

# Maritime Plymouth

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## Opportunities for Strengthening Membership Through Cluster Activities

This report is a summary of the findings that have resulted from a series of interviews with a selection of Maritime Plymouth members. The aim of the research was to ascertain the benefits and perceptions of membership of Maritime Plymouth and to look for ways to increase these benefits thereby increasing the attractiveness of the group and achieving sustainability. The research was supported by CAMIS, an INTERREG IVA EU project that looks to increase sustainable economic growth in the marine industry through cluster activities. This report is the first stage towards identifying achievable outcomes and will be followed by an opportunity for members to discuss the issues the report raises and the formulation of an action plan to take the chosen activities forward.

## Maritime Plymouth

The following is a summary of the interviews carried out over two days in Plymouth. The meetings set up were all informative and each interviewee had given a lot of time and preparation to the meetings. This shows commitment to the enhancement of the marine sector and is encouraging for the success of any ventures that are agreed on.

The issues that were raised during the interviews were pertinent to individuals associated to their particular specialism but also points raised that were generic and felt by quite a few. It was also possible to pick up on a great deal of background to both the maritime history of Plymouth (distant and recent) and the history of Maritime Plymouth as a Network.

The points that were raised fit quite well into two categories: Maritime Plymouth and Individual issues (but not necessarily specific to one person), and Policy issues. Each heading will be taken in turn. For the purposes of the report Maritime Plymouth will, from this point forward be referred to as MP.

## Maritime Plymouth & Individual Issues

There was a wish list of opportunities that were raised and some of these were either unachievable or impracticable. The following comments and suggestions are the considered to be the main issues that could be addressed either fairly simply or with a little facilitation and cluster commitment.

1. Training & Education
  - a. Health and Safety training and marine related training rather than generic H&S training.
  - b. Language training, French, but marine related again.
  - c. More apprenticeships and funded opportunities for young people.

This is important to all companies and could be an initiative that is carried through by MP. Saving money, and therefore costs, by providing joint training initiatives or group reductions where MP facilitates the cost and possible venue. Another initiative would be to look at marinas as a training venue. Marinas providing training initiatives for the companies that are located within the boundaries would mean a reduction for the companies and the knowledge that the companies are up to date on H&S issues.

Concerns were expressed by some that Princess Yachts is a large employer that appears to take the majority of the available young trainees meaning smaller companies are often left with less

apprentices to choose from. Young people may perceive the training at Princess Yachts to be more advantageous to their future career and CV whereas the training given at a small independent company could be broader and more comprehensive. Smaller independent companies need to be able to consistently access the trainee and apprenticeship opportunities and be seen to be a valued and attractive option for young trainees. This is a difficult issue and one that needs further investigation.

2. Sector relationship building – getting individuals in same sector industries to collaborate and network with each other. Marinas, ferryboats, engineers etc. do not seem to communicate effectively and there is an apparent lack of trust that prevents sustainable working relationships from developing. MP provides a platform for increasing the trust through the network and, although it is something that is valued, this needs nurturing. Many ‘competitors’ will not talk to each other through fear of losing a competitive advantage and this prevents clusters forming and initiatives being developed. Best practice research suggests that collaboration creates a marketplace resulting in more business across a wider market for all. Local rivalries tend to create narrow, locally focused markets.
3. Collaboration on costs – this could be fuel supplies, logistics, stationary, accountancy etc. Collaborating to gain a discount which can then lead to cost efficiency and even closer working relationships. An example of an initiative would be: the marinas buying their fuel in bulk and letting the ferries purchase fuel from them at a reduced rate – this would increase the loyalty of the ferries to the marinas and improve the service that the marinas receive, as well as reducing the overall costs to the companies concerned. There are many instances where collaboration of this type would benefit the MP members and encourage an increase in membership as other companies see the cost savings and benefits to being part of MP.
4. Lobbying both local council and central government on issues important to the marine industry and making people aware of the scope and opportunities the marine industry brings to the area – this is something that many felt MP were good at but it was also felt that on many occasions the information was not being received and acted on. Although aware that this activity took time and commitment it was perceived as being important to the longevity and sustainability of the marine industry.
5. Database – it was felt that the MP database could be a really useful tool but because it is not up to date there will be missed opportunities for collaboration. The MP newsletter was seen as interesting and informative. The ‘friends’ of MP are also seen as an undervalued tool for

fundraising and increasing awareness. Many 'friends' took the time to become a part of MP and had a reason and interest for doing so. Could these friends be encouraged to become full members? What are their reasons for seeking out MP in the first place? What role do they play in MP, because it appears at the moment that they benefit from information and newsletters but give little in return?

6. Champions – Innovation is something that the Plymouth area seems to excel at. There are many instances of individuals inventing and developing new products, services and practices and MP could champion these people and provide a centre of information or contacts for the legal, political and marketing aspects of new product development. This could either be through the website – providing links, news on new initiatives etc. or through networking and arranging meetings between contacts. There are many instances of innovation never leaving the development stage due to the inability of the individual to promote their idea to the correct audience. There may also be mileage in increasing the collaboration with Plymouth University for this purpose.
  - a. Innovation ideas that have been reported are: Bio-fuel for boats; disabled access boats; Hull design and glass-fibre mouldings.
7. Supply Chain initiatives – being able to break into an industry sector and become a supplier is seen as something that is currently difficult to achieve for small businesses in the area. The CAMIS database may be able to help MP members with accessing supply chain as it provides a comprehensive list of companies and the research themes that they work in. This will allow companies to identify a selection of companies that they can then target for openings into their desired sector. Widening participation and increasing the communication between both large and small marine companies could also be advantageous to the economic growth of the marine industry in Plymouth.

Many of the issues and initiatives described here can be facilitated fairly easily and at minimal cost – mainly time. Through the CAMIS Project, the University of Chichester can facilitate a discussion and offer advice and practical solutions to assist MP members in gaining more value through the creation of specific cluster activities. The website and database that is currently being developed for the CAMIS research will provide the contacts and support to maintain the links that are forged. This will allow MP to become a network that people feel is important to join and commit resources to in order to ensure they get the benefits that are felt by the current members.

## Policy Issues

One issue that was raised almost consistently was the perceived lack of support from Plymouth City Council to the marine industry as a whole. This is not an easy problem to solve but the following points that were raised give an idea of the specific problems that could be addressed.

1. Many felt that the Council do not recognise the size or scope of the marine industry in the Plymouth area and despite attempts by MP and individuals they remain unaware of the economic impact the industry has on both tourism and employment. It appears that the Council have a lack of understanding about the way the individual companies and sectors link up to provide a coherent support network for other industry sectors and how the water front and Plymouth Sound provide a significant resource for both tourist and business activities. Claims were made that the relationship appeared biased in favour of the Council and that waterfront initiatives - such as the Waterfront Partnership – should involve MP and the marine sector in general. Another example would be the new Mayflower Pontoon - A one size fits all scenario has been provided which makes it difficult for both customers and service providers to manage. A graduated or stepped pontoon would have made it easier for the different sized boats to have loaded and unloaded both goods and people yet it was felt this was not understood or accounted for by the Council. Tackling this issue is difficult as it appears to be a long standing problem that time and effort has already been devoted to. This does suggest that communication may be the key problem and there needs to be an evaluation of the current efforts and a change in the manner the problems are addressed. Ideally there needs to be a 'champion' for the marine industry within the council who could be a liaison between the Council and either MP or the marine industry in general. Achieving this is a long term objective and is an issue that needs time and commitment from both parties.
2. The Chambers of Commerce do not appear to recognise the strength and potential of the marine industry. This is a problem for the future if the understanding is correct regarding the role they will play in the new Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) structure. If so, it is imperative that the Chambers of Commerce is made aware of the perceived lack of support that is felt and steps are taken to mend/build bridges to find a common purpose that will lead to a collaborative relationship. The Isle of Wight Chambers of Commerce currently maintain the administration for the Cowes Marine Cluster and the relationship between the two bodies appears to work well. Contacting the Cowes Cluster may help to gain ideas on how to tackle this issue. CoC is a voluntary membership and without a marine presence within the membership

there will be few opportunities to influence the support and service that the CoC offers. Membership to the CoC comes at a cost and as marine companies tend to be small they will need to see great benefits to membership before committing any costs. It may be possible for MP to explore the possibility of arranging a group discount for membership so more companies are prepared to buy into the service. The more marine companies within the CoC will impact on the type of vision and support the CoC would give.

3. Ferry and water taxi support – are these a visitor attraction or a necessary form of transportation? Many felt that the services should be supported by the Council and seen as an important service. Linking the different areas of Plymouth by sea has been seen as an important enhancement by many. From a policy perspective this may reduce the congestion on the roads and enable many areas of Plymouth currently seen as ‘too far out’ to be within reach and therefore commercially developed. A three mile journey that takes 40mins by car could be seen as a short hop on a ferry/water taxi service. Initiatives here could be part of a wider sustainable transport initiative that should be designed to include the marine transport sector.
4. Plymouth History – something that is important to Plymouth and also mainly maritime in nature. Maritime history is not necessarily seen as being a top priority for promotion as a tourist industry and therefore the opportunities for traditional marine industries are not getting the necessary promotion. There seems to be a tendency to gentrify waterfront areas rather than allow and encourage marine business to flourish and this is something that is fought against by the sector. The removal of the railway lines at the docks has been seen as confirmation that the docks will become residential and marine industry will not be enticed to grow within the area. The traditional marine employment areas are necessary and valued yet there is a perceived lack of support for them within the policy of the Council.
5. 2020 is the 400yr anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower – historic ships may be interested in coming to the area and there will be a rise in the tourist population, particularly from the USA. This is something that MP could champion. Using this date as a target for enhancing the traditional skills and employment opportunities and encouraging the Council to invest in a host of marine activities and initiatives that will increase the value of the industry and the employment and sustainability issues.

## Overview and Suggestions

Strong links with Devon Maritime Forum could be forged and the potential strengthening of the links to Cornwall Marine Network are seen as important. Plymouth sits at the entrance to Cornwall and many of the employees and visitors come from the Cornwall side of the river. There may be a value to bringing together the leaders of the various marine clusters and networks to exchange best practice and to collaborate on larger initiatives, i.e. examples of training opportunities with Cornwall Marine Network and business clusters with Cowes Cluster. This is something that CAMIS and the University of Chichester would be pleased to facilitate and support and a point for further consideration. There are quite a few Networks and Clusters across the South of England and they all work to differing objectives and working practices, sharing this information can help to increase the opportunities for each cluster without threatening the competitiveness of the local marine members.

Collaboration with France is a major part of the CAMIS project and something that Plymouth appears to embrace with some enthusiasm. Plymouth already has an influx of French visitors to the marinas and forging close links with the Northwest of France could provide new and sustainable business opportunities. Trans Europe Marinas (Mayflower) already have dealings with France that they wish to enhance. Devon as a whole has an emerging renewable energy sector that is ripe for cluster activities and cross-border initiatives. If this is something that MP wants to look further into the University of Chichester would be pleased to facilitate. Working alongside the French Partners could create opportunities for collaboration and sustainable knowledge transfer.

## Conclusion

It is clear that the relationship between the marine industry and the Council needs to be developed. There are clear areas where a perception of indifference and a lack of trust have developed. Policy issues are something that need to be tackled yet are also probably the most difficult to achieve. Having a 'voice' on the council that will represent the marine industry is important.

The relationship with the Chambers of Commerce is also in need of strengthening, especially if this provides the gateway to support from the LEPs. Enhancing the profile of the marine sector and increasing the economic impact will lead to further support and opportunities. All this can be achieved, and Maritime Plymouth has gone a long way to helping the marine sector to increase its potential, but it is important that the sector acknowledges that working together to support each other will further enhance their profile and sustainability.

This report is a summary of the main issues and perceptions of those members that were interviewed. It is not a definitive list of issues and should be taken as a guide to possible underlying issues. It is therefore suggested that the next step should be to discuss the findings outlined in this report with the wider MP membership and to help formulate and action plan for opening up new opportunities and addressing the issues that can be solved. It is important to encourage as many companies as possible to attend a meeting where the main priorities could be agreed and commitment to working through these initiatives given.