

Minutes - Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environmental Forum

Meeting – 18th January 2019, Ballycastle (Portnagree House)

10:00 – 12:15

Present

Colin Armstrong	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Chairman)
Gary Burrows	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Secretariat)
Neil McCulloch	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Michael Cecil	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
David Quinney Mee	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Graham Thompson	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Simon Kelly	DfI Governance Policy & Resources Group
Karen Dickson	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Joe Breen	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Rory McNeary	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Michael McConaghy	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Cary Aston	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Brenda Murphy	Tourism NI
Mary O 'Driscoll	Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd.
Cathal Donnelly	UUC placement student (observer)
Amy Garbett	AFBI (observer)

Apologies

Liam McFaul	RSPB, North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association
Kenny Bodles	RSPB
Frank Devlin	National Trust
Jeff Hobson	HM Coastguard
Dawn Miskelly	Ulster Wildlife

Agenda

1. Introductions and Apologies

Gary Burrows brought apologies on behalf of the staff listed above and advised of several changes of membership. Jade Berman left her post with Ulster Wildlife to work with Keep Northern Ireland

Beautiful (KNIB). Ulster Wildlife is in the process of recruiting her replacement. Cathal Donnelly (UUC Marine Science placement student) and Amy Garbett (AFBI) were welcomed as observers.

2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (7th June 2018)

Graham Thompson requested an amendment to the second item under AOB in relation to the UCC submission to the Interreg Programme. Aside from that minor change, the minutes were agreed.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

- Colin Armstrong to convene a meeting of the predator control subgroup - complete
- Kenny Bodles to advise the predator control subgroup when the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan would be completed. **Kenny Bodles provided a progress update which was discussed under agenda item 9.**
- Graeme Campbell to visit farmers on Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful EMS applications. **There have been a number of meetings on EMS and what can be done on Rathlin. New applications are being prepared.**
- RDCA to progress the installation of seal signage, including the securing of funding and all necessary permissions.
- Michael Cecil to speak with Mary O'Driscoll regarding options for a biodiversity garden on Rathlin Island.
- Mary McNeill to include reference to Rathlin Island's biosecurity policies within the NIMP - complete
- RDCA, CCGHT and RSPB to meet and discuss the detail of the EF application.
- Neil McCulloch to reissue advice to airfields on flying near bird colonies, ahead of the 2019 Open Championship. **Neil McCulloch to circulate advice to airfields on flying near bird colonies once the full list of contacts has been checked.**
- Colin Armstrong to provide Rathlin fishermen with the minutes from the meeting in Ballycastle; and to arrange an evening meeting with Rathlin and Ballycastle fishermen to discuss the Beirne Point proposal and increase in pot fishing effort. **There have been discussions with Ballycastle but not Rathlin fishermen. Colin Armstrong said that DAERA would endeavour to update and have focused discussion with Rathlin men.**
- Colin Armstrong to respond to the DfI consultation regarding the need for breeding seasons and environmental impacts to be considered when preparing actions on wildfire responses. **Michael Cecil clarified that this request originated from the Ministerial Forum action plan and that RDCA wished to see if this forum could add weight to the argument.**

4. Rathlin Island's designated areas (Michael Cecil, RDCA)

Michael Cecil explained that whilst there were multiple designated areas on the island there is no central point explaining why they exist. RDCA wishes to showcase Rathlin Island's designations on a map and display posters on the ferry and at suitable points on the island. Joe Breen said that a web link could be added to the map to provide more detailed information. Neil McCulloch advised that information sheets are sent out land owners of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI). Gary Burrows suggested that a folder compiling information on all the designated areas could be held in the Rathlin Resource Centre. Colin Armstrong said that he liked the creative way RDCA illustrates the island's assets, and that the designations should be 'marketed' more. Graham Thompson suggested creating something similar to three CCGHT maps already in production. Joe Breen advised that the boundaries of the designated area were not necessarily important to the general public, more the wildlife and habitats they contained. Brenda Murphy asked RDCA what the key messages were that islanders want to convey. Michael Cecil explained that the main messages would be that people can seek out and enjoy designated areas and that these areas are important for protecting the island's environment. He also said that it is easier to promote the island when people appreciate what wildlife live there. Brenda Murphy emphasised the need to present scientific information about protected areas in an easily accessible message for consumers. Joe Breen indicated that maps should not focus on the boundaries of designated areas but include messages about not disturbing wildlife and taking litter home. A smart tag could be presented on posters for those visitors who wanted more information. Mary O 'Driscoll suggested that it would be a good idea to give tour guides information on the island's designated areas. Joe Breen said that any training for tour guides should include information on the underwater environment e.g. the terrestrial cliffs to the north of the island 'running into' the huge underwater cliffs beneath. Mary O 'Driscoll offered to organise trained opportunity for local and visiting tour guides. Colin Armstrong suggested that it would be ideal to bring together the science, wildlife disturbance messages and communication in one workshop and to include underwater heritage and other aspects of importance to the island community. Michael Cecil spoke about the Florida Everglades as a great example of a protected area being well promoted for tourism. David Quinney Mee said that RDCA was about to start training for tour guides on the island. Rory McNearly asked how well archaeology and cultural heritage were signposted on the island and whether there were potential access issues for some heritage sites. David Quinney Mee confirmed that there could be some sites on private land which may not be accessible. He outlined a proposal for an exciting new project at East Light which would enable virtual reality access to sites that could not be visited in person. Mary O 'Driscoll said that there were three tour guides making regular trips to Rathlin Island. Joe Breen suggested it would be easier to provide training on the Ballycastle side and open the workshop to business that do boat trips, for example *Aquaholics*. Colin Armstrong asked forum members to consider people to include and to make the most of the opportunity. He indicated that the workshop would best be led by the island community with invitations going to both visitors and islanders; DAERA staff would support and provide input to the workshop. David Quinney Mee suggested invite illustrators to interpret the information presented at the workshop and produce maps, posters etc.

Action – Mary O ‘Driscoll to organise a training workshop for tour guides visiting Rathlin Island and to liaise with Joe Breen and other forum members on the support needed to deliver it.

Action – RDCA to look at existing maps of Rathlin Island that have been produced for the public and consider whether they can be amended to include designated areas.

5. Update on European Management Scheme actions (Colin Armstrong, DAERA)

Colin Armstrong outlined that the original Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme was consulted on in 2013. No formal review is required but in light of progress on the actions included, it now needs to be reviewed and updated. If reading the management scheme for the first time now, it refers to old departments and the Rathlin Island Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) was not yet designated. A formal review this year will align with the wider six year reporting cycle. Ahead of a review, the forum members were asked to begin considering new actions and links that should be established. Gary Burrows highlighted the need to detail new actions to tackle marine litter. New actions should address new issues that are emerging, problems which have not been addressed, or new aspirations.

Michael Cecil spoke about the significant increase in cetacean activity and the regularity of bottlenose dolphin sightings from the ferries. He asked about the scope to report sightings to IWDG via an alternative means than the online sightings form. Gary Burrows spoke about the opportunity these encounters provided for citizen science and outlined the findings of the recent AFBI project on bottlenose dolphin photo-identification using images taken by the public. Joe Breen affirmed that bottlenose dolphin sightings were now a regular occurrence further along the coast at Portrush and that the sightings noticeboard was one of the most popular points of interest in Portrush Coastal Zone. Gary Burrows suggested adding a similar sightings noticeboard on the ferries.

Colin Armstrong asked about the recent assessments on bird colonies. Neil McCullough stated that the most recent seabird survey in 2011 indicated that guillemot populations were doing well. Kittiwake numbers were declining although there was a small increase between the 2007 and 2011 censuses for large gulls. The numbers of Herring Gulls remain very small compared with those at the time of designation. Puffin numbers were steady but not increasing, however, they were a difficult species to census on Rathlin as they nest in inaccessible locations. At the time of the Special Protection Area designation, peregrine falcons were known from six territories; in recent years, four or five territories have been occupied. Whilst it is difficult to make a reliable estimate when dealing with such small a small population, their numbers appear to be fairly stable.

In terms of the local development plan, Karen Dickson advised that the existing policy framework was reasonable and no particular issues were raised during the consultation. Michael McConaghy said

that there may be public liability issues with certain paths but that CCG council was willing to consider any issues.

John Morton confirmed that maintenance works were ongoing at Rathlin Island harbour.

Brenda Murphy asked how Tourism NI could best support Rathlin Island and help to manage visitors to the area. She outlined a tourism study of the Causeway Coast on existing spend, numbers and access, with the purpose of better managing the visitor experience. She also spoke of work to test out-of-state markets with new tourism products and how best to develop an interest in visiting to a commitment to travel, studies relevant to both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Michael Cecil responded by saying that RDCA wished to explore the potential for a Dark Skies Discovery Site with NIEA and the importance of developing a safe pedestrian walkway between the old and new harbours which separated tourists and traffic. Simon Kelly stated that DfI would bring that initiative forward. Colin Armstrong emphasised the need to manage any development around the harbour so that seals were not disturbed, with risks being assessed at the pre application stage.

Simon Kelly then spoke about the great potential for use and development of the East Lighthouse. David Quinney Mee explained that whilst there had been earlier ambitions to develop the kelp store, the East Lighthouse was now taking priority as building that could do a lot more for the island. Aspirations include resurfacing the access lane, providing broadband access and providing a Virtual Reality experience from the building, something which would require a significant investment in IT. Simon Kelly said that the Ministerial Forum had committed to establish an Innovation Lab, in essence a think tank which would bring key individuals and funders together to consider issues such as development of the East Light and steps toward making Rathlin a carbon neutral island. He said that there would be a meeting in April 2019 for experts to consider in more depth, potential development opportunities at the East Lighthouse. Rory McNeary said that as the site was listed, it would be important to invite a heritage contact to that meeting. David Quinney Mee clarified that it was the site, not the tower that was under consideration. He said that the building could not be leased for accommodation and that the perspective of the RDCA was to explore scope for making more of the site's view, history and scenery, via the level of thinking levied at the Eden project. There were no firm ideas on architectural changes yet but any future amendments must be in keeping with the site's important heritage character. It would be a great place to interpret Marconi, porcelanite axe heads etc.

Action – Gary Burrows to discuss reporting mechanisms for cetacean sightings with IWDG and inform RDCA of the best way to log these.

6. Update on Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016 – 2020 (Environment Theme)

Colin Armstrong explained that as a group, the forum had agreed to look at the actions in the Environment theme of the Rathlin Island Action Plan.

Simon Kelly provided an update on the status of the plan saying that it is now published and publically available detailing various specific actions to help deliver each theme. He commented that it had taken some time to get agreement from all involved. Progress will need to be checked twice a year and other groups will need to be identified to help achieve the actions. Currently, only stakeholders are listed against the actions for now (pages 23-26 are most relevant). Some DAERA actions will need clarification on exactly who would be involved in their delivery.

Karen Dickson queried whether the activity to '*Work with RDCA to undertake a survey of housing assets in the area (including the possibility of bringing empty/derelict homes back into use) and will publish the findings of the report if feasible*' (page 17), referred to a baseline survey that the Head of Planning and the Local Plan Manager had undertaken with the islanders to determine potential housing sites around the island outside of Church Bay. Michael McConaghy confirmed that the action did refer to that survey and that it had been useful.

Michael Cecil emphasised the need to speak with DAERA staff in relation to the potential access to Kebble Cottage as a Dark Skies Discovery Site and also on farming issues.

Colin Armstrong stated that some farmers, whose applications had been successful under previous schemes, had been declined under the new Environmental Farming Scheme and asked if that had been addressed. David Quinney Mee said that some progress had been made and that Graham Campbell was due back soon to speak with farmers.

Joe Breen asked if the difficulties in controlling geese had been addressed yet. Michael Cecil and David Quinney Mee said that when discussing the overall predator control programme, the management of geese was implicit, along with the eradication of rats and ferrets.

Simon Kelly outlined the intention of making greater use of technology in increasing access to Rathlin Island's features e.g. virtual reality.

Simon Kelly and Michael Cecil asked that DAERA confirm a suitable farming contact in relation to the Rathlin Island Action Plan.

Action – Colin Armstrong to speak to NIEA about the use of Kebble cottage and to clarify who the appropriate contact is for actions on rural development.

7. Marine Protected Area Management and Monitoring Project (MarPAMM)

Amy Garbett (AFBI) provided an overview of the Marine Protected Area Management and Monitoring Project (MarPAMM). This is a €6.4 million EU Interreg funded cross-border project to develop new tools for monitoring and protocols for managing a number of marine environments in Ireland, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland. MarPAMM is coordinated by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Northern Ireland and match funded by DAERA.

The project will run from 2018 to 2022, and will bring together 40 people from seven partner organisations with diverse expertise and experience in diverse aspects of marine conservation, marine research, habitat modelling and stakeholder engagement. It will deliver:

4 models

- A regional sea bird model
- A regional model of protected seabed-dwelling and underwater noise model
- A seal foraging and underwater noise model
- A coastal processes model

6 management plans for the following areas

- Argyll region
- Outer Hebrides region
- Murlough Special Area of Conservation
- Carlingford Lough Special Protection Areas (cross-border)
- Co Down – Co Louth region (cross-border)
- North Coast Ireland – North Channel region (cross-border)

Rathlin Island will be included in the regional plan for the North Coast Ireland – North Channel area and the MarPAMM team will liaise closely with the Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environment Forum in developing it. Colin Armstrong outlined the benefits of MarPAMM in that engagement with a regional management plan will extend the existing local area of focus of the Rathlin management scheme to the protection of seabirds and seals in their wider foraging and migration routes. This project will fund and support more up-to-date seabird counts. The forum will need to give consideration to exactly which components of seabird and seal behaviour need studied. DAERA has been invited to the best practice workshop on management plans in March 2019 and will share advice gained from that meeting with the Rathlin forum. In preparation for the workshop, DAERA will send forum members a questionnaire on the effectiveness of this group to manage marine protected areas. By 2022, the management plans will be completed.

Colin Armstrong said that it was now time to review the original Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme; DAERA will initiate a review soon and republish a revised management scheme for Rathlin within the next one to two years, with links to other relevant plans so that it is up-to-date in its aims.

Amy Garbett explained that one of the other main aims of MarPAMM is to monitor marine management actions and to ensure that those actions are effective. Graham Thompson asked whether the regional plan for the North Coast Ireland – North Channel area would include the other north coast designated sites. Colin Armstrong confirmed that the regional plan would be a 'nested system' of management,

and that specific area plans will sit within it, including the Skerries and Causeway, Maidens and Red Bay marine SACs.

8. Marine Protected Areas Officer update (Gary Burrows, DAERA)

Gary Burrows provided a PowerPoint summary of recent work relating to Rathlin Island Marine Protected Area (MPA).

- 13 MPA patrols between Belfast Lough and Lough Foyle during the period June 2018 – January 2019.
- 8 dedicated patrols around Rathlin Island – by boat (6), quad bike (1) and vehicle (1).
- 4 patrols monitored sea area to the south, west and east of Rathlin Island MPA, from Portaneevy – Torr Head coast.
- Wide range of marine management issues monitored on North Region patrols – mobile fishing gear within MPAs, unlicensed oyster cultivation, shellfish gathering, bait digging, anchoring of cruise ships.
- No incursions of dredgers/tractors observed within MPA boundary during the period June 2018 – January 2019.
- One possible incursions into MPA reported to DAERA Marine & Fisheries. Vessel Monitoring System data confirmed no mobile fishing within the boundary.
- Rathlin Island map of sensitive areas and best practice note for boat users completed and circulated to boat owners at Ballycastle and Portrush.
- The procurement of services to refit DAERA patrol vessel *Dun na Salar* was outlined by Gary Burrows and Joe Breen.
- Two seal entanglements noted at Rue Point (19th September 2018 – image below) and the Church Bay marina area (4th December 2019). Discussion within DAERA and with Exploris with regard to the feasibility of seal rescues. Both very problematic as entangled animals were highly mobile adults and one may have been a pregnant female in an area where disturbance to the wider group was a risk.



9. AOB

Colin Armstrong summarised an update from Kenny Bodles on the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan:

- The EU LIFE funded *Biosecurity for Life* project will run until July 2022.
- It has identified 41 seabird island SPAs across the UK which will have agreed biosecurity plans in place by 2022.
- 5 sites have been identified in NI – Copelands, Sheep Island, Green Island, Blue Circle Island and Rathlin Island.
- Alongside the biosecurity plans there will be Rapid Incursion Response Hubs set up (8 across the UK in total, 1 for NI) which will deal with emergency incursions onto predator free islands. A team of volunteers will be trained up to respond via each hub.
- The project is currently recruiting 3 biosecurity officers – one of which will oversee Southern England, Wales and NI.
- There is no indication as yet of when the work on the Rathlin Biosecurity Plan will begin (or be completed) but it is a priority project for the island.

Joe Breen asked RDCA for any update on the 2019 Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival. David Quinney Mee said that they hoped to run it from end of May – start June 2019, depending on CCG funding. He

extended an invitation to anyone from the forum who could contribute. Mary O' Driscoll suggested visitors may be interested to see DAERA's *Dun na Salar* vessel at the festival.

David Quinney Mee asked if Joe Breen could update the forum on his refugee relief work on Lesbos. Joe Breen gave a short overview of his work in Greece in May 2018 and spoke of the closeness of Turkey to Greece reminding him of the looking over to Rathlin Island. He emphasised the poor quality of the refugees' boats, and the desperation of people with nothing. The conditions the refugees arrive into on Lesbos are terrible; they have to get processed, and most likely end up in Greece although many try to move into other countries.

10. Date of next meeting

To be arranged for mid-August 2019.

Summary of actions

Neil McCulloch to circulate advice to airfields on flying near bird colonies once the full list of contacts has been checked.

Mary O' Driscoll to organise a training workshop for tour guides visiting Rathlin Island and to liaise with Joe Breen and other forum members on the support needed to deliver it.

RDCA to look at existing maps of Rathlin Island that have been produced for the public and consider whether they can be amended to include designated areas.

Gary Burrows to discuss reporting mechanisms for cetacean sightings with IWDG and inform RDCA of the best way to log these.

Colin Armstrong to speak to NIEA about the use of Kebble cottage and to clarify who the appropriate contact is for actions on rural development.