separate vessels. Nonetheless, collaboration between the two organisations has continued where appropriate.

2.2 As part of the EPA's reorganisation, it was mutually agreed by the respective operational teams that enforcement of speed limits on the Exe Estuary would fall under the remit of the EPA. As a result, Wildlife Wardens do not undertake this duty, except in unusual circumstances where there is immediate danger to life.

2.3 After approval of the 2024-25 Annual Business Plan, (but prior to purchase of a new RIB), a more efficient way of working has been identified. The EPA has proposed a 12-month pilot scheme under which Wildlife Wardens would charter access to two EPA vessels — the Highfield (RIB) *Exe Harbour Launch* and the *Exe Harbour Workboat* — for an annual fee of £7,500.

2.4 The proposed charter agreement would offer several operational and financial advantages compared to current arrangements:

- Primary use of the *Exe Harbour Launch*, with the *Exe Harbour Workboat* available when joint patrols are not feasible or as backup.
- Guaranteed maximum of forty patrol days within a 12-month period.
- Vessels fuelled and maintained in a ready-to-use state.
- Annual provision of four training days with EPA instructors.
- Insurance cover provided by EPA for both vessels.
- All maintenance, servicing, and anti-fouling included in the agreement.
- Greater operational flexibility and responsiveness through use of a RIB.
- Lower risk of damage and easier handling associated with a RIB.
- Potential for resale of the existing SEDW patrol vessel should the pilot prove successful — proceeds could contribute to multiple years of charter fees.
- Savings from the release of the current Exmouth Marina berth, which would no longer be required.

2.5 The pilot scheme presents an opportunity to deliver improved value for money and streamlined operations through shared resources. Subject to approval, it is recommended that the charter agreement be progressed and reviewed after the initial 12-month period to assess effectiveness and value.

Comparison of costs.

2.4 Expenditure on the existing SEDW patrol boat has varied annually due to changing requirements for training, usage, maintenance, and equipment. Table 1 summarises the associated costs over the past five fiscal years:

Table 1.

Year	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Expenditure	£4,411	£5,158	£7,178	£4,641	£9,172

2.5 Despite an average annual spend of approximately £6,112, costs are projected to rise further due to:

- Reclassification of the boat's size category, resulting in increased berthing fees at Exmouth Marina.
- Continued annual uplifts to marina charges.
- Rising insurance premiums.
- Increasing costs for servicing and maintenance.

As a result, future annual costs are anticipated to exceed £8,000.

2.6 Unlike the current vessel, the *Exe Harbour Launch* does not have an enclosed cabin. To ensure staff remain adequately protected from the elements, the purchase of new wet weather gear would be required at an estimated cost of £300 per officer (total £900). In addition, temporary team branding would be necessary at a cost of approximately £100 to ensure clarity of boat operator identity during joint use.

2.7 During the initial 16-week notice period required to terminate the current marina berth, it is recommended that the existing patrol boat remain moored at Exmouth Marina. This provides operational resilience should the Wildlife Wardens require access to the vessel during the initial stages of the pilot. Subject to a successful pilot outcome, the boat could then be craned out, cleaned, and stored at Exeter Quay.

2.8 Under the proposed charter agreement (see Appendix 1), the EPA has confirmed that dry storage at Exeter Quay will be included within the first year of the agreement. Any cranaage or cradle hire would be subject to additional cost.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

3.1 The existing patrol boat has served successfully for over seven years. However, operational limitations have become increasingly apparent. The cabin, while offering shelter, contributes to wind resistance, making use in wind speeds above 20mph difficult. Additionally, the hard hull is fragile and more susceptible to damage. Routine tasks such as refuelling, maintenance, and cleaning — currently the responsibility of SEDW staff — would be covered by EPA under the proposed arrangement.

3.2 In order to implement the pilot scheme, it will be necessary to procure appropriate personal protective equipment for officers and to provide storage for the existing mitigation vessel. It is therefore recommended that the £10,000 previously approved for the part-exchange of the current vessel be reallocated to support delivery of the 12-month pilot scheme.

3.2 The proposed pilot offers an opportunity to modernise operations, reduce costs, and enable closer collaboration with EPA staff and volunteers. It is recommended that the patrol boat remain at Exmouth Marina during the 16-week notice period, before being removed from the water and stored, subject to the pilot proving successful.

3.3 It is further recommended that the Executive Committee receive a review report at the end of the 12-month pilot period. This will enable informed consideration of the long-term future of patrol boat operations and associated funding arrangements.

Proposed spend:

£9,500, consisting of:

£7,500 chartering fee to Exeter Port Authority for services as outlined in the Service Level Agreement (Appendix 1).

£900 personal protective equipment for Wildlife Wardens.

£500 fuel for Exe Harbour Launch and/or Exe Harbour Workboat.

£100 temporary logo covering for South East Devon Wildlife.

£500 cleaning, craneage and boat cradle costs.

Less any refund due from Exmouth Marina following the termination of the annual berth contract.

Neil Harris

**South East Devon
Habitat Regulations
Executive Committee**

July 2025

Natural England comment:

NE have reviewed the report and have no comment to make.