

# Minutes - Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environmental Forum

Meeting – 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018, Rathlin Island (Richard Branson Centre)

13:30 – 16:00

## Present

Colin Armstrong	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Chairman)
Gary Burrows	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Secretariat)
Mary McNeill	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
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
Liam McFaul	RSPB, North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association
Kenny Bodles	RSPB
Jade Berman	Ulster Wildlife
Jonathan Roberts	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Jeff Hobson	HM Coastguard

## Apologies

Joe Breen	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Rory McNeary	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Graeme Campbell	DAERA Food and Farming
Linda Cheung	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Regional Operations)
Michael McConaghy	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

## Agenda

### 1. Introductions and Apologies

Gary Burrows brought apologies on behalf of the staff listed above and advised of several changes of membership. Richard Donaghy left the forum to work on Binevenagh LPS. David Galbraith (North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association) left due to time commitments and was assured that any fisheries related management will be developed and shared through the Inshore Fisheries Partnership. Jade Berman (Ulster Wildlife) was welcomed back to the group following maternity leave and has replaced Dave Wall.

## 2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017)

It was noted that the action on page 9 of the draft minutes should be attributed to Graeme Campbell, not Graham Thompson. Aside from that correction, the content of the November 2017 minutes was agreed.

## 3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Actions from November 2017 meeting:

- DAERA Marine & Fisheries to speak to NIFPO regarding the promotion of sustainable fishing around Rathlin Island. **Action completed.** NIFPO attended a meeting on north coast fisheries management measures (17th May 2018), along with local fishermen. Fisheries measures for the area from the Maidens SAC to Skerries and Causeway SAC were discussed. DAERA will also follow up with a specific meeting with Rathlin fishermen in June 2018.
- Colin Armstrong to convene a meeting of the predator control subgroup by mid December 2017. **Action carried forward.**
- Kenny Bodles to advise the predator control subgroup when the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan would be completed. **Discussed under agenda point 6.**
- Gary Burrows to draft literature and maps on sensitive marine protected areas, and circulate to the management forum for consultation. **Map drafted and will be ready to circulate soon.**
- DAERA and RSPB to discuss resourcing of any future monitoring of boat and seabird interactions. **Discussed under agenda item 5.**
- Neil McCulloch to advise on any concerns that NIEA has on the use of chumming to attract seabirds to vessels. **Action completed.** Very little research found on this subject but there is no strong evidence for an adverse effect on seabirds by sea angling or ecotourism boats chumming to attract target fish species. One possible concern relates to deploying chum close to seabird colonies for vulnerable species, like terns, which could draw in gulls to the area. A limited number of species may be affected, mainly shearwaters and gulls but not auks. It is possible that vulnerable species may waste energy investigating the chum.
- Dave Wall to lead on a Rathlin Island 'Extreme Clean' and to contact CCG council regarding support. **Action completed.**
- Gary Burrows to send a map of the coastal litter hotspots recorded by DAERA to Dave Wall. **Action completed.**
- Graeme Campbell to visit farmers on Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful EMS applications. **Action carried forward.**
- RDCA to progress the installation of seal signage, including the securing of funding and all necessary permissions. **Action carried forward.**
- Michael Cecil to speak with Mary O'Driscoll regarding options for a biodiversity garden on Rathlin Island. **Action carried forward.**

## 4. Consultation on draft Northern Ireland Marine Plan

Colin Armstrong explained that public consultation on the Northern Ireland Marine Plan (NIMP) was well underway and had included a number of stakeholder meetings. The NIMTF had organised a discussion among NGOs, there was a general stakeholder meeting at Greenmount College in May 2018, and a local council development planning event at the Gobbins Visitor Centre in June 2018.

DAERA now wished to bring it fully to the attention of the Rathlin Island environment forum. To date, the forum's focus has been on marine protected areas but there is now a need to widen this to the sustainable development of the whole island, reflecting its unique position. In preparing the NIMP, recognition has been given to that approach. Its vision is for a healthy marine area where wildlife can be enjoyed and managed sustainably, in the context of sustainable economic, environmental and social development. Of particular relevance is the special status of coastal communities. The purpose of the NIMP is to bring together all the relevant policies for first time; whilst the plan will not introduce new powers, decision makers must now take full account of all the policies relating to the plan. Taking renewable energy as an example, a decision cannot be taken in isolation as new legislation now requires competent authorities to take account of the marine environment. The public consultation on the NIMP asks if there is anything further that decision makers should take account of. Colin Armstrong asked whether, given the unique status of Rathlin, anything additional needed to be included. He highlighted that the public consultation would close on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June.

Mary McNeill explained that whilst this document was aimed at decision makers, it would be of benefit to everyone as they would now know how decision making should be made around key proposals. In practice, it introduces a greater level of transparency around decision making. She outlined that the plan contained 15 core policies and 10 key activity policies that should be considered for every proposals that may affect the sea. Colin Armstrong said that the plan would be in place until at least 2030 but that DAERA had a duty to keep it under review and that there may be reiterations every 3-6 years.

Michael Cecil stated that the greatest challenge to the environment of Rathlin Island remained the prospect of oil exploration and asked how the NIMP related to that. Mary McNeill advised that developers must now consider all issues across the board. They must weigh up the economic benefits of a project against social and environmental factors. Economic benefits do not supersede environmental considerations. Colin Armstrong explained that the NIMP was framed by the UK Marine Policy Statement (MPS), and that all governments have signed up to this framework. Even where decisions are made to proceed with projects, developers must create measures that include effective mitigation and allow for local jobs. So long as environmental conditions can be maintained at what is known as Good Environmental Status under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, measures can be put in place to permit development. If a decision maker does not make a decision in line with the policies within the NIMP, it must explain why and set out rationale for not adhering to it.

David Quinney Mee expressed his concern is that the Friday 15<sup>th</sup> June deadline is too close to allow a considered response from RDCA. Colin Armstrong advised RDCA to get in markers for areas of concern within the timeframe which would allow DAERA to follow up with further conversation. He explained that

where intractable disputes arise, an independent investigation can be brought to address any concerns. David Quinney Mee asked if the draft NIMP included reference to the Rathlin Island Policy. Mary McNeill said that it was not included in the draft but that the department would want that referenced as a legitimate inclusion. Colin Armstrong said that DAERA must undertake a Rural Needs Impact Assessment before adopting the NIMP and the Rathlin Island Policy is referred to within that.

Kenny Bodles asked if the NIMP included reference to Rathlin Island's biosecurity policies. Mary McNeill and Jade Berman suggested that it would be best to include these within the Invasives section. Mary McNeill emphasised that the marine plan sits at a higher strategic level than that of individual areas. Colin Armstrong said that page 53 referred to the NI Invasives Species Strategy and that it should be referenced there.

**Action – Mary McNeill to include reference to Rathlin Island's biosecurity policies within the NIMP.**

Jade Berman asked whether there would be a right of appeal if Rathlin islanders are not content with a decision. Colin Armstrong said that there is not an appeals mechanism specific to the NIMP; complaints must be directed through existing mechanisms of challenge e.g. judicial review.

## 5. Environment Fund 2019-22

Colin Armstrong brought the Environment Fund 2019-2022 to the attention of the forum, outlining that it related to a three year grant for projects in excess of £30,000, and was open to all not for profit NGOs and councils. The RDCA can apply if interested, either as a single application or as a partner to another application. As a regional countrywide programme, it is competitive and success cannot be guaranteed. An event is scheduled at Crawfordsburn Country Park on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2018 where a list of priority marine areas will be presented. Actions in the Environmental theme of the Rathlin Island Action Plan would be recognised as priorities.

The Environment Fund covers up to 75% of grant costs, so it helps to also apply to HLF and other funds. DAERA is keen that funding gets directed to high priority projects e.g. predator control programme. This project has struggled to get going as it couldn't get seed money, e.g. for officer to make HLF application. Colin Armstrong asked the forum if they wanted the predator control programme to be a single application or a collaborative project. Graeme Thompson said he was content for CCGHT to partner on a LIFE application. Colin Armstrong advised on making the most of the pre-application stage (closing date 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018). David Quinney Mee asked whether CCGHT could be the lead applicant on the rats and ferrets project? Graeme Thompson said that unless CCGHT was applying for a larger percentage of the grant then it was unlikely. Kenny Bodles said that RSPB struggled with capacity to fully engage with the project and was keen to explore it further. Graeme Thompson advised that the first stage application is quite straight forward, whereas the second stage asks for a few options. Kenny Bodles said he could see the benefit of having staff help prepare the final bid. Colin Armstrong said that if applying for funding for a predator control project officer, it would need to be part of a wider

role e.g. a Rathlin Environment officer, whose work would include the project on predator control as well as litter picks, environmental monitoring, education and awareness etc. Kenny Bodles proposed that CCGHT, RDCA and RSPB could co-host the officer. Jade Berman pointed to similar models for co-hosting biodiversity officers. Colin Armstrong recommended that the post would bring the greatest benefits as a community led initiative.

Options were then discussed for RDCA, CCGHT and RSPB to meet and agree the details of the application, including the possible involvement of the CCG Borough Council prior to meeting with Colin Armstrong. Michael Cecil said that it was probably best for RDCA to take the lead and draw in commitment/partnerships to bring in other 25% funding. Colin Armstrong advised that it would be better to see a project officer who could prepare the application, securing the additional funding, and possibly deliver on other projects.

**Action – RDCA, CCGHT and RSPB to meet and discuss the detail of the EF application.**

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

At each environmental forum meeting, the management group takes stock of progress on the Specific Management Objectives within the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme. The aim is to keep these priorities foremost in the forum's attention, especially actions 1-5 which are rated 'amber'.

*Action 1 – Control and removal of alien mammalian predators.* Covered under agenda item five. The difficulty has been getting time and securing seed funding. The EU LIFE Programme is open again but times and costs associated with preparing applications are high. HLF is a more attractive funding mechanism for partners. There was an action for Kenny Bodles to advise the group on progress with a Biosecurity Action Plan for Rathlin Island. He said that action to fund a biosecurity plan was being taken by RSPB at UK level. If that is successful, new staff should be in place by August to develop several local biosecurity plans, including one for Rathlin Island.

*Action 2 – Zoning/control of recreational boat activity.* Gary Burrows is preparing maps of sensitive wildlife areas and best practice guides for boat users. Further monitoring will be done by RSPB officers in the future. Liam McFaul suggested that the scope of monitoring is widened to include the disturbance of seabird colonies by private or chartered helicopters. He cited the recent example of one helicopter which landed at a seabird colony on a headland near the West Light, causing every bird to take flight; two other helicopters kept offshore. The RSPB lodged a complaint with the Civil Aviation Authority. The forum then discussed the feasibility of establishing a no-fly zone near seabird colonies. Neil McCulloch said that advice had been issued to pilots five years ago. Jeff Hobson indicated that most helicopters fly below the level of aircrafts and are not monitored by air traffic control radars. Colin Armstrong said that if there is a code of practice, it needs to be disseminated to operators.

**Action – Neil McCulloch to reissue advice to airfields on flying near bird colonies, ahead of the 2019 Open Championship.**

*Action 3 – Signposting to manage disturbance to seals.* Nothing further to add at present on signage at Mill Bay (RDCA). David Quinney Mee raised the issue of unleashed dogs causing disturbance. Liam McFaul commented on the issues that the new NIEA policy of no dogs at Kebble Reserve is having for visitors who have walked up from Church Bay. The RSPB also have a no dog policy at West Light and they are not allowed on buses.

*Actions 4 and 5 Introduction of a highly protected non-disturbance zone off Beirne Point and ban on mobile fishing gear.* Through the Inshore Fisheries Partnership, DAERA is developing fisheries management measures for all MPAs; discussion with Rathlin fishermen on the proposals for a highly protected non-disturbance zone off Beirne Point and new pot fishing measures will be undertaken as part of this. Liam McFaul asked if there were any minutes from the meeting with fishermen in Ballycastle. He raised concern over the increase in pot fishing around Rathlin Island in 2018; only one boat from the island pot fishes. Discussion on this will need input from fishermen on the Ballycastle side.

**Action – Colin Armstrong to provide Rathlin fishermen with the minutes from the meeting in Ballycastle.**

**Action - Colin Armstrong to arrange an evening meeting with Rathlin and Ballycastle fishermen to discuss the Beirne Point proposal and increase in pot fishing effort.**

All other actions (6-10) were rated 'green' i.e. completed or ongoing.

Colin Armstrong stated that more action would be needed on marine litter. He proposed a project on seabird tracking to address the lack of knowledge about where Rathlin Island's seabirds go to feed. Liam McFaul advised that studies had been undertaken by the RSPB and various universities, with some data on auks now available but that more research was needed. RSPB had been loosely involved in the JNCC seabird monitoring project but it had been a poor year and the seabirds didn't return. Kenny Bodles spoke about the RSPB modelling project, with results expected in July 2018; it tries to predict where birds move using existing information on kittiwakes, razorbills and black guillemots. He indicated that an application for a MCZ project on black guillemot restoration could be made to EF. Colin Armstrong confirmed that EF projects can include structured monitoring. Liam McFaul highlighted the problem of access to birds from land, suggesting that access by boat was safer.

## **7. Update on Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016 – 2020 (Environment Theme)**

Simon Kelly explained that the Rathlin Island Policy is an Executive policy which recognises the unique circumstances of Rathlin and the challenges of island life. For this reason policies developed for Rathlin may differ from policies applying elsewhere. The policy is underpinned by the Rathlin Island Action Plan and the Implementation Plan which provides a more detailed level of outcome-based actions. The Implementation Plan has been consulted on and is ready to be reissued to stakeholders for final

comment. Simon thanked David Quinney Mee and Michael Cecil for advising on the draft Implementation Plan. There have not been any significant amendments to the theme 'Environment – Agriculture & Aquaculture'.

Colin Armstrong said that there were a number of additions to the made to the Environment section, and actions that needed followed up on. When preparing an EF proposal, as many actions as possible from the Implementation Plan should be included e.g. actions on marine litter.

Michael Cecil highlighted an action on firefighting capacity at the west end of island and asked which department normally made decisions relating to water infrastructure? He emphasised its importance in terms of the response to wildfires. Liam McFaul stated that future wildfire responses must take account of breeding seasons and environmental impact and requested that Colin Armstrong makes a formal response to DfI in this regard as part of the consultation on the Rathlin Island Implementation Plan.

**Action – 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.**

## 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). The job title 'Marine Ranger' has been replaced with the new title 'Marine Protected Areas officer – North Region'.

- Seven MPA patrols between Belfast Lough and Lough Foyle during the period November 2017 – June 2018.
- Wide range of marine management issues monitored – mobile fishing gear within MPAs, unlicensed oyster cultivation, shellfish gathering, bait digging, anchoring of cruise ships.
- All seven patrols monitored sea area to the south, west and east of Rathlin Island MPA, from Portaneevy – Torr Head coast.
- Three additional surveys allowing opportunistic monitoring of Rathlin Island MPA.
- No incursions of dredgers/tractors observed within MPA boundary during the period Nov 2017 – June 2018.
- No incursions into MPA reported to DAERA Marine & Fisheries.
- MPA and marine wildlife talks, including content on Rathlin Island MPA delivered The Coast Office and Men's Shed (December 2017), UUC Environmental Science students (March 2018) and QUB Marine Biology Students (May 2018).

- Rathlin Island map of sensitive areas and best practice note for boat users has been drafted.

## 9. AOB

Jade Berman advised that Rebecca Hunter was starting a new project on elasmobranchs and would be providing some training on the island.

Graham Thompson said that UCC has made an application under ERF Interreg 'Our coastal Futures' relating to remote coastal communities.

David Quinney Mee recounted the success of the 2018 maritime festival. He said that a significant feature was the interest in marine education following on from success of Blue Planet II. Rathlin now has a litter wall on the way up to West Light and excellent imagery on Rathlin's wildlife. There is evidence that this all works well and the RDCA would like to incorporate more in the future. There will be an opportunity to talk more about the marine management in future festivals.

Jonathan Roberts advised that the CCG Development Plan team had held a public engagement event on 27<sup>nd</sup> July for the Preferred Options Paper, as part of the Local Development Plan process for a new Area Plan.

Michael Cecil spoke about the success of the Rathlin Island Extreme Beach clean and the 17 stockpiles of rubbish removed from the coastline. He encouraged that work to continue via Ulster Wildlife. He also advised that there had been a significant increase in pot fishing around the island despite the fact that the local fishery supported the Rathlin Island community. Liam McFaul explained that islanders had spent 20 years seeding the area, practicing V-notch schemes but now with the additional pot fishing effort, many of those lobsters were being taken by fishermen from outside the island. Colin Armstrong stated that this gets managed through the Inshore Fisheries Partnership via permitting schemes, tagging schemes, VMS etc. He recommended addressing the issue in the next meeting with local fishermen and then feeding that back into Inshore Fisheries Partnership along with an options appraisal and recognition of the Rathlin Island Policy.

## 10. Date of next meeting

Next meeting to be arranged for November 2018.

### **Summary of actions**

- Colin Armstrong to convene a meeting of the predator control subgroup.
- Kenny Bodles to advise the predator control subgroup when the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan would be completed.

- Graeme Campbell to visit farmers on Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful EMS applications.
- 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.
- RDCA, CCGHT and RSPB to meet and discuss the detail of the EF application.
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- Colin Armstrong to provide Rathlin fishermen with the minutes from the meeting in Ballycastle.
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