

Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme

Minutes – Management Group meeting – 16th October 2015

Portnagree House, Ballycastle

Present:

Damian Campbell	DOE Marine Division (Director and Chairman of Rathlin Island EMS-MG)
Joe Breen	DOE Marine Division (Senior Scientific Officer)
Gary Burrows	DOE Marine Division (North Coast Marine Ranger)
David Quinney Mee	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Gordon Munro	HM Coastguard (Senior Coastal Operations Officer)
John Morton	Moyle District Council (Harbour Master)
Colin Armstrong	DOE Marine Division (Principal Scientific Officer)
Maxime Sizaret	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (Chairman)
Rebecca Hunter	Ulster Wildlife Trust (Living Seas Officer)
Ksenia Zywczuk	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)

Apologies:

Rory McNeary	DOE Marine Division (Senior Inspector for Marine Historic Environment)
Neil McCulloch	DOE Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Michael Cecil	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Simon Kelly	DRD Governance Policy & Resources Group
Gareth Fullerton	DARD Fisheries & Environment Division (Senior Fisheries Officer)
Jennifer Lundy	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (Senior Planner)
Phil Davidson	National Trust
Frazier McConnell	Representative for Crown Estate Commissioners

Agenda

1. Apologies

Gary Burrows brought the apologies received (as above).

2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (20th April 2015)

Damian Campbell asked the management group if they were content with the minutes from the last meeting. All members agreed without comment.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Damian Campbell reviewed progress on the actions from the last meeting. Some actions were discussed under the main agenda items later in the meeting.

- *Action - Gareth Fullerton to provide an update to Damian Campbell by 27th April 2015 on DARD's timeframe for introduction of the new legislation. **Achieved***

Damian asked for an update on the introduction of new legislation to prevent use of mobile fishing gear within Rathlin Island SAC. Gary read the email update provided by Gareth Fullerton:

I've checked with our policy team again – and there is no update regarding the introduction of the legislation. It is still with the DSO office. Although the legislation is not in place fisherman voluntarily agree not to trawl/dredge within the area. Dependant on when the legislation is completed / returned by the DSO will ultimately be the detail for when it can be finalised & introduced.

- *Action - Joe Breen to arrange a comprehensive underwater survey of the two proposed anchorages by July 2015. **Achieved***
- *Action - Joe Breen to provide John Morton with charts indicating the proposed anchorages as precautionary measure. **Achieved***

Both actions discussed under agenda item 6 (Update on Marine Division surveys, including anchorage sites (Joe Breen)).

- *Action - Gary Burrows to draft text for seal signage and present that to RDCA and DOE Marine Division. **Achieved***
- *Action - RDCA to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs. **Discussions are ongoing.***

Gary confirmed that he had provided text to the RDCA, under the titles *Sheltered home to seals* and *Vulnerable animals*. This outlined the importance of the quiet inlets around Mill Bay for resting and breeding seals, and provides guidance for visitors when watching or photographing seals. It is

preceded by an introductory paragraph on the history of the use of Mill Bay for fishing and grinding corn.

David Quinney Mee confirmed that RDCA will produce a stone plinth to display that sign in a way that will be in keeping with the area. He explained that one land owner had requested more info on the signs to cover additional issues such as camping etc. Negotiations with a second land owner are ongoing; his concerns are not on commercial grounds. David emphasised the importance of having the support and favour of the local community when producing signage. It is anticipated that Impact Printing will design and produce the sign.

Action - RDCA to continue to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs.

- *Action - Joe Breen and Gareth Fullerton to discuss the boundaries of the O'Byrne Point proposed non disturbance zone with Rathlin Island and Ballycastle fishermen.*

Progression of a non disturbance zone at O'Byrne Point is tied in with the introduction of the new fisheries legislation preventing the use of mobile fishing gear within Rathlin Island SAC. The boundaries were the ones that DARD Fisheries Division had as a no take zone for pot fishing, diving and other activities to protect key marine species. The area in question is small in size, limited to a couple of hundred metres. It will require monitoring to ensure that no damage occurs there through prohibited activities. Joe Breen confirmed that the site is in pristine condition at the moment, and that DOE Marine Division is not aware of any damaging activity there. The main dive operator using the area knows not to dive that site as it is the only known location in Northern Ireland for certain rare sponge species. Following the introduction of the new DARD fisheries legislation, if necessary, DOE can then bring in its own byelaws to manage any activities of concern there.

- *Action - RDCA to schedule evening meeting on Rathlin Island's marine features before the next Rathlin Island EMS-MG meeting. **Achieved, as a daytime meeting.***

Joe Breen presented a talk on the marine environment of Rathlin Island on the afternoon of Thursday 28th May 2015, as part of Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival. It was well received by both islanders and visitors, who gathered at St Mary's Primary School to enjoy a number of talks/events organised by the RDCA.

- *Action - Joe Breen to invite Rathlin Island and Ballycastle fishermen to the next DARD Fisheries Liaison meeting (4th June 2015) where DOE Marine Division will provide a briefing on all Northern Ireland pMCZs. **Not achieved.***

Colin Armstrong (DOE Marine Division) explained that he gave a presentation to the Inshore Fisheries Partnership and representatives for North Coast fishermen were in attendance. John Morton pointed out that a number of members of the management group '*wore different hats*' and that there are good lines of communication existing so substantive issues are not being missed. Gary Burrows indicated that there were some ongoing issues with representatives of the fishing industry being unavailable to attend due to competing work and family commitments. John Morton indicated that there was little communication from DARD Fisheries Division. Joe Breen commented that communication on marine issues would be more straightforward when DOE and DARD become amalgamated in the new Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in 2016.

Damian Campbell asked whether the management group should have a plan or programme to reach people who '*slip through the nets*', those who aren't represented in groups or associations. David Quinney Mee suggested that there are advantages to addressing a single issue at a time and making sure that relevant people are included. If outside agencies direct people on what to do environmentally without adequate consultation and involvement, some people may be resistant to those changes. Gary Burrows commented that whilst engaging and consulting fully means that it may take longer to achieve some actions the outcome is more likely to be effective and supported by the island community. Colin Armstrong said that the group should consider how it can implement the actions agreed in the Rathlin Island local biodiversity action plan (LBAP), not solely the actions from the original European Marine Site management plan. David Quinney Mee explained that whilst most of the LBAP actions are quite general there are some specific marine actions. Joe Breen asked whether there is a management group overseeing the implementation of the LBAP; David confirmed that the RDCA management committee would provide that function. He also pointed out that some aspects of the LBAP are about recognising good work that is already underway. David also suggested that the LBAP needs to become part of the wider management context for Rathlin Island.

- *Action - Gary Burrows to produce a short leaflet on the marine wildlife of Rathlin Island. **Achieved***

Gary confirmed that he completed the marine awareness leaflet *Rathlin Island's dynamic coast and seas* in May 2015. This publication was designed at the request of the island community, as a visually appealing, jargon free guide to Rathlin Island's marine environment. 500 copies were printed and distributed via the Rathlin Island ferry terminal, Portrush Coastal Zone and at various locations on the island by the RDCA. It was also circulated to the management group and published on the RDCA website.

- *Action - Damian Campbell to arrange meeting with DOE colleagues. **Action carried forward.***
- *Action - Neil McCulloch to arrange a meeting between the RSPB, NIEA and DOE Marine Division (after Damian Campbell's meeting with DOE colleagues). **Action carried forward.***

Damian Campbell said he would arrange a meeting with NIEA colleagues within the next week. Gary Burrows commented that individual meetings with NIEA had taken place e.g. to discuss monitoring seabird disturbance off Rathlin Island.

Damian said that he wanted to address lack of attendance from a range of organisations represented on the management group.

David Quinney Mee said that the management group was probably in a better position than ever to address predator control at seabird nesting sites. He suggested that it may now be time for a dedicated meeting on this management issue, including land owners, but that there would be no point if there was no funding available. Colin Armstrong commented that group needed to clarify who would do the work and how it would be funded, emphasising the need to identify the appropriate funding mechanism. He said that now that there was an action in the LBAP to assist island landowners in seeking effective methods to control pests, there was a good basis to apply for funding, if the community has now decided that it's to be addressed.

Maxime Sizaret (CCGHT) asked whether INTERREG Va may provide an opportunity for funding this work. Colin Armstrong suggested that it would not be relevant to this one, as the focus is more on the development of management plans for other marine sites. He said that he would follow up on this conversation with the RDCA. David Quinney Mee asked whether the RDCA should now consider organising an island meeting to agree a plan that's then ready to be submitted as an application. Colin stated that any plan would need to be properly costed before submission.

Action – Damian Campbell to arrange an internal meeting with NIEA during the following week regarding appropriate representation on the management group.

Action - Neil McCulloch to arrange a meeting between the RSPB, NIEA and DOE Marine Division (after Damian Campbell's meeting with DOE colleagues).

Action – Colin Armstrong (DOE) to arrange an internal meeting with NIEA to discuss an action plan to control rats and ferrets at seabird nesting sites.

- *Action - RDCA to confirm the land owners are at Doon Bay so that Joe Breen can speak to the land owner to get permission to survey this summer. **Achieved***
- *Action - Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to meet with Liam McFaul and John Morton. **Achieved***

DOE Marine Division organised a meeting on 31st September 2015 to discuss a trial seabird monitoring survey by RSPB staff on Rathlin Island. The meeting involved Gary Burrows (DOE MD) Liam McFaul and Peter Harper (RSPB), Neil McCulloch (NIEA) and John Morton (CCG Harbour Master).

1. Review of the Management Scheme, Conservation Objectives and Risk Assessment (Damian Campbell)

The Chairman opted to address this review as the final agenda item.

Damian Campbell said that he wanted a more considered focus on the main objectives of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme, and the statutory Conservation Objectives associated with the Rathlin Island Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Special Protection Area (SPA). He said that whilst it is often useful to widen out the management group's discussion it must not lose sight of the protected features and the conservation actions needed to effectively manage them. At the April 2015 meeting, a matrix had been presented to the management group, risk assessing the current condition of the protected features of the marine site and the group would now need to address this with earnest. He said that he wanted to come back at next meeting with an assessment of the original twelve Specific Management Objectives from the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme (p31-32). As the plan is now three years old, the management group will need to review progress against these actions and ascertain whether any new actions need to be added. It will need to make sure that any protected features that have been compromised do not remain in poor condition. DOE will take the lead on this review, however, others will need to feed into that review and take appropriate actions where necessary.

Rebecca Hunter (UWT) queried where would be the best place to see/publish changes as it would not be feasible to reproduce costly paper copies of the management scheme.

Gary Burrows suggested that the updated management scheme could be published on the RDCA website along with some background information on the purpose of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme, and the minutes of the meetings.

Ksenia Zywczuk (RDCA) said that there would be real value in publishing a page on the RDCA website as it would demonstrate joint working among all those involved in the management of the marine site.

Damian Campbell agreed that more active use of the RDCA website would be an exciting development in the story of the island's management and affirmed that it would be excellent if the RDCA would publish the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme online.

Gary Burrows offered to provide the RDCA with some notes on the purpose of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme, should they agree to publish a page on their website.

Action - Colin Armstrong to produce the basis for this review by the end of November 2015, and to reference any relevant LBAP actions.

Action – Gary Burrows to circulate a link to the Rathlin Island LBAP to the management group, in advance of publication on the RDCA website.

Action – RDCA to consider publishing a page on their website, providing islanders with information on the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme.

2.Update on Rathlin Fisheries Regulations to prohibit the use of mobile gear (Gareth Fullerton) (Conservation Obj.6)

Discussed under agenda item 3 (Matters arising from previous minutes).

3.Update on Marine Division surveys, including anchorage sites (Joe Breen) (Conservation Obj. 5)

Joe Breen confirmed that DOE had originally undertaken underwater video surveys of the proposed sites using a drop camera, and then followed these with dive survey transects within the two areas. Maerl had been found on the outer edge of one area but not within either of the main proposed anchorage sites. Provided that vessels anchor within these two areas, there should be no threat to any of the vulnerable underwater habitats. Joe Breen and Gary Burrows had monitored one cruise ship, the *Island Sky* using one of the two anchorages on 9th June 2015. Discussions with the vessel's skipper via marine VHF confirmed that he found the anchorage suitable to use. Joe said that the next step was to get the designated anchorages within Rathlin Island SAC published on the Admiralty charts.

He also outlined that DOE Marine Division had monitored and boarded an international salvage vessel which had been tracked on VMS making irregular transects around the island, whilst en route to Iceland. The vessel had anchored close to the wreck of *SS Lochgarry* rather than in Church Bay. Nothing of particular concern was noted during the boarding operation.

4. Investigating negative population drivers for Rathlin populations of herring gull and puffin (NIEA) (Conservation Obj. 2)

Not discussed as NIEA was unable to attend this meeting. This agenda item will be addressed at the next meeting.

5. MCZ update, including Rathlin pMCZ (Joe Breen)

Joe Breen explained that the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) programme had now been ongoing for two years with several public meetings and consultations. The actual boundary for the Rathlin pMCZ has been amended, with a slight extension to the west for black guillemot. The northern boundary, for deep mud habitats, has now been reduced to a minimum number of straight lines to aid navigation. Over a third of that extension to the north of the Rathlin pMCZ is a traffic separation zone. Joe said that the next public consultation would be issued on the 11th Dec 2015, with a three month deadline for comments.

Overall DOE Marine Division would initially be going forward with 4 pMCZ sites, with a couple of further subsequent ones later:

- Rathlin pMCZ for deep seabed habitats, geological features and black guillemot
- Red Bay pMCZ for seagrass beds
- Outer Belfast pMCZ for ocean quahog and sublittoral mixed sediments
- Carlingford Lough pMCZ for sea-pens and burrowing megafauna communities

Joe explained that DOE had been as transparent and open as possible so hopeful there would be no unexpected issues and that DOE or the newly amalgamated DEARA would be managing the designation and management of the MCZ programme. Actual designations would take place by December 2015, and will entail active management of the site features. He suggested that this management group would probably include the Rathlin MCZ within its overall marine management. John Morton asked whether the consultation paperwork had been prepared and what were the management implications for the deep seabed habitats? Joe indicated that there would probably be a mobile gear prohibition to the north of the Rathlin Island over these deep seabed habitats. John stated there would be small local vessels fishing in depths of 200m+, so DOE would need to consult locally on the implications for those vessels. Colin Armstrong emphasised that it would be important for fishermen to feed back evidence of current use and socio economic use and implications through the MCZ public consultation issued in December 2015. John Morton indicated that the same issue may apply at Waterfoot (Red Bay pMCZ).

6. Update on seal signage (RDCA)

Discussed under agenda item 3 (Matters arising from previous minutes).

7. North Coast Marine Ranger update (Gary Burrows)

Gary outlined his recent work as North Coast Marine Ranger. He summarised the range of monitoring, enforcement and outreach duties undertaken since the last meeting, with an emphasis on work specific to Rathlin Island.

- Production of the marine awareness leaflet *Rathlin Island's dynamic coast and seas*. This publication was designed at the request of the island community, as a visually appealing, jargon free guide to Rathlin Island's marine environment. 500 copies were printed and distributed via the Rathlin Island ferry terminal, Portrush Coastal Zone and at various locations on the island by the RDCA. It was also circulated to the management group and published on the RDCA website.
- Four boat-based patrols of Rathlin Island SAC were undertaken as part of wider marine surveys to investigate cruise ship anchoring, phytoplankton and sea cave surveys. In May 2015, DOE Marine Division staff also boarded and carried out an inspection of the log of an international salvage vessel operating suspiciously within Rathlin Island SAC.
- Gary participated in scientific dive operations to survey the seabed habitat within the two newly proposed cruise ship anchorages and subsequently took part in filming for the BBC Newsline feature on importance of maerl beds.
- Rathlin Sound Maritime festival – staff visited the island on three days in late May 2015, providing a public talk on the island's marine life and setting up a marine display via the DOE exhibition trailer.
- Text for seal signage at Mill Bay was provided to the RDCA, under the titles *Sheltered home to seals*, and *Vulnerable animals*. This outlines the importance of the quiet inlets around Mill Bay for resting and breeding seals, and provides guidance for visitors when watching or photographing seals.
- In September 2015, Gary organised a meeting on the scope for a trial seabird monitoring survey by RSPB staff on Rathlin Island. The meeting involved Liam McFaul and Peter Harper (RSPB), Neil McCulloch (NIEA) and John Morton (CCG Harbour Master)
- Gary briefly outlined the exceptional cetacean sightings and strandings around the north coast this summer. As highly protected European Protected Species, the response to the strandings of the minke whale at Lough Foyle and fin whale at Portstewart Strand were coordinated by DOE Marine Division. An Arctic beluga was also filmed off Dunseverick harbour at the end of July 2015.

- On 17th June 2015, Gary presented a talk on the marine wildlife of the north coast, and Rathlin Island to about 120 children at St Patricks and St Bridgettes Primary School. This included a demonstration of the specialised scuba equipment used by scientific divers, and a display of cetacean bones. The new Rathlin Island leaflets were also distributed to teachers at this event.
- Gary delivered a presentation at the Coastal Zone centre on Rathlin Island SAC and the Skerries and Causeway SAC to a visiting study group from Cumbria Wildlife Trust, on 11th May 2015.

8.AOB

David Quinney Mee confirmed that the Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival had received the go ahead for 27th May - 5th June 2016. It would not be funded in the same way as previous festivals but the application would now go through the Causeway Coast and Glens council. The RDCA hoped to match fund £25,000 from Tourism Northern Ireland. He stated that the RDCA would welcome the involvement of DOE Marine Division. Joe suggested that UWT could run a sea snorkel safari within the sheltered bay inside the harbour.

Maxime Sizaret outlined a European funded project that CCGHT was working on, involving coastal wildlife tourism and sustainable development on our coast and that of Donegal County Council. Its focus was on cooperation among coastal tourism providers.

David Quinney Mee highlighted an island wide Bioblitz project planned for 11th and 12th June 2016, which would try to encourage people to have a better spread of knowledge of species. He said that the RDCA needed to design a programme of wider events around the project. Joe Breen suggested getting the involvement of recreational divers would add a new dimension to the Bioblitz.

9.Date of next meeting

Action – Gary Burrows to arrange the next meeting by the start of February 2016.

Summary of actions

- RDCA to continue to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs.
- Damian Campbell to arrange an internal meeting with NIEA during the following week regarding appropriate representation on the management group.

- Neil McCulloch to arrange a meeting between the RSPB, NIEA and DOE Marine Division (after Damian Campbell's meeting with DOE colleagues).
- Colin Armstrong (DOE) to arrange an internal meeting with NIEA to discuss an action plan to control rats and ferrets at seabird nesting sites.
- Colin Armstrong to produce the basis for this review by the end of November 2015, and to reference any relevant LBAP actions.
- Gary Burrows to circulate a link to the Rathlin Island LBAP to the management group, in advance of publication on the RDCA website.
- RDCA to consider publishing a page on their website, providing islanders with information on the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme.
- Gary Burrows to arrange the next meeting by the start of February 2016.