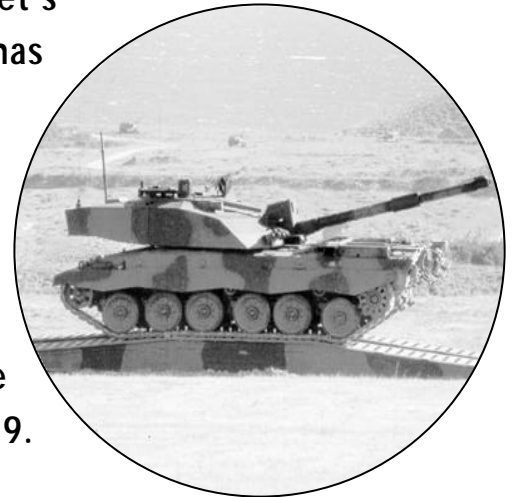


Dorset Coast Strategy aims to achieve integrated management of the whole of Dorset's Coast and inshore waters out to the 12-mile limit for the first time. The Strategy's policies are voluntary, and are promoted by the Dorset Coast Forum.

There is a long history of military use of Dorset's coast. Historically, the most significant site has been the naval base at Portland, established in the 1840s but recently closed. Four significant military facilities now remain. The Army Gunnery School based at Lulworth and the Royal Marines landing craft training wing based at Hamworthy remain long term commitments. HMS Osprey, the Navy's helicopter base at Portland will close in 1999.



Offshore, the coastal seas have been used for naval exercises, whilst the defence research industries retain some testing ranges.

This topic paper:

- Summarises the current position of military activity on the Dorset Coast;
- Invites comment from the Dorset Coast Forum about the integration of future activity with other uses of the coast.

Use by the Armed Forces

UK defence policy demands the maintenance of capable armed forces, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). In meeting this requirement, the military require residential bases, and access to adequate facilities for exercise and training. Dorset continues to play its part in fulfilling the MoD's requirements by hosting three significant military establishments, which represent long-term commitments:

- **RAC Gunnery School**, Lulworth provides live firing and tactical training to meet the needs of the Army. The ranges cover land to the east of Lulworth, and a defined sea danger area of around 30,000 hectares. Lulworth Ranges have been a feature of the coast since World War 1. The MoD has recently signed a new 100-year lease on the facilities.
- **Landing Craft Wing**, Royal Marines, based at Poole. RM Poole is the centre for all landing and raiding craft training for the Royal Marines, and a critical part of the Forces' amphibious capability. The wing use 7.4 metre, fast Rigid Raiders and Landing Craft of 13.5 and 27.4 metres. Most of the afloat activity takes place within Poole Harbour, although Studland Bay, Lulworth Cove, Worbarrow Bay and Portland Harbour may be used for exercises.
- The **Wyke Regis Training Area** is a training facility used mainly by the Army, although public use of both the climbing facilities and adventure training have increased over the last few years. The main use of relevance to the coast is the operation of a small

arms range, with a safety area, which extends across Chesil Beach and out to sea. The range is typically used for 150 days per year and sentries are posted when it is live to police the footpaths and offshore area. At Wyke Regis there is the Royal Engineers Bridging camp on the shoreline of the Fleet.

One other establishment is HMS Osprey, the Navy's helicopter base, which is scheduled for closure in 1999.

Offshore, Dorset's coast has been used for naval training for many years and the Navy identifies a series of exercise areas off the Dorset coast. In addition the Fleet is used for watermanship training. The closure of the Naval Base and relocation of the Navy's sea training unit has led to a substantial decrease in use. The Navy advises that surface use by warships is much reduced, and the main focus for exercise is now off South Devon and Cornwall extending out to the Atlantic. Ships will be found on passage and continue to conduct independent exercises off the Dorset coast. Substantial offshore areas are marked on charts as submarine exercise areas, however the Navy advise that these exercises are now extremely rare off the Dorset Coast and consider that this aspect can be discounted.

Defence Research

Aside from direct use by the armed forces, parts of the Dorset Coast have been used for defence research and testing for many years. This work is now led by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), an executive agency of the Government. DERA have a base at Winfrith Technology Centre and Bingleaves in Weymouth and operate a number of ranges for noise measurement, testing torpedo technology and a permanent and temporary vessel degaussing (demagnetisation) station within the limits of Portland Harbour. Specific allowance for DERA to operate these ranges has been made within the Portland Harbour Revision order, establishing Portland Port Ltd as the new harbour authority.

The Navy at Portland: A Reducing Presence

Historically, Portland has been the most intensive centre of military activity on the Dorset Coast. Portland was established as a Naval Base in the 1840s, when the massive breakwaters that defend the harbour were constructed. The base remained important throughout the twentieth century until the 1990s, when the Navy opted to close it as part of the general cutback in defence

spending following the end of the Cold War. Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST), responsible for co-ordinating the Navy's sea exercises was relocated to Plymouth in 1995. The base closed in 1996 and has been sold to Portland Port Ltd (PPL). The Navy handed over harbour authority responsibility to PPL on 1 January 1998. PPL are in the process of developing commercial port activities, and part of their marketing strategy is to ensure the continued use of the harbour by NATO and foreign navies. PPL wish to actively promote the use of the harbour for military activity. Their current customers include Special Forces (training, diving, exercises), DERA (full use of ranges, and support services) and the Royal Navy (berthing training, crew changes, mail and rubbish collection).

HMS Osprey, the Navy helicopter station adjacent to Portland Harbour will cease to operate on 31 March 1999, and all helicopters will be relocated to Yeovilton. The future use of the site is unknown, but it will be disposed of by MoD. A detailed study has recently been completed to evaluate the options for future use of the site, and identify the constraints.

Weymouth and Portland have also seen relocation of some DERA operations to Winfrith as part of the rationalisation of the organisation.

The overall prediction of the impact of military withdrawal from Portland was that up to 3000 jobs might be lost both directly and indirectly. It is not yet possible to assess whether this estimate was accurate, however the immediate need to try and diversify the economy is very apparent. By the same token, the withdrawal of the military provides perhaps the most significant set of opportunities for economic development anywhere on the Dorset Coast, and the imperative to ensure that this takes place in ways which are integrated with the full range of coastal interests.

Some funding has been made available from Europe through KONVER, a scheme targeted at areas affected by military withdrawal and national sources. Weymouth and Portland Borough Council have a lead in co-ordinating the response to the Navy's departure.

Managing the Impact of Military Activity

Past military activity has had a significant impact on the coast. Reclamation to build the Portland Tank farm was at the expense of the Mere, an area of tidal mudflats. The history of use of hazardous materials means that possible contamination of land and sediments remains an issue.

Where military activity continues it has the potential to impact significantly on the coast. Because MoD activity on the Dorset Coast is well established, its impacts are generally well understood and management arrangements are in place to mitigate them where possible. The most significant impact is that of the RAC Gunnery School at Lulworth. Safety requirements mean that public access to the coast within the ranges is not permitted for much of the year. Access to designated paths (the Range Walks) and beaches is permitted during the main school holiday periods.

Limited public access, and reduced agricultural activity within the ranges has had some wildlife benefits through reduced disturbance. A range conservation committee meets on a six-monthly basis to advise the MoD on management practises. The sea danger areas restrict recreational boating and fishing during weekdays outside the main holiday periods, and during 6 weekends each year which are used for Territorial Army training. The School maintains an emergency pollution plan, and radar coverage of the offshore danger areas, which is integrated with the Coastguard and HM Customs.

The main possible impact of RM Poole is from the use of fast boats within busy waters in Poole Harbour. The lead responsibility for managing the harbour lies with Poole Harbour Commissioners. Whilst the MoD are not subject to harbour authority powers of direction, good liaison with the managers of the harbour remains the most effective means of avoiding possible conflicts. Outside of the harbour RM Poole give rise to limited impacts in the areas where they operate. MoD consider that the most significant impact is from loading and unloading of vehicles from landing craft. However such operations are rarely carried out in Dorset. Good liaison arrangements exist between the Wyke Regis Training Area and Chesil and the Fleet Nature Reserve.

Integrating Military Activity within Dorset's Coastal Zone

Military activity need to be integrated with the other uses and activities within the Coastal Zone where possible. Its potential impacts, and the key questions they raise are:

Archaeology

The abandoned village of Tyneham within the Lulworth Ranges, is a uniquely interesting site. The use of munitions, the clearance of some wrecks and other military material from the seabed and exercises in general, can result in damage to historical material, if the significance of the site is not recognised.

Coastal Defence

No significant interactions.

Educational Use

No significant interactions.

Fishing

MoD activity may impact on fishing through limiting access within range areas. Surface exercise is a cause of concern due to the potential for propeller damage to fixed fishing gear during vessel manoeuvres. Submarine exercise potentially conflicts with the use of trawling gear. The Navy undertakes management of fisheries beyond the 6mile limit by means of the Fisheries Protection Squadron, which is under the direction of MAFF.

Geology and Geomorphology

Military activity can restrict access to important geological sites, such as the Fossil Forest at Lulworth.

Landscape & Seascape

Buildings, signage and structures associated with military land use may have impacts on the landscape.

„ Marine Aggregates

No significant interaction.

Maritime Industries

DERA represents an important part of the maritime industry within Dorset, and has a world class reputation for marine and naval technology. Its recent reorganisation will give it more commercial freedom.

Oil & Gas

The offshore ranges are a minor constraint on exploration activity.

Pollution & Environmental Quality

MoD establishments have the potential to create pollution in the same way as civilian residential and commercial property, and are now required to meet national environmental legislation. The most obvious impact of military activity is noise (from firing, watercraft or helicopters), which is unavoidable, but may be mitigated by the timing of activity. The presence of unexploded munitions on the seabed is a further hazard.

Ports & Shipping

Interactions have reduced following the closure of Portland naval base. The Navy remain a potential customer for Dorset's ports, whilst naval shipping in the Channel takes place alongside commercial traffic.

Recreation & Tourism

Military activity is a constraint on recreational/tourist use of coastal land and water within and adjacent to army and navy property, and within the offshore ranges. Restrictions include that to public access within the Lulworth Ranges, water use within the offshore danger areas, and restrictions on diving and watercraft within some areas around Portland Harbour. Land within the Ranges is however a popular attraction to visitors when open, and at these times MoD has an important role in providing visitor facilities and managing pressures.

Wildlife

Overall MoD management in Lulworth Ranges is considered to benefit wildlife by providing effective 'reserve' status. Some aspects of conservation management - such as grazing conflict with military use. Munitions from the ranges are a source of seabed litter. The potential impact of underwater noise from MoD activity is an area of increasing interest. MoD craft add to the pattern of craft disturbance in Poole Harbour, particularly when navigating in excess of the harbour speed limit.

Policy Issues for Military Activity

The following policy questions are posed about military activity on the Dorset Coast. The responses to them will help shape the Dorset Coast Strategy:

1. Have all the necessary links with MoD over their activity on the Dorset Coast now been made?

Activity within the established military bases in Dorset remains stable, and the constraints they impose on the coast are well understood. It could be concluded that all the necessary arrangements for liaison, co-operation and site management have now been established.

- Is there any dissent from this view?
- Are there still areas of communication and co-operation which need to be addressed?
- Do the military receive the co-operation they would wish from other organisations, and from the public?

2. How can the best possible future for Portland Harbour and the surrounding area be assured following MoD withdrawal?

Portland clearly represents a special case within the Dorset Coast, and the withdrawal of the Navy presents both significant impacts on the economy, and substantial opportunities for commerce, recreation and conservation. Portland Port Ltd has a lead role in realising the potential of the former naval port and harbour, and has already succeeded in attracting new customers and creating jobs. The future of HMS Osprey remains to be decided and requires detailed study. The wider impacts of MoD withdrawal on Weymouth and Portland need to be taken into account. See also the topic paper on Ports and Shipping.

- How can the regeneration of Portland Harbour be best assisted?
- Are the necessary partnerships now in place and working effectively?
- How can benefits to the economy, environment and the community be realised together?

3. Should stronger links between DERA and Dorset's marine industries sector be developed, and if so what assistance is needed?

DERA represents a significant source of expertise in marine technology within Dorset.

- How can links between DERA and the Dorset Coast Forum best be developed?
- What are DERA's plans for future activity within Dorset's coastal zone?

4. How do Military activities offshore impact on the environment?

The possible interactions between military use of land are well understood, but little attention has been focused on the offshore environment.

- Does military activity have any major effects on marine wildlife or underwater archaeology?
- Is it possible to identify positive benefits to wildlife from reduced fishing and recreation within the offshore ranges?
- How significant is military debris on the seabed, is there a need for some areas to be cleaned up?