

Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme

Minutes - Management Group meeting - 20th April 2015

Richard Branson Centre, Rathlin Island

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)
Jen Firth	DOE Marine Division (Strangford Lough Marine Ranger)
Rory McNeary	DOE Marine Division (Senior Inspector for Marine Historic Environment)
David Quinney Mee	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Michael Cecil	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Ana Almeida	RSPB (Marine Conservation Officer)
Liam McFaul	RSPB and North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association
Simon Kelly	DRD Governance Policy & Resources Group
Gordon Munro	HM Coastguard (Senior Coastal Operations Officer)
Gareth Fullerton	DARD Fisheries & Environment Division (Senior Fisheries Officer)
John Morton	Moyle District Council (Harbour Master)
Jennifer Lundy	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council (Senior Planner)
Neil McCulloch	Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Ornithologist)

Apologies:

Colin Armstrong	DOE Marine Division (Principal Scientific Officer)
Jade Berman	Ulster Wildlife Trust (Living Seas Officer)
Maxime Sizaret	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust (Chairman)
Phil Davidson	National Trust
Bob McMullan	North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association
David Galbraith	North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association
Frazier McConnell	Representative for Crown Estate Commissioners

Agenda

1. Apologies

Gary Burrows brought apologies on behalf of those unable to attend (as above).

2. Agree minutes of 2nd meeting (10th November 2014)

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

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Introduction of new fishing legislation

Damian Campbell asked Gareth Fullerton for an update on the introduction of new legislation to prevent use of mobile fishing gear within Rathlin Island SAC.

Gareth confirmed that the legislation has been written but is still in draft form due to competing pressures within the DARD Fisheries Policy unit. It should be issued to the Departmental Solicitors Office shortly, and once signed off by them, Fisheries Division will aim to introduce the legislation during the 4th quarter of 2015. Consultation with islanders has already been undertaken. The main fishery around the island is potting and no impact on the Rathlin Island SAC features is envisaged.

New 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.

Survey of proposed cruise ship anchorages

Action - DOE Marine Division to dive the proposed sites for anchorage by April 2015.

Damian Campbell asked Joe Breen for an update on the establishment of commercial vessel anchorages within Church Bay. Joe summarised the need for DOE and the MCA to work together to try and direct cruise ships to anchor in specific areas within Church Bay in order to avoid vulnerable habitats such as maerl and sea grass. Gordon Munro helped identify two possible alternative proposed anchorage sites identified on the chart (appendix 1) as two 500m diameter areas, both of which are close to the harbour. Initial surveys of the two areas were carried out on Thursday, trialling a new Submertec Spyball underwater video system. Some software issues were apparent and Joe is working with the manufacturer to resolve these. A comprehensive survey of the proposed anchorages will take place within the next three months, to ensure that there are no vulnerable marine habitats, species or archaeological features present in the areas identified.

John Morton confirmed that cruise ships do have to inform him before anchoring. However, as the current and proposed cruise ship anchorages are located outside the council's harbour authority area, he can only recommend alternative areas.

Joe stated that if cruise ships persisted in anchoring in the wrong areas, technically they would be committing an offence. Gordon is able continue to monitor the exact locations being used this season.

He confirmed that once the designated anchorages come into effect, a notice to mariners will be issued, and that HMSO has indicated that it will be willing to update its charts with the new anchorages.

John indicated that the first cruise ship visits of the year would be within the month. Joe stated that he would be prepared to provide him with charts indicating the proposed anchorages as a precautionary measure before the full comprehensive survey, and that it would be useful to gauge whether the proposed anchorages prove useful. Gordon could monitor their use in the interim.

New action – Joe Breen to arrange a comprehensive underwater survey of the two proposed anchorages by July 2015.

New action – Joe Breen to provide John Morton with charts indicating the proposed anchorages as a precautionary measure.

Update on seal signage

*Action - DOE to set up meeting with David Quinney Mee (RDCA), Maxime Sizaret (CCGHT) Liam McFaul to discuss the content and location for the signage. **Achieved***

*Action - DOE to meet within internal units to progress production and erection of signs. **Achieved***

*Action - DOE to follow up with Peter Cush (NIEA Biodiversity Unit) regarding earlier suggestions for the provision of plasma screens on the Rathlin Island ferry. **Achieved***

Damian Campbell asked Gary Burrows for an update on the production of signage to reduce disturbance to seals.

Gary Burrows confirmed that he met with David Quinney Mee, Michael Cecil, Liam McFaul and Maxime Sizaret in February 2015 to progress this work. The key outcomes of that meeting were that the RDCA agreed to pay for the production of two signs (Mill Bay and Rue Point) and that Gary would draft the text. The consensus was that rather than produce 'prohibitive warning' signs, colourful and engaging illustrated signs produced by the island community would be more likely to elicit a positive response from visitors. Whilst signage will not be presented as DOE signs, they will need to outline the protected status of seals and advise visitors to avoid disturbance as this is the main driver for their production.

RDCA is in ongoing discussion with relevant land owners ahead of the erection of signs (plinth style) to address some reservations.

Gary has confirmed with NIEA Conservation, Designation and Protection that they have no concerns with their placement in relation to the boundary of Rathlin Island Coast ASSI. He also secured agreement from DOE Corporate Communications to prepare the graphic design of both signs.

Gary got clarification from Peter Cush that the provision of plasma screens was not part of the original contract with Evergreen Media to produce the Rathlin Island DVD. Michael Cecil has confirmed that Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd. had been successful in independently securing funding for new screens; Gary and Joe have offered the support of text, images and underwater video for the use on the ferry screens.

New action – Gary Burrows to draft text for seal signage and present that to RDCA and DOE Marine Division.

New action – RDCA to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs.

Establish the O’Byrne Point MCZ, where potting and diving will be by permit only

Action - Joe Breen to explain the proposal and wider benefits to fishermen of a highly protected area by January 2015.

New 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.

Monitor condition of terrestrial EMS features and advise EMS-MG of required management

*Action - Gary Burrows to ask Ian Enlander whether there will be a further seabird census, building on the Seabird 2000 surveys. **Achieved***

Written update provided by Ian Enlander and forwarded to Liam McFaul on 19th January 2015.

Monitor any impacts of boating on seabird populations

Action - DOE’s North Coast Marine Ranger will monitor impacts of boating on seabird populations in 2015 and advise the EMS Management Group on management requirements.

Outline of proposals provided by Joe Breen under Agenda item 7 ‘Monitoring Plan’.

Blue Flag designation

*Action – Moyle District Council to provide update for next EMS-MG meeting. **Achieved***

John Morton explained that Keep NI Beautiful had changed the format for applications for Blue Flag status. It had been unclear how the application process might work for the new councils established under RPA. Now that Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council is in place, the council will reconsider and submit its application for flag blue flag status for the marina on Rathlin Island.

Education and work with schools

*Action - Gary Burrows to arrange further marine wildlife presentations to schools in the Ballycastle area. **Achieved***

Further detail provided under Agenda item 8 ‘North Coast Marine Ranger update’.

Presentation on Rathlin Island’s marine features

Action - RDCA to set up evening meeting in February or March 2015.

New action – RDCA to set up and publicise a talk by Joe Breen and Gary Burrows on the marine life of Rathlin Island.

Joe Breen also outlined the work done at the Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) workshop held in the Marine Court Hotel, Bangor on 12th March 2015. Its main aim was to present coastal stakeholders from all parts of Northern Ireland with the boundaries of the pMCZ designations and to introduce potential management options. Representatives of the fish producer organisations were invited, however, this event coincided with a key industry conference and only a few fishermen were able to attend the MCZ workshop. Joe had hoped to provide an update to fishermen operating in the waters around Rathlin Island at that workshop, however, in light of the absence of key fishing organisations, suggested a separate meeting organised through Seafish.

New 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.

Information leaflet for Rathlin Island EMS features

Action - Gary Burrows will consider publication of a leaflet that explains the reason for designation of Rathlin Island EMS and the importance of the marine habitats and species that live on and around the island.

Gary explained that with budget constraints and the proposed dissolution of DOE, there was now a general move away from producing printed material with logos. Gary has, however, considered the options and committed to producing an electronic leaflet on the marine life of Rathlin Island for publication on the RDCA, NIEA and DOE Marine Division websites. A limited number of paper leaflets will be printed and available for islanders and visitors to Rathlin Island.

New action – Gary Burrows to produce a short leaflet on the marine wildlife of Rathlin Island.

Review of Management Scheme

*Action - DOE Marine Division to write out to the Rathlin Island EMS-MG and ask for its views on how the scheme is working. **Achieved***

Update provided under Agenda item 4 'Review of the Management Scheme.'

Potential for development of the harbour on Rathlin Island

*Action - DRD to seek an early scoping opinion from the DOE Marine Division Marine Licensing and Assessment Team on the requirements for making a marine license for development of the Rathlin Island harbour. **Achieved***

Simon Kelly outlined that DRD anticipated taking delivery of a new ferry in summer 2016 to replace the existing *Canna* vessel. A new harbour will be needed to accommodate the larger vessel; a suitable site has been identified at the north end of the existing harbour. The intention to redevelop the harbour is still at the proposal stage, however, DRD officials have met with local residents to inform them of likely disruption. Central Procurement Division has been in discussion with the DOE Marine Division (Marine Licensing and Assessment Team), ahead of submitting a planning application.

4. Review of the management scheme (Damian Campbell)

Damian Campbell explained that DOE Marine Division had written out to the Rathlin Island EMS-MG, asking for its views on how the management scheme was working. The RSPB, DRD and UWT provided responses. Gary Burrows recapped on the four questions that had been circulated and summarised the responses. Damian confirmed that Marine Division would consider the responses before the next meeting. Joe Breen commented that whilst the published scheme represented a 'snapshot in time', it was a living document and could be amended as required.

Damian stated that looking back over discussions at the first three Rathlin Island EMS-MG meetings, the group is not yet looking carefully at the key management scheme actions. The group still has work to do to complete this and he indicated that he wanted the members to review each of the actions ahead of the next meeting. Damian clarified that EU management schemes are not the sole responsibility of DOE. The Chairman's responsibility is to check that DOE and the members are content with the scheme e.g. are the actions still relevant and timely? If the actions are still relevant, is the group implementing them; and if not, why not? Damian stated that his responsibility is to ask representatives for updates on work relating to the key actions and that he wanted to refocus the management group's attention on the conservation objectives and key management actions. A first attempt to do this has been made with the production of a matrix which lists the SAC and SPA features, their current status and the management actions (circulated at the meeting). If the EU audited progress with the scheme, the obvious questions would be "are the features being protected" and "are the objectives being achieved"? The Rathlin EMS-MG needs to start to formally record all actions and progress against the key objectives. Joe Breen pointed out that much work has been done but that this needed formally recorded. Damian indicated that he may bring a revised plan of actions to the next meeting, amended as a result of discussions with DOE colleagues. DOE wants to make sure that these actions are the primary focus of future meetings.

New action – Damian Campbell to arrange meeting with DOE colleagues.

5. Update on Rathlin pMCZ (Joe Breen)

Joe Breen explained that Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) are national designations, not European designations. They are the marine equivalent of ASSIs. The major difference between the designation of national and European sites is that DOE must consider social and economic interests when putting forward MCZs. If a stakeholder comes to DOE with an objection or alternative sites, we will consider those. MCZ designation is very much a stakeholder process, and DOE has held bilateral meetings and workshops all over Northern Ireland. The timing of the last MCZ workshop in Bangor unfortunately coincided with a fishing meeting.

Species listed for designation under the MCZ process are those not already listed on the EC Habitats Directive or EC Birds Directive. The list of species has been reviewed within Northern Ireland and further afield. The black guillemot is not on the EC Habitats Directive so the only way we can protect it is via a MCZ.

DOE is considering a 'black box' extension to the north of the Rathlin pMCZ, largely for 2 features – deep seabed and black guillemot. This area contains undisturbed natural seabed, partly due to the traffic separation zone. An extension to south may also go ahead, in consultation with RSPB for black guillemot. The entire boundary will be a MCZ, sub components of which are the SAC and SPA.

There is currently a voluntary fishing exclusion area to the east. Mobile gear and bottom trawling will be banned under the new legislation but no impact on pot fishing is anticipated.

Following MCZ designation activities such as powerboat racing, anchoring over seagrass, winkle picking, ship to ship transfers of fuel, survey vessels (noise impacts on cetaceans) would become regulated. Joe explained that all the MCZ papers are on the DOE Marine Division website and that he will do a talk for north coast fishermen.

John Morton asked about managing the bycatch of guillemots in pelagic trawls. Joe responded that the main changes following designation may be for boat traffic.

Anna Almeida asked whether a management scheme would be put in place for the MCZ. Joe stated that there would be a single management scheme covering the SAC, SPA and MCZ. This group will be the place to discuss management issues e.g. low wake zones within part of the MCZ.

6. Plans for investigating negative population drivers for Rathlin populations of herring gull and puffin (Neil McCulloch)

Neil McCulloch (NIEA) provided the following response to the management group.

There have been substantial declines in herring gull and puffin numbers on Rathlin Island since at least the mid 1980s. Puffin numbers are down from 2500 to 700 breeding pairs and herring gulls from 4000 to 28 pairs (2011 census). The pattern for herring gulls follows the wider UK and Ireland trends; potential factors include botulism, declines in fishery discards, reduced availability of food at landfill sites and a transition toward inland nesting. The reasons for puffin declines are more complex; whilst the general population has done well there have been substantial declines at some colonies including Rathlin Island. There is a need to establish whether the declines on Rathlin Island have been generated locally or whether there are wider issues. NIEA wants to revisit this matter under the next census. Recent numbers for puffins have been similar, so the earlier declines may have bottomed out. Herring gull numbers have increased modestly but are still low compared to numbers in the 1980s. The next census should clarify if these trends are continuing. Unfortunately the original plan for a HLF bid for a comprehensive census (coordinated by JNCC) failed and there is no coherent alternative plan yet. DOE anticipates that censuses normally undertaken by the statutory authorities will commence in 2016. The hope is to use volunteer surveyors, starting in 2017 at the latest.

There is much uncertainty but NIEA is hoping to carry out full survey of Rathlin Island in 2016 or 2017. Staff sincerely hope that the necessary funding can be secured as monitoring of SPA populations is a legal duty under the EC Birds Directive. We definitely need to investigate diet, local foraging ranges, and return rates for adults. Where declines in puffin numbers have been observed across the UK, those are often associated with declines in sandeels, but this link is less clear off west Scotland and Northern Ireland. It would be particularly useful to know what their foraging patterns are. It would be useful to fit trackers on a substantial number of birds but such research is expensive.

When the SPA designation was made, a baseline threshold was established – favourable means at least equivalent to the original baseline numbers. If the causes of declines are site based, we are required to take action. With peregrine falcon it would be very difficult to adequately address any issues as numbers are very low and fluctuating. Damian Campbell asked what the timescale was for addressing management issues. Neil responded by saying that he was not sure if there is a timescale or even that it would be realistic to address issues in a reasonable timeframe. David Quinney Mee asked what would represent a healthy number of peregrine falcons. Neil advised 4-6 breeding pairs.

Anna Almeida asked how NIEA would investigate productivity for puffins. Liam McFaul and Neil confirmed that there was no productivity data available on Rathlin Island and that it would be hard to attain. There are also issues with predation, and some puffins may be drawn to Tory Island (to an

expanding colony). Neil indicated that he would like the next census to include extra puffin surveys, undertaken at different times.

Joe Breen commented that he was concerned about continued monitoring of bird declines but not addressing the reasons for those declines. Liam asked why not start investigating the causes of declines at the same time? The issues need more cross department working e.g. does DARD have data on sand eels?

There was discussion on whether there was any understanding on the hierarchy of pressures and, specifically how to address predator control at nesting sites. Liam McFaul suggested that the only way to ensure that predators are eradicated is through legislation.

Damian commented that it was clear that central government is responsible for addressing declines in protected species. He said that the primary starting point for action is government and that we need to be clear what our obligations are and what are the difficulties that need addressed.

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

7. Monitoring Plan (Joe Breen)

Joe Breen explained that the focus, to date, has been on seabed monitoring. DOE noted damage to reefs in a 2007 survey and reported this back to the EU in the 2011 monitoring round. The issue mainly concerns boats from outside the immediate area who are not aware of the designation; hence the need for new legislation to prevent use of mobile fishing gear with Rathlin Island SAC. On Rathlin Island, damage has been done to reefs on the outer eastern side but the boulders are still there so the assumption is that by removing gear, the reefs will recover naturally; DOE will monitor the species returning as the reef habitat recovers. One of the species DOE would be looking for is a hydroid which is critical for scallops; they are all part of the same ecosystem. By protecting that area, it becomes a natural feeder for other marine life.

The last cave survey was done in 2007. The caves within Rathlin Island SAC have been identified as grey seal breeding areas; DOE is required to check that these remain suitable habitats for breeding seals and have not become closed by boulder falls, had access impeded through development etc.

Other routine monitoring includes checking for any damage to SAC features from anchorages and reefs becoming damaged as a result of mobile fishing gear.

One individual of wire weed (*Sargassum muticum*) has been located in Doon Bay. This species is typically transported by boats but in this case has been identified in an exposed location and but has the potential to out compete native seaweeds.

New 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.

Progress on Management Actions 1-12 (led by Damian Campbell)

1. Control and removal of non native predators. Damian Campbell asked for clarification on who is responsible for addressing this issue? Michael Cecil indicated that friction between some land owners and government agencies had prevented this matter from being adequately addressed.

Action – Neil McCulloch to arrange meeting with RSPB.

2. Zoning/control of recreational boat activity. Joe Breen requested that RSPB note the numbers of boats passing through the area this summer. He stated that DOE and RSPB may need to set up a standard reporting mechanism.

Action - Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to meet with Liam McFaul and John Morton.

3. Prevention of dumping of materials.

Action - Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to meet with Liam McFaul and John Morton.

4. Control of potentially disturbing activities. Damian Campbell asked for clarification on who is responsible for addressing this issue? Answer – RSPB is responsible as annual commitment.
5. Managing seal disturbance. RDCA and DOE continue to progress this action, as outlined under 'Matters arising from previous minutes'.
6. Establishing a highly protected non disturbance zone. Liam McFaul stated that he had expressed his concerns at the last meeting.

Action - Joe Breen to discuss boundaries of O'Byrne Point MCZ with Rathlin and Ballycastle fishermen.

7. Introduction of ban on mobile fishing gear.

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.

8. Prevention of destruction of wrecks. Rory McNeary outlined the DOE Marine Division's need to determine whether the '*systematic destruction of the wrecks of HMS Drake and SS Lochgarry by divers*' is a real issue rather than a perceived one, and to what extent this activity is ongoing. Once ascertained, the Marine Division can then act accordingly. The Marine Division is already considering Scheduling HMS Drake under the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects Order 1995 on account of its recognised historical importance. Relevant papers have been prepared and conversations begun with the owners, the MoD - who have no apparent objection to this move to designate. Rory will be presenting the merits of the proposed Scheduling to the Historic Monuments Council (HMC) in June in order to get their provisional support for the proposal. The designation can then be brought forward subject to ministerial approval and relevant stakeholder engagement.

Damian Campbell asked whether this management objective was still relevant and needed to be included. Rory argued that this management objective fell under the economic & social objectives of the EMS Management Scheme, i.e. ensuring the cultural integrity of the area is maintained and enhanced. Joe Breen agreed and also called for it to be retained as a management objective. The Chair agreed.

9. Increased promotion of Rathlin Island as a wildlife/ecotourism destination. This is more a RDCA action, not on for DOE. David Quinney Mee linked this to the Rathlin Island Biodiversity Action Plan.
10. Development of the Kelp House as a field centre. RDCA indicated that there is no funding for this at the moment.
11. Introduction of designated mooring zones. Update provided under 'Matters arising from previous minutes'.

8. North Coast Marine Ranger update (Gary Burrows)

Gary made a short presentation to the management group, outlining on his work as North Coast Marine Ranger. He summarised the wide range of monitoring, enforcement and outreach duties plus recent training courses, with an emphasis on work specific to Rathlin Island.

- Secretariat to Rathlin Island EMS-MG
- Development & training
- Marine Ranger patrols
- Marine wildlife response
- Outreach and education

Gary's work on providing secretariat to the management group, seal signage, ship anchorage surveys, advising on the Bull Point marine wildlife interpretation and outreach to St Mary's Primary School were highlighted.

9. AOB

There was insufficient time for AOB.

10. Date of next meeting

To be arranged.

Summary of actions

- Gareth Fullerton to provide an update to Damian Campbell by 27th April 2015 on DARD's timeframe for introduction of the new legislation.
- Joe Breen to arrange a comprehensive underwater survey of the two proposed anchorages by July 2015.
- Joe Breen to provide John Morton with charts indicating the proposed anchorages as precautionary measure.
- Gary Burrows to draft text for seal signage and present that to RDCA and DOE Marine Division.
- RDCA to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs.
- Joe Breen and Gareth Fullerton to discuss the boundaries of the O'Byrne Point proposed non disturbance zone with Rathlin Island and Ballycastle fishermen.
- RDCA to schedule evening meeting on Rathlin Island's marine features before the next Rathlin Island EMS-MG meeting.
- 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.
- Gary Burrows to produce a short leaflet on the marine wildlife of Rathlin Island.
- Damian Campbell to arrange meeting with DOE colleagues.
- Neil McCulloch to arrange a meeting between the RSPB, NIEA and DOE Marine Division (after Damian Campbell's meeting with DOE colleagues).

- 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.
- Neil McCulloch to arrange meeting with RSPB.
- Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to meet with Liam McFaul and John Morton.