

The Solent Seals Code of Conduct

Solent Seal Population

Chichester Harbour Conservancy, Langstone Harbour Board and the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust have been monitoring seal populations in the Solent for a number of years.

The first official sighting of a Harbour Seal (*Phoca vitulina*) in the Solent was in 1994. Since then a small population has slowly established, with around 43-50 Harbour Seals and several Grey Seals in 2015. This is the only known resident population of Harbour Seals in



the eastern English Channel.

The Solent Seal Tagging project in 2009 showed that these Harbour Seals stay primarily within in the eastern Solent - from Southampton Water to Selsey Bill, including regular trips to the Isle of Wight.

Minimising disturbance to haul-out and breeding areas in Chichester Harbour is crucial for the conservation of seals in the Solent.

Behaviour

Seals often rest out of the water, typically on mud and sand flats at low tide, a behaviour known as 'hauling-out'. This is a very important time for the animals as it allows them to recover from foraging activities and conserve energy. The amount of time seals spend on land increases during the moulting and pupping seasons. As seals are not very mobile on land, they are vulnerable and easily disturbed when hauled-out. When disturbed, they will often enter the water and move away. Moving towards a vessel is a sign of stress rather than curiosity.

Distress can adversely affect their health by causing them to use energy unnecessarily, abandon a haul-out site, or cause the death of a pup if it is separated from its mother.

Seals are fascinating and elusive marine animals, and seeing them hauled-out is a highlight for many people.

We politely request that all vessels abide by the code overleaf when visiting the seals, so that they can continue to be observed without experiencing disturbance.



Chichester Harbour Conservancy

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A partnership project with:

Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust
LANGSTONE HARBOUR BOARD **Chichester Harbour Conservancy**

Code of Conduct

- Keep your distance from seals hauled out from the water (no closer than 100m or 300 ft) and use binoculars for a better view.
- Limit observation to a maximum of ten minutes.
- Limit vessel numbers to two at a time.
- Keep quiet! Do not rev engines or shout.
- If you are approached by a seal, maintain course with slow speed or remain stationary. Do not approach the seal.



- If seals show any signs of avoidance or disturbed behaviour (frequent direction changing away from the boat, moving into the water from haul-outs or diving) then move away immediately, but at slow speed.
- If you see a seal in the water, slow down (less than 5 knots or no-wake speed).
- Make steady movements parallel to the animal to minimise risk of disturbance.



- Always allow seals an escape route. Avoid boxing animals in or blocking narrow channels.
- Never drive or walk through a group, or come between a mother and her pup. If you see a nursing pup, leave the vicinity immediately and slowly.
- Never land or go ashore at haul-out sites. Seals can be dangerous when they perceive a threat.
- Chichester Harbour Conservancy will be monitoring boat activity at seal haul-out sites.
- If you see an injured marine mammal call the British Divers Marine Life Rescue on 01825 765546 or 07787 433412.
- Send marine wildlife sightings to www.hiwwt.org.uk/marine-sightings.

