

SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF 18TH MEETING, TUESDAY 24th April 2007
HELD AT MARLOES VILLAGE HALL

P R E S E N T

Mr J Archer Thomson	Dale Fort Field Centre
Mr B Bullimore	West Wales Marine Conservation
Mr M Burton	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr F Bunker	Marine Conservation Society
Mr M Camplin	Countryside Council for Wales
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
Mr I Johnson	Old Mill Diving Services
Ms K Lock	Countryside Council for Wales
Ms A McConnell	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr D McDonough	Welsh Yachting Association
Mr D Miller	Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Mr S Morris	Pembrokeshire College
Mr P Newman	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr J O'Connor	Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers
Mr N O'Sullivan	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Cllr W Roberts	Pembrokeshire County Council

Apologies were received from:

Ms S Bailey (World Wide Fund for Nature), Mr P Coates (South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee), Mr H Dyer (WASAC), Mr R Ellis (National Trust), Mr M Kaiser (School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor), Ms M Rees (EA), Mrs C Millican (Orierton Field Studies Centre), Cllr B Morgan (Marloes & St. Brides Community Council), Mr J Orchard (Pembrokeshire Canoeists), Mr B Oxenham (WASAC), Dr D Parker (CCW), Mr P Smithies (Marloes & St. Brides Community Council), Mr T Theobald (Pembrokeshire County Council), Ms S Tomson (RYA), Mr D Worrall (CCW), Mr R Thomas (CCW), Mr P Varallo (EA), Dr C Wooldridge (Department of Maritime Studies and International Transport, Cardiff), Mr G Philpot (SWWFC) and Mr P Marshal (DEFRA).

Absent were:

Mr J Deason (Pembrokeshire County Council), Ms B Emmett (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Bangor), Mr C Flannery (West Wales Divers), Dr M Havard (SWWWT), Mr D Love (RNLI), & Mr T Luddington (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), Mr G Perryman (WAG).

1 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by all present as a true and accurate account with no amendments.

2 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES

The chairman did write to the Welsh Minister concerning the NTZ proposal and Ms Christine Gwyther AM was very helpful and supportive.

The Marine Bill white paper is now out for consultation and Mr N O'Sullivan, Mr B Bullimore and the chairman all recommended that comments be sent in.

3 STAFFING

Ms A McConnell gave an update of the current status of the seasonal post for Skomer MNR. CCW is still running under a capped staffing budget. There is no definite confirmation of how much money is available for the MNR seasonal post but there is some money for the post – hopefully 6 months fulltime. Other options have been pursued to make up any shortfall. Mr P Newman has contacted Project Aware and has submitted a bid for £5000 of grant money, which will fund specific items of work in the MNR freeing up funds that CCW can then transfer into paying for staff. As yet there is no news on the funding application – it is hoped a CCW decision will be reached this coming week and the Project Aware board should give a decision some time in May. It should be possible to re-employ Mr R Gibbs again (if he is available) without having to advertise the post.

Mrs Y Evans suggested a letter from the advisory committee be sent to CCW and the new AM (whoever that is after the May elections). The letter should reinforce the importance of the MNR work and the need for 4 people. CCW should make it a permanent, core post.

The chairman agreed a letter may be appropriate but he would wait to hear the outcome of the CCW decision first.

Mrs Y Evans suggested that a letter to the newly appointed AM would still be a good idea to acquaint them with the MNR's work and position.

Mr I Johnson suggested that the oil companies/ LNG projects might have some suitable funding.

Mr F Bunker confirmed that LNG would fund local projects.

Ms J Hodges made the point that this should be a core-funded post from CCW and not funded by external organisations. Mr B Bullimore agreed.

Ms A McConnell said that CCW had to look at all options in the current budget restrictions, one of which would be to let the post to contractors.

Mr B Bullimore warned that this could end up being 3 times more expensive than a proper staff position.

Mr N O' Sullivan said that studentships were available from the oil companies.

Mr D McDonough said that he could ask Chevron what options are available.

Mrs Y Evans suggested Mr Danny Howells as a contact for Dragon LNG.

Mr M Burton said that CCW now had a studentship scheme in place. This could be used alongside other funding to provide a placement at Skomer. The current placement at CCW HQ is a fully qualified HSE diver.

Mr J O'Connor pointed out that there is a danger of concentrating on other options and forgetting that this needs to be a core funded post. If other options are successful that CCW will assume they do not need to fund the post. It was important not to go for the soft option – use external funding for extra projects, but get the post on the core staff list.

The Chairman agreed to write a letter once the CCW decision was made.

Mr M Camplin suggested that we look to the future and put pressure on now for next years post which will be discussed in the autumn. A letter from the committee would be good to fit in with the timing of funding bids.

4 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2006/7

Mr P Newman gave an illustrated presentation of the main events of the 2006/7 season. The MNR season went very well with the help of a number of volunteers and the plans for this year include a volunteer diver project to look at echinoderms in the MNR. It is also planned to do more SAC work.

5 MONITORING REPORT 2006/7

Mr M Burton gave an illustrated report on the monitoring programme. Great leaps forward have been made with the Ross coral project: Mr R Gibbs has managed to use the stereo photographs to measure colony size and to produce time series videos of how the colonies grow and decay. These time series images have led to a classification system for Ross corals, which will be tested with the help of Dr J Porter of UW, Aberystwyth. Dr J Bell has moved to Wellington University (New Zealand), but the sponge project continues with the aid of high-resolution digital pictures, which can be sent to him in the post – He has secured a PhD studentship to work up this data.

A lot of effort is going into surveillance loggers this coming year: Temperature loggers are out on the shores and at Dale Fort and a new multi-parameter sonde has been bought which will look at dissolved oxygen, turbidity, chlorophyll, salinity and temperature. The new weather station is working very well and the data is now easily available if anyone requires it.

Mr J Archer-Thomson commented that with all the wealth of monitoring work going on at the MNR and the current importance of climate change it was vital that the seasonal post be funded properly to ensure that this work continues.

6 EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Ms K Lock gave a summary of the interpretation project progress at Fisherman's cottage. She was able to show members the current images for all of the panels to go into the display along with a new high definition video produced by the MNR staff in 2006, which will play on a plasma screen in the display. There is currently no definite time for completion.

The Skomer education booklet is going to be updated by Mr J Archer-Thomson and Mr F Bunker. There are also plans for a primary school education pack.

The chairman thanked the MNR staff for all their hard work on the interpretation project adding that without the MNR's input the results would have been poorer and less cost effective.

7 INTRODUCTION TO THE NEW WEST WALES MARINE CONSERVATION WEBSITE

Mr B Bullimore explained that in response to comments made by a number of committee members that the MNR needed its own website he had designed a website for marine conservation in west Wales. It presented an opportunity to make information about the MNR more easily accessible to the public as well as promoting other work going on in west Wales, such as Seasearch and Neptune's Army of Rubbish Collectors underwater litter picks. MNR information, including safety and zone maps, scientific and annual reports, was freely available from CCW, but not accessible via CCW's website.

Ms A McConnell stressed that CCW's website was under redevelopment, but still needed work.

Ms K Lock added that there would be an opportunity to have a greater level of detail about the MNR on the West Wales Marine Conservation website.

8 OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Y Evans asked the committee to note that there are currently plans to reduce the number of community councillors to 6 who will serve both Marloes / St Brides and Dale (i.e. the 2 community councils will merge). This may well affect the ability of the community council to be represented on the committee. The community council may request a letter of support from the committee in the near future.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 22nd April 2008 at 2.00pm Marloes village hall.