

Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme

Management Group meeting – Resource Centre, Rathlin

31st May 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
Graham Thompson	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Richard Donaghey	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Michael Cecil	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Gordon Munro	HM Coastguard
Neil McCulloch	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Simon Kelly	DfI Governance Policy & Resources Group
Jonathan Roberts	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Kenny Bodles	RSPB

Apologies:

John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
David Quinney Mee	Rathlin Development & Community Association (RDCA)
Gareth Fullerton	DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division
Phil Davidson	National Trust
Dave Wall	Ulster Wildlife

Agenda

1. Apologies

Gary Burrows brought the apologies received.

2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (February 2016)

All members were content with the minutes from the last meeting.

3. Matters arising from previous minutes

Colin Armstrong reviewed progress on the actions from the last meeting. Some actions were discussed as agenda items.

- *RDCA to continue to address any land owner concerns over placement of the new signs. **Achieved.*** The RDCA now has agreement from the relevant land owner to proceed. Draft text has been produced between DAERA and RDCA.
- *RDCA to consider publishing a page on their website, providing islanders with information on the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme. **Achieved.*** A new section on the European Marine Site has been added to the RDCA website. **Action 1 – Rathlin Island EMS-MG minutes to be published on RDCA website.**
- *RDCA and RSPB to seek advice from JNCC on the EU Life application process. **Achieved.*** RPSB has been in contact with JNCC.
- *Gary Burrows to consider the issues that need communicated when scoping out marine awareness material needed for 2016. **Achieved.*** Posters will be produced on seal disturbance and marine invasive species. John Morton will assist with disseminating the messages. Discussion followed on the value of a general induction on marine wildlife and disturbance to Ballycastle NITB and Rathlin Ferry terminal staff.
- *Gary Burrows to draft a recording sheet for use by RSPB staff when boats are noted in proximity to seabird assemblages. **Achieved.*** Recording sheet produced and forwarded to RSPB.
- *DoE to remove management action 3 on the dumping of materials in areas supporting breeding seabirds. **Achieved***
- *DoE to remove management action 4 on the control of activities above nesting locations. **Achieved***
- *Gordon Munro agreed to contact the RoW and acquire new information leaflets which explain the Receiver's role. **Achieved.*** Gordon has published the new leaflets on the website and Facebook pages. **Action 2 – Gordon Munro to provide Gary Burrows with the new link explaining the Receiver of Wrecks role.**
- *Rory McNeary will acquire copies of JNAPC booklet 'Underwater Finds: Guidance for Divers' for broader circulation. **Achieved.*** Rory McNeary contacted Tim Howard (Secretary) of the Joint Nautical Policy Committee (JNAPC) re: obtaining copies of the booklet 'Underwater Finds: Guidance for Divers' (1998). There are currently no copies readily available and it remains out-of-print. This booklet is available as a downloadable pdf at <http://www.jnipc.org.uk/Underwater%20Finds%20Booklet.pdf>.
- *Susan Cramer to be invited to the next meeting to advise on effective ways to raise awareness on marine litter. **Achieved.*** Susan was invited but unable to attend. She provided an update which Colin Armstrong summarised for the management group.
- *DOE Marine Division to map litter hotspots by RIB.*

Joe Breen stated that DAERA had assessed the extent of marine litter along the east coast of Rathlin, and would undertake a second assessment during of other aspects of the island via Ranger patrols. Liam McFaul said that many lost creel and fish trays did get recovered and recycled. **Action 3 – Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to undertake a further assessment of the extent of marine litter via Ranger patrols.**

- *John Morton to arrange a meeting in Portnagree House between charter boat skippers and DoE, regarding marine protected areas and species. **Achieved.*** John Morton held a meeting in March at which Joe Breen provided a presentation on marine biodiversity and protection.
- *DoE to arrange meeting on Rathlin Island on the specifics of the MCZ consultation. **Achieved.*** Joe Breen and Stephanie Bennett travelled to Rathlin Island to meet any interested parties on Friday 4th March 2016.
- *Gary Burrows to arrange the next meeting to coincide with the Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival in May 2016. **Achieved.***

4. Formation of DAERA (Colin Armstrong, DAERA)

Colin Armstrong outlined the reduction in the number of departments following the elections. DoE and DARD have been merged to form the new Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). This amalgamation has brought conservation management and fisheries management into the one department recognising both the importance of marine conservation and a sustainable inshore fishery. Rory McNearry explained that the Historic Environment functions transferred to archaeol to the new Department for Communities (DfC). Rory's post is based in DfC but he seconded to provide DAERA with advice on the management of marine historic environment.. It is important to note that there has been no loss of function within what was DoE or DARD, only restructuring; priorities will not be agreed the Executive has set a new Programme for Government.

5. Review of the Management Scheme (Colin Armstrong, DAERA)

Colin Armstrong 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.

Michael Cecil explained that a representative from CAFRE was due to visit the island in early July to provide guidance and discuss options for an eradication programme. Michael offered to circulate the date when it was confirmed. Colin Armstrong stated that the large scale of the project was not to be underestimated; an earlier estimate of £1.3m was calculated to eradicate rats and ferrets. He said that the call for EU LIFE is out now with a (non mandatory) deadline for screening by the end of June and an actual deadline for submissions by September 2016. He explained that this proposal would fall under the EU LIFE *Traditional* project category. If a positive outcome is achieved, then applicants can consider which partner organisations have the capacity to deliver. Maxime Sizaret had indicated that CCGHT could play a part. Graham Thompson said that financial assistance would be needed as EU LIFE only pays 65% of project costs. More would be needed to manage the project, with a lot of people on the ground for baiting.

Kenny Bodles said that the RSPB is keen for the project to proceed but prefers that it is community led. He suggested a further meeting following the discussions with CAFRE. Kenny reiterated that whilst the original costings were now out-of-date, if it looked likely that the project would go ahead then RSPB could look at revised costs, perhaps as part of the actual application.

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.

Kenny Bodles said that whilst RSPB faced some resource issues it recognised the value of collecting data on boat use around seabird colonies and wished to place a volunteer on site in the short term. Joe Breen explained that boats travelling in excess of 30 knots would likely fail to detect and avoid a certain number of birds; the ideal speed appeared to be 10 knots. He highlighted the likelihood of 'false positives' in the survey, as a proportion of seabirds will naturally take flight when a puff of wind blows across the sea surface. When this coincides with boats coming through, it would be easy to wrongly attribute this to boat disturbance. A discussion followed on the need to establish an audit of boat traffic, identifying any areas of concern and the merits of using communication or a byelaw to manage any disturbance. Liam McFaul indicated that the volume of boat traffic around Bull Point was low and that the speeds of most boats were slow as operators were unfamiliar with the area.

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

Text has been prepared and land owner agreement is now in place for the placement of a sign at Mill Bay. RDCA will continue to progress this work via a Ballycastle based printing company; Gary Burrows will assist with finalising the text.

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).

Joe Breen explained that only one operator actually dived at the site and he knew not to anchor there. He briefs his divers not to touch any sponges. Liam McFaul said that in terms of fishing activity, it's mostly small pots that are set inshore there when the weather is poor to the north. Joe reaffirmed DAERA's desire to come to a voluntary agreement with fisherman to try and avoid that area, and the need to involve local fishermen in that discussion. The department had tried to establish a workable voluntary agreement with scallop boats in Rathlin Island SAC, but that was not successful and so that will now have to be regulated.

Action 4 – Joe Breen to set up a meeting with local fishermen to establish a voluntary agreement to avoid fishing off Beirne Point.

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

Colin Armstrong said that he had spoken with colleagues in DAERA Fisheries Inspectorate and that the new legislation did not get into the last term of the Environment Committee but was scheduled to go through the current 3-4 week stage. The timing depends on political priorities; it has been through the Departmental Solicitors Office. If it does not get through the current stage, then it will be tabled for September-October 2016.

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.

Rory McNeary reminded the group and any new members that although there are numerous historic shipwrecks in the EMS none currently have any statutory protection. The *Drake* and *Lochgarry* are very popular dive sites and remain vulnerable to divers with the intention of removing cultural material from them. UK policy re: historic shipwrecks supports 'preservation in-situ'. This policy approach is in direct conflict with salvage law (the Merchant Shipping Act 1995). There are still conversations happening between DAERA and DfC with regard to the proposed designation of HMS Drake in 2017 under the HMAO Order 1995. This would be in recognition of its historic and cultural importance and would mark the centenary of its sinking (1917). It would not prevent responsible diver access and

diving would not be licensable. Ad-hoc removal of material from the Drake could, however, be challenged. Rory reminded the group that it is UK policy to encourage responsible public access to all cultural heritage assets whether they are on land or in water. The *Lochgarry* wreck, although not currently a candidate for designation, is also a popular wreck dive and an important recreational asset drawing in divers from all around Ireland and the UK. Richard Lafferty of the local dive charter business *Aquaholics* has expressed his disappointment at the unchecked removal of material from the wreck. Rory updated the group on recent DAERA-led side-scan sonar survey work on some of the wrecks in the last week. Side-scan sonar imagery was captured over the wrecks of *HMS Drake*, *Lochgarry*, *Santa Maria* (off Fairhead) and the *Templemore* (off Ballycastle) – these surveys will provide archaeologists with information on present condition and inform future targeted diver surveys. Rory circulated a side-scan sonar image of the *Lochgarry* for the benefit of the group.

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

Michael Cecil said that while there was no specific update the action should be retained as an opportunity. Colin Armstrong indicated that the fishing industry would like to see nursery areas for scallops as part of an inshore strategy and that there is some scope within the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to develop these nurseries. He emphasised the need to look at opportunities to get grants in for local fishermen through this fund. As soon as it is launched, fishing groups need to see how best to get the most from this fund. If Church Bay is closed to mobile gear, it makes sense to use it as nursery. Joe Breen commented that fishermen were fishing up close to the boundary line as they were seeing the benefit of the Special Area of Conservation producing good catches (spill over) outside the protected area.

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

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.

Colin Armstrong asked about any current actions to promote the island. The 2016 Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival was highlighted as a key event; Gary Burrows and colleagues would represent DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division at the festival, helping to promote the Rathlin's exceptional marine wildlife to both islanders and visitors. The recent opening of Bull Point Lighthouse to the public by the Commissioner of Irish Lights was also brought to the attention of the management group.

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

Joe Breen stated that the UK Hydrographic Office had been provided with the positions of the new anchorages and will publish these on future charts. Whilst the Harbour Master has no direct control over where ships anchor, DAERA would like to see vessels making use of the two preferred anchorages in order to avoid maerl and seagrass. A similar approach will also be taken in the Skerries and Causeway SAC. Gordon Munro affirmed that this was a very positive initiative; HM Coastguard had observed that visiting cruise ships were using the two new anchorages. Joe Breen confirmed that the CIL vessel *Granuaile* now knows the location of the preferred anchorages.

New actions

Colin Armstrong led a wide ranging discussion on several proposed new actions to address marine litter on Rathlin Island.

He circulated a very informative *Marine Litter Briefing for Rathlin European Marine Site Management Group*, prepared by Susan Cramer (DAERA); the report contained some concerning figures. The February 2016 Marine Litter survey indicated that litter levels on Rathlin Island were the highest in Northern Ireland for a number of litter classifications which suggests that litter levels could be increasing. The results indicate relatively high levels of litter related to fishing activity, food consumption and sewage related debris. For example, in 2013 Rathlin had the highest number of pieces of string and cord < 1cm in Northern Ireland and relatively high levels of confectionary litter, plastic pieces and cotton buds. In 2014, Rathlin again had high levels of string and cord with a diameter < 1cm (the second highest in NI).

The paper queried if there was something in the nature of the island's environment that accounted for the high litter figures. A number of potential litter management issues were outlined including data, education, infrastructure and removal. Key educational proposals included engaging with NI Water and the introduction of a *Fishing for Litter* scheme. Colin Armstrong suggested that there may be an EMFF opportunity to bring the *Fishing for Litter scheme* to Rathlin and Ballycastle. Liam McFaul commented that he strongly believed that Rathlin Island catches a large proportion of litter from the mainland. He also said that there were not sufficient bins on the island.

Rory McNeary asked if cultural heritage could be captured in this initiative as a chance to record material before it was disposed of. Colin affirmed that it could be included if a protocol was developed to enable this.

The management group agreed that a new action or actions were needed on marine litter. This would warrant further discussion by the group with Susan Cramer.

Action 5 – Susan Cramer to be invited to the next management group meeting.

Action 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.

Action 7 – DAERA to promote any EMFF funding opportunities that are relevant to addressing marine litter.

6. Rathlin Fisheries Regulations to prohibit the use of mobile gear (Gareth Fullerton DAERA)

This item was discussed under the Review of Management Scheme (agenda item 5).

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

This item was discussed under the Review of Management Scheme (agenda item 5).

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

Joe Breen confirmed that the public consultation on four proposed Marine Conservation Zones (pMCZ) had been completed on 11th March 2016. Rathlin Island pMCZ had been identified on the basis of its deep seabed habitats, black guillemot, submerged lagoons and sea arches (geological/geomorphological features).

Joe also provided an update on the condition assessment for the Rathlin Island marine SAC features. These assessments are part of a six yearly statutory commitment to survey the island’s European protected features, namely reefs, sea caves and sandbanks. Assessing sea caves is relatively simple; checks are made that they are still present and have not been lost to erosion etc. Most are dry caves, but there are also underwater caves along the north coast where trapped air can kill roof species. Bernard Picton has recently surveyed a number of these caves and indicates that the three main species are still present. The sandbank features, including maerl have been surveyed recently. Using ‘citizen science’, volunteer divers are used to help survey areas that DAERA does not dive often, particularly useful when all we need to confirm is presence or absence. Reefs are in unfavourable condition, due to the impact of trawling. One species that had gone has returned through good management.

Action 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.

9. Advice on a Marine Litter Strategy for Rathlin Island (Susan Cramer, DAERA)

This item was discussed under the Review of Management Scheme (agenda item 5).

10. 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 February 2016:

- Four dedicated ranger patrols including visual observation over Rathlin Island SAC
- Three opportunistic ranger patrols whilst undertaking other duties locally
- A recording sheet has been developed for use by RSPB staff when boats are noted in proximity to seabird assemblages; meeting held with RSPB to discuss options for volunteer use of this form.
- Work has been underway to reproduce the booklet '*Rathlin Island's dynamic coast and seas*' at the request of RDCA and RSPB.
- Minutes of the February 2016 meeting produced for the management group.
- Preparations underway for a DAERA marine wildlife exhibition at this year's maritime festival.

11. AOB

Joe Breen briefly mentioned that *Sargassum* (not *Sargassum muticum*) had been picked up by the ferry and had been found in Church Bay. It does not appear to be growing locally but some occasional fragments have been found on the north coast, most likely coming from rafts floating offshore over the winter months.

12. Date of next meeting

To be arranged for September or October 2016.

Summary of actions

1. *Rathlin Island EMS-MG minutes to be published on RDCA website.*
2. *Gordon Munro to provide Gary Burrows with the new link explaining the Receiver of Wrecks role.*
3. *Joe Breen and Gary Burrows to undertake a further assessment of the extent of marine litter via Ranger patrols.*
4. *Joe Breen to set up a meeting with local fishermen to establish a voluntary agreement to avoid fishing off Beirne Point.*
5. *Susan Cramer to be invited to the next management group meeting.*

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.*
7. *DAERA to promote any EMFF funding opportunities that are relevant to addressing marine litter.*
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.*