

SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF 13TH MEETING, WEDNESDAY 1ST MAY 2002
HELD AT PICTON CENTRE, HAVERFORDWEST

P R E S E N T

Mr J Archer Thomson	Dale Fort Field Centre
Mr B Bullimore	Countryside Council for Wales - CHAIRMAN
Mr M Burton	Countryside Council for Wales
Mrs M Bryant	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Mr M Camplin	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr D Chant	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Dr R Crump	Orielton Field Centre
Mr P Crocombe	Welsh Association of Sub-Aqua Clubs
Mrs M Dunn	Wildlife Trust - South & West Wales
Mrs Y Evans	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Mr K Gainfort	Dale Sailing Company
Mr T Allen	DEFRA
Miss J Hodges	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Mr I Johnson	Old Mill Diving Services
Mr B Jones	British Sub-Aqua Club
Miss K Lock	Countryside Council for Wales (Secretariat)
Mrs A Love	West Wales Divers
Mr P Newman	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr J Orchard	Pembrokeshire Canoists/Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group
Ms M Rees	Environment Agency
Mr L Richardson	South West Sea Fisheries Committee
Mr P Smithies	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Miss L Squire	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr T Theobald	Pembrokeshire County Council
Dr C Wooldridge	Department of Maritime Studies and International Transport, Cardiff
Dr D Worrall	Countryside Council for Wales

Apologies were received from Mr R Thomas (CCW), Dr D Parker (CCW), Miss D Kearsley (National Trust), Cllr. B Morgan (Marloes & St. Brides Community Council), Ms S Bailey (World Wide Fund for Nature), Mr J Brown (Wildlife Trust South & West Wales), Mr F Bunker (Marine Conservation Society), Mr A Corey (Milford Harbour Users Association), Dr P Lloyd (Royal Yachting Association), Dr I Rees (School of Ocean Sciences), Mr D Gardener (South and West Wales Fishermans Association), Mr J Skinner (Crown Estate).

Absent were: Prof. L M Warren (Department of Law, Aberystwyth), Mr B Deas (National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations), Mr R J Daniels (Sports Council for Wales), Mr J Deason (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr C Doyle (Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers), Mr N O'Sullivan (South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee), Mr G Perriman (Welsh Assembly Government Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division), Mr P Morris (HM Coastguard), Mr R John (Welsh Yachting Association).

1 WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Chairman welcomed members and apologised for the absence of the CCW Chief Executive, Roger Thomas, and the Director of Conservation, Dr David Parker, both of whom had intended to attend the meeting but had been unable to do so at the last moment.

2 ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Following the previous meeting, CCW has reviewed the membership of the Committee as agreed. The chairmanship of the Committee was included in that review. Although the terms of the Skomer MNR made by the Secretary of State are quite rigid in its identification of Committee structure, CCW had concluded that there is sufficient scope for the appointment of an independent (non-CCW) chair if the appointment were at the invitation of CCW. As a result CCW, because of his long standing involvement with and commitment to the MNR and its voluntary predecessor, sought the endorsement of members for inviting Dr Robin Crump to become Chair of the Advisory Committee.

Members welcomed and endorsed the proposal and Dr Crump was appointed Chair with effect from the end of the current meeting.

Members were briefed on the changes in representation and membership of the Committee. An invitation has been extended to the new project officer for the Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group. Further changes are still required to accommodate changes in fishermen's and sports organisations and committees.

3. MINUTES OF TWELTH MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman took members through the minutes of the last meeting and these were accepted as a true record.

Mr Dai Chant advised members that despite winning a judicial review against the National Assembly, funding issues within SWSFC had not improved and they are struggling to meet their statutory duties. In 2001 the lobster 'v-notching' programme was very successful and it is hoped that it can continue however staffing and funding levels are a problem. Byelaws continue to be made and the SWSFC want to continue to help and support the Skomer MNR. Mr Larry Richardson told members that there is an Objective One application in to fund the 'v-notching' programme.

The Chairman confirmed that CCW view the role of the SWSFC as crucial and will continue to support whenever possible.

The Chairman updated members on progress with the Marine Environmental High Risk Areas (MEHRAs) to be designated by the DTLR and the possible link with the issue of tankers anchoring in St Brides Bay. Only one MEHRA has been identified in Wales and current information was that it will be based on the Skomer MNR. A consultation document was anticipated as being in the public domain by the end of the month. The draft document had not included maps of the proposed MEHRAs and therefore precise extent and boundaries were unknown. Interested members were advised to check the DTLR website for the latest updates.

Mr Trevor Theobald asked why the Pembrokeshire Marine candidate SAC boundary could not have been used as the MEHRA boundary. The chairman advised that this has been the preferred option submitted by CCW, however it did not appear to have been accepted as a realistic option.

Bathing water quality data for Martins Haven in 2001 is in the Annual Report.

Mr Bruce Jones said that he had talked to the dive club that had been identified taking scallops from the MNR during the 2000 season. They assured him that it was not their club and were upset that they had been accused.

Mr Richardson told members that the SWSFC have in place a strategy to address and tighten up on recreational divers taking scallops through education.

4 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Phil Newman, Skomer MNR officer, gave members an illustrated presentation summarising key points from the 2001 annual report and highlighting and expanding upon specific issues of particular interest. Members were invited to ask questions and comment on the report and specific issues.

The core MNR staff complement remained Phil Newman and Kate Lock; joined in July by Mark Burton as a seasonal assistant. With 3 team members the MNR field work, staff dive times and days at sea improved. CCW area marine staff, Blaise Bullimore and Mike Camplin were unable to help with diving but provided management support and Claire Walker helped with weekend patrol work. HQ staff contributed four days diving assistance on MNR projects.

The MNR team was additionally boosted by substantial contributions by volunteers. Mr Newman paid special tribute to the contributions made by: Pembrokeshire College placement students Steve Myatt, who has provided valuable assistance in all fieldwork projects, and Dawn Wilde, who completed a visitor survey and assisted with shore fieldwork; Louise Squire, a local marine biologist who assisted with diving fieldwork; and the territorial fish volunteer diving team (22 divers). Mr Newman thanked all the Honorary Wardens for their contributions including opening the visitor centre, maintaining diver records and cetacean sightings.

Mr Richardson asked if there had been any problems with commercial fishermen in the MNR. Mr Newman said that occasionally strings of pots had been seen across monitoring sites and a few tangle nets had been observed at the boundary of the MNR. Mr Chant asked if the fishermen were aware of the monitoring sites. Mr Newman said that some of the fishermen were aware of the location of the sites and had known for years, but there remains a need for reminding and awareness raising.

The chairman commented that the major contribution from volunteers and placement students provides very valuable assistance and is an excellent educational opportunity that should continue; however he noted that it is no substitute for an adequate core of full-time staff.

Spear fishing incidents in 1999 and 2001 were considered a concern as the activity had not previously been an issue in the MNR. The chairman expressed disappointed in the attitude of some of the individuals involved and the unwillingness to accept the codes of conduct which the individuals had considered an infringement of their rights.

In response to Mr Ivor Johnson's query whether it was illegal to spearfish with SCUBA in the UK, Mr Peter Crocombe confirmed it was not, but Mr Terry Allen reported that it is illegal to sell fish caught by spear fishing.

Mr Newman said that it maybe possible to control spearfishing through the PCNP's carriage of firearms byelaw, at least as a deterrent.

Miss Jane Hodges volunteered to take the issue back to PCNP to get clarification on the byelaw.

Mr Jones asked if the SWSFC could take any action. Mr Chant reported that as there are very few spear-fishermen in the area it was not a major issue and that there will always be a limited percentage of people that will not follow codes of conduct.

Mrs Margi Bryant asked whether members were aware how well the PCNP diving codes of conduct leaflet was circulated, whether it has any effect and whether diving clubs or organisations were reading it. She told members the PCNP would be grateful for feedback and asked how the Park could monitor the codes of conduct to see if the leaflets are reaching the right places.

Mr Jones commented on the changes in diver attitudes over the previous 10-15 years in that most divers are now interested in diving to see what is there, rather than wanting to take things.

The chairman observed that the MNR scallop survey has shown that the numbers of scallops was four times greater in 2001 than 15 years ago and suggested that that the SWSFC byelaw may have made a significant contribution. Although this is primarily due to the stopping of scallop dredging, the reduction of divers collecting scallops will also have had a contribution to the increase in scallop numbers.

The chairman commented on the high science output that has been achieved in the past year. It remains essential that the biological and physical data is related and analysed together and the science programme is expanded and improved to allow for quality analysis to be conducted. It is also essential that the reports be used to develop education and interpretation of the MNR.

Dr Chris Wooldridge highly commended the work that has been achieved and commented that these are the best science based reports that he has seen in Europe. He advised that an annual executive summary on 'profile of achievements' should be produced, listing the key work done in science, management and recreational recording and reporting on the MNR's health at the end of this year with respect to environmental protection and performance indicators.

The chairman acknowledged the need to report health against performance indicators but noted that such indicators were still in development for the majority of features. Mr Mark Burton added that it is very difficult to define healthy/unhealthy when looking at species populations against the background of natural fluxes in populations.

Miss Hodges said the obvious place to start is to look at the MNR management plan and asked if members could have more details on the MNR audit report. Has the audit report listed the achievement of targets set in the management plan?

Dr Dave Worrall confirmed that the MNR audit provided the information asked for by Dr Wooldridge and that a summary of the audit could be made available to members. Dr Wooldridge reiterated that an audit of environmental performance was essential

Mr Newman reported that the audit confirmed the MNR is working on the right procedure for setting performance targets.

ACTION: An executive summary detailing performance will be included in future MNR annual reports.

Mr Johnson asked if there were any data on crustaceans caught in the MNR. Mr Newman reported that there is not. The chairman commented that catch returns held by the SWSFC was for boat rather than area and was confidential.

Mr Newman informed members that the MNR is endeavoring to partially address the lack of data with the help of one regular fisherman who will record his catch data.

Mr Johnson considered that in return for fishing being allowed in the MNR fishermen should provide data on their catch. Mr Newman said that one problem is that none fish only in the MNR and it maybe difficult to separate the data from other areas.

Mr Crocombe reported that that the continuation of commercial fishing in the MNR although taking shellfish by divers is prohibited by the Code of Conduct remains a contentious issue. Mr Johnson asked whether it would be possible to have the 'v-notching' programme operate for all lobsters caught in the MNR so as to generate information on the effects of fishing.

Mr Chant commented on the process of, and time taken required to obtain SWSFC bylaws, and acknowledged the sense in there being no fishing in the Reserve. Dr Crump reminded members of Leigh Marine Reserve in New Zealand where all fishing is prohibited and where, following initial objections from fishermen, fishermen are now amongst the main supporters.

It was agreed that discussions with the SWSFC should be instigated to investigate voluntary procedures for recording catch data and fishing-free zones. Mr Newman said that the MNR will continue to work with the fishermen to gain catch data in the meantime. **ACTION: CCW**

The Chairman informed members that tidal data was collected at Martins Haven during the SAC/MNR bathymetric survey has provided very useful baseline data for the MNR.

5 STAFFING RESOURCES

Mark Burton joined the team in July 2001 and now has a fixed term contract to March 2003, after which it is hoped that he will be converted to permanent.

Kate Lock became part-time, on a one year trial basis, from April 2002 to enable her to undertake more educational work. To make up the loss of Kate's time a casual seasonal assistant post has been funded; Louise Squire has been appointed to this post for 6 months starting at the end of April 2002. The MNR team will thus be 3½ staff for the field season; this will address health and safety issues and will significantly boost the capacity of the team for essential science work both in data collection and analysis.

Dr Crump welcomed the improvement in staffing and suggested that the pressure from the Advisory Committee on the Director of Conservation, Dr David Parker, at the last meeting had made a contribution. The Chairman reported that Dr Parker had certainly been impressed by the Committee.

6 MNR INTERPRETATION BOOKLET

The chairman regretfully reported to members that although the booklet had been 3½ yrs in development it was currently delayed again. Mr Newman and Miss Lock had visited the CCW publications officer in Bangor in November 2001 and all the comments by the sub-committee had been accepted. They had been assured that a draft would be completed in January for the sub-committee to review and comment. The draft was not completed and has been promised through February and March. Unfortunately the publications officer had recently been involved in a bad car accident, though she is still trying to do work on the booklet at home and sent apologies to the committee.

Mrs Bryant said the sub-committee must see another draft before publication. The chairman assured members of this. He suggested that in view of the delay the opportunity might be taken to including a new seabed image using the 2001 bathymetric survey data.

Dr Wooldridge strongly expressed the views that taking four years to produce a booklet was terrible, that the time and input contributed to its development by members has been abused and their advice rejected, and that CCW was treating the Advisory Committee with contempt. He considered that the committee could have completed the booklet years ago and the delays

are unacceptable. He further stated that the booklet has almost been overtaken by events, is old hat and needs revision even before it is published. There had been a failure to complete what should have been completed years previously, and attention should now be directed toward development of an interactive website.

Dr Worrall replied that CCW are very grateful to the time given by the Committee but acknowledged that performance on the booklet has been particularly bad and that it was a failure of a centrally focused organisation to address local needs.

Dr Crump and Dr Wooldridge reminded members that they met with Dr Parker to address this issue 18 months ago and that Dr Parker had made a commitment that the booklet would be finished quickly and this has not happened.

Mr Chant asked why the production of the booklet was not contracted out to a commercial company. Mrs Bryant said that production of the booklet should be devolved to the Advisory Committee to manage.

The chairman told members that work on the booklet was initially contracted out but problems developed because MNR staff had to communicate with the contractor via the publications officer and production of the booklet was subsequently brought back in-house.

Dr Wooldridge reiterated that the sub-committee must see a further draft and be able to comment and possibly incorporate new images. It remains essential that there is a booklet to support the Martin's Haven visitor centre and there must be a return for the advice and time given by the Advisory Committee.

The chairman agreed that the numbers of visitors to the Martin's Haven centre and the results of visitor surveys certainly reinforced that there remains a 'market' for the booklet.

Dr Crump said that it is essential to have 'value added' interpretation as the average visitor only spends a short time in the centre and they need to have something to take away to reinforce the message. He considered it necessary to accept the current position and to concentrate on taking the booklet forward and getting it finished. He agreed to write, as Chair, to CCW Chief Executive and CCW Chairman. **ACTION: Dr R Crump**

Mrs Bryant commented that the 1992 MNR Interpretation Strategy needs to be reviewed and possibly revised. She commended the new CCW head of interpretation and advised involving him at the earliest opportunity. **ACTION: CCW**

The chairman reported that the MNR still has no presence on the CCW website. Ms Lock commented that the MNR office still fails to have internet access because Martin's Haven is not linked to CCW's intranet and CCW policy is that out-posted offices should not have free-standing internet access.

Dr Crump recommended that MNR staff revive the winter month presentations to groups of divers and other recreational clubs so as to widen the distribution of the type of information presented to the Committee by Mr Newman.

5. OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Jones asked if there had been any diver safety incident reports last year, Mr Newman confirmed that there had been none that the MNR were aware of.

Mr Julian Orchard asked if the Pembrokeshire Environmental Forum that was established initially to address Agenda 21 issues could be used as forum to co-ordinate the work of environmental groups. Dr D Worrall agreed that it could be possible but queried who would lead the group.

The chairman informed members about the current round of dredging and spoil disposal operations in Milford Haven and the associated tracer monitoring work. Small samples of sediment were required from sites around the coast and islands and he asked for offers of assistance from anyone organising dives between The Smalls and Grassholm.

(Note added after meeting: the dredging and tracer monitoring has been postponed until July – August. Offers of assistance are still required for late summer.)

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Next meeting to be held at the Picton Centre on Wednesday 30th April 2003.