

# **Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environment Forum**

## **Portnagree House, Ballycastle**

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017, 10:30**

### **Present:**

Colin Armstrong	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Chairman)
Gary Burrows	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division (Secretariat)
Joe Breen	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Rory McNeary	DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division
Cathy Smyth	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Graeme Campbell	DAERA Food and Farming
John Early	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (Regional Operations)
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
Dave Wall	Ulster Wildlife
Frank Devlin	National Trust
Michael McConaghy	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Jonathan Roberts	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
John Morton	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council
Jeff Hobson	HM Coastguard

### **Apologies:**

Mary O'Driscoll	Rathlin Island Ferry Ltd.
Neil McCulloch	DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Rebecca Hunter	Ulster Wildlife
Bob McMullan	North Coast Lobster Fishermen's Association
Mathew Tickner	RSPB

# Agenda

## 1. Introductions and apologies

This was the first meeting that brought together members of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Group and representatives of the dissolved Rathlin Island Environment Forum. The new expanded group will be known as the 'Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environment Forum'.

Colin Armstrong welcomed everyone, especially new members of the management group. Introductions were made and individuals explained their roles in relation to the management of Rathlin Island's environment.

Of particular note, Rory McNeary, Marine Archaeologist with DAERA Marine & Fisheries Division, outlined his expanded remit.

In his present role, Rory works closely with DfC Historic Environment Division and relevant stakeholders, to ensure significant marine heritage sites in Northern Ireland territorial waters are managed and protected through planning, licensing, designation, strategic investigation and the implementation of appropriate policy and guidance. Rory's involvement with the Management Forum has, to date, been focused on the management objective relating to reducing perceived negative impacts on submerged cultural heritage resources, such as *HMS Drake* and *MV Lochgarry*. He led on the statutory designation of the *HMS Drake* site as a historic monument in 2017. Given the wider remit of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environment Forum, he will now be the representative for all historic environment and cultural heritage matters, reporting back to DfC Historic Environment Division on cross-cutting issues and opportunities relating to the terrestrial historic environment.

Apologies are noted above.

## 2. Declarations of interest

Colin Armstrong asked members to declare any personal interests. None were declared.

## 3. Agree minutes of previous meeting (8<sup>th</sup> May 2017)

Graham Thompson requested that a minor correction be made to the section on the Dark Skies project. Gary Burrows agreed to amend the minutes accordingly.

Otherwise, members agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting were accurate.

#### **4. Matters arising from previous minutes**

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

1. Colin Armstrong will consider additional membership of Rathlin Island EMS-MG and speak to the group at the next meeting. **Completed.**
2. DAERA Marine and Fisheries to speak to NIFPO regarding the promotion of sustainable fishing around Rathlin Island. **Colin Armstrong advised that this discussion would take place in 2018.**
3. RDCA to liaise with the final respondent regarding their concerns over the predator control programme. **Completed.**
4. Colin Armstrong to discuss alternative sources of funding for the geese management plan with DAERA colleagues. **Discussed under agenda item 6.1**
5. Michael Cecil to speak with Tracy Platt (NIEA) about the potential availability of the Kebble Cottage site as a Dark Sky Discovery Site. **Completed. Michael Cecil had contacted Tracy Platt and initiated a discussion about its availability. He will continue to liaise with NIEA Regional Operations to explore potential access to the cottage for stargazing events.**

#### **5. Revised Terms of Reference**

Colin Armstrong provided the background to the amalgamation of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Group with the Rathlin Island Environment Forum. He explained that there is a Rathlin Island Policy and Action Plan, published on behalf of the Executive in March 2010 and overseen by a Ministerial Forum. As part of its delivery, there had been an Environmental Forum, however, it had not met for 18 months. When consulting on the Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016-2020, stakeholders pointed to the European Marine Site management group and suggested merging the two groups. Electronic copies of the Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme and Rathlin Island Policy and Action Plan were circulated to members prior to the meeting.

Gary Burrows circulated the draft Terms of Reference for the Rathlin Island European Marine Site and Environment Forum. Colin Armstrong asked members to identify any omissions. All members were content and accepted the new Terms of Reference.

Colin Armstrong confirmed that DAERA Marine & Fisheries would be providing regular updates to the Ministerial Forum, currently chaired by the DfI Permanent Secretary. The forum last met in October 2017.

#### **6. Update on Rathlin Island European Marine Site management scheme actions (Colin Armstrong, DAERA)**

Colin Armstrong explained to new members that there is typically an update on progress against each of the management scheme actions at each meeting. The last comprehensive review took place in February 2016.

A summary sheet was circulated to the management group showing the twelve actions currently underway and several new actions to take forward.

Discussion first took place on two key management scheme actions (as main agenda items) - predator control and the disturbance of seabirds – before seeking updates on the wider actions.

### **6.1. Rathlin predator eradication programme and geese management plan (Richard Donaghy, CCGHT)**

Colin Armstrong informed members that since the last meeting, a predator control sub-group involving RDCA, CCGHT, RSPB, DAERA NIEA, and DfI had met to take this work forward. Considerable work had gone into preparing the funding application to the EU LIFE Programme for an eradication programme for black rats and ferrets from Rathlin Island. However, the sub-group had agreed to delay the application to the September 2018 submission deadline in order to fine tune costs and improve the likelihood of a successful application. Members would now need to look closely at this work again. He invited suggestions on how best to progress this application.

Richard Donaghy commented that the estimated eradication costs of £1.6 million and administration costs of £300,000 needed to be reduced; EU LIFE is funded at 60% of total project costs and it would be difficult to source match funding to that value. In particular, the project management costs needed to be cut back in order to secure match funding. Colin Armstrong asked if there was any further update on the one person who had raised concerns in their questionnaire response. Michael Cecil explained that an offer had been made to meet and discuss those concerns but that offer had not been taken up. Richard Donaghy reaffirmed that the respondent supported the overall aims of the project but not the costs involved. The person was now content to leave the matter.

Colin Armstrong said that the group would need to confirm the submission date for the 2018 EU LIFE Programme. He suggested that Heritage Lottery Funding should also be considered but that whichever funding mechanism was applied for, we would need to be confident that the costs are as low as possible whilst delivering an effective eradication programme for Rathlin Island. Graham Thompson advised that there were two key issues to be addressed with the current application: 1) the substantial funding gap, and 2) the extent to which the proposal itself meets the EU LIFE application criteria. He advised that more 'balancing work' would be required to develop an application that was likely to succeed. Colin Armstrong asked whether CCG council may be able to assist. Michael McConaghy said that the council could partner with others in the application but was unlikely to be able to contribute financially. John Early mentioned that in similar projects in Scotland, project

organisations had successfully partnered with student apprenticeship providers to help keep the labour costs low. Colin Armstrong asked that the project sub-group, including CCG Council (assisting on biosecurity elements), meets together soon to check that all possible funding avenues have been fully explored.

Colin Armstrong concluded by thanking all those who had put in so much effort to progress this important work. He emphasised the value of the early 'ground work' on the application and the substantial benefits that could result from a successful application for significant funding. Graham Thompson explained that it is often the case that first applications to the EU LIFE Programme are not successful but that the group needed to work hard to make the application as robust as possible. Kenny Bodles extended the appreciation of the RSPB to DAERA and all the subgroup members for the collective effort put into making the application as likely to succeed as possible. He commented that he and Liam McFaul were also working on producing a biosecurity plan for Rathlin Island and that it may provide an opportunity to further reduce the costs of the project. Liam McFaul said that a biosecurity plan had to be in place as an important part of the overall predator control programme. Colin Armstrong said that there was an EU LIFE funding application being made for a UK-wide biosecurity plan for islands, and that this included Rathlin Island as a candidate area. He asked Kenny Bodles to confirm when the RSPB work on a biosecurity plan for the island was likely to be completed.

**Action – Colin Armstrong to convene a meeting of the predator control subgroup by mid December 2017.**

**Action – Kenny Bodles to advise the predator control subgroup when the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan would be completed.**

## **6.2. Seabird and bottlenose dolphin disturbance (Colin Armstrong, Gary Burrows)**

Colin Armstrong outlined that a zoning area for monitoring seabird disturbance around the West Light, Rathlin Island, had been agreed in 2016 ahead of a trial monitoring period and that DAERA now had the results of the more extensive monitoring project undertaken in summer 2017. DAERA also received one formal complaint of disturbance of bottlenose dolphins that had been investigated and action taken. He confirmed that there is level of concern about wildlife disturbance around Rathlin Island. Consideration needs given on whether effective management of disturbance could be delivered through advice and enhanced monitoring (evidence gathering) rather than through introducing a byelaw.

Gary Burrows provided a summary of the key results of the 2017 project to monitor boat-seabird interactions around Rathlin Island SAC/SPA/MCZ:

- Monitoring was undertaken from 17<sup>th</sup> June - 12<sup>th</sup> August, intended to coincide with the peak breeding season.
- 10 full days monitoring were completed by dedicated volunteers who visited the island to observe boat – seabird interactions from the seabird centre at the West Lighthouse and record the level of disturbance observed.
- 21 vessels were observed from the seabird platform of which 8 vessels were observed to cause disturbance to seabirds.
- Speed was typically slow-moderate in a vicinity of the seabird colony beneath the seabird centre; however, a number of incidents were observed when vessels exited the area at high speed, despite a slow approach.
- Observable disturbance was seen to be made to loafing birds in the form of scattering on the surface, taking flight or diving to escape.
- A full record of each observation was recorded, including date, time, observer, boat details (type, speed, vessel movement), bird behaviour (species, comment on response) and observed impact.
- Four RIBs and three hard hulled vessels were involved in the disturbance.
- Kittiwakes, razorbills, guillemots and various gull species were disturbed.

Colin Armstrong stated that whilst no injuries were evident, the boat handling observed was not ideal and disturbance was an issue to be addressed. DAERA colleagues had met with the RSPB to discuss management options; whilst the Department could introduce an emergency byelaw, this would create issues with enforcement. DAERA has written and met with the RIB cruise organisers to discuss disturbance and to advise on best practice as set out in the WiSe Scheme [www.wisescheme.org](http://www.wisescheme.org) and the RYA Green Blue guidance [www.thegreenblue.org.uk](http://www.thegreenblue.org.uk). Recognising that the majority of boat users are considerate and that disturbance is mostly an issue of ignorance, he asked the management forum how best to raise awareness and whether there were issues at other coastal areas, such as Sheep Island and the Skerries. John Morton said that it was definitely possible to engage with local and visiting boat users. He cited the presence of 250 boats in CCG area, with over 1000 vessels visiting the area and 310 boats using the harbour on Rathlin Island. The vast majority access the area through the North Channel. He confirmed that CCG could distribute information and posters, and facilitate engagement by DAERA with local users via its schedule of boat owner and charter operator meetings (presentation or literature). Colin Armstrong commented that these meetings would be a very useful platform for promoting the WiSe Scheme and RYA Green Blue. He suggested a face-to-face event with a short informal presentation highlighting local marine protected areas and best practice would be the most effective approach, with group engagement facilitated by John Morton.

Joe Breen stated that it was important that marine protected areas were clearly identified for stakeholders. Frank Devlin commented that the National Trust view was that wildlife disturbance was increasing with the growing appetite to view the coast from the boats, coupled with growing tourism. He highlighted the higher frequency of vessels operating around Carrick-a-rede and the Giant's Causeway, in addition to the impact of private and commercial helicopters sight-seeing from the air.

He agreed that there was a definite need to raise awareness of disturbance. Michael Cecil asked whether there was scope for some awareness raising on the Scottish coast where some of the boats were based. John Morton stated that CCG had good quality statistics on where visiting boats come from and that the council was mapping this data. He advised that information on wildlife disturbance could be targeted to those areas ahead of the cruising season. Colin Armstrong stated that this would also be an opportunity to promote tourism whilst raising awareness. Liam McFaul highlighted the increasing use of drones over seabird colonies by users who were not aware of the environmental regulations. He said that this had been an issue in the 2017 summer season although not as significant when undertaken by media companies. Dave Wall advised that the impact of drones on birds needs outlining to users, suggesting that people admire scenes of birds taking flight but do not understand that the behaviour seen may actually be disturbance. Kenny Bodles stated the RSPB had a policy on drones under development, essentially prohibiting their use unless expressly permitted. Frank Devlin confirmed that whilst the National Trust had a policy on drone usage, it was not always effective as operators often simply move to an adjacent area.

Colin Armstrong concluded the discussion by stating that it was the disturbance offence itself that needed to be made clear to the public. In terms of best practice by boat users, DAERA would direct people to the WiSe Scheme and RYA Green Blue guidance. Dave Wall reiterated the need to provide the public with maps showing protected areas along with literature, and to consider the content of the RSPB policy on drone usage. Colin Armstrong confirmed that as the management forum was in agreement not to introduce a byelaw at this stage, DAERA would produce a map showing the most sensitive marine protected areas. Kenny Bodles asked for the draft literature to be circulated to the forum for consultation, and requested further discussion with DAERA regarding future monitoring of boat and seabird interactions. Richard Donaghey asked if DAERA had any concerns about the use of chum to attract seabirds to boats. Colin Armstrong agreed to take advice from NIEA on the issue.

**Action – Gary Burrows to draft literature and maps on sensitive marine protected areas, and circulate to the management forum for consultation.**

**Action – DAERA and RSPB to discuss resourcing of any future monitoring of boat and seabird interactions.**

**Action – Neil McCulloch to advise on any concerns that NIEA has on the use of chumming to attract seabirds to vessels.**

Colin Armstrong then progressed to the wider management actions, asking for updates from the forum.

Management action 9 (Development of kelp house as field centre) – Michael Cecil advised that this was still an option and should be retained as an action.

New management actions introduced in February 2016 – three new actions on marine litter. Colin Armstrong asked for an update on any new initiatives to address marine litter. Michael Cecil explained that the beach cleans were being undertaken twice yearly and that the accessible areas are now relatively clean with fewer plastic bottles littering the shore. Dave Wall said that Ulster Wildlife would be introducing the ‘2 min beach clean’ initiative to Rathlin Island and providing bags. Grants are available for this project from Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB). Michael Cecil said that accessible areas are now relatively clean. Dave Wall commented that UK statistics on coastal litter did not support that view. Colin Armstrong asked how an ‘extreme clean’ for problem areas on Rathlin Island would be arranged. Dave Wall advised that Ulster Wildlife would take the lead and may enlist the assistance of locals with boat handling skills e.g. Robin Ruddock. Joe Breen advised that DAERA Marine & Fisheries had mapped the most heavily littered coastal areas from sea. Michael Cecil suggested that the council may be able to fund some clean ups. John Morton confirmed that the council had provided reception facilities for earlier litter cleans.

**Action – Dave Wall to lead on a Rathlin Island ‘Extreme Clean’ litter and to contact CCG council.**

**Action - Gary Burrows to send coastal litter hotspots mapped by DAERA to Dave Wall.**

New management action - Monitor the extent and impact of *Sargassum muticum* and consider appropriate management. Joe Breen commented that monitoring was ongoing and that the indications were that this invasive weed was not spreading.

## **7. Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016-2020**

Simon Kelly explained that the Rathlin Island Action Plan 2016-2020 was published in September 2016 and contained high level actions for councils. It will be underpinned by an implementation plan, the draft of which had been consulted on with the Rathlin Island community and relevant departments. Colin Armstrong circulated a paper (*Theme: Environment – Agriculture & Aquaculture*) to the management forum which summarised an excerpt from the implementation plan following three days of consultation with islanders. Michael Cecil emphasised that the excerpt only considered the environmental themes.

Colin Armstrong advised that progress would be checked against these actions in future meetings, to avoid any duplication of effort. The plan included an action to assist land owners in seeking effective methods to control pests and invasive species. He confirmed that since the last meeting he had spoken with Herbie Jones (DAERA Food and Farming, EU Area Based Schemes) about how land is typically managed in order to support farmers undertaking pest control. A new Environmental Management Scheme (EMS), launching in February 2018, would cover three discrete management levels: 1) High level catchment areas; Rathlin could be considered as one catchment area. 2)

Agricultural land within designated areas. 3) Undesignated agricultural land. He affirmed that DAERA would look again to see how it could best support farmers in their applications to the scheme.

Liam McFaul explained that some farmers, whose applications had been successful under previous schemes, had been declined under the new EMS scheme and it was important to check that Rathlin Island qualified for inclusion. Colin Armstrong advised that there were many ways that farmers improved wildlife on their land and that we could help them improve their applications by directing them to the environmental priorities. Frank Devlin commented that it may be difficult for Rathlin Island to meet the application criteria under new EMS scheme. Graham Thompson outlined a very useful Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) pilot project in the Glens which had been established to look at how to promote sustainable management and economically assist farmers. The CCGHT had worked with farmers in the Glendun area on diversification, tourism activities and water catchment areas. The initiative had been limited to a local area but is now being extended to consider wider areas and Rathlin Island would be an ideal area. Colin Armstrong agreed, commenting that as Northern Ireland's only inhabited island, the Rathlin Island Policy had identified it as a distinctive catchment area which required an adaptive approach. Any future funding applications should draw on that distinctive status; the management forum needs to consider how best to help farmers reflect that in their applications.

David Quinney Mee said that Réamaí Mathers (CCGHT) had been very keen to present to Rathlin farmers what the Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) meant, however, Rathlin Island was not included in the scheme. Graham Thompson advised that the current scheme would close in spring 2019 and that CCGHT would consider its legacy and how best to build on it. HLF had advised that Rathlin Island was not suitable for LPS due to its small area.

Colin Armstrong highlighted additional actions within the Environment theme, including actions on Aesthetics, Energy and Environmental Research.

John Morton asked which CCG council staff were involved in the Rathlin Island Action Plan. Michael McConaghy confirmed that Elizabeth Beattie, Moira Quinn and David Jackson (CCG Chief Executive) had been invited to engage with the plan. John Morton stated the importance of direct engagement with the aesthetics action in relation to the appearance of harbours and marinas.

Colin Armstrong concluded by advising that a project that contributed to several actions would constitute a strong EMS application. Michael Cecil asked who was best placed to explore the failings in EMS applications. Graeme Campbell expressed his surprise that some farmers' applications had been turned down. He agreed to visit Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful applications. Liam McFaul emphasised that the principle of EMS is to strengthen environmental protection. Frank Devlin advised that overall c. 950 applications were made in the first tranche, but only 450 were approved to proceed to the next stage. Whilst the high level part of the scheme was well subscribed, applications in relation to undesignated agricultural land had been undersubscribed. Cathy Smyth said that the issue may relate to the level of stakeholder engagement.

**Action – Graeme Campbell to visit farmers on Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful EMS applications.**

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

Gary Burrows outlined some of the key Marine Ranger outputs in relation to Rathlin Island from May – November 2017. For the benefit of new members, it was explained that this work took place in the context of a wider programme of monitoring and engagement between Belfast Lough and Lough Foyle.

- Providing the Secretariat to the Management Forum
- 14 Marine Ranger patrols between Belfast Lough and Lough Foyle.
- 7 shore-based patrols that monitored sea area to the south, west and east of Rathlin Island MPA, from Portaneevy – Torr Head.
- 3 dedicated patrols on Rathlin, using DAERA Marine & Fisheries quad bike. Patrols undertaken on Fridays to provide a high visible presence coinciding with high visitor numbers.
- No incursions into Rathlin Island MPA by fishing vessels using mobile gear observed or reported.
- Management advice and action in relation to August 2017 cetacean disturbance incident.
- Management of minor seal disturbance at Rue Point on 31<sup>st</sup> May and 28<sup>th</sup> September 2017.
- Review of seabird-boat interactions and incidences of disturbance.
- Two opportunistic seal counts.
- Meetings with RDCA, RSPB and St Mary's Primary School.
- One to one conversations with public around key sites on Rathlin Island

Michael Cecil updated the management forum on the installation of signage to reduce seal disturbance. Permission has been granted from the land owner at Mill Bay, however, permission has not been agreed for Rue Point. Liam McFaul suggested the south gate entrance along the access road (under RSPB ownership), or Coastguard House or Smuggler's House as alternative places to affix signage. David Quinney Mee confirmed that planning permission is required for a sign of this size. RDCA will progress this work but it will need funding. Joe Breen suggested an alternative may be to put a small sign on tourist buses.

**Action – RDCA to progress the installation of seal signage, including the securing of funding and all necessary permissions.**

## **9. AOB**

Gary Burrows relayed a query from Mary O'Driscoll regarding the installation of a biodiversity garden on Rathlin Island. Discussion followed on the numerous trees already planted, possible void spaces and the value of speaking with the Woodland Trust.

**Action – Michael Cecil to speak with Mary O'Driscoll regarding options for a biodiversity garden on Rathlin Island.**

John Early explained that Tracy Platt (NIEA Regional Operations) had changed posts and that when her position was replaced, that officer would sit on the management forum.

## **10. Date of next meeting**

To be arranged for May 2018.

## **Summary of actions**

- DAERA Marine & Fisheries to speak to NIFPO regarding the promotion of sustainable fishing around Rathlin Island.
- Colin Armstrong to convene a meeting of the predator control subgroup by mid December 2017.
- Kenny Bodles to advise the predator control subgroup when the RSPB Rathlin Island Biosecurity Plan would be completed.
- Gary Burrows to draft literature and maps on sensitive marine protected areas, and circulate to the management forum for consultation.
- DAERA and RSPB to discuss resourcing of any future monitoring of boat and seabird interactions.
- Neil McCulloch to advise on any concerns that NIEA has on the use of chumming to attract seabirds to vessels.
- Dave Wall to lead on a Rathlin Island 'Extreme Clean' litter and to contact CCG council regarding support.
- Gary Burrows to send a map of the coastal litter hotspots recorded by DAERA to Dave Wall.
- Graeme Campbell to visit farmers on Rathlin Island and ascertain the reasons for the unsuccessful EMS applications.
- RDCA to progress the installation of seal signage, including the securing of funding and all necessary permissions.
- Michael Cecil to speak with Mary O'Driscoll regarding options for a biodiversity garden on Rathlin Island.

