

PRESS RELEASE (22 DECEMBER 2009)

ACADEMICS ENLISTED TO PROTECT ESTUARINE WILDLIFE

Consumerism and more imports from China are increasing demand on European ports, which could lead to an ecological imbalance according to scientists at the University of Hull. UK ports handle more than 95% of the countries import and export tonnage valued at almost £400 billion as well as being vital to regional economies and employment.

The trade relies on containerships which have become larger over time. If ports are to be commercially competitive, they need to be able to accommodate these large carriers and this usually means expanding the port and deepening shipping channels.

Such changes have implications for estuarine wildlife. 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 the 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 fishes.

Expanding ports also can 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.

In January 2010, experts from the University's Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies will address these issues when they embark on a €4 million European project called Tidal River Development (TiDE). Their initial task will be to determine the effects of the ports on the estuarine wildlife and then work with other stakeholders to make recommendations for the integrated management of estuaries.

This is the first project of its kind and involves major European ports including the four in the Humber - Hull, Immingham, Grimsby and Goole - the largest port complex in the UK, plus Antwerp in Belgium and Hamburg and Bremerhaven in Germany. The University will work with the Associated British Ports and the Environment Agency and with organisations elsewhere to ensure that 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.

Professor Mike Elliott explains: “Our role is to ensure that the environment is protected and EU laws are adhered to, while at the same time allowing the shipping industry to flourish sustainably. The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment stated that the biggest threat we face globally is habitat loss, so we will also advise on the issue of off-setting; that is creating new habitat where wildlife can flourish, in order to compensate for the extension of ports.”

He explains: “The port industry has changed significantly over the past few decades. The first purpose-built containership was built 40 years ago and carried 58 metal containers. Today, containerships 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 recent Copenhagen accord and other international agreements require countries to have environmentally sustainable industries and this research shows that we are committed to ensuring that ports are both economically successful and environmentally responsible.”

The TiDE project will start on 1st January 2010.

Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact Claire Mulley on 01482 466943 or 07809 585965 or c.mulley@hull.ac.uk

Professor Mike Elliott is available for interview on Wednesday 23 December. To arrange an interview slot, please contact Claire Mulley.

About the University’s Institute for Estuarine and Coastal Studies

The Institute of Estuarine and Coastal Studies (IECS), formed in 1982, is a multi-disciplinary research and consultancy organisation set up to utilise the facilities and expertise in coastal science and management within the University of Hull. IECS carries out projects worldwide and covers a wide range of environmental specialisms ranging from biological and physical research to coastal planning, environmental quality, marine law and environmental impact assessment.

For more information visit: <http://www.hull.ac.uk/iecs>

About Tidal River Development (TiDE)

TiDE brings together experts, scientists, policy-makers and managers representing the various economic, social and environmental interests in the estuaries.

TIDE raises awareness of the issues at stake among the target groups, ranging from EU policy makers to estuary residents. On this basis, it increases understanding and acceptance of necessary changes.

For more information visit: www.tide-project.eu

About the Millennium Assessment

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment assessed the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being. From 2001-2005, the Millennium Assessment involved the work of more than 1,360 experts worldwide. Their findings provide a state-of-the-art scientific appraisal of the condition and trends in the world's ecosystems and the services they provide, as well as the scientific basis for action to conserve and use them sustainably.

For more information, visit: www.millenniumassessment.org

About the University of Hull

The University of Hull is one of the world's top 500 universities and is well known for the discovery of liquid crystals, for which the Department of Chemistry received the Queen's Award for Technological Achievement. Philip Larkin, one of the greatest English poets of the twentieth century, was the University's librarian for 30 years and he wrote some of his most celebrated works at the University. Famous alumni include: Lord Dearing, Roger McGough CBE, John McCarthy and Anthony Minghella.

For more information visit: www.hull.ac.uk



