

Press release: New River Wear fish pass is complete

Essential work to safeguard the future of a flood warning service on the River Wear has also significantly improved access for fish.

The new state of the art Larinier fish pass at Stanhope is now complete, and will allow more species of fish to pass upstream over the weir in a much wider range of river levels, improving access to around 15 miles of spawning grounds.

The pass includes a series of 'baffles' – metal plates which are fixed to a sloped concrete channel – which slow the flow of the water so fish can swim over the top of them easily.

Phil Rippon, Fisheries Technical Specialist with the Environment Agency in the North East, said:

This fish pass has improved access to a large section of what was a difficult to reach area of the River Wear, improving spawning and nursery grounds for salmon and trout in particular.

Projects such as this at Stanhope is an example of the sort of work which takes place right across the country to open up and enhance our rivers and streams.

We will be keeping a close eye on the success of the pass, and will be hoping to do some detailed monitoring of the pass and the upstream areas in the future.

Safeguarding the flood warning service

The Environment Agency has also carried out repairs to the weir which will improve the river flow and level monitoring capability of the Stanhope River Gauging Station – safeguarding the flood warning service for the area. Environment Agency Project Manager, Daniel Magee, added:

By improving the monitoring capabilities of the gauging station we can continue to provide an accurate and timely flood warning service to around 400 homes at risk of flooding from the River Wear.

This project safeguards the flood warning system for the future as well as creating environmental improvement. We appreciate the community's patience throughout this project and hope they are reassured now it is all complete.

Stanhope Gauging Station is ranked in the top 10 most important flow sites in the North East area. Opening in September 1958 it has almost continuous record of flow data, making it one of the longest flow records in the North East at 60 years.

[Stanhope Fish Pass](#)

News story: Search in Cowes harbour after ferry collides into yachts

Just after 8am Sunday 21 October HM Coastguard received reports that the Red Falcon Ferry had collided with at least two yachts whilst trying to berth at the entrance of Cowes Harbour during heavy fog.

At around the same time we received a 999 call from a member of the public reporting that he'd heard cries for help within Cowes Harbour.

We carried out an extensive search of the area with Cowes RNLI lifeboat, Calshot RNLI lifeboats and Coastguard Rescue Teams from Bembridge, Needles and Ventnor. A Coastguard search and rescue helicopter was searching the area but due to the low visibility in the area had to turn back.

The ferry with 56 persons onboard was grounded at the entrance at Cowes. Those who were onboard are safe and well.

The search is ongoing and we have no further information at this stage.

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HM Coastguard can confirm that there is nobody in the water or missing in Cowes Harbour. HM Coastguard has made contact with the person who was initially heard crying for help and he is reported to be safe and well. We have established that the person was onboard his own vessel and crying out to try and alert the master of the ferry of the situation.

The Red Falcon, with assistance of tugs, has been refloated and is now in the process of going alongside in East Cowes where MCA surveyors will make an assessment of the vessel.

All passengers remain safe and well and will disembark when the vessel is safely alongside.

MCA surveyors have completed an initial assessment of the vessel and it has been cleared to be relocated to Southampton, without passengers, to undergo further inspections. Once the in water survey has been successfully completed the vessel will be cleared to return to passenger service.

The vessel is being accompanied by two tug escorts as a precautionary measure and an MCA surveyor is onboard for the short duration of the journey.

News story: Defence Minister teams up with with international counterparts to improve support for veterans

Delegates from each nation came together under a shared commitment to their defence communities, and took part in discussions on mental health support, and the transition process undertaken by the military as they adjust to civilian life.

The Minister was hosted by The Honourable Darren Chester, Australian Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel, and joined by General Walter Natynczyk, Deputy Minister of Veterans Affairs, Government of Canada; Ms Jacquelyn Hayes-Byrd, Acting Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs, United States of America; The Hon Ron Mark MP, Minister for Veterans' Affairs, New Zealand; and Ms Bernadine Mackenzie, Head of Veterans' Affairs, New Zealand.

During the two-day conference, the Minister addressed the delegates on the progress made at the last meeting, which was hosted in London, at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. The conference then heard from leading experts on the latest international research on suicide prevention, the importance of evidence-based research to inform new policy, and the promotion of employment and education for those preparing to leave service, and supporting veterans struggling with mental health.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said;

Following the success of last year's conference, it's an honour to be able to continue to discuss the ways in which each of our nations supports those who have served.

The UK has established several new initiatives since I met with my counterparts in London, including the new veterans ID card, and later this year we will introduce our new transition policy, which will provide additional support to those that need it.

By combining our knowledge and expertise, we can continue to improve and enhance the way we thank our service leavers for their dedication and sacrifice.

The Minister and his international counterparts then signed a statement of intent, which recognises the benefits of working together and exploring examples of best practice in support and care for the defence and veteran communities and their families.

Each of the delegates also travelled to the ANZAC War Memorial, the commemorative military monument in Sydney, where they laid wreaths to honour Australians who lost their lives in the first and second World Wars.

The Minister is in Sydney to support Team UK at this year's Invictus Games, which were founded by HRH The Duke of Sussex to harness the power of sport to aid wounded, injured and sick serving and former personnel in their recovery. On October 20th, he attended the opening ceremony at Sydney Opera House, which hosted 500 competitors from 18 nations preparing to compete in 11 medal sports including powerlifting, sailing, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair rugby and basketball.

News story: New study into Iraq and Afghanistan veterans launched

The new study, which follows on from similar reports conducted after the Falklands War and the First Gulf War, will investigate cause of death, including rates of suicide, for all personnel who deployed to conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2001 and 2014. This will cover personnel who are still in service, and those who have now transitioned into civilian life.

While rates of mental disorder are lower in the military (3.1%) than the general population (4.5%), the MOD routinely carries out research into those who have served on large scale combat operations, in order to more accurately assess the effects of deployment.

Previous studies into mortality rates of those who served during the 1982 Falklands and 1990/91 Gulf conflicts found that they were no more likely to take their lives than the wider population, while rates of suicide within the military remain low.

This latest research will be conducted in collaboration with NHS Digital, and will match the MOD's service database with corresponding NHS records in order to track causes of death. It will compare findings with the general population, as well as all personnel who served during the same period outside Iraq or Afghanistan.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans Tobias Ellwood said:

Our Armed Forces do a magnificent job, and we owe a huge debt of

gratitude to each man and woman who has laid their life on the line to keep our country safe.

Most transition successfully into civilian life once they have put away their uniforms, but we cannot afford to be complacent. Mental health problems can affect us all, and the wellbeing of our people remains a top priority.

By conducting this vital new study, we are furthering our understanding of the wellbeing of our people so we can continue to provide the best possible care to all who have served.

The study will work alongside the ongoing research by King's Centre for Military Health Research and Imperial College in order build as detailed a profile as possible of those who served on these operations.

The MOD's Defence People Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is working to challenge the stigma surrounding mental health issues, to ensure that all who serve, and have served, can enjoy a state of positive physical and mental health. It aims to offer the tools and support necessary for each of the Armed Forces' men and women to lead a long and healthy life, during their service, and following their transition back into the civilian community.

The MOD has committed to spending £22 million a year on mental health, and has set up two 24/7 helplines for serving personnel and veterans, so that there is always somewhere to turn in times of crisis. This year, the MOD will launch the new Defence Transition Service, a specialist support system that will provide an additional layer of care for those preparing to leave service, who are most likely to face difficulties once they leave the Armed Forces.

The majority of veterans go on to lead successful and healthy lives once they have left the Armed Forces. They leave with strong values and transferrable skills, demonstrating qualities such as leadership, resourcefulness, adaptability, and the ability to work under pressure.

Of the veterans who use the MOD's Career Transition Partnership upon leaving the Armed Forces, 86% are in education, training, volunteering or in a job within six months. The MOD continues to run the largest apprenticeship scheme in the country.

[News story: HM Treasury and HMRC invest in customs training and](#)

automation

The government fully acknowledges the potential capacity challenges facing the customs intermediaries sector in the unlikely event of no deal being reached before the UK leaves the EU on 29 March 2019.

Therefore, HM Treasury and HMRC have designed a package of measures to support the intermediaries sector to expand ahead of March 2019. This will include a one-off investment of £8 million to support broker training and increased automation.

Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Mel Stride, said:

HM Treasury and HMRC have been engaging extensively with the customs intermediaries sector on EU exit, including customs brokers, freight forwarders and fast parcel operators. We have listened to their concerns about the extra demand for customs broker services in the unlikely event that the UK leaves the EU without a deal in March 2019.

That is why we plan to invest £8m for customs training and automation to support the sector to expand to help meet the potential increase in demand for this scenario.

This investment will involve:

1. a procurement process to establish contracts with training providers for creating and delivering new training courses and/or expanding existing material for customs brokers to assist in a no-deal scenario. The government's engagement with key intermediaries and training providers identified a lack of widely available and accessible training provision for customs brokers. It wants to support the sector to train more people, to a good standard.
2. a grant scheme to support intermediaries and/or traders with the upfront costs of training their employees. The government understands that intermediaries train their staff using both internal and/or external training provision. This element will support customs intermediaries with some of these upfront costs to make it easier to train staff.
3. a grant scheme to support investment in automation in the sector. The government understands that upfront cost is a key barrier to automation, particularly for smaller businesses. This will seek to improve the productivity of smaller intermediaries that rely on manual data input to complete customs declarations by supporting them with the set up costs of IT solutions.

We expect the procurement process for establishing contracts with training providers to start in coming weeks, with the grant schemes to support upfront

costs of training or increased automation expected to be available in late autumn.

Further details will be published on GOV.UK in due course. There is no need to contact HMRC at this stage.