

Embracing Estuaries – Management of Natura 2000 sites in
Estuaries and Sea Ports, Hamburg, 15-16 September 2016



The importance of communication to the sustainable management of the Dee Estuary (Natura 2000 and Ramsar) UK

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Dee Estuary Conservation Group*

Aim of my presentation



To show the importance of **communication** to the protection, management and resource utilisation of the Dee Estuary

- **Eurosite** – a Network of Natura 2000 site managers across Europe
- **Dee Estuary Conservation Group** – an NGO (and charity) representing 25 organisations concerned with the sustainable management of the Dee Estuary

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Location of the Dee Estuary



Dee Estuary – Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*) high-tide roost



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Dee Estuary habitats and land-use – sand dunes and residential areas



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Dee Estuary habitats and land use – intertidal sand and mud



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Dee Estuary habitats and land use – saltmarsh and developed Welsh coastline



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Dee Estuary habitats and land use – Shotton Steelworks in the 1970s



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Dee Estuary – facts and figures



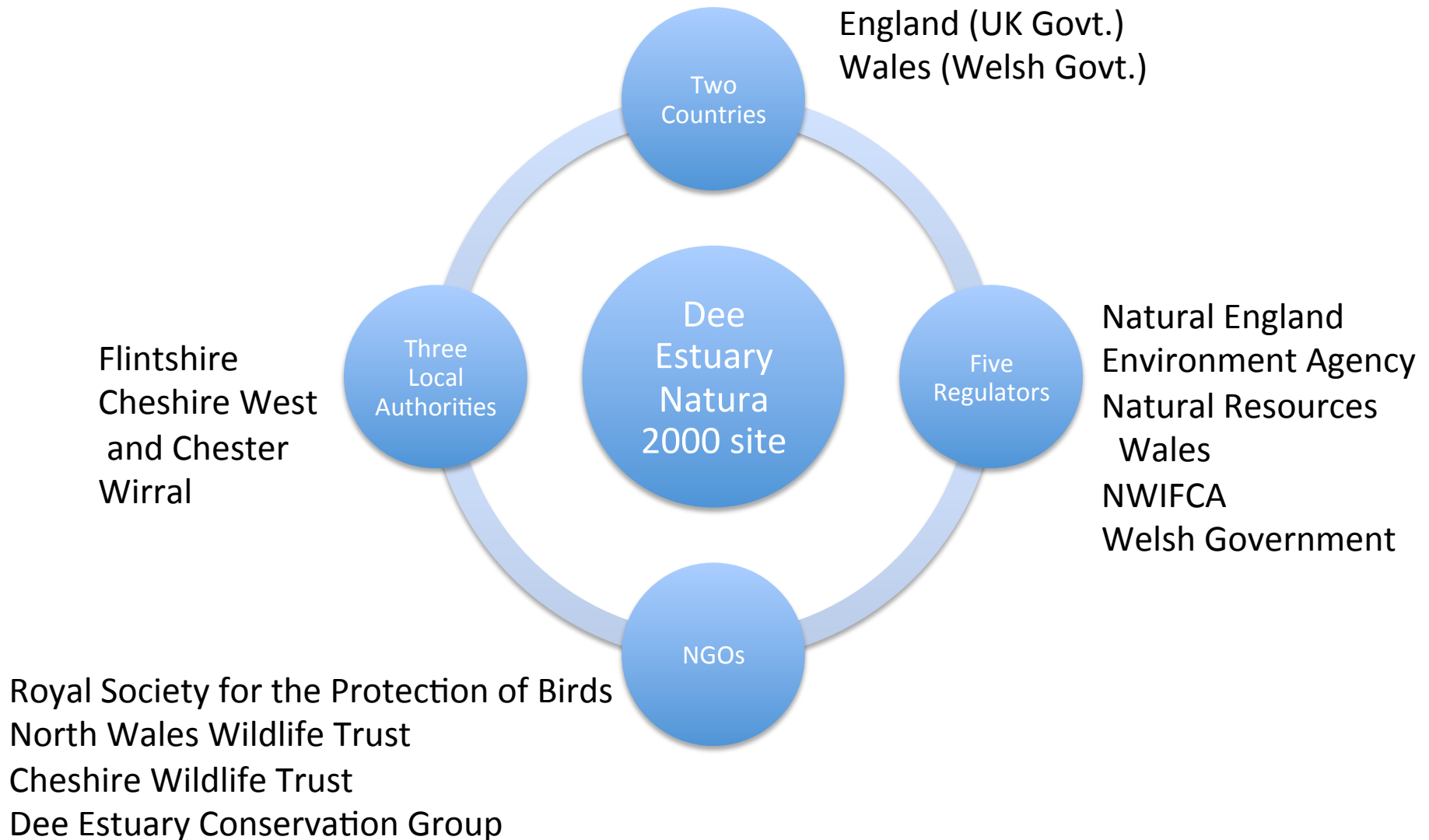
- Dee Estuary Natura 2000/Ramsar is in both England and Wales
- Sixth most important estuary in the UK for wintering and migratory waterbirds
- 5-year peak mean of 130,254 waterbirds
- Covers an area of 15,805 ha
- Habitats: intertidal sand and mudflats, grazed and ungrazed saltmarshes and sand dunes
- Adjacent land use: residential, industry, conservation sites, agriculture

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Dee Estuary – Location and Local Government areas



Governance of the Dee Estuary Natura 2000 site



The Dee Estuary Strategy 1985-2000



- Estuary-wide forum and management group established with full-time Project Officer
- Strategy agreed by governments, regulators and NGOs
- Thematic groups established: Industry; Recreational Users; Nature Conservation; Coastal Processes
- Processes closed due to budget cuts and rise of new mechanisms and regulation, eg. Habitats Directive, new planning legislation, improved pollution controls, etc.

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Dee Estuary – policies and plans that aid estuary-wide management



- Dee Estuary Strategy (1985-2000)
- SPA Conservation Objectives
- SAC Site Improvement Plan
- Natura 2000 Priority Action Framework
- Water Framework Directive – Tidal Dee Catchment Management Plan
- Cockle fishery management (NRW)
- Natura 2000 embedded into planning policies

Dee Estuary – factors which improve estuary-wide communication



- **Threats to the estuary**, eg. fracking, FGD, dredging
- **Difficulties with regulation**, eg. shell fisheries
- **Large planning issues**, eg. Shoreline Management Plans
- **Wildlife decline**, eg. Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) nest failure

- **Investment of time in regulator-client relationships**
- **Programmed meetings**
- **Public engagement and events**

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Dee Estuary Conservation Group



- Founded in the early 1970s in response to a threat to empound the estuary for water storage
- Members are the 25 NGOs, both local and national, with interests in the sustainable management of the estuary
- Meetings are also attended by the 7 regulatory organisations as Observers
- Three Committee Meetings per year, but ongoing surveillance and activity between meetings
- DECG is the only estuary-wide platform where all stakeholder organisations can meet.

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Dee Estuary – improving the connectivity of people and estuary



- Engagement of local **industry** protecting wildlife (from 1970)
- Presence of **country parks** (from 1970s)
- Presence of estuary **nature reserves** (from 1980s)
- **Public events** to view bird spectacles (from 1990s)
- Mobilisation of **volunteers** (from 1990s)
- **Infrastructure Projects** opening up estuary frontage and access (from 1990s)
- Dee Estuary **websites** (from 2000s)
- **Wirral Wader Festival** (from 2015)

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Dee Estuary – issues where communication problems remain



- **The management and regulation of fisheries and shell fisheries** – four regulators from two Governments
- **Aircraft, kite surfing, paraglider and drone disturbance of waterbirds** - unregulated
- **Absence of formal links between the three Local Planning Authorities** - lost in 2000

Dee Estuary: hope for the future, the power of improving communications



- **NGOs** are playing an increasingly important role in estuary-wide cohesion through their communication channels;
- **Natura 2000 management plans** operated in a consistent manner through improving communications between regulators;
- **Planning policies** respect the protected status of the Dee Estuary;
- **People** are better connected with the estuary and therefore value it more;

BUT problems remain with fisheries regulation and the recreational disturbance of waterbirds – better communication is the key.

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Acknowledgements

Hannah Birtles, Natural England

Paul Day, Natural Resources Wales (retired)

Dr Alan Jemmett, Merseyside Environmental Advisory
Service

Dr Neil Smith, Natural Resources Wales

Colin Wells, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Members of the Dee Estuary Conservation Group

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