

# SEAFIT PROGRAMME

## Evaluation Report

Year One  
2019



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# Evaluation Report Year One

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## Introduction

The SeaFit Programme is designed to deliver and test a range of services that provide easier access to improve the health and wellbeing of fishermen and their families.

Activities include coordinating and commissioning healthcare services to provide free health and dental checks on, or close to, harbours and quaysides. Services have included: mental health support, dental treatment, counselling, health screening and self-management, physiotherapy, cancer prevention information and eye tests.

SeaFit is a joint initiative, set up between the Fishermen's Mission and the Seafarers Hospital Society, with funding from Seafarers UK. In addition to the main partners, SeaFit also works with local GPs, opticians, health professionals and charitable organisations listed in Annexe A.

## Issues

Reports such as the Seafarers UK Fishing for a Future<sup>1</sup>, recent academic studies<sup>2</sup>, and current anecdotal evidence all highlight insufficient mental and physical healthcare provision for fishermen. Fishing is a hazardous occupation with high rates of injury and accidents. Of the population working in 87 industry classes, those in 'Fishing and Aquaculture' had the 5th highest rate of poor general health and the 6th highest rate of limiting long-term illness. It is thought that through life health outcomes for fishermen are second only to lignite miners in terms of poor long-term health, demonstrating the need for tailored occupational health services to support UK fishing communities.

“ I just wish that this service was available 15 years ago, as two of my friends might be still alive now, having lost two fishers to suicide one 3 years ago and one 14 years ago”. Fisherman, Newlyn

Fishermen are often disadvantaged in accessing health services through the usual care pathways because of the transient nature of their work. Pre-booking appointments is difficult; fishermen are unable to plan time off due to the unpredictability of the weather, and when and where fish species are located. Often, they face a loss of earnings if attending appointments during favourable fishing conditions.

Fishermen regularly live with adverse health conditions. Some are short-term such as back pain, joint pain, fatigue, anxiety, disturbed sleeping patterns, sunburn and infections. Others can be longer-term conditions i.e. hearing problems, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, diabetes, yet they rarely seek medical advice.

The long-established risks associated within the fishing industry such as dangerous working conditions, fluctuating markets, industry uncertainty, variable catches, self-employment and working odd hours all impact on fishermen's health and wellbeing. These issues often lead to both mental and physical pressure, coupled with working in a male predominant environment, in which fishermen are traditionally expected to be strong and just carry on with their work.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.seafarers.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Fishing-for-a-Future.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X18308510>

## SeaFit Programme Objectives

The overall aim of the SeaFit programme has been to use collaborative methods that demonstrate alternative models of healthcare delivery taken to ports and quaysides throughout the UK. It is hoped that these models would then be taken up by health providers in the long-term, providing easier access to health services for fishermen and their families.

It is anticipated that the programme could also have a wider long-term impact, and although less quantifiable, the following additional outcomes could contribute in bringing about real social change among fishing communities:

- Less financial hardship and reduced deprivation; better health is likely to translate into sustained and less interrupted hours at sea.
- Improved home life for the whole family through better health and greater financial stability.
- Kickstarting a culture change among this often 'hard to reach' predominantly male workforce in terms of health self-management.
- Greater life and self-management skills leading to higher levels of independence and greater feelings of empowerment and wellbeing.
- Better health awareness among the non-fishing community who will also be exposed to pre-event publicity messages as a matter of course and who may also attend events.
- Improvements in local economies; a healthier workforce is more productive.

## Findings and Observations

A key observation is the vital role that staff from the Fishermen's Mission play in contributing to the success of the SeaFit Programme. The Fishermen's Mission Port staff are known, trusted and respected within the fishing community. Their local knowledge is also a key factor in enabling fishermen to engage with health providers.

Many events and partnerships would never have taken place if it were not for local connections. Influencing of statutory services has also relied on local input, for example a GP Surgery in Brixham has worked closely with the Fishermen's Mission and are now offering to accommodate same day appointments and medication requests for local and visiting fishermen.

As with any complex programme, SeaFit has taken longer to set up than envisaged and the programme is still taking time to become established. In some areas statutory providers have been reluctant to get involved in a short-term programme. However, some are embracing the partnership and another early initiative is the commencement of integrating health care messages into mandatory training courses.

Partner organisations have had to take time to become known (and trusted) by the fishermen and associated fishing organisations. However, having providers based, or regularly visiting the harbours, cafes and pubs that the fishermen frequent, has begun to open conversations around health. We have also observed that when we make return visits more fishermen are aware of our services and come along for treatment.

Fishermen have sometimes been hesitant in engaging with the programme. However, those who have participated are reporting an improvement in their health and/or wellbeing. Even more encouraging is that the fishermen and families who have received support are then discussing their experience with their peers, thus building the first foundations for acceptance and behaviour change.

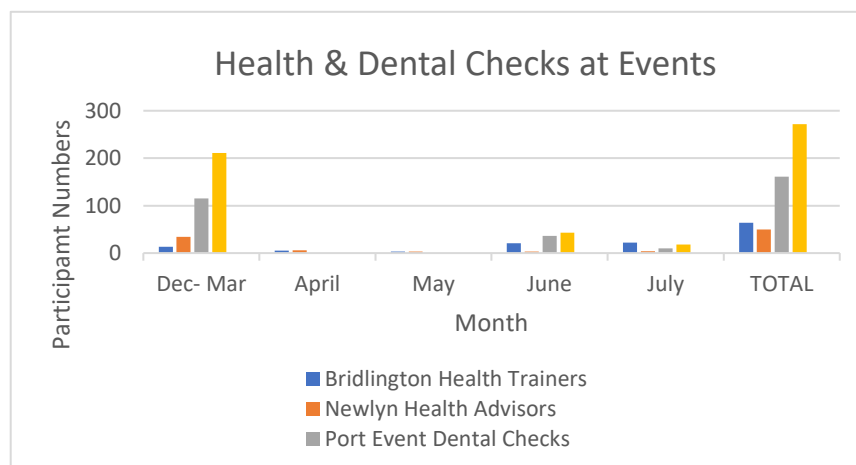
## Port Events

Events have taken place in 12 ports around the UK: England – Newlyn, Padstow, Looe, Plymouth, Poole Newquay, Mevagissey. Northern Ireland – Kilkeel, Portavogie, Ardglass, Scotland – Peterhead, Troon. A total of 272 health checks were conducted at these events using various local health providers and services.

The events are preceded with a series of press releases and social media posts, as well as posters and flyers being distributed. It is vital to have the support and input from local Fishermen’s Mission staff and volunteers, as they can draw upon their considerable contacts. Some of the Fishermen’s Mission staff reported back that they often receive more requests for support immediately after a SeaFit health event has taken place.



The most successful events have been ones in which treatments are available on the day. Having a physiotherapist, optician or dentist providing treatment is more successful than giving out information for the fishermen to follow up later. Numbers of fishermen and their families varies at each event, with an average of 15 to 25 per day.



The optician who supported events in Northern Ireland noted a high number of the fishermen having uncorrected refractive errors. Astigmatism was a common finding which causes squinting and eye strain if uncorrected, as well as reduced vision. Presbyopia was also prevalent, where the fishermen struggled with near vision, which is exacerbated by their long working hours. When they relax at night to use their phones, vision is often blurred at near due to presbyopia prematurely increased by physical fatigue and long working hours.

Within all the fishermen, but particularly the Ghanaian fishermen, there were high levels of UV exposure, causing conjunctival hyperaemia and associated inflamed irritable eyes. Conjunctival pingecula and /or Pterygium are lesions which are a sign of chronic exposure to UV. Pterygium can grow across the visual axis causing significant loss of sight requiring corneal surgery. Dry Eye was also a common occurrence, exacerbated by a dry, windy work environment and long working hours.

Chronic UV exposure to the eyes are not only known to be causative in pingecula and pterygium development but also BCC (basal cell carcinoma) and SCC (squamous cell carcinoma) skin lesions around the eye area, as well as premature cataract development and macular degeneration. These conditions are all sight threatening and so early detection and prevention is highly recommended. This includes regular eye tests, wearing a cap with a peak or brim and use of UV protective lenses in glasses or sunglasses.

## Health Advisors

The SeaFit Programme has been working with NHS partner organisations based in Newlyn in Cornwall and Bridlington in East Yorkshire. Both locations have a fulltime presence at their respective harbours, and also cover neighbouring ports, providing information, advice and support on general health and wellbeing. This includes conducting health checks, blood pressure, smoking cessation, drug and alcohol advice, weight management etc.

Many fishermen smoke and drink and have done so for many years. They are reluctant to quit; however, the Health Advisor in Newlyn is supporting 5 to quit smoking, and whilst there have not been individual discussions on alcohol consumption the leaflet stand needs to be regularly replenished as fishermen take information away to read.

The Health Advisors have conducted 114 health checks, with at least 5 high risk medical issues being referred immediately to a GP. Some fishermen are reporting they have seen their doctor more often following their health check and almost 700 people have engaged with the Health Advisors in some way.

Often informal quayside conversations can lead to small behaviour and mind-set changes. This regular contact is not seen as 'going to get help' by fishermen, it's 'just a conversation'.

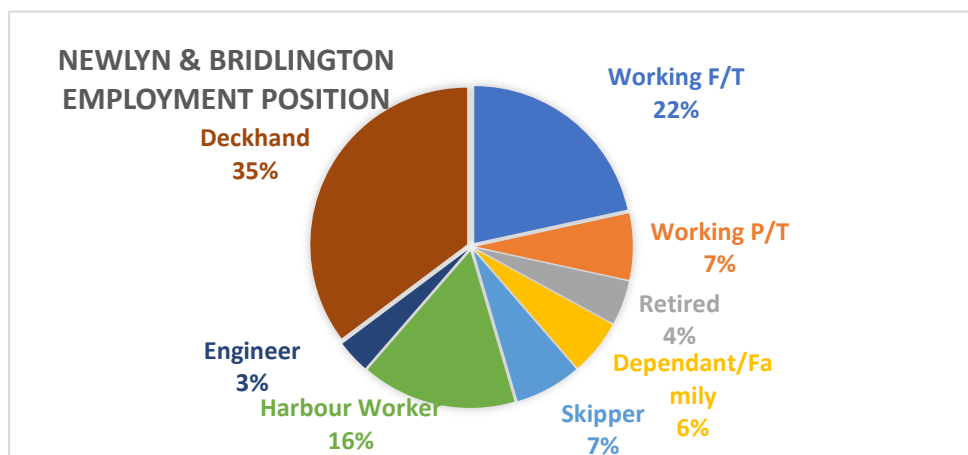
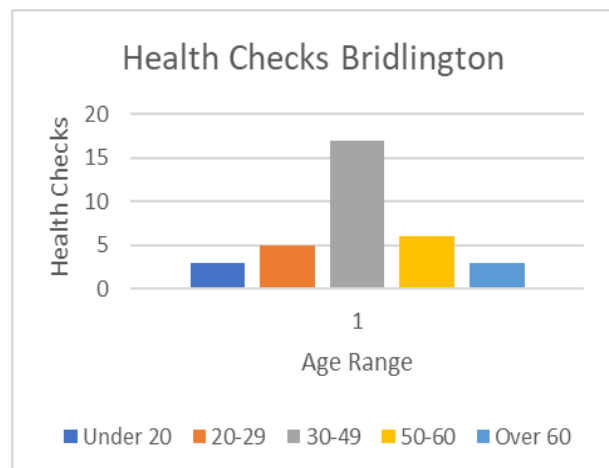
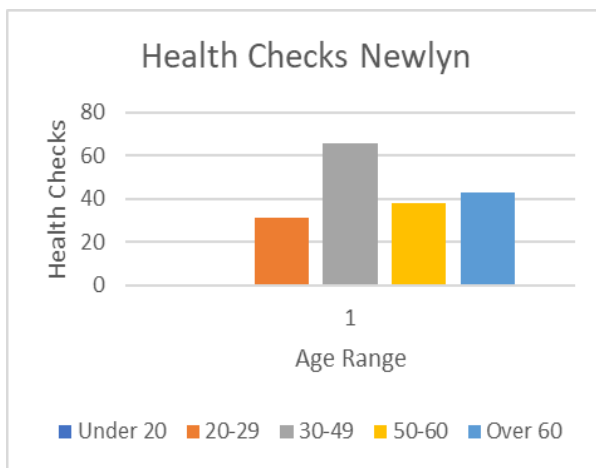
There have been 237 'guided conversations' recorded over the last year, weaving key health messages into the conversation. There are also many other informal conversations taking place on a daily basis with the Fishermen's Mission staff.

In Bridlington the Health Trainers have purchased a BodiTrax machine that measures weight, segmental muscle and fat, total, intra and extra cellular fluids, skeletal and abdominal cavity analysis, metabolic efficiency, metabolic age and cellular performance. Health goals can then be set, tracking, reporting and sharing of individual and organisational data sets accessible online. This machine has really helped to instigate health conversations and the commencement of a lifestyle plan.



The fishermen then like to banter about their results whilst carefully tracking their own progress. One fisherman has turned 7kg of body fat into muscle in 8 weeks. He has reduced his alcohol intake, changed his diet and is regularly going to gym. He also likes to proudly tell everyone on social media of his progress.

Data on gender, age and employment status of those receiving a health check has been collected from April 2019; 91% are male and 9% female. In both locations fishermen aged 30-49 are the highest cohort coming forward for a health check, although Bridlington are reporting they are seeing a shift in this trend with younger fishermen now coming forward.





“I’m not registered, and I can’t make an appointment anyway, as I’ll never know where I’ll be or when I’ll be working. But they gave me some really good advice today, it’s a good idea”. – Chris Skinner, Fisherman, Poole



## Dental Checks

Dental treatment pilots have been conducted to assess how much of a need there is to improve the overall oral health of fishermen and their families.

Our primary aim was to alleviate any immediate acute pain within a timeframe that accommodates the fishermen’s irregular working hours.

A secondary purpose of the dental component is to assess if there is a model of dental care that could be implemented further throughout the UK, if substantial benefit was seen.

161 dental checks have been conducted, highlighting there is a significant need for dental services. Appalling oral hygiene is almost the norm; many fishermen required extensive work, multiple extractions and fillings. Most fishermen had not visited a dentist in years, resulting in higher dental costs than expected.

Our data has shown that treatment requirements tend to be much higher for British fishermen than for foreign fishermen. Frequently foreign fishermen have never had any dental treatment, and yet through a combination of good oral hygiene regimes and a less sugar dominant diet, tend to not require so much treatment.

The dental sessions can be emotional, as providers received tearful thanks from one fisherman when he received his first set of dentures, giving him confidence to smile again. The dental nurse, dentist and receptionist were all in tears with him.

However, we are acutely aware that there are not enough NHS dental services being commissioned, making it even more difficult for fishermen and their families to access affordable dental treatment. For example, there are 25,000 people on the waiting list in Cornwall and Bridlington’s nearest NHS dental provider taking NHS patients is in Beverly some 25 miles away.



We have gone a long way to making dentistry more accessible and less frightening for many fishermen and hope this encourages more of the fishing community to visit the dentist. The Fishermen’s Mission port staff and volunteers are key in promoting the sessions and often directly assisted in bringing the fishermen down to the harbourside to encourage attendance.

Four different dental models were implemented:

### 1. Mobile Dental Unit (MDU) providing emergency/urgent treatment

DentAid regularly provide mobile dentistry to homeless people but have been shocked at the state of the fishermen's teeth. A recurring theme has been fisherman focusing on being at work and not taking care of themselves. Many fishermen were registered with a dentist, but missed appointments due to irregular working hours, and so were taken off the dental register.

The dental unit also saw several nervous and anxious patients who hadn't seen a dentist for many years. The dental team said it was great to be able to help to break down those barriers. An example of a port day involved DentAid treating 10 people. 4 scale and polish, 9 fillings, 10 examinations as well as oral cancer screening.

### 2. Dental surgery specifically reserved appointments for fishermen

Tron Dental Studio opened once a month on Fridays from 2 p.m. until 7 p.m. exclusively for fishermen, then changed to once every 8 weeks. In total 6 sessions ran with a total of 24 patients attending over 28 appointments, demonstrating some returning patients.

Some patients required a lot of treatment, multiple areas of dental decay, abscesses and rampant gum disease; whereas others, some of whom had never seen a dentist, there would be no treatment required. Some attendees then registered as NHS patients, others registered having heard about the sessions, since word of mouth relaxed any anxiety, or uncertainty, they had about attending the dentist.

### 3. Harbourside assessment, follow up treatment at dental surgery

This model was trialled in Bridlington with the dentist reporting a reluctance among some of the fishing community to access services out of fear and apprehension. There were 25 x-rays, 25 fillings, 16 extractions (including 2 wisdom teeth) and 3 dentures, for 11 people, as well as 10 appointments with the hygiene therapist to treat gum disease. There were 2 assessment days at the harbourside then 7 days of the dentist's time and a day of the hygiene therapist's time.

Some of the fishermen required additional work to get rid of decay and gum disease and have been signposted to NHS services. However, the dentist is not optimistic about their chances of receiving treatment due to the shortage of NHS dentists. There are further fisherman who now want to receive treatment and it would be good to build on this growing desire to improve the oral health of those on the harbour, however, dentistry is a costly service to fund, particularly with the extensive treatment needed.



#### 4. MDU providing urgent treatment, dental surgery follow up

This is a model used prior to the SeaFit Programme commencing, funded by Seafarers Hospital Society (SHS), It is included in this report as it was initially a pilot and offers further proof of the need for dental care for fishermen.

The dental team saw 115 patients at 7 harboursides over two weeks; 40 patients were referred for further treatment provided locally at a subsidised rate. The fisherman paid normal NHS charges, and SHS paid the remaining costs, essentially registering them as 'private' patients, to avoid registration waiting lists. Even paying NHS charges proved to be too expensive for some fishermen, only 19 of the 40 fishermen referred took up the offer. The follow up treatment for those who did attend was extensive and costly due to the lack of dental care over many years. Over 70% of those treated hadn't seen a dentist in the last five years.

We will use the same model again in September 2019; however, the high costs may not make this sustainable and we would welcome a conversation about the best way forward for dental care for fishermen.

### Mental Health

The Fishing for a Future report highlighted evidence of mental health issues and depression experienced by fishermen, with over 95% of their respondents indicating they suffered from stress.

Social stigma, discrimination and admitting the need for help are the biggest barriers to accessing mental health support and therefore recovery. Fear of being ridiculed, or being perceived as weak, means that fishermen tend to struggle on alone, or downplay their stress and anxiety, which can make their situation worse.

Evidence from the SeaFit Programme shows us that fishermen are more likely access services, when they are close to the harbour and via trusted and recommended providers.

#### Mental Wellness Support

"Fantastic, brilliant, Ceri's an amazing lady. Had an accident, a fire that sunk my boat.

Afterwards I knew I had to talk about it and what was going on in my head, but in this industry you cant show weakness or you're thought of as weak.

I've recommended it to other people; once came out nearly in tears, someone asked me what was wrong so I told them.

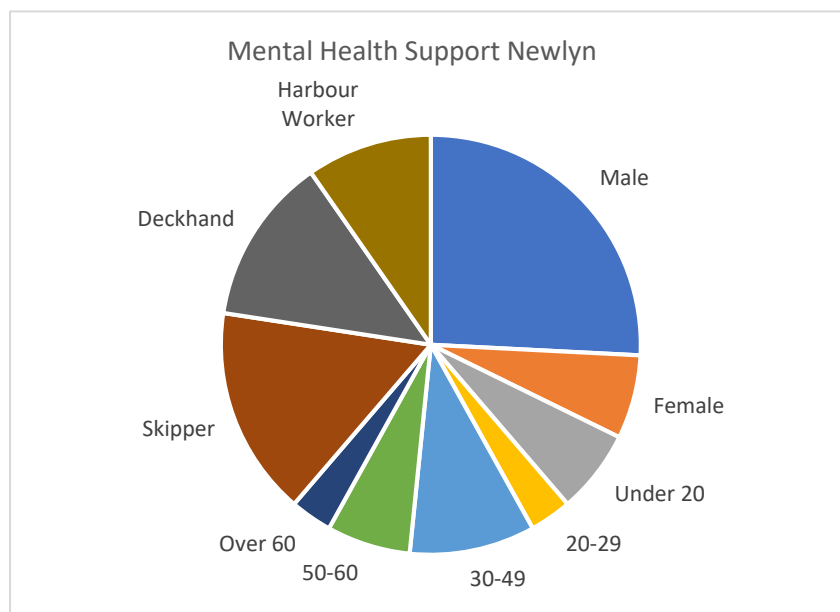
You have to talk about things, not bottle it up. If not I'd have had a drink, probably become self-destructive". - Nigel Taylor Fisherman, Newlyn

SeaFit is piloting two mental health models; the first is via a Mental Health Practitioner based in Newlyn, she works near the harbourside one day a week to support fishermen. She regularly 'walks the quayside' to talk to fishermen about the service, which also enables the fishermen to get to know and trust her.

Uptake has been slower than anticipated; which isn't surprising given the stigma associated with seeking mental health support. However, 14 people have been provided with a total of 51 sessions. Those who have used the service have reported that they really benefitted from being able to talk confidentially to someone and have all provided positive feedback. Most people who experience mental wellbeing problems recover, or can live with and manage their issues, especially if they get help early on.

The second mental health pilot is based in Lowestoft and consists of two phases. The first phase is a participatory research model to identify what mental health and wellbeing support is available throughout Suffolk and King's Lyn Norfolk. This work is ongoing and will shape the second phase of the project, developing mental health and wellbeing services which are trusted and easily accessible for the fishing community.

The data collected will be used to show local commissioners the need, uptake and success of the service with a view to discussing how the service, or at least part of it, could be commissioned in the future. It is at this stage unknown how realistic this is despite government promises to improve statutory mental health and wellbeing services.



## Physiotherapy Network

The Seafarers Physiotherapy Network is operational in Cornwall, Plymouth, Brixham, Peterhead, Oban, Kilkeel and Tarbert. The Harbourside Centre in Newlyn has seen 59 patients and the other network physios a combined total of 35 patients in the first year of the programme. The network also provides a focus on prevention, not just treatment once injured, which is something the NHS does not offer.

Most fishermen receive an average of 4 physio sessions, with treatment being paid for by SHS. Physiotherapists who advertise the service have had a good response and it's encouraging to know that there are physios wanting to work in partnership.



In March, a workshop was held in Newlyn for all Network members, which was very successful. The morning consisted of presentations by various partners about local health and wellbeing services, maritime charities working with fishermen, basic information about the types of fishing and the implications of ILO188 given by Sally Bell, Chief Medical Advisor for the MCA.

The afternoon was spent on the harbourside talking to fishermen about the physio they have received and touring

the boats used for the different types of fishing. This enabled the physios to experience first-hand the cramped and difficult environments that fishermen live and work in.

Network members take part in the research to set baseline level needs and to monitor the impact of the different types of fishing on physical bodies. SHS will continue to build on the network now the pilot has established feasibility to expand further.

## Conclusion

The SeaFit Programme confirms what many academic reports claim; that fishermen's health needs are not being met within current health service structures and provision. Having to pre-book appointments, when not being able to plan for time off, is not a system that works, given the unique pressures faced by the fishing industry.

Within the first year of the SeaFit Programme we believe our collaborative methodologies have demonstrated that alternative models of delivery can provide easier access to health services for fishermen and their families. In Northern Ireland the Farm Families Health Check Programme agreed to continue to provide health checks for fishing communities and other providers have expressed keen interest in supporting more SeaFit events.

Our health provider partners, and individual fishermen, have told us that there have been clear health benefits for individuals. Most of the fishermen engaged in dental, physical and/or mental health services have made improvements to their health and wellbeing. It is hoped that their improved health will in turn lead to more uninterrupted hours at sea, which will increase their earning capacity.

The dentists we've worked with tell us that in some locations the oral health of the fishing population generally consists of gross neglect. Some fishermen have been suffering from continual pain and infection, even when offered treatment they refused because they were either too scared, or too embarrassed by the state of their teeth.

Throughout the whole of the UK we are aware that there is an acute shortage of NHS dentists and private dental fees are often beyond the reach of many fishing families. However, many of those who can afford to pay are not seeking treatment as they put their work before their health, and many don't attend through fear and anxiety. Most of the fishermen and family members treated by the dental teams had not accessed any dental care for years. One dentist said, 'it was distressing at times to see the terrible depravity, especially of the children that we saw'.

The Fishermen's Mission port staff are invaluable when engaging with fishermen to promote events. Their local knowledge attracts support from other port users, staff, fishing associations, local businesses and port offices. They are also able to engage with fishermen and their families on the day and are often in greater demand after an event for further support.

Breaking the stigma of seeking help for poor mental health is possible, albeit a slow process. To create significant behaviour change we need to ensure there is long-term commitment to support different ways of providing services so that we can determine if our actions are making a difference. In short whilst the future for mental health and wellbeing provision looks brighter nationally, it is by no means certain and it is important we consider how to manage the potential end of the service and programme once expectations have been raised.

The SeaFit Programme has begun to lay down a foundation for culture change amongst a hard to reach, predominantly male, workforce. Fishermen and their family members who received first-hand support are benefitting from improved health and are encouraging peers and crew members to also seek treatment or advice.

## SeaFit Year 2 Recommendations:

The SeaFit Programme has begun to demonstrate real practical solutions. However, this is only a 'sticking plaster' with some costs and demands being higher than anticipated, mainly due to the amount of treatment required. More awareness of the fishing industry's health requirements is needed, therefore we would recommend the following actions for the next 12 months:

**Yr2 Recommendation 1** Repeated messages in the public domain to ensure fishermen are acknowledged as a hard-to-engage cohort.

**Yr2 Recommendation 2** Continued work with statutory and local health services, providing evidence to show that changing service provision can accommodate and benefit the specific health needs of fishermen through bringing services to the quayside and offering repetitive drop-in sessions that don't require appointments.

**Yr2 Recommendation 3** Working with maritime leaders to enable key health messages to be incorporated into fishing industry training organisations for both mandatory and/or refresher health and safety courses.

**Yr2 Recommendation 4** Target skippers and boat owners to lead by example; encouraging crew members to stop smoking/drinking, lose weight, regular health checks. Potential for competitive campaigns to find the healthiest crews.

## Strategic Recommendations for Sustainability:

A much longer-term view on culture change would enable the sustained improvement of fishermen's health and wellbeing. Continued investment into the SeaFit Programme is required in order to bring about real social change among fishing communities. The Fishermen's Mission and the Seafarers Hospital Society would want to engage in strategic level discussions with lobbying support from Seafarers UK as set out below:

**S Recommendation 1** Addressing health inequalities are at the heart of NHS values, higher level discussion is needed with Commissioners and Providers working together to initiate service change for the fishing industry. Lessons can be learnt from other industries, such as farming via proven programs and models that could be modified for use in the fishing industry.

**S Recommendation 2** The NHS Five Year Forward View sets out an expectation through the Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships and Integrated Care Systems that Clinical Commissioners think creatively as to how service provision can be improved to suit local circumstances to reduce health inequalities. A joint strategic proposal needs to be presented to coastal Health and Wellbeing Boards, who bring together Local Authority and NHS representatives responsible for developing joint health and wellbeing strategies for their local populations.

**S Recommendation 3** Lobbying the Government to address the lack of NHS Dental provision. As well as calling for a national campaign to allocate drop-in services that offer more flexibility and the continued use of a mobile dental unit to provide easier access to dental care for those fishermen and their families with the greatest need.

## Annexe A: Partner Organisations:

### **Main Partners:**

The Fishermen's Mission  
Seafarers Hospital Society  
Seafarers UK

### **Programme Partners:**

DentAid  
Fairwinds Counselling Service  
Harbourside Physiotherapy  
Healthy Cornwall  
Humber Teaching NHS Foundation Trust  
Smile:Together CIC  
The Mentis Tree CIC  
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust

### **Health Event Providers:**

Addaction Penzance  
Alcoholics Anonymous  
Alverton GP Surgery  
Bridlington Dental Studio  
British Red Cross  
Community Energy Plymouth  
Compass Hse GP Surgery  
Cornish Fish Producers Organisation Ltd  
Credit Union  
Environment Agency  
Faith Donaldson Optometrist  
Faye Pedlar Physiotherapy  
Harbourmasters  
Jen Cardew Physiotherapy  
Local PCSOs  
MacMillan Cancer Support  
OneYou Plymouth  
Prostate Cancer UK  
Plymouth Trawler Agents  
RNLI  
Seafarers Advice Information Line (SAIL)  
Seafood Cornwall Training  
St Clare GP Surgery  
Stephanie Murray Physio  
Torbay Healthy Lifestyles  
Troon Dental Studio  
Western Maritime Training

There have also been 78 referrals into other services such as housing, IAPT, weight management, GP's etc.



