

SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF 24th MEETING, THURSDAY 18th April 2013
HELD AT MARLOES VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT

Mr B Bullimore	Independent
Mrs A Bunker	Natural Resources Wales (NRW)
Mr M Burton	NRW
Mrs S Burton	Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation
Dr R Crump	CHAIRMAN
Mrs Y Evans	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Miss J Hodges MBE	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Mr B Jones	British Sub-Aqua Club
Mrs J Jones	NRW
Ms K Lock	NRW
Mr D McDonough	Welsh Yachting Association
Mrs C Millican	Pembrokeshire Field Study Council centres
Mr D Miller MBE	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Mr P Newman	NRW
Cllr. P Smithies	Marloes & St Brides Community Council
Miss C Gutman Roberts	Wildlife Trust Wales & Wales Environment Link
Miss L Wilberforce	Wildlife Trust South & West Wales
Mrs A Winterton	NRW
Mr F Bunker	Marine Conservation Society
Mr I Johnson	Old Mill Diving Services
Ms M Rees	NRW
Mt T Theobald	Pembrokeshire County Council

Apologies were received from: Mr J Archer-Thomson (Independent), Ms L George (Welsh Government), Mr R Perkins (Cardiff University), Mr G Thompson (Crown Estate), Ms T Forsyth (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), Ms M Lewis (NRW), Mrs G Bell (Marine Conservation Society), Mr J O'Connor (Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers), Mr N Jacobson (Crown Estate), and Mr M Camplin (NRW)

Absent were Mr I Ball (World Wide Fund for Nature), Mr P Coates (Welsh Government, Fisheries), Dr M Kaiser (School of Ocean Sciences), Mr D Kennard (WSAC), Mr D Love (RNLI), Cllr R Owens (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr J Reynolds (Dale Sailing Company), Mr P Wensley (Welsh Government Fisheries).

1. INTRODUCTION

Mrs A. Winterton provided an update on new 'Single Body' Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru, Natural Resources Wales, which assumed the role of Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission as of the 1st April 2013. The senior management structure is now in place but the rest of the management structure will "evolve" over time. There will now be a single NRW response to all consultations.

2. MINUTES FROM THE 2011 MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

Mr B. Bullimore made a correction to "MHWESG"

Action: MNR staff

The minutes of the 23rd meeting were signed off as true record.

The chairman reported that he had written to Mr E Roberts, Chief Executive of NRW, to express the committee's concern about the future of Skomer MNR, enclosing a copy of the minutes of the last meeting. A response was received and Dr R. Crump and the Skomer MNR team will meet with Mr Roberts on the 26th April 2013. The chairman proposed that Mr E Roberts should be invited to attend future meetings. **Action: Chairman**

Mr. P. Newman reported that the CCW Chief Executive, Mr R Thomas and the directors' team had discussed the future of Skomer MNR/MCZ in one of its final meetings:

"Directors' Team agreed that it would be desirable to retain the direct management of Skomer as an MCZ in order to safeguard the continuation of community engagement, long-term monitoring and site safeguard that have been the site's strengths to date. It was also agreed that the conversion of Skomer from MNR to MCZ should provide the opportunity to

potentially enhance the levels of protection and management at Skomer and that we would like to explore options with the MNR Advisory Committee. The Chief Executive will include Skomer in the Legacy Report as an excellent example of community involvement." 4th march 2013.

3. ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011/2012

Mr P Newman gave an illustrated summary of the main events of the 2012/13 season. Visitor numbers were very low with a 30% drop in diver numbers compared to the previous 2 years. Bad weather was a consistent feature of the 2012 season. Ms J Jones has been employed for a 3rd season as the MNR seasonal assistant. Thanks was given to the many volunteers who have helped the MNR in its work in 2012, without whom many of the projects would not have been possible.

He reported that the Skomer MNR team had contributed to other CCW marine fieldwork in West Wales, in particular boat and staff time for the sediment infauna grab sampling work in the shallow areas of the Cleddau waterway and the Three Rivers estuary in Carmarthen Bay.

Mrs A. Winterton praised the MNR team for completing the fieldwork despite the poor weather.

Mrs S Burton asked if the changes to NRW had affected the budget for the Skomer MNR. Mr P. Newman explained that the Skomer MNR budget comes from a funding block for NNR's so for the 2013/14 season will not be significantly changed, but that this could all change in the future.

4. MONITORING REPORT 2011

Mr M Burton & Ms K Lock gave a presentation on the monitoring results from the 2012 season.

Mrs A Bunker asked for a formal thank you to be included in the minutes from the Natural Resources Wales marine staff (from both regional and HQ monitoring teams) that Skomer MNR has made a large and valuable contribution to their work during the lifetime of CCW:

"We have used long term data sets collected in the MNR (for example temperature and seagrass monitoring) to inform casework advice.

The various monitoring projects undertaken in the Reserve have formed a large part of our reports to JNCC on the status of Habitats Directive features in Wales.

MNR staff have helped regional staff with monitoring work including sediment infauna and contaminants, rocky shore and marine climate change and lagoon monitoring.

Skalmey and its equipment have been deployed to do essential grab sampling work in areas outside the marine reserve (Carmarthen Bay and Three Rivers estuary) and much MNR staff time was given to this project.

The MNR contributed to the work of the Milford Haven Environmental Surveillance Group by retrieving lost equipment from the seabed, allowing the expensive Sediment Profiling Imagery work to be completed.

We hope that this will continue in the new NRW".

Mr D Miller asked if there had been any changes in salinity at Skomer. Mr M Burton reported that salinity is measured every hour at the surface and weekly through the water column but since 1992 the water column has always appeared fully saline and well mixed, at least within the sensitivity of the instruments. Mr F Bunker questioned if turbidity had influenced the large increases of slipper limpets, *Crepidula fornicata*, recorded in the South Hook area at the entrances of Milford Haven. Mr M Burton suggested that it was likely that the populations had reached a "critical mass" in the Milford waterway and possibly now needed space to spread out.

Mr B Bullimore stated that a huge proportion of the UK marine monitoring long term datasets comes from the Skomer MNR and that this data is all the more important given the emphasis on evidence-based decision making in marine legislation by UK and Welsh authorities. Dr R Crump agreed that it was very important that this monitoring work continues and that this message needed to be put forward to the Chief Executive of NRW.

Mr B Bullimore suggested that a Skomer MNR monitoring presentation should be offered to the new Welsh Government as the message of what the MNR does needs to reach a high level audience. He also suggested that Ms K Lock should present a talk on the work of Seasearch in Wales, illustrating the high levels of quality control and the credibility and usefulness of the data.

5. UPDATE ON MCZ PROCESS

Mr P Newman was seconded to Welsh Government between Nov 2012 and Apr 2013 to be on the "MCZ Task & Finish group" following the MCZ consultation. He gave an update of the process so far and reported that the draft of the final

report is currently out to the MCZ Stakeholder Focus Group for comment. After this group has commented the final report will be sent to the minister with recommendations.

At the moment the main recommendations are that Welsh Government:

1. Take a different approach to using the MCZ power where the level of protection and site management is determined on a site by site basis following a risk-based approach to meet any shortfall in the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network.
2. Undertake a comprehensive review to determine the role and potential benefits of sites with higher levels of protection to improve its understanding of whether there is a role for such sites in managing Welsh seas.

The Task & Finish group considered the legal obligations on Welsh Government under the Marine and Coastal Access Act and under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which can be summarised as a requirement for a coherent network of marine sites by 2016.

Mr T Theobald is the Welsh Local Government Association representative on the MCZ Stakeholder Focus Group. He reported that the feelings of the group supported Skomer MNR continuing as it is. It wanted better management of the marine environment with sustainability high on the list. Ultimately the minister would decide which elements of the report needed acting on.

Mr B Bullimore asked whether the recommendations in the report had been agreed by all members of the MCZ Task and Finish group. Mr P Newman replied that they were arrived at by consensus.

Mr T Theobald noted that with stakeholder support and evidence then “No Take” could still have a place.

Mr B Bullimore asked what the results of the analysis of consultation responses had been.

Mr P Newman reported that the analysis was not quite complete, but that around 80% of responses were in favour of the principle of HPMCZs.

Mrs Y Evans asked if anything had been or was likely to be published about the responses to the consultation.

Mr P Newman replied that nothing had yet been published, but that the report would be going to the MCZ Stakeholder Focus Group so it would be in the public domain from then on.

Mr B Bullimore said he was alarmed by the draft report which he found grossly misleading and had ignored a lot of what had already been done. He considered that there were huge resource implications for the proposed way forward, and that the whole emphasis on risk & evidence based approaches was just an excuse for procrastination.

Mr F Bunker could not understand why the weight of positive responses had not been taken into account.

Mr B Bullimore noted that public stakeholder meetings held by WG were dominated by very vocal groups who were against the proposal and that this was what WG officials saw in their face to face contacts with the public.

Mrs Y Evans said that WG did not help matters in the consultation process by refusing to answer questions even at public meetings. The community council had also found it very difficult to get any representation on the stakeholder group. She added that until the consultation feedback analysis was made available it was difficult to comment on any proposal for the way ahead.

Mr B Bullimore added that the lack of answers from WG allowed disinformation to flourish. He considered that representation on the Stakeholder Focus Group appeared to go to those who got in first and made the most noise.

The chairman noted that he had tried and failed to get a place on the Stakeholder Focus Group for a representative from the Advisory committee. He was told that the group was full.

The chairman also said that he considered this change in direction away from highly protected sites to be a huge opportunity missed and asked how the process in England was going.

Mr B Bullimore replied that highly protected sites had been dropped and that it looked like the stakeholder-led approach, which resembled what was being proposed now for Wales, had been a resounding failure. Even the sites currently going forward, which are not highly protected, are running into trouble despite being approved by stakeholders.

Ms J Hodges noted that a current report by the wildlife trusts in England had many concerns over the MCZ project.

Cllr. P Smithies noted that now may be an opportune moment for the community council to be seen as a willing partner in making Skomer succeed as an MCZ and that with the history of the advisory committee it should be possible for a positive outcome for Skomer.

Mrs Y Evans asked if there were any time limits on when something had to be done at Skomer.

Mr P Newman replied that when the WG enact the Marine and Coastal Access Act then Skomer will have to become an MCZ. However there is no indication of when that will happen or what MCZ status will mean for future management, particularly in terms of which organisation would be responsible for the day to day running (including monitoring, etc) of the site.

Mrs Y Evans suggested sending a letter to the new Minister agreeing with CCW's legacy report and the feeling of the MCZ Stakeholder Focus Group that Skomer should retain its current management regime.

Mr B Bullimore added that now would be a good time because of the change in Minister and the various changes in WG staff. He added that local Assembly Members should be involved.

Mr B Jones considered that a special case could be made for Skomer because of the benefits its long-term data has for other sites.

Mrs Y Evans suggested that with engagement from the community council the MNR offers a unique possibility for WG to get something positive out of the process.

Mr T Theobald added that the stakeholder group had discussed the Advisory committee and its functions so they would be aware of the situation at Skomer.

Mrs Y Evans and Cllr. P Smithies agreed to communicate the advisory committee's concerns for the future of the staff at Skomer MNR to Marloes and St Brides community council and investigate possibility of community council representing those concerns to Welsh Government together with local community support for the work of the MNR.

Action: MNR staff Mrs Y Evans and Cllr. P Smithies

6.AOB

Mr B Bullimore noted the publicity surrounding the work Bangor University were engaged in with scallops and asked whether the workers there had been in communication with MNR staff given the MNR's long-term scallop population monitoring?

Mr M Burton replied that MNR staff had made MNR results available to the Bangor research group and that CEFAS staff had also made enquiries about MNR scallop population data.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be decided – Mr P Newman will send out date either

Tuesday 15th or 22nd April 2014 at 2.00 pm at Marloes Village Hall.