

# **Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme - Management Group meeting**

**Richard Branson Centre, Rathlin Island**

**8<sup>th</sup> May 2017**

## **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)
Graham Thompson	Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Richard Donaghey	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
Rebecca Hunter	Ulster Wildlife
Peter Harper	RSPB
Frank Devlin	National Trust

## **Apologies:**

Mary O'Driscoll	Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd.
Neil McCulloch	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Jonathan Roberts	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Fraser McConnell	Crown Estate Commissioners

## **Agenda**

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were received from the members noted above.

## 2. Agree minutes of previous meeting (31<sup>st</sup> October 2016)

All members agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting were accurate.

## 3. Matters arising from previous minutes

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

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. **Achieved.***
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. **Action - Colin Armstrong will consider additional membership of Rathlin Island EMS-MG and speak to the group at the next meeting.***
3. *Kenny Bodles to consider options for obtaining dedicated volunteers to extend the monitoring effort into 2017. **Achieved.** Colin Armstrong asked the RSPB whether they felt it was necessary to introduce management measures to reduce bird disturbance around Bull Point. Kenny Bodles explained that it was evident from the 2016 trial that the data was not sufficiently robust to make that assessment, but that there were concerns about staff capacity. There were early indications that some boat activity may disturb, with one vessel late in the season approaching close to the cliffs beneath the seabird centre. During the summer of 2017, 10 days monitoring of bird-boat interactions will be undertaken between mid-June and August, with additional measures in place to record incidents during the week where resources allow.*
4. *Liam McFaul to set up a meeting with the North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association, to include discussion of the Beirne Point proposal. **Discussed under agenda item 4.***
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. **Discussed under agenda item 5.***
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. **Discussed under agenda item 7.***

Colin Armstrong also asked the RDCA for an update on the production of seal signage. David Quinney Mee said that the sign was not in place as there was an issue with planning permission. The foreshore at Mill Bay is within an ASSI and may require a statement from NIEA to state that it has no concerns. Simon Kelly advised that signage may qualify as permitted development but only up to a certain size.

Colin Armstrong also said that since the October 2016 meeting, the paperwork on the proposed scheduling of *HMS Drake* had been completed.

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

Colin Armstrong introduced the update by emphasising the additional importance now being given to the European Site management plans. When the previous Executive had consulted on a Programme for Government (PfG), it was evident that there was a move toward an outcome-based approach. Outcome two is: '*We live and work sustainably, protecting the environment*'. For European protected sites, areas are considered well protected when the habitats and species which underpin their designation are in favourable condition, with the risks to their status being effectively managed.

The Executive will now ask for quarterly updates on progress toward achieving this outcome. Colin explained that the introduction of designated anchorages and new fisheries measures to control the use of mobile fishing gear (January 2017) within Rathlin Island Special Area of Conservation (SAC), are cited as examples of the success of this management group. What was at one time a voluntary agreement to avoid using mobile fishing gear within the protected boundary has become mandatory in legislation. Colin stated that the group would now focus its efforts on introducing effective predator control. Stakeholders are engaged and understand the importance of the group; its work is valued and is now getting higher profile. A natural environment brings income to the island and contributes to society's wellbeing; the importance of mental health is now better recognised and is a high level government target.

The proposal for a hand gathered fishery at Beirne Head has not, to date, being given much emphasis but the time is now right to promote sustainable fishing (pot fishing, aquaculture etc.) under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). Colin proposed opening a discussion with NIFPO regarding the fishing actions on the management plan.

**Action – DAERA Marine & Fisheries to speak to NIFPO regarding the promotion of sustainable fishing around Rathlin Island.**

## **5. Rathlin Predator Eradication Programme and Geese Management Plan (Richard Donaghy, CCGHT)**

Colin Armstrong confirmed that CCGHT had been resourced to work on the predator control programme through the DAERA NIEA Challenge Fund.

Richard Donaghy explained that £12,000 had been used to update aspects of the original plan (legislation on traps, current costings etc.), however, the methodology remained the same. CCGHT has been able to dispel islander's concerns that the programme would result in many dead rats lying around the island and also address biosecurity issues. He confirmed that traps would not be used in gardens but set in discrete areas. The results from the Lundy Island case study had been of great assistance.

CCGHT has also employed *Allen and Mellon Environmental* to undertake a greylag geese study and to work with land owners to ascertain the main issues. The main outcome will be a further one year study to grasp the population size and migrations of these birds within the context of populations from Islay,

Colonsay and Inishowen. Richard also confirmed that CCGHT had undertaken a consultation in partnership with the RDCA using more than 100 questionnaires sent to land owners, houses, farms and holiday homes on Rathlin Island. Most responses were very encouraging and the majority of large land owners responded.

Peter Harper advised that the LIFE project was open for applications until June 2017 and would fund 75% of project costs. The prospective cost for the rats and ferrets eradication programme may be c. £1.6 million but could be reduced by accounting for existing staff time and machinery. The cost of the geese management work may be c. £15,000. He asked if the proposed work had the full support of the islanders.

David Quinney Mee confirmed that significant progress had been made and that the sole opposition was from an individual house owner. A number of people who had been previously opposed now support the proposal and are keen for the project to progress. He qualified his comments by stating that there was a proviso from some respondents that they be kept informed of developments.

Kenny Bodles commented that he was surprised that there was not 100% support for the proposals and asked how the concerns of this person may be accommodated. Richard Donaghy said that the operational aspects of the work could exclude that person's household. Frank Devlin asked CCGHT if it was confident that all land owners had been consulted. Richard said that only two consultees had not responded, one of which was Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. Colin Armstrong explained that one of the conditions of the LIFE application process was that access agreements with land owners needed to be in place. Peter Harper stated that it was very encouraging to hear the positive feedback and that the RSPB was fully behind the proposals and would support them in any way it could. However, he reiterated the importance of having 100% support from islanders before proceeding. Kenny Bodles asked whether it was possible to send the relevant paperwork to the resident with concerns to inform that person's final decision. Colin Armstrong advised that the appropriate approach was best left to the judgement of the RDCA.

**Action – RDCA to liaise with the final respondent regarding their concerns over the predator control programme.**

Colin Armstrong asked whether CCGHT was able to help the management group through the application process, as time was running short to apply before the closing date. He asked if RSPB had similar access agreements and could advise on those aspects of the application. Peter Harper confirmed that if there was full community support, RSPB would provide full support. Colin said that the time put in by the Rathlin Island EMS-MG would contribute as match funding. His recommendation was to make an application to the LIFE project for environmental management of the seabird populations on Rathlin Island, the main action of which would be the rat and ferret eradication programme. The staff time outlined in discussions may reduce the 25% match funding allocation. Rebecca Hunter advised that the 25% portion may need to be solely financial; she offered to check the rules on in-kind contributions. Joe Breen spoke about his attendance at a LIFE application workshop, and the lessons

learned there regarding failed applications e.g. incomplete application forms. Rebecca explained that Ulster Wildlife had an application underway and that the process was rigorous and need completed very carefully. She said that JNCC had published a draft application form online and would scope out applications in advance.

Colin Armstrong said that funding had run out for the geese management plan but that he would ascertain if the DAERA Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) or Rural Affairs grants may be possible alternative sources of funding. Liam McFaul asked whether a lack of funding for the geese management study could jeopardise the wider project. Richard Donaghy stated that some farmers see the control of geese as a larger issue than rat and ferret management. Colin reiterated his commitment to source funding for a full 12 month study to start before next year's breeding season. Michael Cecil commented that as long as there is a commitment from the islanders to allow access, the timing of the geese management project is less critical. David Quinney Mee said that it had been noted, and valued, that the RSPB has remained supportive whilst being sensitive to early discussions. Colin closed this discussion by thanking all the parties involved for their hard work in progressing predator control on the island.

**Action – Colin Armstrong to discuss alternative sources of funding for the geese management plan with DAERA colleagues.**

## **6. Marine Ranger update (Gary Burrows, DAERA)**

Gary outlined some of the key Marine Ranger outputs in relation to Rathlin Island since the October 2016 meeting, explaining that this work took place in the context of a wider programme of monitoring and engagement between Belfast Lough and Lough Foyle:

- Prepared and circulated the minutes from the October 2016 Management Group meeting. Arranged the May 2017 meeting.
- Two boat-based patrols to Rathlin Island, in conjunction with site visits by Marine Licensing and Marine Conservation colleagues regulating the development of the new harbour. Patrols were undertaken on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2017 and 30<sup>th</sup> March 2017. No incursions into the SAC boundary or anchoring by vessels in areas of sensitive seabed habitats were observed; no other issues of concern noted.
- Four land-based patrols along the Antrim coast road toward Belfast Lough included monitoring toward Rathlin Island SAC/SPA/MCZ. Patrols were undertaken on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016, 24<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017 and 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017. No incursions into the SAC boundary or anchoring by vessels in areas of sensitive seabed habitats were observed; no other issues of concern noted.
- Opportunistic monitoring toward the east side of Rathlin Island SAC/SPA/MCZ was undertaken from Torr Head during monthly cetacean surveys on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016, 29<sup>th</sup> November 2016, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016, 19<sup>th</sup> January 2017, 21<sup>st</sup> February, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2017 and 19<sup>th</sup> April 2017. No incursions

into the SAC boundary or anchoring by vessels in areas of sensitive seabed habitats were observed; no other issues of concern noted.

- Evening presentation on '*The Marine Treasures of Rathlin Island*' was made to the RSPB Antrim Local Group on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2016.
- Presentation to 100 UUC students on '*Marine Conservation Management in Northern Ireland*', including promotion and discussion of Rathlin Island SAC/SPA/MCZ on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2017.
- Joe Breen and Gary Burrows supplied Corish Productions with video of the underwater marine environment around Rathlin Island, as part of their contribution to five promotional seascape videos which CCGHT is producing for the Causeway Coastal Route area.
- Article in the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) Marine Litter Report (2016) on the Rathlin Site Management Plan and the July 2016 boat-based marine litter survey of Rathlin Island. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/litter-beaches-northern-ireland-2014>

## **7. Update on refugee work in Mediterranean/Aegean (Michael Cecil, RDCA)**

Michael Cecil spoke to the management group about his ongoing work with refugees in the Mediterranean/Aegean, showing three videos to illustrate the extent of the crisis in the region.

He introduced the videos by explaining that he had been involved in relief work near Lesbos since 2016. Following conversations with others already working there, flights had been booked for his first visit as a relief worker. There were no tides in the local area but strong winds and challenging shore conditions. Up to 8000 refugees were arriving per day with no formal government response at the time and NGOs leading the relief work. Most boats were small (30 feet) and of poor quality, their operators generally having no training.

The first video showed that there was much activity at night. Refugees arriving ashore in Turkey tend not to end up in camps due to protracted bureaucracy; people often end their journeys by camping in fields. With c. 500,000 refugees arriving in up to 8000 boats, there is also an environmental impact. Michael explained that he was due to return in June 2017 as the rescue boat was in constant need of skippers and crew. Thousands of refugees were arriving daily from the Middle East, often suffering hypothermia. They feared becoming lost at sea or tear gassed at the borders but through desperation, they are forced to make the hazardous crossings. Though traumatised by the long and arduous journey, making landfall does not signal the end of their hardship as many will be forced to spend several more weeks trying to travel across Europe.

Responders will often be the first people that refugees meet. Michael worked as part of a team of six people using a donated ex-RNLI lifeboat. Major changes came in 2016 as European countries took measures to control their borders more rigorously reducing the numbers of people attempting crossings. However, this had the effect of making journeys more hazardous as refugees opted to travel with

smugglers, often at gunpoint. In one incident, Michael's team helped by recovering bodies from a sunken boat.

The second video considered the issues of paranoia and xenophobia, and followed a New York resident who travelled to Greece to help with relief work and to see *"if the refugees are as undesirable as they say"*. It showed how smugglers abused the vulnerable and yet *"Europe doesn't want them."* It focused on refugees from Syria and highlighted the policies of the American Senate to prevent Syrian refugees from entering the USA.

In the final video, *'Mo Chara in Action'*, the work of the Lighthouse Charity and Proactiva is profiled. It showed vessels assisting refugees landing at Skala, Greece.

David Quinney Mee provided some closing thoughts, commenting that whilst Michael's presentation was very different to the usual maritime business of the group, when we view the sea as a bridge rather than an obstacle, we realise that we are all linked. There are certainly environmental issues but more critically, we need to consider our human response when so many vulnerable people need rescued off the rocks. He compared our risk assessments to the intricate boat operations to rescue refugees. He added that whilst the care that Liam and others give to seabirds is appropriate, we all need to think about our personal and collective response to those in need.

## **8. AOB**

### **Rathlin Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ)**

Colin Armstrong stated that at the time of the last meeting (October 2016), the Rathlin Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ) had not yet been designated. It is now designated and DAERA is scoping out fisheries management measures that will be needed as part of the overall management of the MCZ e.g. stakeholder consultation for mobile fishing gear to the north of Rathlin Island. Similar measures will be considered for the other Northern Ireland MCZs.

### **Ferret damage to puffin colony**

Liam McFaul presented photographs showing damage to seabird colonies on a stack close to West Light, Rathlin Island in April 2017. A single ferret managed to access the main puffin breeding colony and killed a minimum of 15 puffins within two days; there were probably many more dead birds unaccounted for. All the seabirds killed were puffins; there were no razorbills or kittiwakes. The ferret could not have swum to the stack so must have come down from above, possibly having fallen down the cliff. It was noticed by a member of the public who saw it emerge from a burrow among the puffins. The stack was approached by boat and eight traps set, successfully catching the ferret on the second day; it was a male, weighing 1.6kg. This case provided compelling evidence of the significant damage to bird populations that a single ferret can do when controls are not in place.



Dead ferret with puffin remains, April 2017. Photo credit: Liam McFaul.

### **Dark Skies project**

David Quinney Mee and Michael Cecil explained that this project has been discussed since a RDCA visit to the Isle of Coll (Inner Hebrides). Dark Sky Discovery Sites are a nationwide network of places that provide great views and which are accessible to everyone. They have been nominated by local groups and organisations as their top local spot to see the stars.

David indicated that the application process was challenging. If applying for status as a Dark Sky Discovery Site, the location would need to be secure, risk assessed and have disability access. Kebble Cottage car park may be suitable as a place where people could observe the night sky. RDCA has no funding to apply for this at the moment.

The second more rigorous application is for International Dark Sky Places designations – these include Communities, Parks, Reserves or Sanctuaries. This would require, at the very least, an audit of light levels and anything that may need planning permission. Applying for the international designations would need more human resources but may be an easier process.

Liam McFaul explained that the ground behind the RSPB West Light Seabird Centre had a 360° view of the sky. The RDCA had spoken to Armagh Planetarium in the past but had received a limited response to date. Graham Thompson suggested that if there was a strong interest from the



management group, that might elicit a better response. David added that the Commissioners of Irish Lights planned to change the lighting at East Light.

**Action – Michael Cecil to speak with Tracy Platt (NIEA) about the potential availability of the Kebble Cottage site as a Dark Sky Discovery Site.**

## **9. Date of next meeting**

To be arranged for October/November 2017.

## **Summary of actions**

1. Colin Armstrong will consider additional membership of Rathlin Island EMS-MG and speak to the group at the next meeting.
2. DAERA Marine & Fisheries to speak to NIFPO regarding the promotion of sustainable fishing around Rathlin Island.
3. RDCA to liaise with the final respondent regarding their concerns over the predator control programme.
4. Colin Armstrong to discuss alternative sources of funding for the geese management plan with DAERA colleagues.
5. Michael Cecil to speak with Tracy Platt (NIEA) about the potential availability of the Kebble Cottage site as a Dark Sky Discovery Site.