

Preface

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The Thames is a very important estuary. It drains a catchment area of 14,000 km² and has a surrounding population of about 12 million, including London. The estuarine region may be classified as macrotidal (tidal range >4 m) when referenced to its average tides, and is approximately 110 km long. Over much of recent history, the estuary has perhaps been subject to more development than any other UK estuary, consistent with the status of London both as a major international centre of commerce and a port.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are only a limited amount of published, readily available data on the Thames Estuary and other estuarine regions of South East England, although considerable efforts have been made over the years to carry out surveys and to publish reports with the overall aim of improving the general management of the estuary, especially from a water quality and a navigation point of view. However, many of these remain unpublished in view of their nature as 'grey' literature, the main aim of

which was always to inform relatively small bodies of interested stakeholders.

In 2008, under the auspices of the Estuarine and Coastal Sciences Association (ECSA), it was decided to hold a conference on the Thames Estuary in order to attract more open discussion and debate on the state of knowledge and scientific advances made in recent years. An ECSA local meeting duly took place at London South Bank University in April 2009, which was attended by representatives of a number of scientific organisations, including universities, consultants, ports authorities and the Environment Agency of England and Wales. In all, around 40 presentations were made during the course of the 3 day conference. Contributors were then invited to submit papers to the international journal *Hydrobiologia*, and some of the resulting collection forms the contents of this volume. Other contributed articles, more strongly focused on sediments and especially sediment management issues, will appear elsewhere.

Of the nine peer-reviewed papers contained in this volume, three have their basis in the physical processes, three are chemistry-based, and three are biology-based, emphasising the interdisciplinary nature of the processes that take place and require management in the Thames Estuary. It is further hoped that the material presented in this volume will form the stimulus for further research work in the scientific and management fields over the years to come.

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