

NORFOLK BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

SEAGRASS BEDS

(*Zostera spp.*)

Ref 1/H8	Tranche 1	Habitat Action Plan 8
Plan Author:	Environment Agency	
Plan Co-ordinator:	Environment Agency	
Plan Leader:		
Date:	Stage:	
31 December 1998	Final Draft	

1. CURRENT STATUS

National Status

- Three species of eelgrass (*Zostera*) occur in the UK. These are : *Z. noltii*, the dwarf eelgrass, which is found highest on the shore: *Z. angustifolia*, the narrow leaved eelgrass, which is found on the mid to lower shore and eelgrass, *Z. marina*, which is predominantly sub littoral. All three species are considered to be scarce. Preferred habitats are intertidal or shallow subtidal sands/muds which are sheltered from significant wave action. Eelgrass beds are an important food source for a number of bird species including brent goose and wigeon. Plants can also be colonised by a range of micro and macroalgal species. In certain areas the habitat is an important nursery area for flatfish.

Norfolk Status

- The only location where eelgrass beds are known to exist in Norfolk is off Brancaster, grid reference TF8946, covering an area of 0.25km² ; Wells, grid reference TF9145, covering an area of 0.5km² ; Blakeney, grid reference TG0345, covering an area of 0.1km² (All in Old Hunstanton to Sheringham Maritime Natural Area); and Breydon Water, grid reference TG5180, unquantified extent (Broads Natural Area).

2. CURRENT FACTORS IN NORFOLK CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

- *Zostera* habitats are limited to intertidal sites throughout the action plan area.
- It is likely that the turbid nature of the estuarine water precludes any subtidal distributions.
- Compared to other parts of the UK, East Anglian estuaries generally receive enhanced nutrient loadings from the freshwater catchments. Recent research has shown that this does not always cause an environmental problem. However, where suitable solid substrates exist blanketing growths of *Enteromorpha* can occur. Such growths could potentially impact the *Zostera* bed in Norfolk.

3. CURRENT ACTION

- The *Zostera* population in the plan was mapped by the MNCR survey teams during 1992 and 1993.

4. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National

- Maintain extent and distribution of eelgrass in UK waters.
- Assess feasibility of restoration of damaged or degraded eelgrass beds.

Norfolk

- Maintain and where possible enhance eelgrass beds in Norfolk.

Seagrass Beds - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.1	Policy and Legislation			
5.1.1	Ensure that development schemes, dredging operations and fishing activities do not affect the integrity or the conservation interest of intertidal and subtidal seagrass beds.	Ensure that estuarine planning proposals, dredging operations and fishing activities do not affect the integrity of intertidal eelgrass beds.	EA, EN, ESFJC, Harbour Authorities	
5.1.2	Explore options for using statutory measures, aside from those specifically designed for conservation, to protect seagrass beds. Particular attention should be given to fisheries legislation and port/harbour regulations.	Consider statutory safeguards for eelgrass beds in any local fisheries legislation or port/harbour legislation.	EN, ESFJC, Harbour Authorities	
5.2	Site Safeguard and Management			
5.2.1	Determine the extent of seagrass beds which falls within protected areas and notify further sites to fill significant gaps.	Encourage national action plan to be implemented.	EN	
5.2.2	Identify seagrass beds of particular significance as nursery areas for commercial fish.	Assess locally identified areas.	EN, EA	
5.2.3	Identify suitable sites for reintroduction or restoration of seagrass and draw up a strategy to meet this target.	Assess local areas in relation to national action.	EN	
5.2.4	Seek to control high nutrient loads from agricultural sources through the designation of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, where the water body is affected by eutrophication (as defined in the EC Nitrates Directive).	Assess estuaries in relation to appropriate Directives.	EA	
5.2.5	Take account of conservation requirements for seagrass beds in the implementation of Coastal Zone Management Plans.	Encourage national action plan to be implemented.	EN, EA	

Seagrass Beds - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.3	Species Management and Protection			
5.3.1	Provide advice to local authorities on minimising impacts on eelgrass beds.	Provide advice to Norfolk County Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.	EN	
5.4	Advisory			
5.4.1	Ensure liaison is maintained with research bodies throughout Europe into all aspects of eelgrass ecology. Encourage appropriate research to be undertaken.	Encourage action to be implemented.	EN	
5.4.2	Compile and publish up to date information on the extent of eelgrass communities around the UK.			
5.4.3	Complete a classification of the different types of eelgrass communities throughout the UK.			
5.4.4	Set up a network of eelgrass monitoring stations throughout the UK.			
5.4.5	Promote awareness among coastal users of the importance of eelgrass and how to avoid damage to these habitats.			
5.4.6	Standardise procedures for monitoring eelgrass beds.			
5.4.7	Provide advice to local authorities on minimising impacts on eelgrass beds.	Provide advice to Norfolk County Council, Great Yarmouth Borough Council, North Norfolk District Council and King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council.	EN, EA	
5.5	Future Research and Monitoring			
5.5.1	Compile and publish up to date information on the extent of eelgrass communities around the	Maintain up to date information regarding, extent, quality and distribution of eelgrass beds in	RSPB, EN	

Seagrass Beds - Norfolk Action Plan

NATIONAL ACTION		NORFOLK ACTION	ACTION BY:	PARTNERS:
5.5.2	UK. Set up a network of eelgrass monitoring stations throughout the UK.	local area. Select local sites for long-term monitoring and implement as required.	EN	