

RDA DEBEN ESTUARY SURVEY



April 2025

Executive Summary

The River Deben Association received survey responses from 450 people

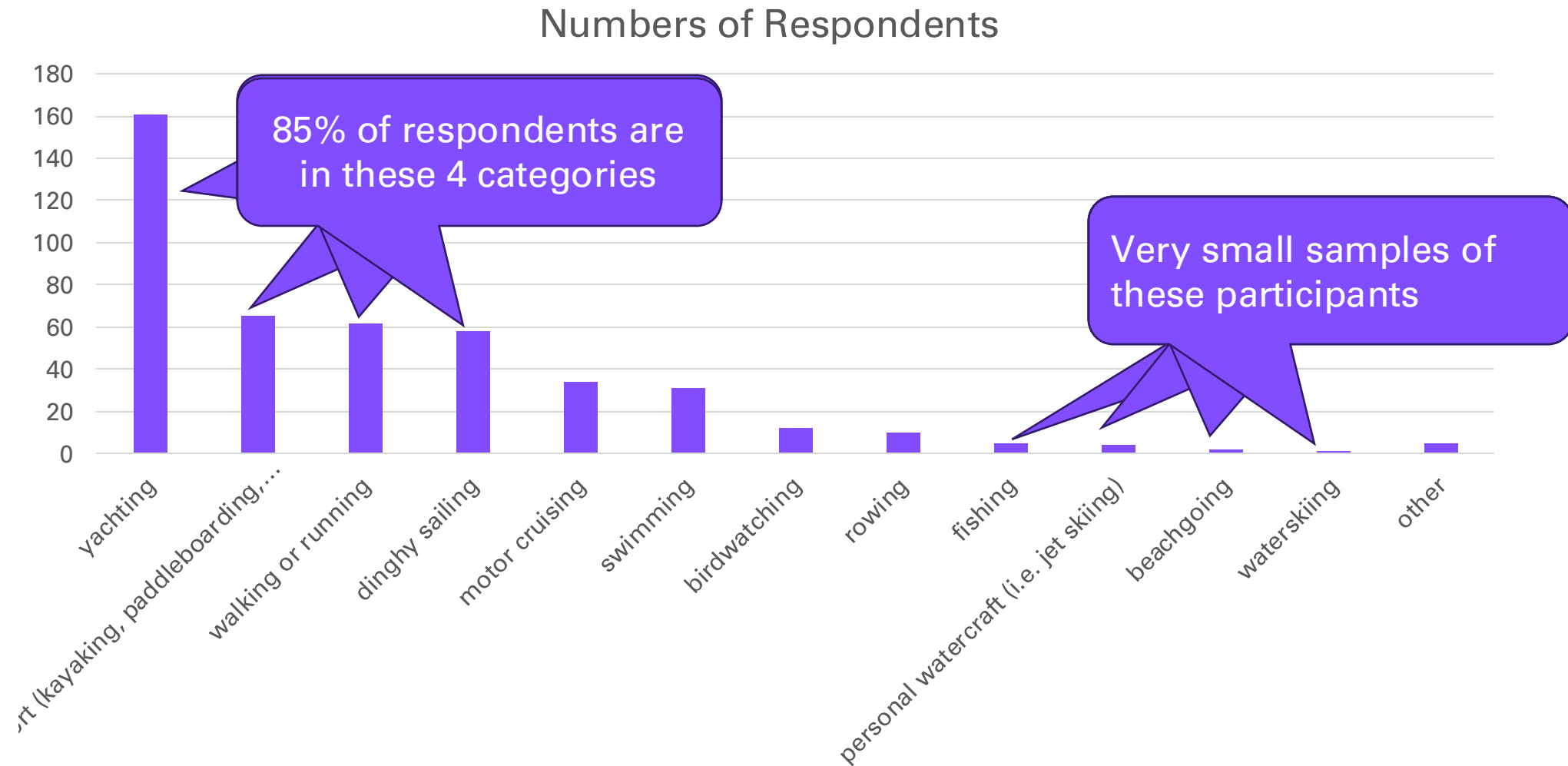
The survey shows different interest groups with different perspectives; with concerns about

- Noise, wash, safety on the water, restrictions of freedoms
- There are some important insights about injury concerns amongst vulnerable users, and surprisingly, yacht users
- There is strong support in this sample of respondents for restriction or banning of Personal Water Craft on the Deben

The majority of respondents believe we should

1. Change the byelaws:
 - Ban Personal Water Craft upstream of the 'no speed limit' area
 - Reduce the speed limits to 8 knots or less; the average suggested speed limit is about 7 knots
 - Allow existing no-limit zone to continue, though a sizeable minority want to abolish it
 - Make the byelaws apply year-round
2. Provide more publicity & signage of the byelaws so users are aware of their responsibilities
3. Have more enforcement of byelaws and some call for more general 'policing' of poor behaviours by some empowered body

The Survey Respondents



What do you value about the Deben Estuary and the time you spend on it?

Sum of each row=1.00, number indicates relative priority , by group

Breakdown by Respondents' activity	beautiful environment	place to observe and appreciate wildlife	easily accessible piece of flat water	club/facility is located there	safe sheltered water	friendly community spirit of users	lack of restrictions, allowing my activity/sport
yachting	0.19	0.17	0.13	0.10	0.15	0.14	0.13
paddlesport (kayaking, paddleboarding, etc)	0.18	0.16	0.15	0.10	0.15	0.14	0.12
walking or running	0.21	0.20	0.14	0.08	0.12	0.15	0.10
dinghy sailing	0.17	0.14	0.13	0.16	0.13	0.14	0.13
motor cruising	0.18	0.15	0.14	0.09	0.15	0.14	0.14
swimming	0.18	0.15	0.15	0.08	0.14	0.15	0.14
birdwatching	0.23	0.23	0.14	0.07	0.11	0.13	0.08
rowing	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.13	0.12	0.15	0.13
fishing	0.17	0.15	0.15	0.10	0.15	0.11	0.16
personal watercraft (i.e. jet skiing)	0.15	0.15	0.17	0.12	0.16	0.14	0.12
beachgoing	0.17	0.13	0.08	0.09	0.17	0.18	0.17
waterskiing	0.23	0.18	0.05	0.14	0.18	0.09	0.14

Green – more highly rated

Amber – medium

Red – less highly rated

What do you value about the Deben Estuary and the time you spend on it?

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waterskiing	0.23	0.18	0.05	0.14	0.18	0.09	0.14

Green – more highly rated
Amber – medium
Red – less highly rated

Environment is valued by all groups, more or less

Dinghy sailors are club orientated

In the last two years, have you ever experienced problems on the Deben Estuary or been upset with the behaviour of other estuary users?

Percentage of respondents answering 'yes'

Row Labels	Number of Respondents	difficulties with boat wash from other estuary users	sustained antisocial noise	fear of personal danger because of others' speed, behaviour or collision risk	unwanted arguments or altercations	congestion preventing you doing your activity	restricted access to the water for your activity
yachting	161	34%	19%	28%	4%	4%	2%
paddlesport (kayaking, paddleboarding, etc)	65	37%	8%	26%	6%	0%	11%
walking or running	62	23%	18%	21%	6%	3%	0%
dinghy sailing	58	34%	17%	28%	7%	3%	5%
motor cruising	34	26%	12%	21%	9%	6%	3%
swimming	31	26%	13%	48%	3%	10%	10%
birdwatching	12	33%	50%	25%	17%	8%	0%
rowing	10	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%	10%
fishing	5	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%
personal watercraft (i.e. jet skiing)	4	0%	25%	0%	50%	0%	0%
beachgoing	2	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%
waterskiing	1	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%
other	5	40%	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
Grand Total	450	31%	17%	27%	7%	4%	4%

In the last two years, have you ever experienced problems on the Deben Estuary with the following activities?

A quarter of all users have feared for their safety

Half of swimmers have feared for their safety

Row Labels	Number of Respondents	difficulties with boat wash from other estuary users	excessive noise	fear of personal danger because of others' speed or behaviour or collision risk	unwanted arguments or altercations	congestion preventing you from doing your activity	restricted access to the water for your activity
yachting	161	34%	19%	28%	4%	4%	2%
paddlesport (kayaking, paddleboarding, etc)	65	37%	9%	26%	6%	0%	11%
walking or running	62	23%	0%	21%	6%	3%	0%
dinghy sailing	58	34%	0%	28%	7%	3%	5%
motor cruising	34	26%	1%	21%	9%	6%	3%
swimming	31	26%	13%	48%	3%	10%	10%
birdwatching	12	33%	50%	25%	17%	8%	0%
rowing	10	40%	30%	20%	10%	0%	10%
fishing	5	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%
personal watercraft (i.e. jet skiing)	4	0%	25%	0%	50%	0%	0%
beachgoing	2	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	0%
waterskiing	1	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%
other	5	40%	40%	40%	20%	0%	0%
Grand Total	450	31%	17%	27%	7%	4%	4%

Percentage of respondents answering 'yes'

30% of all respondents have had issues with boat wash

In the last two years have you (or your organisation) been involved in an accident on the Deben Estuary involving anyone other than yourself or other members of your own organisation/group?

Breakdown by Respondents' activity	no	yes - damage to property	yes - injury to people
yachting	156	5	
paddlesport (kayaking, paddleboarding, etc)	64		1
walking or running	60	2	
dinghy sailing	55	3	
motor cruising	33	1	
swimming	31		
birdwatching	12		
rowing	10		
fishing	4	1	
personal watercraft (i.e. jet skiing)	4		
beachgoing	2		
waterskiing	1		
other	4		1
Grand Total	436	12	2

12 report damage to property

12 report injury to people

Verbatims

our boat on its mooring hit and damaged by another yacht -it was witnessed by HM

Yes a jet ski was weaving between the moorings at Felixstowe Ferry and lost control hitting our boat, luckily the jet ski glanced off the side a no significant damage. It was reported to me and could do nothing about it...

Damage to moored boat, more than once.

Wash from boats at antisocial speeds damaging dinghies alongside pontoons

Our yacht was collided with, as it sat on the mooring. Breaking the forestay and scraping the hull

Just a boat speeding close into shore, which ran over my fishing line, snapping my rod before I could reel in to avoid (I did try)

Our small yacht on a mooring at Waldringfield was hit by a passing boat, leaving their bow navigation light on our side deck. Just scratches on our boat.

Near miss. Pulled up and anchor that had been abandoned off the water ski jetty.

struck by another boat whilst on mooring

Another sailing boat looking for a spot to anchor hit my boat whilst I was at anchor - damage to stanchions.

Accidentally capsized onto a moored boat with people in

Saving lives of jet skiers on 3 occasions plus a board sailor.

BYELAWS DISCUSSION

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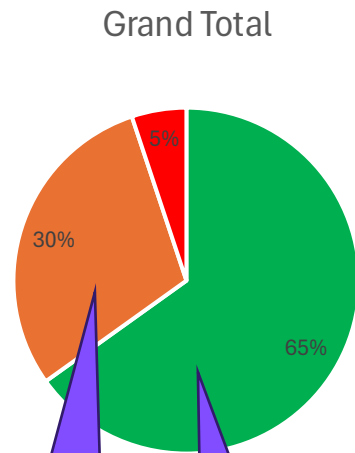
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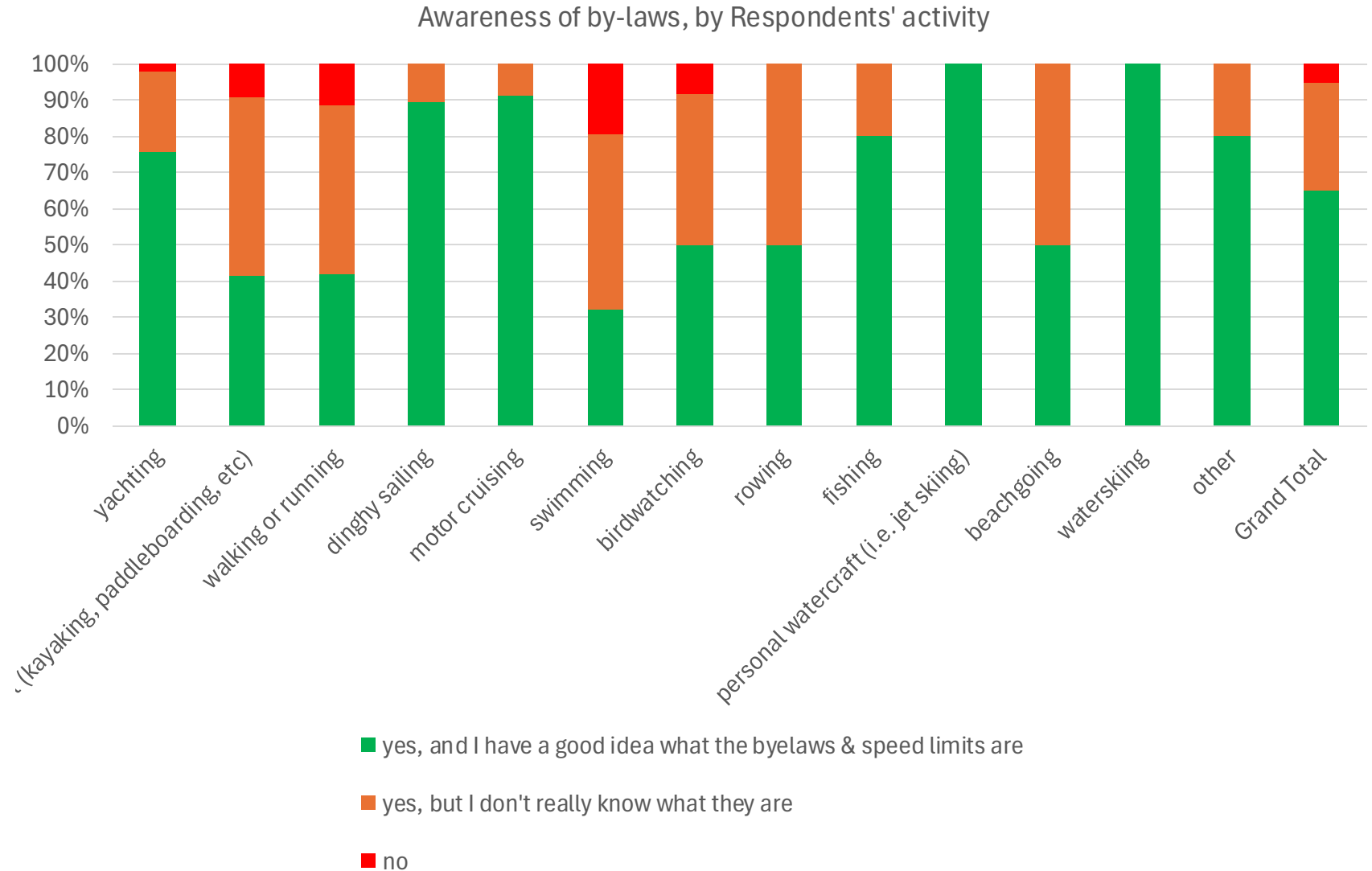
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Were you aware there are byelaws, including speed limits, that apply to the Deben Estuary?

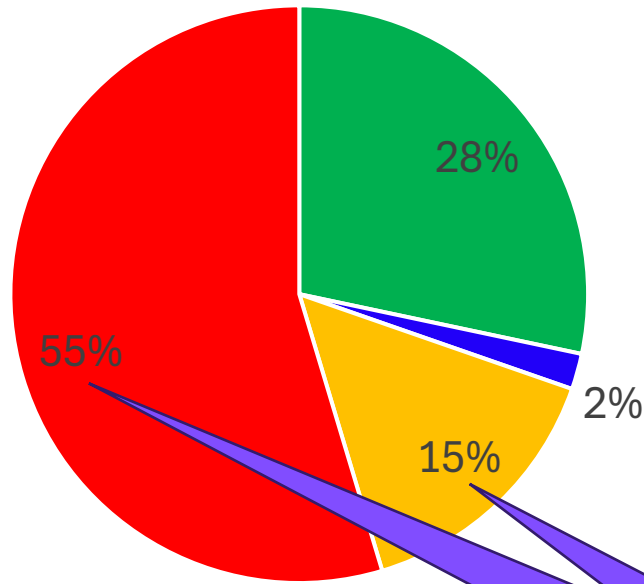


95% of respondents are aware that byelaws exist



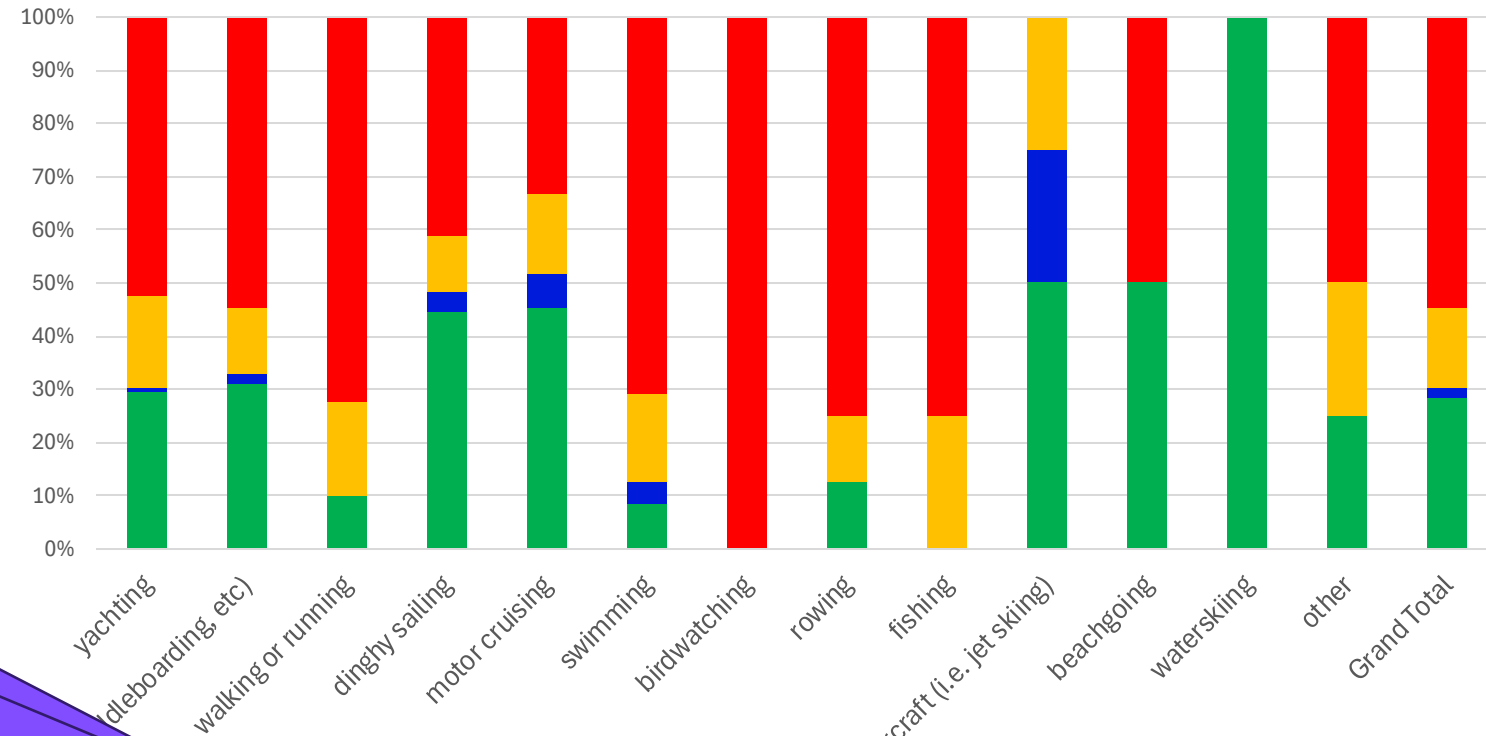
In terms of making changes to the Deben byelaws - which mostly cover speed limits and noisy/ dangerous behaviour – do you feel they need to be changed?

Overall Views



- they are fine as they are
- they are too strict and we should scrap them
- they need tightening up and simplifying a bit but otherwise they are fine
- they need tightening up and simplifying and should be enforced more rigorously

Change the byelaws? (399 views expressed), by Respondents' activity



70% of respondents think byelaws need an update, and 55% think they need stronger enforcement too

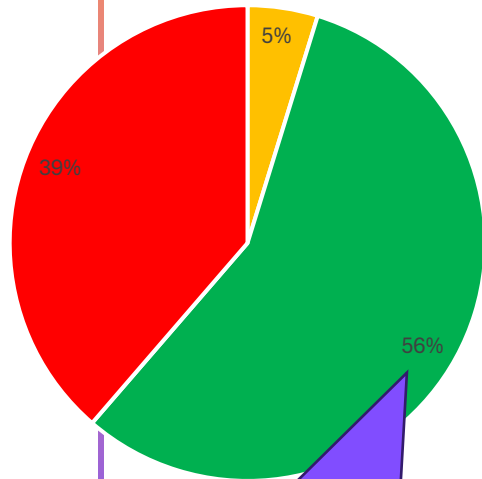
Waterskier response = 'no change'

Birdwatchers' responses = tighten up & enforce (environment?)

Rowers' responses = tighten up & enforce (vulnerability?)

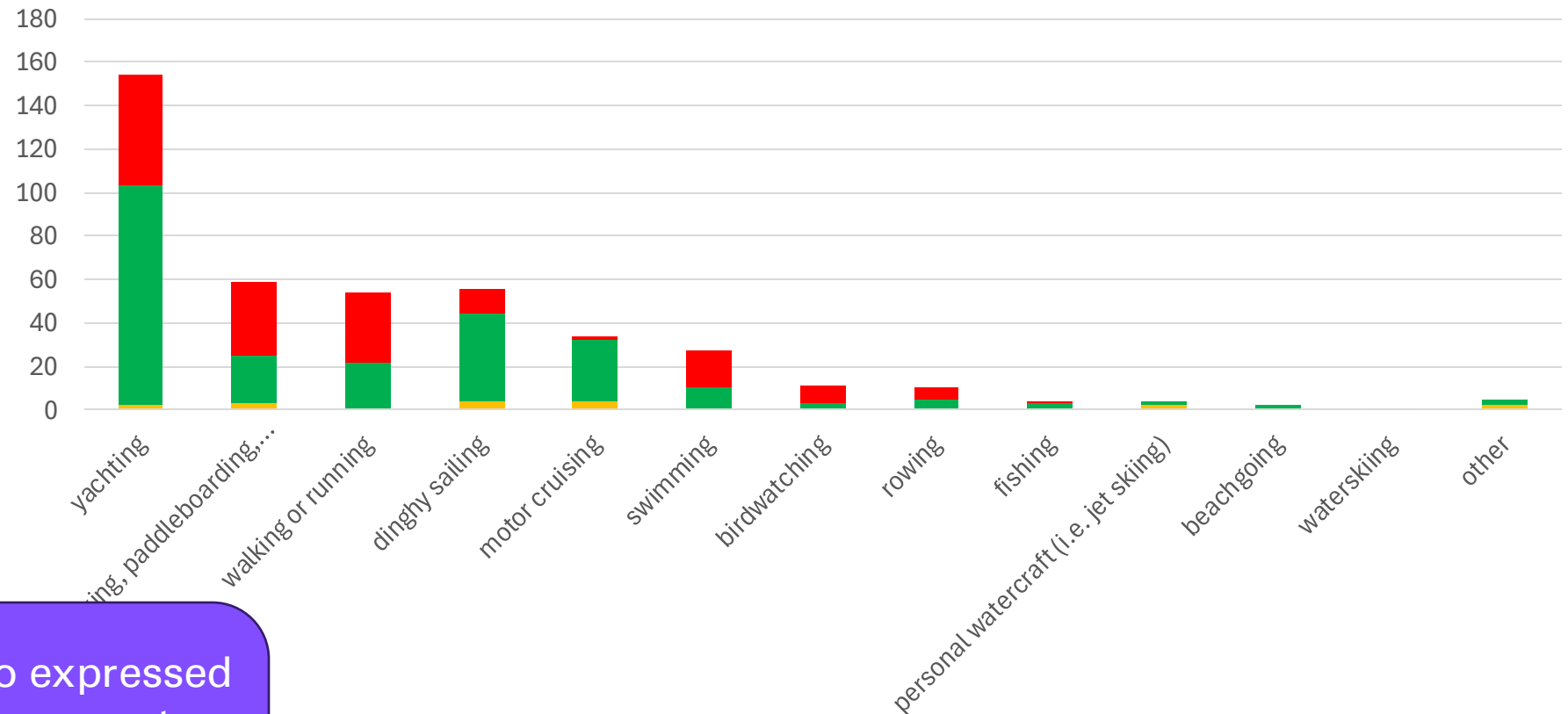
Thinking specifically about the geography of the speed limit zones on the estuary, should changes be made?

Overall Views



56% of respondents who expressed a preference think the current speed zones should be retained. Only 5% want an increase in no-speed zone

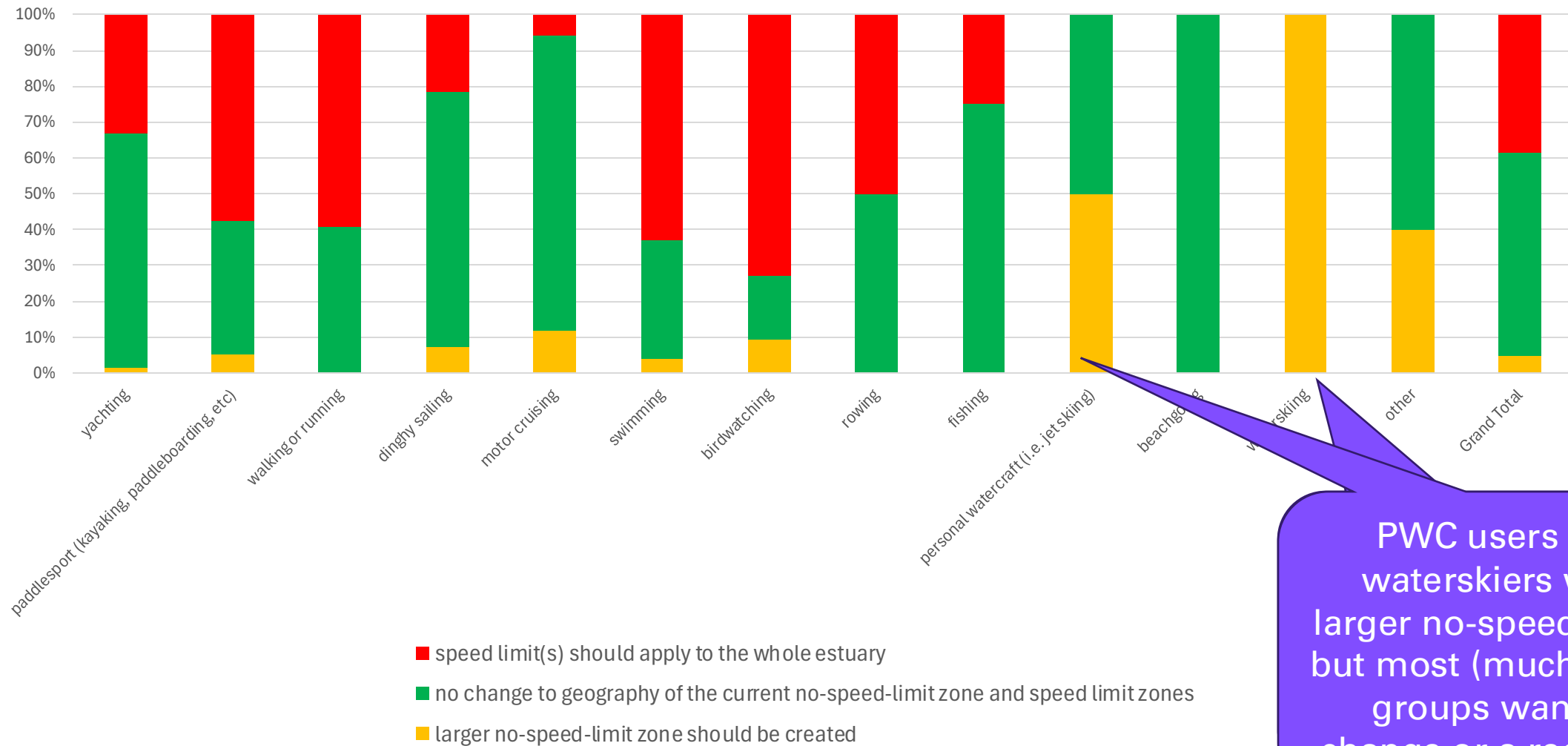
Make changes to speed limit zones? (421 expressed views)



- speed limit(s) should apply to the whole estuary
- no change to geography of the current no-speed-limit zone and speed limit zones
- larger no-speed-limit zone should be created

Thinking specifically about the geography of the speed limit zones on the estuary, should changes be made?

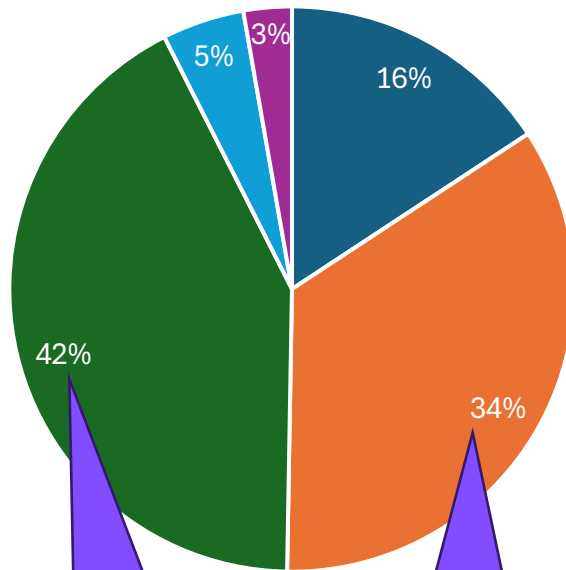
Make changes to speed limit zones? (421 expressed views)



PWC users and waterskiers want larger no-speed zones, but most (much larger) groups want no change or a reduction

If there was one speed limit for the Deben Estuary outside of the no-speed-limit zone, please say what speed you think would be appropriate

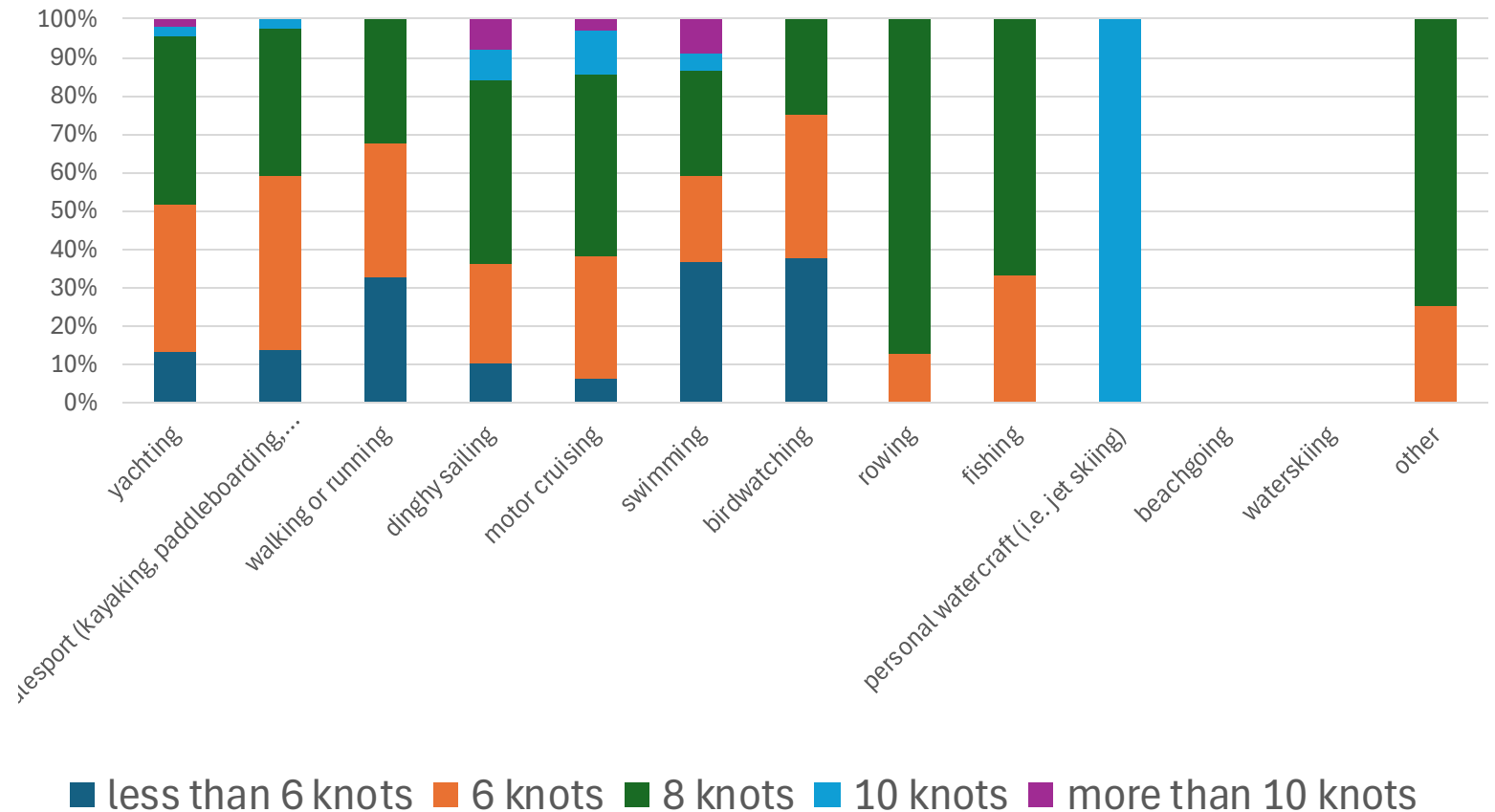
Overall Views



8 knots

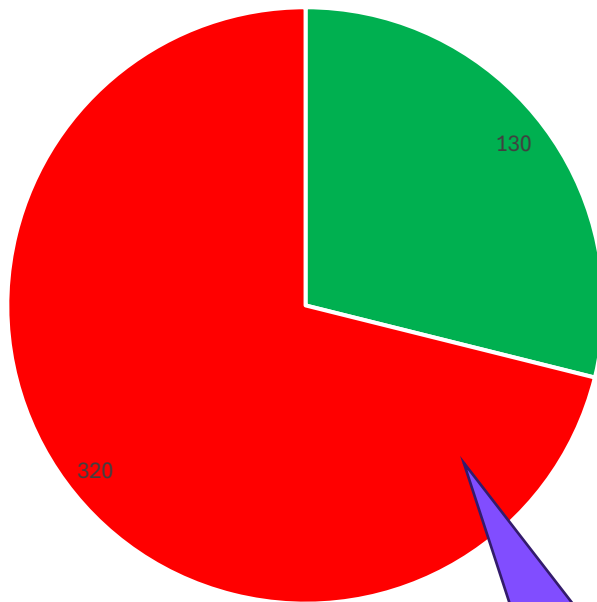
6 knots

Preferred speed limit (362 expressed views)



Median Answer (i.e. middle of the answers from slowest to fastest) = 6 knots
Modal answer (i.e. most common answer) = 8 knots

Thinking specifically about when speed limits should apply

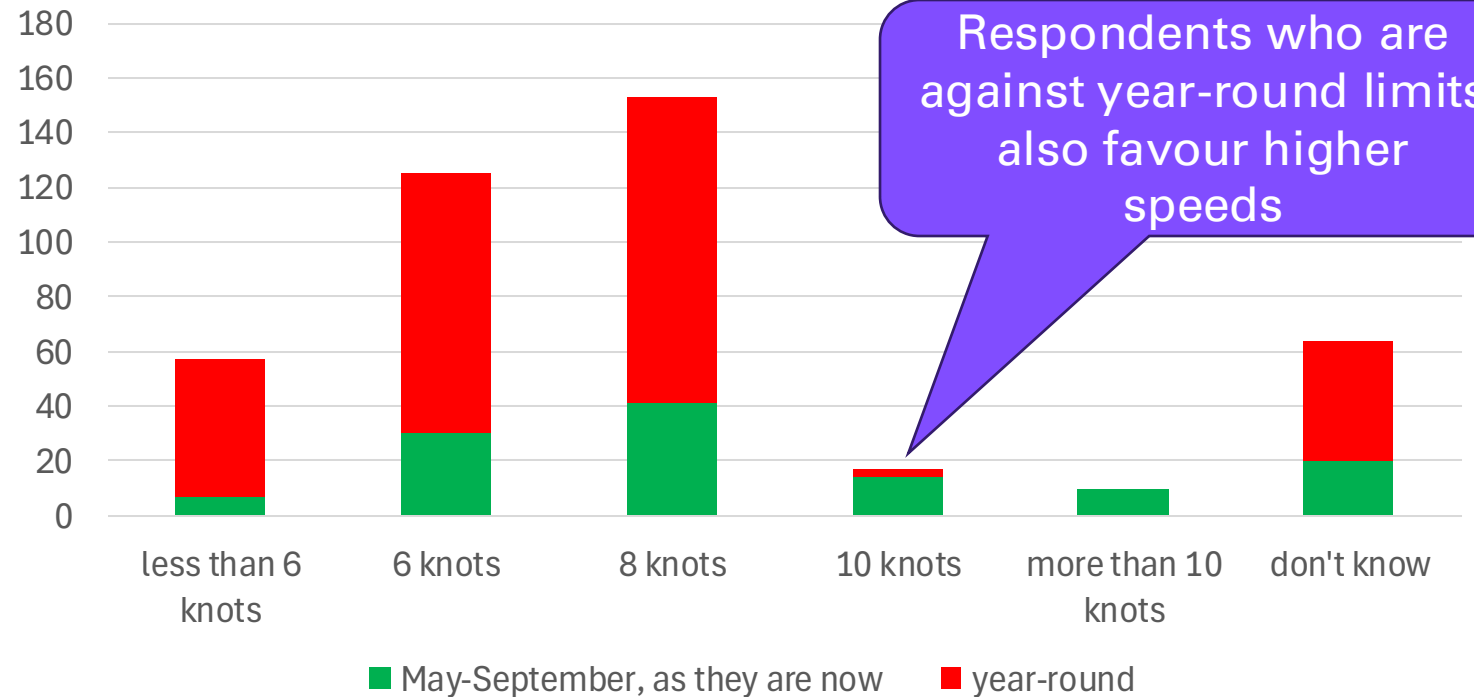


■ May-September, as they are now

■ year-round

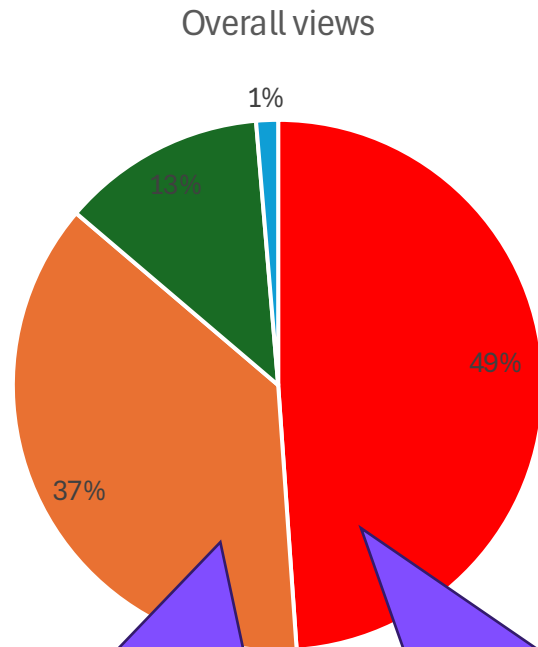
71% of respondents think the byelaws should apply year-round

Chart showing when speed limits should be applied, against what those speed limits should be

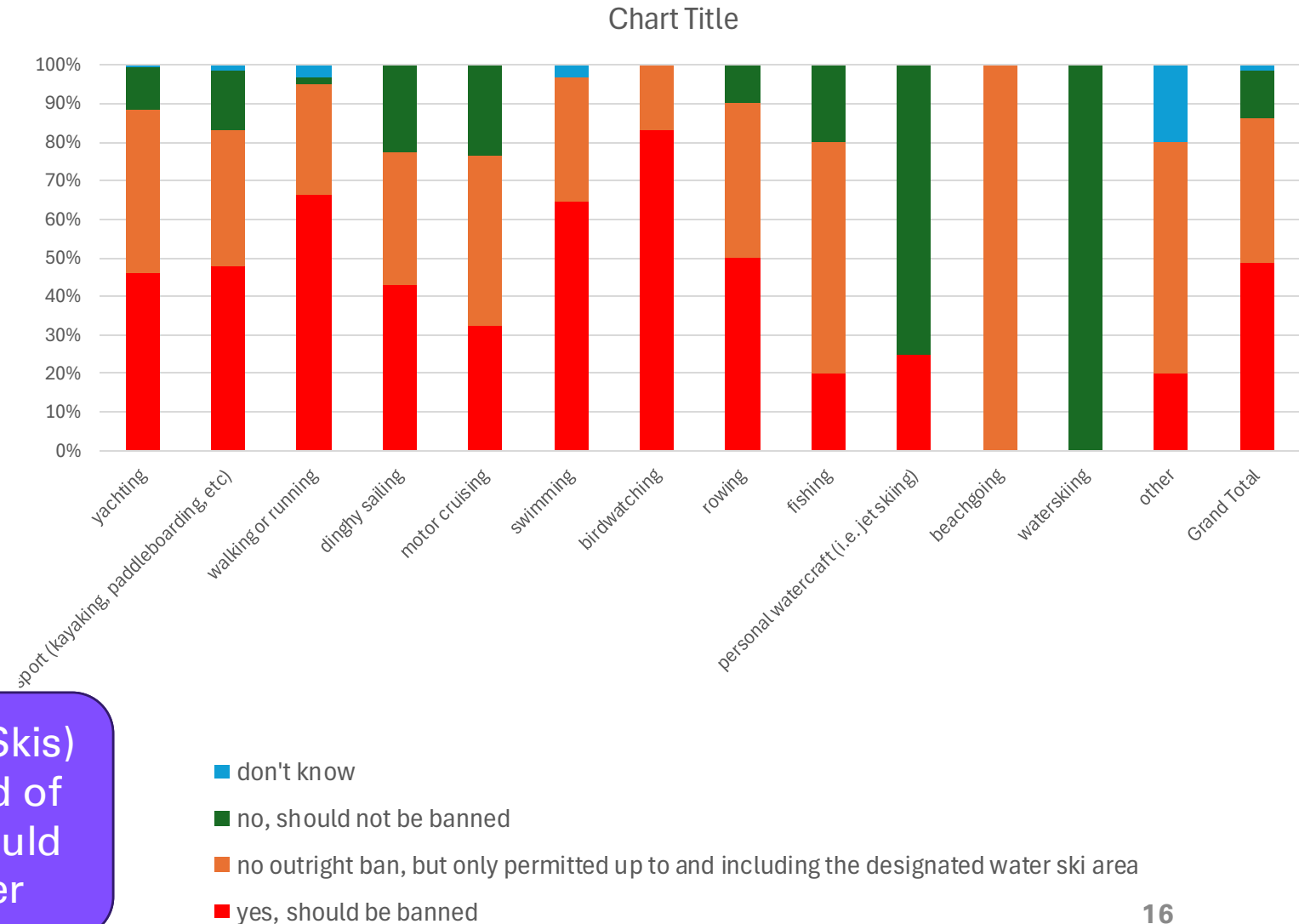


Respondents who are against year-round limits also favour higher speeds

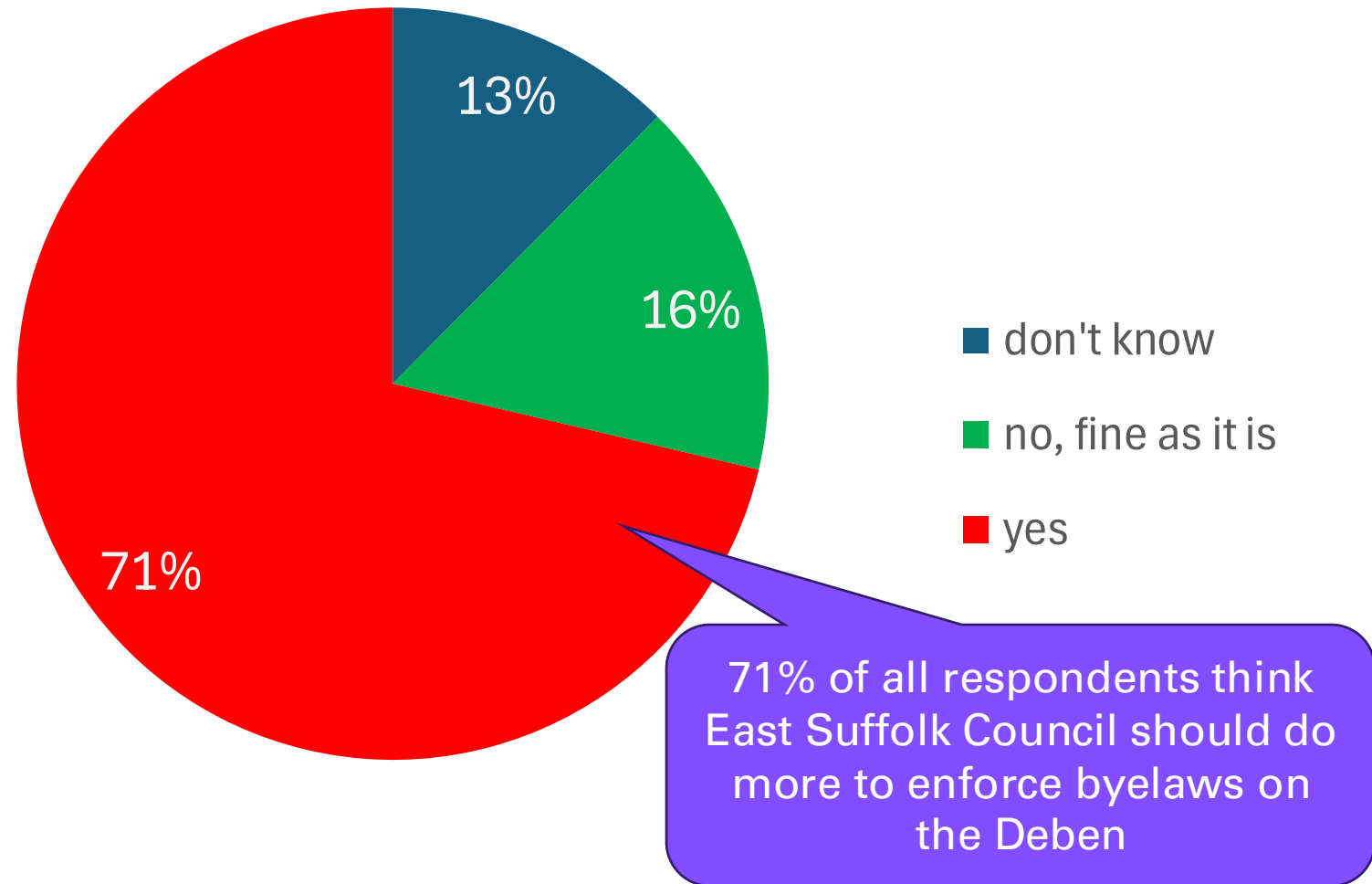
A recent consultation issued by East Suffolk Council received very strong feedback against the commercial hiring of jet skis in Suffolk's rivers. Do you think the Bylaws should be amended to ban outright the use of personal watercraft (jet skis) on the Deben Estuary?



86% of all respondents think PWC (JetSkis) should only be permitted up to the end of the no-speed zone. 49% think they should be banned from the Deben altogether



The management of the Deben Estuary byelaws is the responsibility of East Suffolk Council. Do you think the council should do more to ensure the byelaws are complied with?



Are there any other additions/amendments to the byelaws that you feel would improve the safety or enjoyment of the Deben Estuary?



Are there any other additions/amendments to the byelaws that you feel would improve the safety or enjoyment of the Deben Estuary?	Numbers of Comments - byelaws ammendments
On river enforcement of byelaws & general orderliness	40
Publicise rules (signage, buoys, leaflets)	27
Educate river users on speed	7
Designated areas for PWC, swimming	6
Nature reserve	4
Ban jet skis	3
Keep balance for all users	3
Water quality	3
control wash not speed	2
licencing for PWC	2
Nature education	2
Nature reserve beyond wilford	2
Reduce speeds through moorings	2
Restrict riverbank cycling	2
swimmers use float markers	2
Work together	2
Better access to river	1
Better access to shoreline	1
Control dogs	1
Dinghy race groups consider other users	1
Fees and better facilities	1
Improve dredging	1
Life jackets	1
lower speed through moorings	1

IN SUMMARY...

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Summary of Responses

- 450 individuals responded, and 3 organisations
- 90% of respondents' primary activities are sailing/cruising, paddle-sports, or walking-running
- The most appreciated characteristic is the beautiful environment, and to a lesser extent, the haven for wildlife.
- Most users don't associate to clubs strongly, except dinghy sailors and rowers
- 12 respondents have recorded damage to property, and 2 cited personal injury, in the last two years

...Continued

- Most people know there are byelaws, but only 2/3 even *think* they know what they are
- 70% of people think the byelaws should be tightened up
- Over half of respondents think byelaws should be more rigorously enforced, especially swimmers, rowers, fishermen, birdwatchers and walkers
- Around 2/3 of people think the no-speed limit zone should remain. Vulnerable and peace-seeking groups favour its abolition.
- The vast majority of people think speed limits should be 8 knots or less. The median is 6 knots and the mode (most common answer) is 8 knots.
- 70% of people think the speed byelaws should apply year-round. Those favouring summer-only also tend to favour higher speed limits in general
- There is 85% support for a ban of PWC above the no speed-limit area, and 50% support for banning PWC in totality from the Deben
- Over 70% of respondents think the Council should do more on byelaw compliance

Conclusions

The survey shows different user groups generally provide the answers you might expect: with concerns about

- Noise, wash, safety on the water, restrictions of freedoms
- There are some important insights about injury concerns amongst vulnerable users, and surprisingly, yacht users
- There is strong support in this sample of respondents for restriction or banning of PWC on the Deben

The majority of respondents believe we should

1. Change the byelaws:
 - Ban Personal Water Craft upstream of the 'no speed limit' area
 - Reduce the speed limits to 8 knots or less; the average suggested speed limit is about 7 knots
 - Allow existing no-limit zone to continue, though a sizeable minority want to abolish it
 - Make the byelaws apply year-round
2. Provide more publicity & signage of the bylaws so users are aware of their responsibilities
3. Have more enforcement of byelaws and some call for more general 'policing' of poor behaviours by some empowered body

Appendix: Organisation responses

Please state which organisation:	Felixstowe Ferry Residents Association	Felixstowe ferry fairways committee	Marine Management Organisation
Approximate number of members if applicable	75	190	
difficulties with boat wash from other estuary users		Yes	Yes
sustained antisocial noise	Yes	Yes	Yes
fear of personal danger because of others' speed, behaviour or collision risk		Yes	Yes
unwanted arguments or altercations			Yes
congestion preventing you doing your activity			Yes
restricted access to the water for your activity			Yes
If you ticked any of the boxes above, please describe the problem concisely. Please do not include identifiable names.	The use of Jet Skis in the river entrance area causing noise pollution and exhaust fumes, especially those still using 2 Stroke fuel.	Motor cruisers wash and speeding noisy jetskis	Each of the issues above have been frequently raised to the MMO during stakeholder consultation at the Deben Estuary.
Were you aware there are byelaws, including speed limits, that apply to the Deben Estuary?	yes, and I have a good idea what the byelaws & speed limits are	yes, and I have a good idea what the byelaws & speed limits are	
In terms of making changes to the Deben byelaws (link to byelaws) - which mostly cover speed limits and noisy/ dangerous behaviour – do you feel they need to be changed?	they need tightening up and simplifying and should be enforced more rigorously	they need tightening up and simplifying and should be enforced more rigorously	
Thinking specifically about the geography of the speed limit zones on the estuary, should changes be made?	no change to geography of the current no-speed-limit zone and speed limit zones	no change to geography of the current no-speed-limit zone and speed limit zones	
Thinking specifically about the levels of the existing speed limits, do you think speed limits should be changed?	no changes to current speed limits	there should be one speed limit for all of the Deben Estuary outside of the no-speed-limit zone	
If one speed limit for the Deben Estuary outside of the no-speed-limit zone, please say what speed you think would be appropriate		6 knots	
Thinking specifically about when speed limits should apply, do you think speed limits should be:	year-round	year-round	
A recent consultation issued by East Suffolk Council received very strong feedback against the commercial hiring of jet skis in Suffolk’s rivers. Do you think the Bylaws should be amended to ban outright the use of personal watercraft (jet skis) on the Deben Estuary?	no outright ban, but only permitted up to and including the designated water ski area	no, should not be banned	
The management of the Deben Estuary byelaws is the responsibility of East Suffolk Council. Do you think the council should do more to ensure the byelaws are complied with?	yes	yes	• East Marine Plans - GOV.UK
Finally, thinking generally about the existing byelaws, are there any other additions/amendments to the byelaws that you feel would improve the safety or enjoyment of the Deben Estuary? Do you have suggestions about the best way to publicise/enforce/raise compliance with the byelaws?		Redeployment of speed limits signs throughout the river and an overall speed limit of 6knots except for the area of no restrictions above the Ferry and below Ramsholt.	The East Inshore and East Offshore Marine Plans cover this consultation area. Any public authority decisions that affect the UK marine area must be made in accordance with the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the relevant adopted marine plan. We recommend your own interpretation of the East Marine Plans is completed.