

A cuttlefish in its underwater habitat in the Solent Paul Naylor

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust (HIWWT) have been awarded £640,300 to deliver transformational Secrets of the Solent programme, thanks to National Lottery players

Secrets of the Solent aims to open people's eyes to the under-water world, the dangers of pollution, and the action they can take to protect the Solent and its Marine Protected Areas.

The Solent is one of UK's the liveliest straits, supporting a vibrant fishing and tourism industry. However, while it is central to people's lives, the Solent's underwater world, with seagrass meadows, and sponge gardens, home to seals, anemones, and cuttlefish, remain largely unknown.

Local seas under pressure

Local seas are under pressure from plastics and damaging activities, and wildlife has declined rapidly. This award comes at a time of high public awareness of plastic pollution.

Blue Planet II, aired last October, saw David Attenborough surrounded by mounds of plastic on an uninhabited island in the Indian Ocean; A Plastic Ocean is being watched globally, and a UK Government report, Future of the Sea, says we have a 'lack of understanding of the sea and its value'.

Tim Ferrero, Marine Policy Specialist at HIWWT, said: “Many people think our local seas are devoid of life, but that’s so far from the truth. Sadly we have reached a tipping point and, without action, the Solent could lose all its fantastic natural treasures. We know, if we are going to turn the tide and improve the Solent’s fortunes, we need people to appreciate what’s at stake and take action to care for the sea.”

Dedicated volunteers and communities working together

The project will see volunteers championing their patch of coast, local food groups promoting Great Solent Seafood (locally sourced, low impact seafood), businesses reducing pollution and communities working together against plastic pollution.

HIWWT will work with organisations and volunteers, to ensure that people appreciate and support the Solent. The Wildlife Trust hopes this will lead to:

- Less pollution and plastic litter
- More information about under-water wildlife, gathered through ‘citizen science’
- Better legal protections and management of the Solent's sensitive areas
- More sustainable seafood, produced by local fisheries and available in local restaurants and shops

Michelle Roffe, Head of HLF South East said: “This award is wonderful news. With films such as Plastic Ocean and Blue Planet II public awareness of plastic pollution in our seas and waterways has never been higher. Now, thanks to National Lottery players, the people of the Solent will be able to learn about and take an active role in this vital work to protect their local seas and under-water wildlife for future generations.”



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