

SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF 14TH MEETING, WEDNESDAY 30th April 2003
HELD AT PEMBROKESHIRE COAST NATIONAL PARK MEETING ROOM,
HAVERFORDWEST

P R E S E N T

Mr J Archer Thomson	Dale Fort Field Centre
Mr B Bullimore	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr F Bunker	Marine Conservation Society
Mr M Burton	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr D Chant	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Mr P Coates	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Dr R Crump	CHAIRMAN
Mrs Y Evans	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Dr M Havard	Wildlife Trust - South & West Wales
Mr J Hughes	National Trust
Miss J Hodges MBE	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Mr B Jones	British Sub-Aqua Club
Dr P Lloyd	Royal Yachting Association
Miss K Lock	Countryside Council for Wales (Secretariat)
Mrs Chris Millican	Orielton Field Centre
Dr S Morris	Pembrokeshire College
Mr P Newman	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr T Pain	Welsh Association of Sub-Aqua Clubs
Dr D Parker	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr J Percy	South and West Wales Fishing Communities
Ms M Rees	Environment Agency
Mr L Richardson	South West Sea Fisheries Committee
Mrs A Sutcliffe	Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group
Mr T Theobald	Pembrokeshire County Council
Mr R Thomas	Countryside Council for Wales

Apologies were received from

Cllr. P Smithies & 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 J Skinner (Crown Estate), Mr T Allen & M P Marshall (DEFRA), Dr C Wooldridge (Department of Maritime Studies and International Transport, Cardiff), Mr D Love (West Wales Divers), Mr. P. Morris (HM Coastguard), Mr J Orchard (Pembrokeshire Canoeists).

Absent were:

Prof. L M Warren (Department of Law, Aberystwyth), Mr B Deas (National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations), Mr J Deason (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr C Doyle (Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers), Mr G Perriman (Welsh Assembly Government Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division), Mr J Reynolds (Dale Sailing Company), Mr I Johnson (Old Mill Diving Services).

1. OF THIRTEENTH MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING

The Chairman welcomed members in particular Dr Madeleine Havard representing the Wildlife Trust South & West Wales, Chris Millican representing Orielton Field Centre, Dr

Steve Morris representing Pembrokeshire College, Tony Pain representing Welsh Sub Aqua Club Association, Anna Sutcliffe representing Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group and Jerry Percy representing South & West Wales Fishing Communities. Resignations from Mr A Corey (Milford Harbour Users Association) and Mr R John (Welsh Yachting Association) were acknowledged and replacement representation from these organizations is being pursued.

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

Mrs Yvonne Evans asked about representation by the Sports Council. Kate Lock told members that Sports Council for Wales had decided that representation should be made locally. Mr John Deason from Pembrokeshire County Council had suggested that possibly someone from Pembrokeshire Watersports centre would be a good candidate, this needs to be pursued further. Representation had been established with Mrs Anna Sutcliffe, Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group, which represents all outdoor activity groups in Pembrokeshire.

Miss Jane Hodges reported that she had discussed byelaws regarding spearfishing in the PCNP with Charles Mattheison. In their opinion PCNP Byelaw No. 7, which states “No person shall without lawful authority bring or have on the access land any gun, engine, instrument or apparatus used for shooting”, is broad enough to cover spearguns. Mr Phil Newman informed members that there had been no incidents during 2002.

2. FISHERIES MATTERS

Mr Newman informed members that there had been a number of reports of scallops being taken by divers and that MNR staff had forwarded these to SWSFC. Mr Larry Richardson said that the SWSFC has continued to communicate with divers during the season with the emphasis on education. The new joint SWSFC and SMNR Scallop poster, which includes a map of the MNR and outlines the byelaws, had been posted at key launching sites, dive shops and circulated to diving clubs before Easter. Mr Bruce Jones said divers are often unaware that the North Marloes Peninsula is included in the Reserve; Mr Newman hoped that the poster should help clarify the boundaries of the MNR.

At last years meeting several members had suggested that the MNR staff should look into the possibility of a No Take Zone (NTZ) within the Reserve. Mr Newman briefed members that discussions had commenced with SWSFC. The Chairman, Mr Blaise Bullimore, Mr Newman and Mr Phil Coates had met on the 11th April and a briefing note based on the discussion had been circulated to members in preparation for consideration at this meeting. Mr Bullimore presented a brief summary of the note to members.

Mr Coates outlined general fisheries views NTZs but stressed that the concept had not been considered by SWSFC, only by officers. He noted that the review of the EC Common Fisheries Policy had identified potential improvements to fisheries management. Uninterrupted areas for fish breeding and NTZs were identified as possible mechanisms, however there are currently very few examples in Europe. The Cornwall, St Agnes voluntary NTZ is the first initiative established by a fishing community.

Mr Coates confirmed that Sea Fisheries Committees have powers to establish NTZs, but that consultation and a cost-benefit analysis would be required. He considered that it was difficult to draw firm conclusions, but the benefits could be very broad. Various ways of implementing NTZ would need to be considered, for example seasonal closures of areas. Research is needed to assess the pros and cons of a NTZ and to do this a control area is needed and he asked where would be better than an MNR. Lundy MNR has established a NTZ and there are possible opportunities with Skomer MNR. The first point of discussion

must be with the commercial fishermen and anglers, as diving already operates under a voluntary code.

Mr Peter Lloyd asked for assurance that the NTZ would be enforceable and would include all commercial fishing and angling, and this was confirmed. Mr Jones asked if the idea was a No Take Zone or an Exclusion Zone. It was confirmed that the idea would be for a NTZ rather than to stop access to the Reserve.

Mr Jerry Percy believed that fishing communities could be supportive in principle, but possibly not in their “back yard”. He was keen to discuss the subject with his members and active fishermen in the area. He reminded members that this is an Objective 1 area and significant grants are available that could be used to fund research into the costs and benefits of a NTZ and the effects on fishermen. He suggested that perhaps areas around Grassholm or the Hats and Barrels would be better sites as a first trial as they were less likely to have been as intensively fished as the MNR area, which is relatively well sheltered. Mr Newman said that more than 10 years baseline biological data exists for the MNR and this would provide a foundation of pre-NTZ data.

Mr Mark Burton told members that the Potting Report produced in 2002 looked for evidence of fishing effort related to biological data, but this was difficult to assess as all areas were fished. He stressed the need for “control zones”, where no fishing is permitted, and which need to be established for a minimum of five years. He added that a potential benefit of a NTZ is for it to act a breeding/stocking area, where species are able to overspill into surrounding areas through migration or larval dispersal. This would be more likely to happen around Skomer MNR because suitable habitat for commercial species continues beyond its boundaries, but the benefits would be minimal for a NTZ around Grassholm, which is surrounded by less favourable habitat.

Mrs Evans reminded members that many compromises had been made to establish the MNR. The local community must be considered, both fishermen and sea anglers.

Mr Steve Morris asked how big a NTZ needed to be and suggested the MNR could possibly be divided to provide both a regularly fished area and a NTZ. The Chairman suggested that a possible division could be between the island and the Marloes peninsula. Such a division could potentially also make the idea more acceptable to anglers. The Chairman added that it had been difficult to get representation from anglers organisations on the MNR Advisory Committee, but that discussion of NTZs would regain their interest.

Mr Lloyd said that there was a need to provide evidence to support any proposal and this needed to be discussed with organizations. He added that the idea of a voluntary NTZ should also be discussed. Mr Roger Thomas commented that in his experience depending on voluntary cooperation for this kind of initiative did not work.

Mr Percy added that dividing the Reserve could cause displacement of fishing effort into the other half and therefore distort the results of monitoring. Mr Jones commented that it would also add to existing confusion over where the boundaries of the MNR lie.

Mr Bullimore agreed that there had been no specific relevant research in West Wales. However, he pointed out that many desk studies have been completed in other areas, the latest by the World Wide Fund for Nature, and we must be cautious not to waste time and resources by repeating work. He acknowledged that local field based studies of effectiveness were necessary, but that they necessitated fishing-free control areas to provide meaningful information.

Mr Percy said that the next step must be to start discussing the ideas with the local fishing community.

Mr Francis Bunker said that there must be examples from Lundy and St Agnes NTZ as to how the fishermen in these areas had been compensated. The Chairman told members that at Lundy the last fisherman had retired from fishing and at St Agnes the area was very small. He added that in at Leigh MNR in New Zealand that there had been substantial benefits in an area similar in size to Skomer MNR. Mr Bunker asked whether research had come up with recommendations on size of zones. Mr Coates replied that it depended on the species in question, for example CEFAS had recommended that a cod NTZ would need to be 50% of the North Sea to be effective, however for wrasse, a territorial fish a NTZ could be quite small.

The Chairman emphasised that a NTZ for Skomer MNR is simply an idea so far and that as such it needed to be discussed with angling and fishing communities at this very early stage. He asked committee members for approval to continue with exploring the ideas.

Mrs Evans asked how all anglers could be included as the majority are not members of clubs. Mr Coates said that discussions would have to start with local clubs and information widely circulated through the local press, angling press and angling shops. Mr Bullimore agreed that will be difficult to address all anglers as many do not belong to clubs, however a large number read the angling press.

Mr Jonathan Hughes suggested that there is a need to consider policing and enforcing the NTZ in the next stages of ideas.

Mr Lloyd agreed that we should explore the ideas further and this must include considering the voluntary approach.

Dr Madeleine Harvard added that the local community should be told soon rather than allowing misleading rumours to spread. She stressed the need to be as open as possible from the beginning.

Mr John Archer Thomson told members that he was very excited about the ideas. He felt that the MNR needed this sort of development.

Mr Bunker suggested that a press release on the ideas should be prepared, explaining what will happen over the next year.

The Chairman asked for a show of hands to approve continue with the ideas on NTZ for Skomer MNR. There was unanimous approval.

Mr Dai Chant reinforced that the development of the NTZ idea be as transparent as possible and that the briefing note should be public domain.

Dr Madeleine Harvard said that it must be very clear that if it is a NTZ then this applies to everything including research.

Mr Bullimore suggested that the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Liaison Forum and Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum could be one mechanism for liaising with interested parties. Mr Coates added that the SWSFC members also needed to be informed of the current ideas. Mr Bullimore and Mr Newman agreed to draft a press release which would be agreed with the Chairman, Mr Coates and Mr Thomas before release. **ACTION: BB/PN**

Mr Coates said that research into mitigation methods for fisherman, and whether or not byelaw powers could be applied to shore anglers needs to be pursued. **ACTION: PC**

Mr Thomas added that a holding statement as a response to any enquiries should also be prepared. **ACTION: BB/PN**

Mr Dai Chant reminded members that the fishing community had been assured before MNR designation that there would never be a ban on lobster pot fishing and thought this might now cause problems.

The Chairman concluded the discussions with the agreement that MNR staff would continue with progress on ideas for a NTZ and would talk to as many interested parties as possible.

ACTION: MNR staff

3. ANNUAL REPORT

Mr Newman, Skomer MNR officer, gave members an illustrated presentation summarising key points from the 2002 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.

Positive developments in MNR staffing for the 2003 season were reported. Mark Burton's contract was to be made permanent full-time and approval had just been granted for a permanent 6-month seasonal post (to be filled by Louise Luddington). Phil Newman would remain as the MNR officer and Kate Lock continuing part time (3 days / week). CCW's investment in these extra permanent posts would enable the MNR team to continue as in 2002, completing all essential fieldwork, expand the monitoring programme and complete reporting. Members welcomed the improvements in MNR staffing.

During 2002 the staff complement allowed the MNR to field a 4 person team on three days of the week; as a consequence staff dive times and core MNR field work improved and expanded on previous years. The MNR team was additionally boosted by substantial contributions by volunteers. Volunteers included individual divers working as part of the MNR team, volunteer teams assisting with the eelgrass mapping project and the territorial fish project, and local marine biologists and underwater photographers who helped with the nudibranch survey. Mr Newman thanked all the Honorary Wardens for their contributions including opening the visitor centre, maintaining diver records and cetacean sightings.

Office infrastructure had also improved with new computers arriving in March. Improvements in the office network and the more modern computers had helped with essential data analysis and the MNR has internet access for the first time.

Skalmey has been fitted with all required equipment for MCA work-boat coding and was awarded its certificate in March. Work is currently underway on the RIB to prepare it for coding.

Mr Newman showed members a new digital 3D image created from data generated from the bathymetric survey completed in 2001. The image was computer generated by Mr Mike Camplin from several million depth soundings. The image showed a view to the southwest through Jack Sound, from an altitude of about 300 metres just to the north of Martins Haven. The image has been used in the new interpretation booklet.

Mr Newman told members that in 2003 a sea urchin and starfish survey was planned for volunteers and that if anyone was interested to please contact the MNR.

4. MONITORING UPDATE

Mr Mark Burton, gave members an illustrated presentation highlighting examples from the 2002 project status report. Members were invited to ask questions and comment on the report and specific issues.

Mr Burton demonstrated the value of long-term recording to marine research as well as the management of the Reserve. He showed that data series over many years allow us to answer the simplest of questions like how long some slow growing marine animals live, but more importantly they enable us to detect when something unusual happens in the marine

environment. Mr Burton told members that no one else in the UK is doing work like this and monitoring work at in Reserve is the envy of marine conservationists in Britain.

Mr Coates asked for clarification on the condition of Ross corals in the Reserve. Mr Newman said that work on Ross coral had only been conducted at one site and at this site the numbers had declined from 17 in 1995 to none in 2002, although it was unclear what had caused this decline. To help improve our knowledge into Ross corals, including recruitment, growth and longevity, monitoring has been expanded to two new, additional sites.

Miss Hodges told members of the wider contribution of MNR work to Pembrokeshire. Eelgrass is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Species and when she recently wrote the local BAP plan she was greatly helped by the contributions of the MNR eel grass survey work. The pioneering work of the MNR will also have a significant input to the development of the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC.

Dr David Parker added that the MNR datasets and skills would contribute towards the monitoring of SAC features and how this would be organised Wales wide and UK wide. The work in the MNR would also assist with monitoring in the wider marine environment.

Mr Coates asked if there were plans to publish the MNR research work. Mr Burton said that project status report would become an annual standard, and that recently all MNR projects had been included in a JNCC report. Miss Lock added that reports had been produced in the last couple of years where projects are substantial enough to stand alone. This is more difficult for long-term datasets, so the project status report can present annual progress. Only in the last year or two had there been sufficient staff time to tackle report writing. She added that the MNR were also strengthening links with Universities and encouraging undergraduate and postgraduate research projects in the Reserve.

The Chairman commented on the value of long-term data sets and that this was emphasised by experiences during and after the Sea Empress incident.

5. INTERPRETATION

The new interpretation booklet was circulated to all members. The Chairman welcomed the completion of the booklet and commented that it was worth the long haul. He added that the backgrounds and close up images really created an atmosphere of what it would be like underwater.

Mr Bunker commented that the booklet was overall excellent, but it was a shame that minor printing and cropping errors were present. These mistakes were acknowledged by Mr Thomas who added that two of the spelling mistakes had not been in the previous draft.

Overall the booklet was warmly welcomed and it was agreed that circulation must be as wide as possible.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Dr Havard thanked MNR staff for their continued support to the Island staff, and Mr Newman in turn thanked the Island staff for the observation records they completed for the MNR.

Mr Lloyd congratulated the MNR staff on the excellent improvement to the annual reports and presentations. Mr Thomson added that we have something unique at the MNR; it is at the front of conservation in the UK and must be continued.

The Chairman commented that we must include the launch of the new booklet in the proposed press release.

ACTION BB

Mr Thomas informed members that the Wildlife Crime Conference had produced an action plan and one outcome of that was to produce a marine code that included basic messages and codes of conduct. The marine code was due to be launched very shortly.

.7..DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Next meeting to be held on Tuesday 27th April 2004, location to be arranged.