

# Weymouth Harbour Report

Harbours Advisory Committee  
15th March 2023



Ed Carter  
*Weymouth Harbour Master*

# Weymouth harbour statistics as of end of January 2023

The below figures compared year on year are for the comparable period, for example 01 April to 31 January.

	2019/20	2020/21*	2021/22*	2022/23
Highest Annual % Let Achieved (Marina Berths)	71%	74%	83%	96%
Highest Annual % Let Achieved (Commercial Berths)	79%	80%	82%	76%
Visiting Leisure Craft Revenue (Berthing Fees)	£131,808	£53,485	£138,276	£150,804
Slipway & PWC Permit Revenue	£9,699	£22,940	£19,868	£24,598
Number of Bridge Lifts	1,240	926	1,383	1,193
Number of Vessels Transiting Bridge	6,314	6,151	7,251	5,915
Number of Non-resident Fishing Vessel Visits	152	193	96	42
Number of Acts of Pilotage	1	0	0	0

\*Years impacted by Covid restrictions

## Current Situation

**Annual Leisure Berths:** Occupancy of berths in the Marina peaked at 96% in July. It has been more than 10 years since occupancy rates have been at this level, and budget expectation in 2022/23 will be exceeded.

**Visiting Leisure vessels:** The early part of the season started well but overall visitor numbers are lower than last year, most notably there have been less visits from motor cruisers. Income for visitors using the slipway is up compared to previous years.

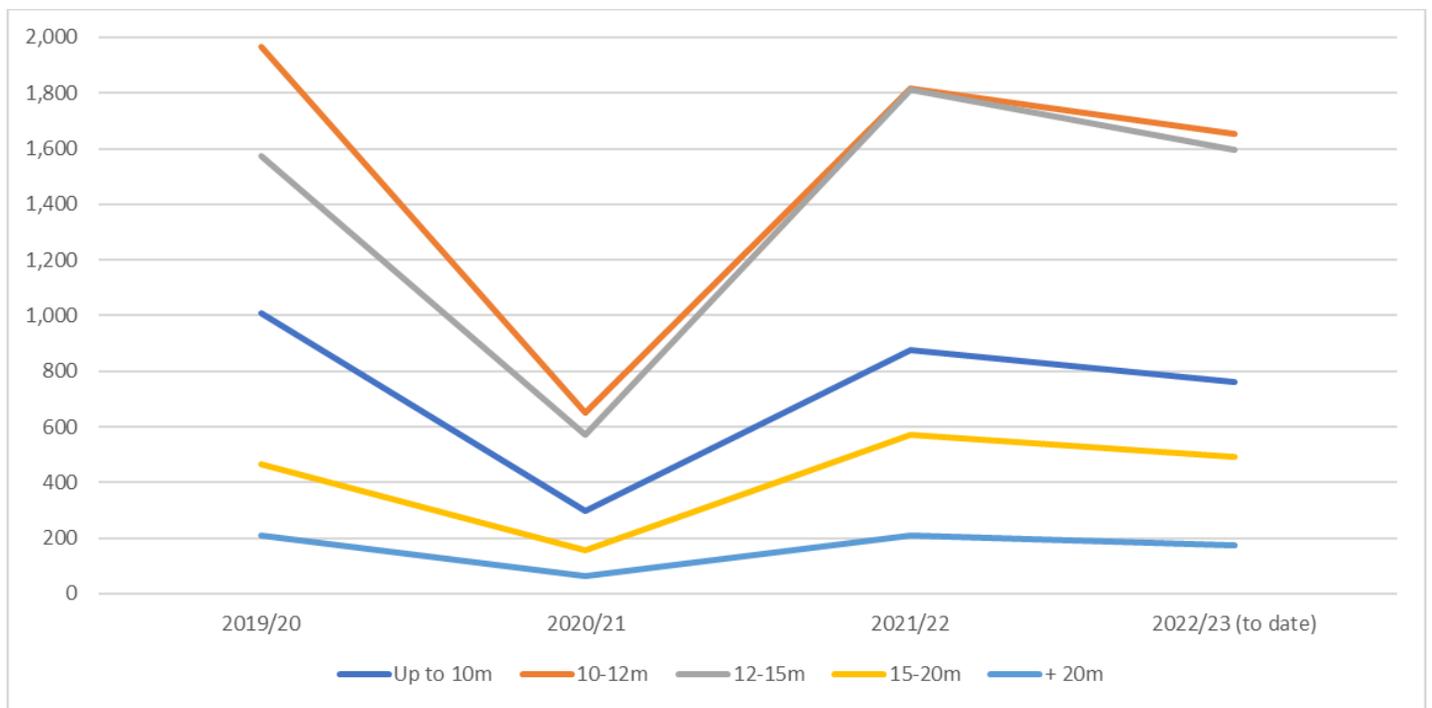
The table below shows the split for visiting leisure craft by their length overall.

	Up to 10m	10-12m	12-15m	15-20m	+ 20m
<b>2019/20</b>	1,007	1,968	1,572	465	210
<b>2020/21</b>	299	651	572	158	63
<b>2021/22</b>	878	1,816	1,814	572	208
<b>2022/23 (to date)</b>	761	1,651	1,597	491	174

As shown below, analysis of the visiting craft numbers highlights a clear drop during the severest restrictions put in place during the Covid pandemic. The drop in visitor numbers during 2022 is also reflected below. Despite the drop in visitor numbers, we have seen an increase in revenue this year due to the increase in visitor rates levied at the beginning of the season, and a higher than expected take up of winter berthing.

There are many factors influencing visitor behaviour currently. The sharp recovery in 2021 can be attributed to the 'staycation' effect, as people chose to holiday in the UK rather than risk fighting the travel chaos that was evidenced in many UK airports and the Channel Tunnel or being stuck abroad as return transport were cancelled. As restrictions on international travel have eased, the more recent complications of the cost-of-living crisis, the cost of travel from high fuel, accommodation, and food costs, are all putting increasing pressure on people to re-evaluate their plans and priorities.

It may be that more people will choose to stay in the UK again in 2023, and visitor numbers will rise. However, with so many rapidly changing factors to consider, evaluating trends and making predictions is extremely difficult in the current economic climate.



# Harbour Operations & Port Marine Safety – Quarterly Update

## 1.0 Harbour Use

1.1 Public use of the harbour has been low, as expected during the winter months. Many berth holder's vessels, commercial and private, have been taken ashore for winter lay-up and maintenance. There are several visiting yachts that have taken up winter berthing.

1.2 The fishing fleet has remained active during the winter, helped in part by the weather conditions. While very cold at times, this winter has not seen much in the way of winter storms and sea conditions have remained generally calm.

## 2.0 Staff Changes

2.1 Ed Carter has been appointed to the position of Weymouth Harbour Master and took up the post on 6th February. Ed comes to Weymouth after 10 years at Chichester Harbour, most recently as the Senior Deputy Harbour Master.

2.1 Karen Womack has been appointed to the position of Assistant Harbour Master, from her previous position of Berthing Officer. Karen has extensive experience in all aspects of harbour operations, and we welcome her appointment to this post.

2.2 Applications are currently being sought for the position of Berthing Officer, recently vacated by Karen Womack. Following a successful appointment, the Harbour Team will be operating at full strength going into the 2023 season.

## 3.0 Operations

3.1 Powers of General Direction have been assessed by specialist maritime solicitors and a draft copy has been produced. After seeking approval from the Harbours Advisory Committee at the June 2023 meeting, it is proposed that a 6-week public consultation will be conducted on the Directions, prior to them coming into force.

3.2 Pilotage – Weymouth Harbour is a Competent Harbour Authority under the Pilotage Act 1987, and issues Directions requiring certain classes of vessels to embark pilots authorised by the Authority when navigating within the Harbour area. In 2021, Marico Marine conducted a review into the continuing requirement for Pilotage services in Weymouth.

The extensive review found that considering the current and expected future traffic, and the result of a formal navigation risk assessment, it was recommended that we commence the process of removing the Harbour Authority's Pilotage functions. Removal of the Pilotage service is predicated on the introduction of the General Directions, which will be enforceable as soon as pilotage ceases.

The process of removing the Pilotage service, which has already been agreed by the Harbours Advisory Committee, has been put on hold prior to the appointment of a new Harbour Master. Now that a new Harbour Master has been appointed, the next step is to conduct an informal consultation process to gather views from interested parties (organisations and individuals), in this case primarily the Harbours Consultative Group, and any other people or organisations which we would consider would be likely to be affected by the removal of the pilotage function.

This informal consultation can be done at the next Consultative group meeting, with the findings being presented to the Harbours Advisory Committee in June. After the General Direction consultation has been completed and the General Directions are in force, the final part of removing Pilotage is to make an application to the Department for Transport, who will expect to see evidence of the process described above.

3.3 Oil spill pollution response forms part of our compliance with the PMSC, and as such regular exercises are conducted to test the effectiveness of the Weymouth Harbour Oil Spill Contingency Plan.

A Tier One exercise is planned for early March, involving harbour staff deploying and testing resources designed to contain a low level of spill. A Tier Two exercise is planned for May, which will involve a full mobilisation of equipment in conjunction with Oil Spill Response Limited and geared towards containing a more serious pollution incident. Representatives from the MCA, Dorset Council, Weymouth Town Council, Natural England, the Environment Agency, Police, and Southern IFCA will be invited to observe the exercise.

3.4 Trinity House, the General Lighthouse Authority, inspected the aids to navigation on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February and found them to be in good and efficient order.

3.5 Cleaning of the infrastructure and the rolling repair and maintenance to the pontoons continues. The appointment of a Port Operative specifically responsible for maintenance has proved very successful, and reported defects are being actioned quickly.

3.6 Deployment of safety buoys. Following an in-depth service and inspection of the Weymouth Bay Water Sports Zone buoys, a heavier gauge chain has been fitted to each buoy. It is hoped that the heavier chain will provide better holding for the buoys in rough conditions and will reduce ongoing servicing costs as the chain will last longer before it needs to be replaced.

The buoys are scheduled to be deployed at the end of March, ready for the start of the season.

## **4.0 Incidents**

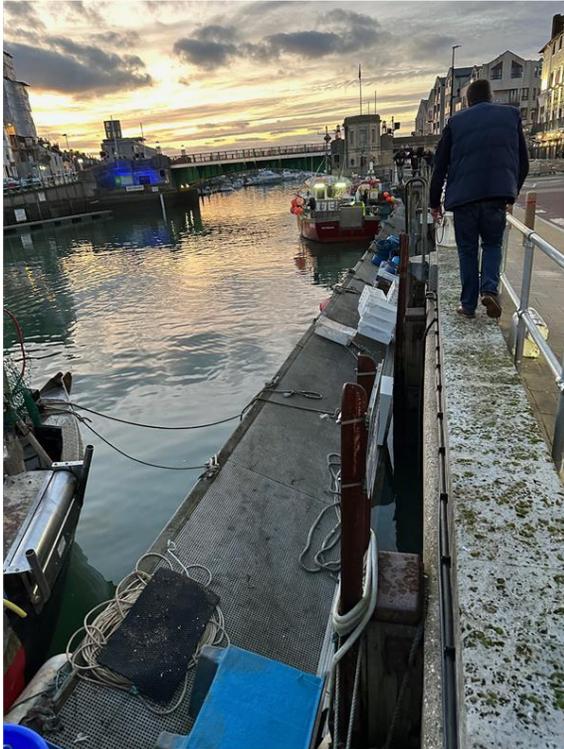
4.1 Over the last quarter, incidents have been rare. Notably, at least 20 vessels over the period required pump-out by Harbour Staff due to vessels being left unattended and uninspected by the owner for long periods of time. Owners have been contacted in all cases, and where vessels are clearly in an unseaworthy condition, details regarding the ongoing plan for the vessel have been requested from the owner, along with a valid certificate of insurance.

A recent spate of incidents has occurred where life rings have been removed from their holders and thrown into the harbour. The life rings have been recovered in all instances, and the incidents have been reported to the police so they can factor this into their regular patrols.

Following the recent pontoon incident (detailed below), an Incident Log Sheet has been developed to be used where a more complex incident requires detailed reporting of actions taken, and to keep a comprehensive record of situations as they develop, potentially over a period of days or weeks.

4.2 Partial Capsize of Pontoon – At 1645 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January, harbour staff were called to attend an incident where the pontoon adjacent to the Royal Oak pub, immediately east of the Town Bridge had become stuck at low spring tide. As the tide rose, the pontoon was not free to float and subsequently was sat at a severe and unsafe angle. An amount of fishing gear had been removed from the pontoon by berth holders during the incident, but prior to staff arriving on scene, and after pulling on the cleared pontoon with a rope, it was possible to free the stuck section and allow the pontoon to float as designed.

Investigations into the cause have drawn no fixed conclusion, however upon visual inspection it became clear that the condition of the H-beams, that secure the pontoon and allow it to rise and fall with the tide, was under question. The pontoon was declared closed, and the resident vessels moved to other available berths. A dive survey was commissioned and carried out on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February. While the full report has not been provided at the time of writing this report, the 'on scene' view from an underwater camera clearly showed serious corrosion and weakening of the H-beams, and deterioration of quayside pilings below mean low water.



Quotes have been obtained and a contractor appointed to replace the H-beams and get the pontoon operational again as soon as possible. Once the dive survey has been received, a programme of works will be developed to replace quayside pilings where required.

4.3 Following the above incident, concerns have been raised by harbour staff regarding the amount of fishing gear being kept on the pontoons. It is a clear requirement of the Berthing Conditions that only 2 x 227ltr boxes can be used for 'light gear that is required for daily use'. It has been observed that some fishing vessels are storing more than the allowed amount on the pontoons, in the location of their berth. By storing more than the prescribed amount, safe access to the pontoon and emergency ladders can be compromised, as well as potentially overloading the structure beyond its intended safe use.

Further to conversations with the Consultative Group representative for Commercial Fishermen, we are proposing that 24-hour access storage bays be created in a secure compound at the Peninsula site for fishermen to store excess and/or heavy gear. A separate compound will be created within the existing commercial area using Heras Fencing, where fishermen can rent a defined and clearly marked space. Fishermen that pay to use this compound will be given 24-hour access through a padlocked gate but

will not be given access to the wider commercial area. A plan is being considered to see how many, and of what size, storage areas can be created. Benchmarking is taking place to ascertain the correct pricing for such a facility, and Terms and Conditions of use will be created. A diagram of the proposal can be seen at Figure 1.

This is only intended as a temporary solution, until the wider plans for a fishing storage area on the Peninsula can be developed and implemented. This temporary storage will help to guide decisions for the Peninsula development by gaining insight into the amount of space required by Commercial Fishermen and will provide income from an area of harbour freehold land not currently being utilised.

4.4 Weymouth and Portland Marine Litter Project (WPMLP, who operate the Crab Line Recycling scheme and Weymouth Beach Toy Library), and in conjunction with Litter Free Dorset, organise the collection of litter from the beaches at Chesil, Portland, Weymouth and Ringstead.

The collected litter is sorted into recyclables (bottles, cans, plastic packaging etc) and waste that enters the existing Dorset waste/recycling process, and is separated from fishing gear like nets, ropes, fish boxes. This fishing gear that would normally go to be incinerated, is collected by Cornwall based company Odyssey Innovations and is fed into a recycling process which produces plastic nurdles. These in turn are used to manufacture new items such as kayaks, benches, pontoon boards, and tables.

Currently, the majority of collected litter is being sorted at the private properties of the volunteers of WPMLP. They have recently enquired as to whether a space can be provided inside the commercial area of the Peninsula where the litter can be brought and sorted into three bins, prior to collection for recycling.

The deliveries would be approximately once every two weeks during winter (when the most litter is washed ashore) and every one to six weeks during the summer. Deliveries would be made using a small car or van, and collections made by a skip lorry.

Single bins have already been placed at Weymouth, West Bay and Lyme Regis, and the placement was highlighted in a Dorset Echo article in May 2021. Usage of the Weymouth bin to dispose of fishing gear has been low, primarily down to the access issues posed by being sited within a restricted access compound.

Alongside the excellent work being conducted in promoting clean beaches, a large part of the initiative is to encourage the responsible disposal of old fishing gear by providing a convenient local facility. Alongside the plan outlined in Point 4.3, it is thought that such a facility could easily be incorporated into the proposed fishing gear storage area, at no capital cost to Weymouth Harbour, and would be available for the use of all fishermen that store gear at the compound. The proposed litter sorting area is also shown at Figure 1.

Figure 1



## 5.0 Commercial Berths & Notable Traffic

5.1 LECHLADE, a 24m LOA Naval Auxiliary vessel, has been berthed in Weymouth Harbour for almost 16 years. Most recently, the vessel was sold, and following a protracted period of discussion with the new owner, towage of the vessel has finally been arranged. LECHLADE is due to leave the harbour, towed by the tug KNIGHTON, in late February.



## **6.0 Dredging**

6.1 Following the completion of the sampling plan with the MMO (Marine Management Organisation), our disposal dredge licence is now valid until 2026 and can be used in the case of any future build-up of material within the Inner Harbour, with the disposal zone located at Swanage. The latest maintenance dredge to the harbour approaches and Commercial Berth 1 was completed by a local contractor in April 2022. The works continue to maintain a safe navigable channel and reduce the risk of vessels coming aground near the pleasure pier. Annual dredging in this location is programmed to maintain the design depths.

6.2 Further to a survey of the Inner Harbour in October 2022, a meeting is planned with Shoreline Surveys to discuss the analysis of the bathymetric data which highlights some recently formed high spots, and to consider future dredging requirements.

## **7.0 Harbour Works**

7.1 Further to concerns raised surrounding the condition of the Pleasure Pier railings, a visual survey, above and below the water was conducted in September 2022, with a further and extensive condition survey in October 2022. The survey's confirmed that the pier is structurally sound, and "that the pier is able to adequately carry pedestrian loading." The loads that the pier was designed to carry far exceed what it currently experiences, or indeed has experienced for at least the last 30 years. It is worth noting that considerable spalling has been observed on some of the structural concrete.

The condition of the railings surrounding the pier however are giving cause for concern. The timber edging sections surrounding the upper edge are showing signs of serious deterioration, and as the railings are fixed to this timber, and that the railings themselves are in poor condition, it has been proposed that the railings are replaced and set back slightly, so that they can be fixed securely into the concrete deck.

The 3 sets access steps at the western (shore side) end of the pier are also showing some deterioration. These steps are no longer in active use, however whilst providing an excellent means of emergency access to and from the water, the steps act as a magnet for persons wishing to jump from the pier into the water (a prohibited activity). This ongoing activity puts a drain on harbour staff that are required to police the area to keep people safe, but also brings an anti-social behaviour element onto the pier in the form of littering, vandalism to infrastructure, and abusive language, often directed at Harbour Staff.

It is proposed that new railings are put in place surrounding the steps, with clear signage as to their purpose and intended use, and that the steps be repaired. The steps provide emergency access for vessels to land persons, or for persons to escape the water that would struggle to climb a ladder. The wide access also provides space for emergency services should it be required. While the railings and signage will not totally prevent persons jumping from the pier, it will make it easier for Harbour Staff to police, and where it is known that people are accessing the steps (authorised or not), it is not acceptable under current HSE regulations to leave the area in poor repair.

Verbal update to follow.

## **8.0 Pilotage**

8.1 No acts of pilotage have taken place during this reporting period.

## **9.0 Upcoming Events Relevant to Harbour Operations**

- Weymouth Rowing Regatta – 27th May
- SQUIB National Championships – 23rd to 30th June