

84. Portsmouth Harbour

Geographical Coordinates: 50°50'N 1°07'W **Area:** 1,248ha

Location: Between the city of Portsmouth and the town of Gosport, in the county of Hampshire, on the coast of central southern England. Immediately east of Chichester and Langstone Harbours Ramsar site.

Date of Ramsar Designation: 28 February 1995

Other International Designations: European Union Special Protection Area

National Designations: Site of special scientific interest

Principal Features: Portsmouth Harbour is a large industrialised estuary and includes one of the four largest expanses of mudflats and tidal creeks on the south coast of Britain. The Wallington River flows into the northwest estuary and gives rise to Fareham Creek, the most notable channel. Together with the adjacent Langstone and Chichester Harbours Ramsar site, Portsmouth Harbour forms an unusual intertidal ecosystem receiving comparatively little freshwater and possessing a characteristic hydrology arising from only narrow connections to the sea via the Solent. This is a very productive ecosystem with an invertebrate flora similar to Langstone and Chichester Harbours and a high density of benthic species including the mud snail *Hydrobia ulvae*. The mudflats support large beds of eelgrass *Zostera angustifolia* and *Z. noltii* and large numbers of phytoplankton. The saltmarshes contain *Spartina* with a sea couch *Elymus pycnanthus* zone above the high water mark. The channel is a nursery for sea bass *Dicentrarchus labrax*. The estuary regularly supports an internationally important wintering population of *Branta bernicla bernicla*. In the five winter period 1986/87-1990/91, an average peak count of over 2,290 birds was recorded. The area also supports nationally important numbers of the following species (figures given are average peak counts for the five year winter period between 1986/87 - 1990/91): *Calidris alpina* (8,010), *Limosa limosa* (70) and *Mergus serrator* (100). (Criteria 2b,3c).

Conservation Issues: Land uses at the site include habitat/nature conservation and harbour use. There is a proposal for the development of 800 residential units at Priddy's Hard, immediately adjacent to an area of inter-tidal mudflats that has been proposed as an extension to the existing Portsmouth Harbour SSSI. The environmental effects of this proposal will be fully assessed before a decision is reached. A study is in preparation for a shoreline management plan.