

Tackling anti-social behaviour related to jetskis

Improving safety of speeding personal watercraft (PWC) along the Essex coastline, known as Operation Wave Breaker.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Community engagement Public order offences
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2021

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Communities General public

Aim

Operation Wave Breaker aims to tackle anti-social behaviour and promote safety on the water across the Essex coast, in partnership with local authorities and harbour masters.

Essex Police aims to see a decrease in overall reports of anti-social behaviour and speeding on the water as more users become aware of the byelaws and the associated risks of speeding on PWCs on the water.

The force currently has a very low level of accidents involving PWCs in the area and aims to maintain that, despite the significant increase in people using PWCs along the coastline since the COVID-19 lockdown.

Intended outcome

- reduce speeding and anti-social behaviour from powered watercraft
- increase awareness of the dangers of powered watercraft being driven at speed in close proximity to other water users
- promote water safety

Description

This operation refers to additional targeted patrol that focus on education, engagement and enforcement to tackle water-based anti-social behaviour across the Essex coast. These patrols are carried out weekly throughout the season of April to September. Patrols are carried out on the water as well as shore-based, utilising the PWC or jet skis provided to the force by the Maldon District council.

Reducing speeding and anti-social behaviour from PWC

This is achieved through regular high-visibility patrols that are conducted on known hot spot areas from April through to September. This is predominantly done on the water but can also be done on the shore. A police boat is used in conjunction with two Seadoo PWC or jet skis, purchased for police use by a local district council.

Greater awareness of reporting methods and awareness of the local bylaws is encouraged. This ensures the capture of the most accurate data possible, to give an informed picture of the problem.

A close partnership with the local councils has been formed. Local councils have responsibility for the areas where there is greatest risk. This ensures that when Essex Police report offenders for breaching the local bylaw speed limits, the councils initiate the court action promptly.

Officers look to report offenders for court action where the behaviour has or is likely to put them or others at risk. The success of this outcome is measured through the number of reports received or patrols come across each year.

Increasing awareness of the dangers of PWC being driven at speed in close proximity to other water users

A significant number of police interactions with PWC riders during Operation Wave Breaker resulted in educational chats to raise awareness of the dangers, and to highlight and inform them of the local bylaws and restrictions. Explaining where the restricted areas are often builds trust and rapport. This results in safer behaviour.

Having use of two police PWC also enables Essex police to break down initial barriers with PWC riders. Before owning two police powered watercraft, riders would often head off at speed in the other direction when the police arrived in the area by boat. Now riders tend to want to interact and find out about what the police are riding and why.

The success rate for this outcome is measured on the number of reports received per season.

Promoting water safety

The dangers of the sea can never be underestimated. The majority of PWC riders arrive at the coast with little to no experience of being on the water or safe navigation. Unfortunately, there are no national requirements around licensing, insurance, or experience. In most locations, anyone can purchase a PWC and take to the water in it.

Essex Police aim to engage with as many PWC riders as possible. They highlight the risks of factors such as wearing the correct clothing or life jackets, and riding at speed too close to other water users such as swimmers and bathers. The success of this outcome is measured through recorded accidents and rescues over the season.

Additional efforts to increase education, engagement and enforcement

- increased attendance by the force at marine community events to raise the operation's profile and provide reassurance
- increased support to the community policing teams at their street meets and events
- increased Twitter activity by the force to highlight the work that is being done to build community confidence, this involves highlighting successful prosecutions and referencing court fines to highlight that the matter is taken seriously

Resources

The main financial outlays for this operation have been from the Maldon District Council. The council purchased two Seadoo police watercrafts, which has the approximate cost of £18,000. There are no additional staff requirements to cover this, as the officers who are already scheduled to work are tasked with this as part of their patrols.

To encourage a greater awareness of reporting methods and awareness of the local bylaws, Essex Police worked with a local harbour master to produce an information leaflet. This contains:

- useful safety advice
- a clear map indicating the locations of the speed limits, restricted areas and areas that are safe for PWC use

The force has also used social media to highlight the speed limits and encouraged the local authority to erect clear signage.

Overall impact

- In 2022 there were 74 incidents of PWC-related anti-social behaviour across Essex. This was a decrease from 84 in 2021 and 99 in 2020, highlighting this operation as having a positive effect on reducing anti-social behaviour.
- Direct feedback from the marine community and key stakeholders revealed they are aware of Operation Wave Breaker and the PWC that Essex Police now have.
- BBC Look East featured the police PWC and the work in 2021 and 2022.
- Operation Wave-Breaker is very much established in Essex now and the Marine Community (including jetski riders) are increasingly aware of the force's presence and direction on the water.
- Maintained a strong social media presence, keeping the public and partners updated with our activity including prosecutions and court results.
- Collaborated with Southend City Council in 2023 to help extend an already established a Public Spaces Protection Order out on to the sea so that anti-social behaviour (ASB) on the water was included. This has seen not only a drop in reports of ASB but has also given both the force and the local authority some really useful tools to deal with offenders.
- During 2025 the force have continued to run Operation Wave-Breaker from April through to September. While there has been a slight increase in the number of reported incidents of PWC related ASB this year compared to 2024 and 2023, the general behaviour has improved and the force's patrols are witnessing significantly less risk-taking and dangerous riding.

Learning

- Legislation covering the water is mainly directed at commercial vessels or shipping. As such, Essex Police is restricted to using the local bylaws to enforce things such as speed limits.
- When compared to fixed penalty notices that can be issued on the spot for speeding on a road, the process on the water can be clunky and slow. By creating specific points of contact between the team and the local authority legal departments, this process has been smoothed to pass on the evidence and request that summons is issued promptly. This has resulted in 12 prosecutions against PWC riders in 2022 – a number that has increased each year.
- The lack of legislation is not widely known. The force often find that people cannot understand why the force is not issuing tickets for speeding or riding a powered watercraft while using a mobile phone. It's a difficult balance to advertise the absence of regulations while informing people of powers the police can use. The force carefully manages the key messages they put out

both in person and through social media.

- Implementing recording all verbal warnings given on to our Intelligence System to ensure that repeat offenders are identified both nationally and locally.

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Tags

Marine policing