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HULL: University in £3.6m research project

Tide coming in to help wildlife

SCIENTISTS from the University of Hull are taking part in a £3.6m research project to protect wildlife near ports.

Consumerism and more imports from China are increasing demand on European ports, which could lead to an ecological imbalance, according to academics at the Cottingham Road university.

Container ships have become larger and ports need to be able to accommodate them.

It means expanding the port and deepening shipping channels which has an impact on the estuarine wildlife.

In the new year, experts from the university's Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies will address these issues when they begin the project called Tidal River Development (Tide).

Their initial task will be to determine the impact of the ports on the estuarine wildlife and then work with other groups to make recommendations for the integrated management of estuaries.

It is the first project of its kind and involves major European

INSHORT

Wildlife near ports, including Hull, is to be the focus of a multi-million pound project involving the city's university.

Academics from the University of Hull will begin the project in the new year.

BY KATIE KNASS

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ports, including the four in the Humber – Hull, Immingham, Grimsby and Goole – as well as Antwerp in Belgium and Hamburg and Bremerhaven in Germany.

Professor Mike Elliott, of the University of Hull, said: "Our role is to ensure the environment is protected and European Union laws are adhered to, while at the same time allowing the shipping industry to flourish sustainably."

"The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment stated the biggest threat we face globally is habitat loss, so we will also advise on the issue of off-setting – that is creating new habitats where

wildlife can flourish, in order to compensate for the extension of ports.

"The port industry has changed significantly over the past few decades.

"The first purpose-built container ship was built 40 years ago and carried 58 metal containers. Today, container ships are 400 metres long and carry up to 15,000 containers.

"Just as the demands on ports have increased, the environmental restrictions have become more significant."

The university will work with Associated British Ports and the Environment Agency and with organisations elsewhere to ensure the development and management of these ports follows the European Union's ecological protection legislation. Any breach of these can lead to countries being reported to the European Court.

Links

University of Hull

www.hull.ac.uk

Environment Agency

www.environment-agency.gov.uk



» **DESTROYING HABITATS:** A container ship passes along the Humber Bridge.



» **DISTURBS ORGANISMS:** The docks in Hull.

Problem of ports

WHEN ports are enlarged, the organisms that live on the seabed are disturbed and, since estuaries are rich feeding grounds for fish, birds and seals, the loss of habitat could have damaging consequences.

It could affect birds such as shelduck and knot feeding on worms and shellfish along the shores, the fishes, such as juvenile cod and plaice using the estuaries as nursery grounds, and the grey seals in turn feeding on the fish.

Expanding ports can also lead to the narrowing of estuaries and cause sea levels to rise locally.

And when container ships offload ballast water new organisms can be introduced to the water, creating a further imbalance.