

SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF THE 19TH MEETING, TUESDAY 22ND APRIL 2008
HELD IN MARLOES VILLAGE HALL

PRESENT

Mr J Archer Thomson	Dale Fort Field Centre
Mr B Bullimore	Independent
Mr M Burton	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr P Coates	South West Sea Fisheries Committee
Dr R Crump	CHAIRMAN
Ms L Dodd	World Wildlife Fund
Mr R Gibbs	Countryside Council for Wales
Dr M Havard	Wildlife Trust South and West Wales
Mr B Jones	British Sub Aqua Club
Mr D Kennard	Welsh Association of Sub Aqua Clubs
Ms M Lewis	Countryside Council for Wales
Mrs G Lister	Orielton Field Centre
Ms K Lock	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr P Marshall	Welsh Assembly Government – Fisheries
Ms A McConnell	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr S Morris	Pembrokeshire College
Mr P Newman	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr J O'Connor	Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers
Mr G Philpot	South and West Wales Fishing Communities
Miss M Piggot	Orielton Field Centre
Ms M Rees	Environment Agency
Mr J Reynolds	Dale Sailing Company
Cllr W Roberts	Pembrokeshire County Council

Apologies were received from:

Mr Francis Bunker (Marine Conservation Society), Mr M Camplin (Countryside Council for Wales), Mrs Yvonne Evans (Marloes Community Council), Miss J Hodges (Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority), Mrs J Jones (West Wales Dive School), Dr M Kaiser (School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor University), Mr T Luddington (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), Mr D Miller (Maritime and Coastguard Agency), Dr D Parker (Countryside Council for Wales), Mr J Percy (Welsh Federation of Fishermen Association), Alan Thomas (WASAC), Mr R Thomas (Countryside Council for Wales), Mr T Theobald (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr P Smithies (Marloes Community Council).

Absent were

Mr J Deason (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr D Love (RNLI), Mr G Perryman (WAG), Dr C Wooldridge (Dept of Maritime Studies and International Transport, Cardiff), Ms S Thomson (RYA), Mr D Worrall (CCW), Mr J Orchard (Pembrokeshire Canoeists), Mr D McDonough (Welsh Yachting Association), Mr I Johnson (Old Mill Diving Services).

1 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING

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

2 STAFFING

Rob Gibbs had been recruited for his third term as seasonal assistant on a fixed term contract. There was as yet no news on the long-term security for this post. Ms A McConnell said that CCW was currently in discussions over baseline staffing with the Welsh Assembly. The minister Jane Davidson had requested CCW to complete a workforce review to evaluate the staffing levels it needed in order to carry out essential functions. This review is to report by June 2008.

Mr P Newman explained that HSE had been putting extra pressure on with respect to diving regulations and scientific work. It was now essential to operate with a four-person dive team, but this could not be accomplished by relying entirely on volunteers to make up numbers, as they were not always available.

3 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2007/08

Apologies were made that the Annual report had not been completed in time for the committee meeting. Delays had been caused by other unforeseen events during March (see agenda item 6 below) and a complete crash in the MNR computer storage system, resulting in the loss of much work carried out since December.

Mr P Newman was able to give an illustrated presentation of the main events of the 2007/8 season. The MNR season went very well with the help of a number of volunteers. MNR staff also provided substantial field support for SAC work. Plans for 2008 include a volunteer diver project to look at the scallop population in the MNR.

4 EDUCATION AND INTERPRETATION

Ms K Lock gave an update of progress with the interpretation project at Fisherman's Cottage. A new large plasma screen had been installed with a touch screen that enables visitors to view a choice of video clips of underwater life. It was planned that the system would also provide options to view other videos, the web cam mounted on the Coastguard Lookout and slide shows of still photographs, including the MNR competition entries. The system allowed for content to be updated as and when new materials became available.

There had been delays in the instalment of the backlit panels pending designs for Lockley Lodge and the Island displays being finalised. The planned date for instalment for the whole project was June 2008.

The Skomer education booklet had been updated by Mr J Archer Thomson and Mr F Bunker and this had been translated into Welsh. Materials for a primary school education pack have also been developed.

Dr M Havard apologised for the delays to the MNR interpretation display. She explained that the company responsible for installing it was based in Devon and did not want send personnel to Pembrokeshire until all elements of the project were ready and that the whole project was behind schedule. However, a new Education Officer had been recruited by the WTSWW and they would be responsible for developing the education materials and projects. She thanked MNR staff and the members of the Research and Education subcommittee for their input into the designs for Fisherman's Cottage.

Ms K Lock gave a presentation on the 2007 photo competition entries and the Committee were asked to vote on the overall competition winner. The abstract photo 'Urchin spines' by Rob Spray was the winner.

4 MONITORING REPORT 2007/08

Mr M Burton gave an illustrated report on the monitoring programme. He detailed results from the range of monitoring projects carried out by MNR staff inside and outside the MNR. Some results were encouraging, such as the high quality of sediment communities demonstrated by the large numbers and abundances of organisms found in samples. Other results were less positive, with reductions in populations of red sea fingers, Ross corals and the disappearance of several mature sea fan colonies.

Dr R Crump commented that the monitoring programme was really achieving the objectives of the Marine Nature Reserve set more than 20 years ago. There were long term datasets, a resource of data available for Wales and this needed to be recognised by the outside world. It was essential to have long-term datasets that were comparable to other areas. He professed to be "blown away" by the level of work achieved and the uptake of projects by universities.

5 MARINE BILL

Ms M Lewis provided a summary of the measures in the Marine Bill that would affect the Skomer MNR. The Bill would provide tools to manage the marine environment in a more sustainable way, with more effective marine planning, licensing and marine conservation. Marine nature conservation would be provided through the creation of 'Marine Conservation Zones' (MCZ), which could be for any habitat, species, geo-morphological or geological feature. The designation is by ministerial order based on clear and concise conservation objectives that describe what was and was not allowed at a site.

The Marine Bill would replace current MNR legislation but those MNRs already designated would continue to be protected. MNRs will become MCZs based on their conservation objectives, but this does not have to happen immediately and will only occur when the government placed an order to change from an MNR to MCZ. It was thought that no consultation would be needed if the conservation objectives did not change.

Ms M Lewis reported that Natural England intended to change Lundy MNR's status to MCZ with its current conservation objectives immediately the Bill went through. In Wales it was planned to use the MCZ tool in the Marine Bill to designate a network of Highly Protected Marine Reserves (HPMR) and the Welsh Assembly had agreed the 2012 target for this. It was planned that Skomer MNR would remain a MNR until the network of HPMRs in Wales was decided and, according to the

policy statement within the draft Marine Bill, would continue to be protected by its current byelaws. Skomer MNR would be considered in the selection process, but there were no guarantees that it would be designated a HPMP. CCW was currently working on the design of selection criteria for sites that would form the HPMP network

Mr M Burton said that the Skomer MNR currently had very little protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and that most protection afforded to the MNR came from SWSFC byelaws. He suggested it might be better if it became a MCZ.

Dr M Havard said that this would just create another level of unnecessary paperwork and that it would be better to wait to look at the suite of options for HPMP in Wales first and to include Skomer MNR in this process.

Mr B Bullimore suggested that highly protected status in the Skomer MNR had been long awaited. Headlines in Marine Conservation magazines from 1990 and 2008 were identical: 'Marine Reserves What Next?' In eighteen years little had changed and the success of the Skomer MNR had been due to the hard work making it work in spite of the lack of protection from the Wildlife and Countryside Act. There was a need to continue campaigning for full protection.

Dr R Crump asked the Committee to decide whether they thought that Skomer should remain an MNR for the next 4 years or become a MCZ immediately. Because there were no assurances that Skomer MNR would be given highly protected status his opinion was that Skomer should become a MCZ and then pursue HPMP status during CCW's assessment.

Mr B Bullimore recommended that Skomer become a HPMP immediately. Other countries like New Zealand had started with one or two HPMP first and then built up a network from these afterwards.

Dr M Havard was of the opinion that Skomer MNR should be considered as part of the assessment for a network of HPMP in Wales.

Ms M Lewis considered that CCW would not opt for making Skomer MNR a HPMP immediately as the wish was to complete the assessment for a network first. She reasoned that CCW did not want a front-runner, but to learn from other countries and start with a network of HPMP.

Mr S Morris suggested that Skomer MNR was already a flagship site and that it was unthinkable that a network of HPMP in Wales would not include Skomer, therefore why not straight away. He was intensely worried that all the investment in Skomer MNR and the body of work accumulated would be wasted if the Reserve did not achieve HPMP status.

Ms M Lewis said that the level for protection of a HPMP would be much higher than currently at the Skomer MNR, therefore it must follow the proposed process of assessment. The 2012 target for a network of HPMP to be established was very ambitious, but it was encouraging that a deadline had been set. Welsh Assembly would make the final decision as to which sites would be designated.

Mr B Bullimore reminded the Committee that deadlines change and cited the delay in implementation of the EU Habitats and Species Directive, which was a legal commitment. He added that the Committee had agreed over the years that the current legislation for Skomer MNR gave insufficient protection. He asked whether the Committee was prepared to wait another four or more years for that to be rectified when it was feasible to go for HPMP status immediately?

Mr B Jones agreed that there should be a high level of protection for Skomer MNR immediately.

Mr P Coates said that 3 years ago the committee looked at options for Skomer MNR to become a NTZ in areas of the Reserve and that the proposals were rejected by the Sea Fisheries Committee at that time. He thought it was possible that if these same proposals were presented now then they would be considered more acceptable. He reminded the committee that there were different issues for the mainland areas and island areas of the Reserve. He hoped that the new Marine Bill would provide the tools for more effective management, and that issues to do with enforcement would be addressed.

Ms M Lewis recommended that the Advisory Committee maintain pressure to ensure that Skomer MNR was ready with its proposed conservation objectives for the 2012 target.

Dr R Crump suggested that the Committee seek reassurance that CCW was committed to creating a network of HPMP and that Skomer MNR would be included.

Dr M Havard added that there had been a revised action plan for the Wales Coastal and Maritime Partnership and they together with the Advisory Committee must put pressure on the Welsh Assembly and CCW.

Mr S Morris added that the Committee needed to be assured that the process would adhere to the 2012 date and that this must not be extended.

Action: Advisory Committee Chair to write a letter to CCW Chief Executive Roger Thomas supporting and calling for a commitment to adhere to the 2012 date and that Skomer MNR is proposed to Welsh Assembly as a HPMR.

Mr P Coates added that the Committee also needed to ensure that SWSFC byelaws for nature conservation objectives were retained following the review of fisheries management being undertaken in Wales. Currently there were only plans to focus on byelaws with fisheries objectives.

6 SCALLOPING IN ST BRIDES BAY

Mr P Newman gave an illustrated presentation on the recent scallop dredging activities in St Brides Bay adjacent to the MNR boundary. He thanked the SWSFC for the high profile presence of their enforcement staff in the area. Work with sidescan sonar was planned to investigate reports received that dredgers had been seen operating within the MNR.

Dr R Crump also thanked SWSFC for its efforts to ensure the MNR was protected, but added that the issue of damage to the wider Pembrokeshire Marine SAC by dredgers still remained.

Mr D Kennard asked what the situation was for divers and Mr P Coates confirmed that the closure from St Annes Head to Cemaes Head and three miles offshore applied to the taking of scallops by any means.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 21st April 2009 at 2.00pm Marloes village hall.