4. Use of the Exe Estuary

This section describes how the Exe Estuary is used by people today.

The Exe Estuary is a valuable resource to both local people in Devon and to the many visitors who come to the county every year. A broad spectrum of activities takes place on the Exe Estuary, and it is important to balance the level of human activity with protection of the diverse natural resources so that they can continue to be enjoyed in the future. Site managers have been using a suite of management measures, such as tailored Codes of Conduct and zoning schemes, to ensure the sustainable use of the Exe Estuary.

4.1 Farming & Farmed landscape

Farming is an integral part of our landscape. It has the potential to enhance wildlife and biodiversity, and provide us with food, employment, export revenues and even improved water quality and flood protection. The agricultural industry has come under many pressures economically, environmentally and socially in recent years – a prime example being the Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001. It is vital that the farming industry is maintained, supported and respected in order to ensure that society can benefit from all that the farming industry has to offer.

Image 4a:  Grazing on the Exe Estuary
Source: EEMP

The area covered by the Exe Estuary Management Plan Boundary is mainly characterised by mixed farming including:

- **Grazing for beef production**: The majority of the farmland within the Exe Estuary Partnership’s management boundary is grazed for beef production. This mainly occurs on the low lying areas where damp soils and the likelihood of flooding restricts the production of arable crops, e.g. the lowest parts of the Clyst Valley and most of the Exminster and Powderham marshes.

- **Grassland management for dairy production**: This represents a small fraction (12%) of the farming activity and is mainly concentrated in the Clyst Valley.

- **Arable farming**: makes up the remainder, mainly around the margins of the Clyst Valley, along the Kenn Valley, and on the drier land behind Starcross and Dawlish Warren.
Farmed Landscape

Farming has a strong influence on the character of the landscape around the Exe Estuary, particularly on the western side. Here, the landscape is mainly farmed, with some obvious areas of coniferous plantations, particularly on the Haldon Ridge, and broadleaved plantations at lower elevations. Parts of Powderham Estate have stands of evergreens which are prominent in winter. The western side of the estuary is also characterised by a large area of lowland grazing marshes on the upper Estuary.

The eastern side of the Estuary, especially the lower Estuary, is less rural and the impact of farming on the landscape is less-pronounced. There are more settlements and a number of large properties bordering the Estuary, including the Royal Marines’ Commando Training Centre at Lympstone.

The Exe Agricultural Catchment

Information on farming can be collected in agricultural census\(^1\) reports within sub-catchments of the wider River Exe catchment. The agricultural catchments associated with the Exe Estuary management boundary are the Clyst, Exe Tidal and Exe Lower.

In 2005 the census shows that there were 685 holdings in the Clyst, Exe Tidal and Exe Lower areas, most of which were located within the Exe tidal area. In 2010 the total number of agricultural holdings was 540 and the decrease is due a change in the way DEFRA collects the data. From 2010 onwards the data is only collected from commercial holdings (with a significant amount of farming activity). In Devon around 45% of holdings are regarded as non-commercial farming, therefore they have been excluded from the recent DEFRA June Survey of Agriculture\(^2\). In addition, in 2009 DEFRA conducted a register cleaning exercise to remove inactive holdings from the database. Figure 4b shows how the types of agriculture found around the Exe Estuary and the number of farms has changed between 2005 and 2010.

Figure 4c shows how farm sizes have changed between 2005 and 2010 and Figure 4d shows how numbers employed in agriculture have changed over the same time. The 2010 census shows small differences in the number of full time and part time farmers within the sub-catchments. Compared with the 2005 data the number of full time farmers has declined, likely explained by farmers either semi-retiring from agriculture or reducing their level of farming activity as a strategy to increase off-farm work. The farms in the Exe Tidal catchment are predominantly livestock (sheep) and woodland, whilst the Clyst catchment supports more cereal and dairy farming, as shown in Figure 4b.

\(^1\) Results are from the June Survey of Agriculture 2005 and 2010, a large sample surveys sent to representative samples of holdings across England. As the results are based on sample surveys, they are subject to a degree of sampling error and do not take into account other sources of survey errors, such as non-response bias or administrative data errors.

\(^2\) Dr. Matt Lobley, CRPR, Exeter University (personal communication)
Figure 4a: Agricultural subcatchments around the Exe Estuary
Source: DCC 2014 and OS 2014 background mapping.
DEFRA 2006 data.
Figure 4b: Trends in types of agriculture within the Exe Agricultural Catchment Units

**Figure 4bi:** Types of agriculture found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2005)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014

**Figure 4bii:** Types of agriculture found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2010)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014
Figure 4c: Trends in the range of farm sizes within the Exe Agricultural Catchment Units

Figure 4ci: The range of farm sizes found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2005)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014

Figure 4cii: The range of farm sizes found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2010)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014
Figure 4d: Trends in agricultural employment within the Exe Agricultural Catchment Units

Figure 4di: Agricultural employment found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2005)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014

Figure 4dii: Agricultural employment found within the Exe Estuary’s agricultural sub-catchments (2010)
Source: Farming Statistics, DEFRA 2014