

**SKOMER MARINE NATURE RESERVE**  
**ADVISORY COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES OF 20th MEETING, TUESDAY 21st April 2009**  
**HELD AT MARLOES VILLAGE HALL**

**P R E S E N T**

Mr T Allen	Welsh Assembly Government Fisheries
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
Mr P Coates	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Ms K Collins	Environment Agency
Dr R Crump	CHAIRMAN
Mr M Cullen	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Mrs Y Evans	Marloes & St. Brides Community Council
Mr T Hall	Wildlife Trust South and West Wales
Miss J Hodges MBE	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Mr B Jones	British Sub-Aqua Club
Mrs J Jones	West Wales Diving School
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
Mrs C Millican	Orielton Field Studies Centre
Mr P Newman	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr R Thomas	Countryside Council for Wales
Mr A Tuddenham	National Trust
Ms M Rees	Environment Agency

Apologies were received from: Ms G Bell (Marine Conservation Society), Ms L Dodds (World Wide Fund for Nature), Mr D Love (RNLI), Mr T Luddington (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), Mr D Miller (Maritime and Coastguard Agency), Cllr B Morgan (Marloes & St. Brides Community Council), Mr S Morris (Pembrokeshire College), Dr D Parker (CCW), Mr P Smithies (Marloes & St. Brides Community Council), Mrs J Milborrow (Wildlife Trust South and West Wales), Mr T Theobald (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr A Thomas (British Sub-Aqua Club), Ms S Tomson (Royal Yachting Association), Ms Helena Towers Welsh Assembly Government, Dr C Wooldridge (Department of Maritime Studies and International Transport, Cardiff).

Absent were: Mr J Deason (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr M Kaiser (School of Ocean Sciences, Bangor), Mr J Orchard (Pembrokeshire Canoeists), Mr J O'Connor Welsh Federation of Sea Anglers, Cllr M Davies (Pembrokeshire County Council), Mr D Worrall (CCW).

Ms B Emmett (Centre for Ecology and Hydrology) has asked to be removed from the membership list due to other commitments.

## **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**

Health and safety diving issues have been addressed: An underwater communications method has been developed that can be used with a regular diving mask rather than a full face mask. As agreed with Health and Safety Executive (HSE) diving specialists Nitrox (oxygen enriched air) is now used for most diving in CCW to allow for improved safety margins and an additional oxygen kit has been purchased for emergencies. PN and KL attended a country agency dive safety training course, which was useful for exchanging information on the safety procedures and equipment used by the different country teams.

The visitor exhibition at Fisherman's cottage is completed. The marine habitats montages along with the large touch-screen display have been very popular with visitors. The numbers of visitors has increased significantly and positive comments have been received. The touch-screen video facility provides a variety of options including video clips, photo

competition slide show and the potential to link with webcams. The design of the software means that all display materials can be regularly updated by MNR staff.

The MNR photo competition has been popular and is an excellent way for the MNR to increase the number of images available to it for interpretation. Due to Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) finance protocols special permission to award prize money is needed before the proposed 2009 competition can go ahead. Mr R Thomas agreed to follow this up.

**Action: RT**

Ms A McConnell gave an update on the current status of the Marine Bill: CCW has provided recommendations on the process for designating Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) to WAG. In addition a stakeholder workshop has been held and recommendations from this have also been submitted. WAG is currently considering the advice. Highly Protected Marine Reserves (HPMR) are now to be called Highly Protected Marine Conservation Zones (HPMCZ) to be consistent with the terminology in the Marine Bill. CCW needs to start collating information on areas for potential HPMCZs. Mr R Thomas said that CCW was expecting a response from WAG in the summer. Dr R Crump asked how the new legislation would affect the future of Skomer MNR. Mr R Thomas said that he shared the interest in Skomer MNR becoming a HPMCZ and that few would argue that it should not be considered. He stressed that it was essential to maintain the same level of protection of the Skomer MNR during the transition to a MCZ. Ms A McConnell said that there was provision within the Bill to maintain the current MNR and Sea Fishery Committee (SFC) byelaws during the transition.

Mr B Bullimore asked what the role of WAG would be in terms of fisheries management and how fisheries measures would be translated. Mr P Coates replied that in 2010 the SFC would cease to exist in Wales and staff would then move to the fisheries division in WAG. He added that there was a need to identify priorities of work, which would include the transition of current byelaws to ensure consistency. Mr B Bullimore asked whether WAG would have the same duties as Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) in England and what those duties would be with respect to marine conservation. Mr P Coates replied that, whereas in England IFCAs have a duty to report to a minister, in Wales the situation was not as clear, other than a general duty to sustainability.

Mrs Y Evans asked if there would be another round of consultation on the establishment of HPMCZs following the enactment of the Marine Bill. Mrs A McConnell replied that it was planned to include full stakeholder involvement in the designation process for HPMCZs.

### **3 STAFFING**

Mr P Newman began by restating the need for four people to make up the minimum diving team under HSE regulations. This would be met this coming season as the seasonal MNR post had been recruited for 6 months starting in April 2009, but that the future of the post would be dictated by the outcome of the CCW workforce review, which was still to report. Dr R Crump added that the current post-holder, Rob Gibbs, was an excellent member of the MNR team and that security of the post was needed to ensure that we do not lose his particular skill set. Mr R Thomas stated that due to resource restrictions CCW was unable to increase staff numbers and therefore difficult to appoint permanent positions. Ms A McConnell confirmed that to change the current 'casual' post to a permanent post could only be decided with the outcome of the workforce review. Mr R Thomas highlighted that in UK law continuous employment for four years entitles a person to permanent status and that the current post holder would be in the fourth year of casual contracts.

Mr P Coates asked whether the use of volunteers for work operations that would otherwise not take place affected the insurance cover provided for them by CCW. Mr R Thomas confirmed that volunteers have the same cover as CCW staff.

Mr B Jones asked what the current situation was for diving emergencies and the use of recompression chambers. Mr P Newman stated that all precautions continued to be taken, including the use of Nitrox and carrying additional oxygen supplies. It has been identified that HSE needs to issue clearer guidance on the requirements for the planning of evacuation of casualties to allow the use of the emergency services, for example search and rescue helicopters and air ambulances. Mr F Bunker explained that for his scientific diving work they now have an 'evacuation plan' for self evacuation including road routes to recompression chambers in case emergency services are unavailable. Mr I Johnston said that at Withybush airport there is an aeroplane equipped with oxygen for use in transporting patients and donated organs. This privately-operated aircraft is on permanent standby and could be worth contacting to see if it could be called on for diving emergencies.

### **4 ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2008/9**

Mr P Newman gave an illustrated summary of the main events of the 2008/9 season together with items from 2007 that he had been unable to present due to the computer problems experienced that year:

His talk touched upon the scallop survey and the gratitude of the MNR team towards the volunteers who took part in this and other MNR projects. Mention was made of the sidescan sonar work done to try to establish whether illegal scallop dredging had taken place within the Reserve and of the continuing growth of fishing effort within the MNR. Incidents involving jetskis were reported together with latest results for recreational visitor numbers.

Illustrations of the new MNR exhibition were displayed as well as evidence of greatly increased numbers visiting the exhibition. MNR staff efforts to increase the awareness of local youngsters to their marine environment through the 'Martins Haven Marine Day' activities were also mentioned.

Current and possible future collaborations with other organisations were discussed as well as plans for the coming season, including a volunteer diver project to continue monitoring of territorial fish in the MNR.

## **5 MONITORING REPORT 2008/9**

M Burton gave a presentation on the features of the reserve.

Sea fans have shown an increase in necrotic tissue, but not to a worrying level.

Grey seal numbers were the highest on record with an increase in the number born on the mainland.

The scallop survey in the summer of 2008 surveyed a total area of 9780m<sup>2</sup> and 1653 scallops were measured. The mean density for the whole MNR in 2008 was higher than the overall density recorded during the previous survey in 2004.

The MNR is starting work on a settlement project with the Warsaw Institute of Oceanography and in the 2008 season a survey of the Pickleridge lagoon was completed in conjunction with Aberystwyth University.

Digital camera systems are now the main photographic tool used by the MNR and this has drastically improved efficiency and quality.

The infauna and epifauna projects, which look at the animals that live in and on the sediment habitats of the Reserve, are going to be combined. Having several sets of results from each method has allowed statistical analysis which shows that the two methods give comparable results. Because both are expensive contracts to run it is hoped that by combining them money will be saved without any loss of data.

A multi-parameter oceanographic instrument was deployed in 2008 which measures seawater temperature, salinity, PH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and chlorophyll. This is connected to a telemetry buoy on the north side of Skomer. When operational it sends back readings to the MNR office every 10 minutes. Temperatures in the 2008/09 winter were the lowest recorded since 1994.

The passive sediment collector samples have been analysed and show some interesting changes. Pre-2000 the samples were dominated by the mud fraction but post-2000 the sand fraction is dominant. The metal analysis has shown an increase in copper and zinc in 2008 – this might be explained by the use of antifouling paint and zinc anodes nearby.

Plankton samples were taken throughout the 2008 season and are being analysed by Aberystwyth University, these samples will be continued in the 2009 season.

The automatic weather station has taken another step towards going onto the internet; it is now fitted with a GSM (mobile phone technology) transmitter / receiver so the data can be sent to CCW head office. We are now waiting for the website to be updated to take on the Skomer weather data.

## **6 SCALLOP DREDGING IN ST BRIDES BAY**

Ms A McConnell explained that a CCW position statement regarding scallop dredging in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) had gone to WAG and the SFC. This stated that as a precautionary interim measure all scallop dredging within SACs should be suspended, pending completion of appropriate assessments and the development of a strategy for the sustainable development of the industry in Wales. Mr P Coates stated that the situation in the UK is more complex because of the public right to fish and therefore fishing should happen unless it is against conservation objectives. The balance between conservation objectives and rights to fish need to be married up, this can be through different methods of restriction, which could include stopping all fishing activity except by permission.

## **7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr R Thomas informed the group that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee council would be visiting Skomer Island and the Skomer MNR between 22-24<sup>th</sup> June 2009. He invited members to a public meeting of the council on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June in the Mariners Hotel, where the meeting would have a marine emphasis.

Mr D McDonough told members that he had been asked by the RYA to do a magazine article on the Pembrokeshire marine environment and would welcome contributions and comments from the MNR team.

## **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010 at 2.00pm Marloes village hall.