

Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme
Management Group meeting – Portnagree House, Ballycastle
25th October 2016

Present:

Colin Armstrong	DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division (Chairman)
Joe Breen	DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division
Gary Burrows	DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division
Rory McNeary	DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division
Cathy Smyth	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Michael Cecil	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
David Quinney Mee	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Mary O'Driscoll	Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd.
Graham Thompson	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Richard Donaghey	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Simon Kelly	DfI Governance Policy & Resources Group
Jonathan Roberts	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Liam McFaul	RSPB, North Coast Lobster Fisherman's Association

Apologies:

Phil Davidson	National Trust
Dave Wall	Ulster Wildlife
Kenny Bodles	RSPB
Neil McCulloch	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Agenda

1. Apologies

Gary Burrows brought the apologies received.

2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (31st May 2016)

Members were content with the minutes from the May 2016 meeting.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Colin Armstrong reviewed progress on the actions from the last meeting:

1. *Rathlin Island EMS-MG minutes to be published on RDCA website. **Achieved.***
2. *Gordon Munro to provide Gary Burrows with the new link explaining the Receiver of Wrecks role. **Achieved.***
3. *Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to undertake a further assessment of the extent of marine litter via Ranger patrols. **Achieved.***
4. *Joe Breen to set up a meeting with local fishermen to establish a voluntary agreement to avoid fishing off Beirne Point. **Discussed under agenda item 5.***
5. *Susan Cramer to be invited to the next management group meeting. Susan was invited to the October meeting but was not available. There will be further opportunities to liaise regarding marine litter actions.*
6. *RDCA to engage with NI Water and consider displaying “Dirty Dozen” posters which advise on the appropriate disposal of sanitary products in guest houses, pubs, restaurants etc. Explore the possibility of having the ‘Water Bus’ visit Rathlin Island at key festivals. **Achieved.** Posters are available as downloads from NI Water website, and RDCA will discuss their placement with CCG council. The ‘Water Bus’ is too large to be accommodated by the ferry but will be considered for future festivals at Ballycastle.*
7. *DAERA to promote any EMFF funding opportunities that are relevant to addressing marine litter. Discussed later in the meeting.*
8. *Joe Breen to circulate a map of Rathlin Island’s sea caves to Liam McFaul in order to get local place names for these features. **Carried forward as Action 1.***

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

Colin Armstrong explained that to date, the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Group had largely focused on the marine environment but that it was important that members were aware of a key associated action plan.

Simon Kelly outlined that in 2010 the NI Executive introduced a *Rathlin Island Policy and Rathlin Island Action Plan 2013-2015* in recognition of the different challenges faced by island communities, and the need to address them in a different way.

<https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/development-rathlin-island-policy-and-action-plan>

A revised action plan for 2016-2020 has now been developed through consultation with RDCA, government departments, CCG council etc. Three stakeholder days were held in March and April 2016 as part of the process of developing a relevant and meaningful plan. This plan commits departments to certain actions and is overseen by a Ministerial Forum held annually. An Environment Forum had also previously met on a regular basis to discuss environmental issues on the island. However, it has not met for more than two years and the Rathlin Island EMS-MG (which includes the same representatives) has effectively taken on much of the function of the Environment Forum. The current thinking is therefore that the Environment Forum should be dissolved and its work should now continue through this Management Group.

Colin Armstrong said that whilst this group was focused on the marine environment, as any new plans or projects would have to account for the Special Area of Conservation this was the appropriate advisory forum. He asked RDCA to consider whether farmers were adequately represented on the group, especially with discussions on predator control. Joe Breen suggested inviting NIEA Regional Operations as a member so that there would be a full terrestrial link. Colin added that DAERA agricultural colleagues and CCG tourism and biodiversity interests may need representation. Michael Cecil stated that tourism promotion had been discussed at the last Environment Forum meeting and asked whether this group wished to take that on as well.

Colin advised that the Terms of Reference for the management group may need expanded and asked members if they were in agreement with the proposal. Members agreed to take on the function of the Environment Forum.

Action – Rathlin Island EMS-MG to consider the need for additional representation on the Rathlin Island EMS-MG and amendments to the Terms of Reference.

Colin Armstrong then asked the management group for an update on the key actions in the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme.

Management Action 1 - Control and removal of alien (non-native) mammalian predators, particularly land-based predators, where impact on breeding seabirds may be evident.

Discussed under agenda item 6.

Management Action 2 - Zoning/control of recreational boat activity in areas adjoining main seabird colonies during breeding season to limit risk of actual impact and disturbance to seabird rafts.

Gary Burrows relayed the update provided by Kenny Bodles (RSPB):

- 5 observation days (manned by a volunteer dedicated to surveying) were scheduled on busy weekends (bank holidays, festivals) between late June and October with volunteers also attempting to record significant boating activities when observers were not present.
- A total of 11 vessels were observed from the seabird platform: 1 fishing boat, 6 motorboats, 2 high speed RIBs, 1 yacht and 1 cruise ship (at extreme range).
- Speed was typically slow-moderate with only one incidence of a vessel (RIB) coming close to the cliffs at high speed. However, in this instance the main colony had left as it was late in the season and no disturbance to the remaining birds was observed.
- No disturbance was observed to rafting or nesting birds from the incidents recorded here.
- We recommend another survey next year with greater intensity. RSPB is exploring ways of obtaining dedicated volunteers to increase the monitoring effort for more robust results.

Colin Armstrong added that if there is evidence of disturbance, DAERA will introduce a byelaw to protect seabirds. This action will be retained until the end of next season when more substantive surveys have been completed and an informed decision can be made. No controls are to be introduced at this stage.

Action – Kenny Bodles to consider options for obtaining dedicated volunteers to extend the monitoring effort into 2017.

Management Action 3 - Signposting of Mill Bay and Rue Point to manage disturbance to seals by unleashed dogs, people throwing stones and sightseeing boats.

David Quinney Mee explained that the designers had been provided with the text and that RDCA is awaiting delivery of the signs. The signs are to be erected over the winter. Gary Burrows has supplemented this work with posters advising on seal disturbance.

Management Action 4 - Establish a highly protected non-disturbance zone off Beirne Point/Damicornis Bay (some local fishermen have already begun discussion with respect to this issue).

Discussed under agenda item 5.

Management Action 5 – The introduction of a ban on mobile fishing gear in specific areas to protect the reef feature.

Discussed under agenda item 5.

Management Action 6 – The prevention of the continued systematic destruction of the wrecks of HMS Drake and MV Loch Garry by divers unaware of the historic importance of these wrecks.

Discussed under agenda item 7.

Management Action 7 – The development of an artisanal hand gathered scallop fishery.

Discussed later in the meeting.

Management Action 8 - Promotion of Rathlin Island as a wildlife/ecotourism destination with particular emphasis on the populations of seabirds and birds of prey.

This action is met through the ongoing work of RDCA and RSPB.

Management Action 9 - Development of the Kelp House as a field centre to promote awareness and understanding of Rathlin's important ornithological communities and unique marine biodiversity.

No action at present on the development of the Kelp House. It will be developed when the time is right.

Management Action 10 – Introduction of designated mooring zone for visiting cruise ships.

Action achieved followed dive survey work by DAERA and through liaison with John Morton, as Harbour Master.

New actions on marine litter are to be considered by the management group in future meetings.

5. Rathlin Fisheries Regulations to prohibit the use of mobile gear (Colin Armstrong, DAERA)

The draft legislation is currently with the Executive for comment prior to formal approval. If approval is granted at the meeting on 1st December 2016, DAERA plans to have the legislation in place before the end of the year. The prohibition should be in place by January 2017.

An earlier delay was due to the inclusion of a proposal at Beirne Head, which had not gone properly out to consultation. That proposal needs to be consulted on with local fishermen and their representative organisations. DAERA is considering that as part of a package in early 2017 on wider

fisheries management measures. Although Liam McFaul represents North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association (NCLFA) on the management group, a face to face meeting with the association's members is needed. Liam suggested that DAERA representatives could perhaps come to their next meeting. He also offered to provide Joe Breen with the names of hobby fishermen outside NCLFA so that they could also be invited. Colin said that wider consultation with other fishing organisations would also be needed on the mobile fishing gear. Whilst towed mobile gear will be prohibited in Rathlin Island SAC, the use of sustainable pot fishing will be supported. The future development of Rathlin Island as a scallop fishery also warrants further discussion.

Action – Liam McFaul to set up a meeting with the North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association, to include discussion of the Beirne Point proposal.

John Morton suggested that recreational pot fishermen needed consulted too. Joe Breen responded that reaching recreational users of the Beirne Head area was difficult but that if monitoring of activities showed persistent damage, action could be taken. John offered to circulate a note via CCG council if one was prepared for February 2017.

6. Rathlin predator eradication programme (David Quinney Mee, RDCA)

David Quinney Mee reported on a very positive recent meeting between Rathlin farmers and a CAFRE representative where predators and pests were discussed, accounting for sensitivities around the issue. Whilst land owners must take the lead, David suggested that CCGHT may be willing to assist.

Colin Armstrong explained that another issue, not addressed in the original management scheme and not directly influencing seabirds, was geese. Farmers want control and management of geese populations where there are impacts on agricultural land. Similar geese management plans have been introduced in Fermanagh and parts of Scotland. Similar to rat eradication plans, any geese management projects need licensed by NIEA Wildlife Inspectors. As geese are already on a permitted list, it would be expected that appropriate measures should have been taken in the proper season before issuing a license to shoot geese on agricultural land. Existing powers should have been used before applying for a license for control during the closed season. There are certain sensitivities, as some people do not wish to see any management or control.

Joe Breen said that pest control had been discussed at a recent UK Chief Scientists Group meeting and that the secretary of the JNCC Chief Scientists Group, Helen Baker, was an expert on greylag geese control. She had stated that the issue was well studied and that an acceptable control measure exists. She may be willing to advise RDCA.

Michael Cecil explained that the management measures already attempted had been ineffective.

Liam McFaul and Colin Armstrong then discussed the need for a carefully considered business case, setting out why eradication or control measures are needed. The main objectives will be to eradicate rats and ferrets, and to control geese on agricultural land. RDCA needs to consider the scale of the rat, ferret and geese problems, and detail the proposed control measures. It will be necessary to demonstrate that whatever measures are proposed will not impact protected birds on Rathlin Island and to ensure that plans are safe.

Action – David Quinney Mee (RDCA) and Graham Thompson (CCGHT) to discuss the proposals for a predator eradication or control programme, and then to meet with DAERA representatives.

Colin Armstrong stated that DAERA could not finance the programme but could support development of the application proposal. There were relevant funding mechanisms such as the EU Life Programme and possibly HLF. Graham Thompson explained that CCGHT did not have any funding for it. He asked for an estimate of the total cost of the project; Colin indicated that it may be less than £1,000,000 if farmers were paid to undertake the work.

7. HMS Drake survey (Rory McNeary, DAERA)

Rory McNeary provided a presentation to the group on pre-designation survey work carried out at the *HMS Drake* site in 2016 (both side-scan sonar survey and diver-led assessment). The wreck of *HMS Drake* is of significant archaeological importance as the contained and cohesive wreck of a World War One era Drake Class armoured cruiser built by the Royal Navy as the flagship of its class. Despite obvious damage sustained, the dive team were able to discern that there remains not only a main body of wreckage in reasonable condition but intact and recognisable structural remains, such as the bow anchor. A formal designation proposal will be brought to the Historic Monuments Council (HMC) in early December and it is planned to schedule the *HMS Drake* site in 2017 in line with other commemorative activities associated with its sinking. The conservation objectives for the proposed *HMS Drake* Scheduled Area are focused around minimising loss of the marine historic asset *in situ* and minimising further deterioration of site condition due to man-made activities. Rory further updated the group on another recent survey initiative led by INFOMAR and Ulster University that collected high-resolution multi-beam over two of Rathlin's WWI wreck sites: the *Lugano* and *Santa Maria*.

Mary O'Driscoll suggested that the 2017 Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival could be used to help commemorate the sinking and to promote awareness of the scheduling of *HMS Drake* among the diving community. Rory explained that he had met recently with Seasearch divers, and there had been discussion about a Nautical Archaeological Society (NAS) training event culminating in a dive of *HMS Drake*. Joe Breen said that the INFOMAR mapping conference in Galway, the Marine Institute's Chief Executive Dr. Peter Heffernan had spoken about the fact that whilst only 5% of their budget spend was on wrecks, about 95% of the public interest in undersea mapping is on shipwrecks. One of

the projects highlighted was the WWI wreck visualisation that Rory worked on, and which included the waters around Rathlin Island. The software for this project allows users to 'navigate' over multibeam and 3D images of a wreck, helping satisfy the growing public interest in underwater heritage. Colin Armstrong asked if the diver trails in use in other parts of the UK were virtual or real; Rory explained that the norm was for trails to use a fixed shot line, which divers could descend with a laminated waterproof sheet guiding them to key points of interest. Joe said that with accurate GPS, the technology was now readily available to direct divers to specific parts of wrecks. Colin concluded the discussion by emphasising that these are all important tourism products which needed developed to bring investment to the area.

8. MCZ update, including Rathlin pMCZ (Joe Breen, DAERA)

Joe Breen informed the management group that the MCZ designation process was nearing completion, with the four new sites to be formally designated by 13th December 2016. Rathlin MCZ would be designated for its deep seabed, black guillemot and geological/geomorphological features. The proposed Rathlin MCZ boundary had been challenged by fishermen but as no additional evidence was provided to warrant an amendment, the boundary was not changed. Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data confirms that trawlers rarely operate within the proposed MCZ area; perhaps 9 hours per annum, less than 1% of the ICES area. Colin Armstrong explained that DAERA would formally write to the fishermen to explain the new designation and to invite them to a direct bilateral meeting. He emphasised that the MCZ designation primarily defines the boundary but the next step of developing management measures or regulations will require continued dialogue with the fishing industry.

9. Marine Ranger update (Gary Burrows, DAERA)

Gary Burrows provided a summary of key activities that he had been involved in since the previous management group meeting in May 2016:

- Minutes of the May 2016 meeting produced and circulated to the management group.
- DAERA marine environment exhibition at this year's maritime festival – 3rd-5th June 2016.
- 4 boat-based ranger patrols including all or part of marine waters around Rathlin Island SAC on 21st July, 26th August, 20th September and 26th September 2016. Issues investigated included possible incursions of fishing vessels within the boundary of the marine SAC.
- Additional shore-based patrols were undertaken on 29th July and 4th August 2016.
- Marine litter survey of the coast of Rathlin Island was undertaken by RIB on 21st July, with Joe Breen. Results summarised for the Management Group and will be plotted on ArcGIS in order to inform future actions.
- Assisted with two days of dive surveys on *HMS Drake* on 14th and 15th September 2016.

- At the request of RDCA and RSPB, 500 copies of the booklet '*Rathlin Island's dynamic coast and seas*' has been reprinted with new DAERA logo, and the new versions provided for online publication.
- Liaised with Kenny Bodles to arrange for the recording sheet developed for use by RSPB staff when boats are noted in proximity to seabird assemblages to be used during the summer period; meeting held with RSPB to discuss options for volunteer use of this form.
- Poster aimed at reducing disturbance to seals as a marine protected species produced and distributed to Rathlin Ferry Ltd, and RDCA for display.
- Marine invasive species posters circulated to RDCA (Michael Cecil) and CCG (John Morton) for display in harbour and marina.

10. AOB

David Quinney Mee reiterated the great asset that the maritime festival was to the management group and all the people represented on it. He thanked DAERA for its support and involvement in the festival.

David then spoke eloquently about how the sea we seek to protect locally links us with people facing tremendous challenges on other shorelines, even as a bridge down to the Mediterranean/Aegean. He talked about the difficulty of separating what we talk about in the marine management group with other conversations on the island about the refugee crisis in Lesbos.

He asked the management group whether there was anything they wanted to explore in relation to refugee concerns, in order to try and help address the crisis. Specifically, could the Rathlin Island EMS-MG do anything to support the relief efforts underway?

It was suggested that Michael Cecil could speak to the group about possible ways to engage with or support relief efforts.

Gary Burrows suggested using the maritime festival to help generate awareness and support for relief efforts, for example, by replicating the living conditions (crowded tents) that many Greek refugees are forced to endure.

Action – Michael Cecil to consider speaking to the management group about the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean/Aegean and suggest possible ways to engage with and support relief operations.

11. Date of next meeting

To be arranged for April 2017.

Summary of actions

1. Joe Breen to circulate a map of Rathlin Island's sea caves to Liam McFaul in order to get local place names for these features
2. Rathlin Island EMS-MG to consider the need for additional representation on the Rathlin Island EMS-MG and amendments to the Terms of Reference.
3. Kenny Bodles to consider options for obtaining dedicated volunteers to extend the monitoring effort into 2017.
4. Liam McFaul to set up a meeting with the North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association, to include discussion of the Beirne Point proposal.
5. David Quinney Mee (RDCA) and Graham Thompson (CCGHT) to discuss the proposals for a predator eradication or control programme, and then to meet with DAERA representatives.
6. Michael Cecil to consider speaking to the management group about the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean/Aegean and suggest possible ways to engage with and support relief operations.