

Hinkley Update from John May

I have been an angler all of my life and fished the Bristol Channel (BC) boat and shore since the early 60s. My home water is Bridgwater Bay where I first started boat fishing in 1980 soon after Hinkley B was commissioned. I retired 18 months ago after 6 years with the Devon and Severn Inshore Fishery Conservation Authority (DSIFCA) as a Marine Management Organisation representative for recreational angling. I have a very clear picture of how the BC has evolved since my early days at Portishead.

It comes as a surprise to many that the brown waters of the Bristol Channel are designated “ a special place that supports a huge array of marine and coastal wildlife “ from Slimbridge and above down to the unique marine protected areas around Lundy. It provides a highway for migrating fish and bird life into great rivers like the Severn, Wye, Usk, Avon, Brue and others.

Millions of pounds and volunteer hours are invested in projects that have been completed, planned or are in progress to support improve the environment. Projects in the rivers to support shad, salmon, elvers and bird migrations attract the interest of visitors from all over the country.

The area is acknowledged as having one of the most diverse estuarine fish fauna’s in the UK. Some species spend their entire life in the estuary. Others use the estuary for certain critical parts of their life cycle and the estuary is recognised as a nursery area for a wide range of species. This fish assemblage is protected as part of the Severn Estuary Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Now we come to Hinkley Point C (HPC) - much larger than HPB. It takes far more water 3,500,000,000 gallons a day from the sea for cooling and with that comes the increased pressure on the marine environment. The cooling water intakes for HPC are now located 3 kms offshore compared with 400metres currently for HPB.

HPC unlike HPB recycles the debris and fish (dead, wounded or alive) straight back into the sea via a shorter tunnel. HPB historically took it to tip. Obviously a saving on operational cost over 70years but also “ an out of site out of mind “ very convenient solution!

I have followed the Hinkley saga since 2012 when I took the chair at an open meeting hosted by my club, Burnham Boat Anglers, for EDF to give a presentation on their proposed scheme for HPC. David Eccles led the team.

We were told that their intention to use an Acoustic Fish Deterrent (AFD) on each of the inlets would prevent the majority (circa 75%) of fish from entering the system. He said that the newly designed Low Velocity Inlet heads (LVIs) together with the Fish Recovery and Return system (FRR) would give protection to those fish that still entered system.

The meeting challenged the effectiveness of the AFD and the survival of fish going through the system which resulted in a reluctant admission that the system was still work in progress and only the most robust of fish would survive the ordeal ! This set our alarm bells ringing on day one.

Shortly after this in 2013 EDF applied for, and were given a conditional permit by the EA to extract sea water. In order to get this permit EDF had to satisfy the EA that it had complied with their requirements.

Seven years later, in 2019 when construction was well underway, EDF applied for the removal of the AFD because of “Health and Safety “Issues when accessing the units for maintenance “in the harsh environment of the BC”. They now claim that the LVIs and FRR system alone will get the same or even better results?

The EA, after meetings with EDF, unsurprisingly said that the reduced scheme did not meet the standard and they were about to issue a refusal.

This was immediately followed by a formal appeal by EDF to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) about the length of time and probable outcome of the EA response

This appears to prevent the EA from formalising their response so we do not know the details of the refusal. Apparently the EA cannot be contacted directly on this subject. Contact is now via National Resources Wales (NRW) until the hearing.

Whatever the result of the PINS appeal - scheduled for April-June - IT WILL BE FINAL.