

# **Christchurch Harbour and Marine Society (CHAMS)**

## **Why is Christchurch Harbour so vulnerable**

If someone was to ask what the single key message was that has come from the 4 years of water testing that has been carried out by our small group within CH&MS, it has to be the stark realisation of just how vulnerable Christchurch Harbour is. Vulnerable, primarily, because of the abuse and pressure our two major rivers are subjected to.

Christchurch Harbour is tiny (with as little as a 15<sup>th</sup> of the surface area and water volume of Poole Harbour (source DEFRA)) with a small outflow restricted further by the double high tides and the lowest tidal range of any Harbour along the central south coast. Having to deal with high levels of Nitrates (primarily leaching off farmland) and Phosphates (exacerbated by an inadequate sewage treatment infrastructure) is too much to ask. If one examines the sheer scale of the catchment area of the Stour and the Avon it is no wonder that Christchurch Harbour needs (and deserves) a greater level of proactive protection. Poole Harbour has the comparatively small rivers, the Frome and Piddle flowing into it.

30 years ago, excess sewage flows would have ended up in Poole Bay, now, in order to help protect the tourism industry that excess goes to the sewage treatment plants along the Stour, and when they can't cope with the scale of contaminated water, it ends up heading towards our precious Harbour.

Those at CHOG know well the effects of high nitrates on excessive algal growth and subsequent adverse effects on the resident and migrating bird populations but add to that invisible arrival of high phosphates and forever chemicals coming down the rivers, it is easy to understand the overall concern.

It's not exclusively sewage of course, there is the road system, the cattle farming and the many old landfill sites up river, but someone has to take a lead on this. The Environment Agency is massively under funded and do not test for E-Coli currently and while the recent Channel 4 docu/drama 'Dirty Business' will have caused the EA leadership some embarrassment the teams on the ground care and want to help. We see our role as simply collecting consistent relevant data to help keep a focus on the Harbour

Our immediate concern has been the almost total lack of concern and action shown by BCP. Back in March 2025 following the largest demonstration ever held outside the Civic Centre they were presented with a 4,000 signature petition and a 'ready to go' Environmental Protection Policy for Christchurch Harbour. It was voted for UNANIMOUSLY at the Full Council Meeting that evening, but ever since it has been brushed under the carpet. There are too many vested interests at play but all the while Christchurch Harbour is bearing the brunt.

Things are about to heat up. On July 15<sup>th</sup> the Environment & Place Committee are to discuss 'what to do next with the Policy' this has got to be Christchurch's big moment.

We intend to be there.