

CYNGOR GWYNEDD GWYNEDD COUNCIL

Draft minutes of the 23rd Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Liaison Group meeting held on the 17th April 2013 (starting 7pm) at Plas Tan y Bwlch, Maentwrog.

Present:

Cllr Caerwyn Roberts (CR)	Local Authority – Snowdonia National Park Authority (chairman)
Alison Hargrave (AH)	PLAS SAC Officer
Rhys Owen (RO)	RA - Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)
Bill Miller-Jones (BMJ)	Other - Diver and boat owner
Rowland Sharp (RS)	Other
Rhys Jones (RJ)	RA – Gwynedd Council
David Roberts (DavR)	Local Authority – Snowdonia National Park Authority
Cllr Ray Quant (RQ)	Local Authority – Ceredigion
Lucy Kay (LK)	RA – CCW
Mike Bowyer (MB)	Other – Archaeology
Nia Jones (NJ)	North Wales Wildlife Trust
Jen Kelly (JK)	Cardigan Bay SAC Officer

(PLAS – Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau)

(RA – Relevant Authority)

Introduction

CR welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Apologies:

Dafydd Roberts (DR) RA - Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA)

2. Minutes of the last meeting

2.1 The minutes were accepted as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. Matters arising

3.1 AH to prepare a response to the hpMCZ consultation on behalf of the group and send it round for comment: *Action completed.*

4. Update from the SAC Officer

AH outlined the work that had been accomplished since the last meeting noting that it had been a busy year adding that the two major pieces of work were under separate agenda items.

AH has;

- Given a number of presentations;
- Visited a large number of schools and universities;

- Organised and run a selection of events including guided walks, beach fun days, and seawatch events;
- Produced an events leaflet for 2012 and is in the process of producing the 2013 leaflet;
- Attended a number of shows with the SAC displays including the Sea and Land Food Festival, the Eisteddfod and Sioe Meirionnydd;
- Put a lot of work into publicity including a large number of press releases, articles and radio interviews;
- Updated the SAC website;
- Distributed SAC material;
- Taken part in a number of projects including Fisheries Ecological Surveys Project (CCW grant funded) and N2K LIFE project to ensure a joined up approach to MPA management;
- Attended a number of meetings to ensure partnership working.

5 Porthdinllaen seagrass project

AH provided an update on the Porthdinllaen seagrass project.

The seagrass in Porthdinllaen is part of the intertidal mudflats and sandflats feature of the SAC. This feature is noted as being in unfavourable condition due to the impacts caused by anchoring and mooring at this location. This has been recorded in aerial images and by underwater surveys. The project that has been set up to look into this aims to look at different methods of protecting the seagrass whilst still allowing people to use the area and if possible to realise some economic benefit for the area.

The work that has been undertaken so far:

- A steering group has been set up that includes the SAC Officer, NRW, the National Trust, RYA and the Llyn Fishermans Association.
- Speaking to people and including stakeholders in management decisions is an important part of this project. Many people have been spoken to already. An open day was held in December to give people the opportunity to drop by and ask questions, get involved. About 30 fishermen turned up. A really good discussion ensued and with a consensus that this could be a good opportunity to show that the principles of striking the balance could work.
- An initial report has been produced that looks at the current situation and looks at the types of management options available.
- A number of publications have been produced to raise awareness about the project including a leaflet, poster, drinks mat, briefing note and pop ups.
- An article on the project has been published in Seagrass Watch magazine.
- As has been mentioned on a number of occasions it is important that we collect scientific information and evidence at a local level. A lot of effort has been put in to build on the knowledge we have for Porthdinllaen following from the 2008 and 2009 surveys.
- Funding was secured from the European Resilience and Diversity fund to map the mooring scars. The practical element has been completed and a report will be available shortly.
- An infaunal survey and analysis has taken place. A report will be available shortly.
- A company called SEACAMS is working with the steering group on the project. They will be running two seagrass projects in Porthdinllaen. This is at no cost to the SAC.
 - Project 1 is an ecological project to see how important the seagrass bed is to the local area. This is nearly finished and a report will soon be available. Initial

findings indicate that there is on average 50% more species within the seagrass than on bare sand. A total of 37 different species have been recorded, ten of which are of commercial value. Many of these were juveniles.

- Project 2 is a moorings project to see what would work best in Porthdinllaen. The aim of this project is to look at adaptations to existing mooring designs. This will help reduce impact whilst still allowing people to use the same mooring equipment and moor in the same location.
- The SAC is also linked in with the SEACAMS ERDF project – baited camera work. Porth Dinllaen seagrass bed is one of the locations of the survey.
- There are a number of students undertaking projects ranging from looking at snorkel trail ideas to fish studies.
- Funding was secured from the Llyn AONB SDF fund.
- The type of options that are currently under discussion include:
 - Creation of an anchor zone – this will also benefit moored boats as users have noted an issue that anchors are ripping up mooring chains.
 - Adapt the moorings so that they have less impact.
 - Create a snorkel / rocky shore trail – to help local businesses and provide a resource for local schools.

Discussion / questions:

- MB asked if anyone had looked at sediment composition. He noted that when you have seagrass you have a compacted top layer of sediment. In the scars the sediment is mixed.
AH stated that this was not done as part of any of the recent work in Porthdinllaen.
- RO asked if there was any seagrass within the Park boundary and if so what condition was it in compared with the bed in Porthdinllaen.
AH/LK explained that the nearest seagrass bed to the Park is at Criccieth. This is a small patch. It is unlikely that seagrass would settle in the estuaries as they do not have the right conditions for seagrass settlement.
- RS noted that lifting the moorings each year could be what is causing the scars.
AH agreed that lifting the moorings could have a large impact. However results indicate that the riser chain is causing the circular scars.
- BMJ noted that when he dived the site ten years ago he noted that the sediment height where the seagrass had settled was approx 10-12 inches higher than the surrounding sediment.
LK noted that this has not been noted in any of the surveys but it is worth checking to make sure.

Action: *AH to check if any observations were made re difference in sediment height in Porthdinllaen.*

6 SAC Management

6.1 Reporting on SAC feature condition and status to Europe – N2K reporting round

LK provided an update on reporting on SAC feature condition and status to Europe.

The four country agencies have completed reporting forms for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) for each feature (i.e. Annex I and II habitat and species). In some instances

JNCC led the assessment e.g. marine mammals. JNCC have aggregated the reports from the country agencies using criteria provided by the EC (e.g. how to account for different trends provided by the different agencies).

These reports, both the ones provided by the separate countries and the aggregated JNCC one are now out to consultation. The consultation website is: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-6387>. On this page, in the section named 'CONSULTATION DRAFT', there are links to web pages for the 'habitats' and 'species' reports. These pages hold links to the individual reports for each species and habitat provided by each country agency as well as JNCCs overall report. The consultation runs until May 10th.

The reports from Wales are underpinned by internal assessments of monitoring data (CCWs and others), casework records and other evidence. The assessments are of the habitats and species in UK waters and are not SAC specific. Further work is required this year to develop reports at the SAC level (i.e. on the conservation status of SAC features), though much of the underlying data collation and assessment has been undertaken.

Following the consultation, JNCC will review the consultation responses and finalise the reports accordingly, with overview from DEFRA and the devolved administrations. Final reports go to the EC this summer.

Action: AH to circulate website link to N2K reporting consultation.

Action: AH to draft a letter to NRW regarding the need and urgency for site level feature condition / status reports.

6.2 PLAS Management Scheme

AH outlined the work that had been done over the year.

AH noted that a lot of work has gone into reviewing and updating the PLAS Management Scheme this year. A first draft will be ready shortly and will be sent out to the group. The next step is to arrange a number of meetings to discuss specific plans in more detail. The first draft is something AH put together so ensure the plans were as up to date as possible before detailed discussions take place. AH noted that these plans can be changed and amended at any time and that anyone is welcome to attend these meetings. AH will then edit the document and send it out a second time. Then the document will go out for wider consultation.

Action: AH to draft a letter to Alun Davies (chair of the MCZ stakeholder group) to say that the PLAS is a good model wrt to marine management especially with regards to stakeholder engagement and involvement.

6.3 NRW N2K LIFE project

Jen Kelly gave a presentation on the NRW N2K LIFE project. The following areas were covered.

What is the LIFE project?

- Project run by Natural Resources Wales
- 1 Sept 2012 – 31 Dec 2014
- £1 million budget – 50% LIFE, 50% Natural Resources Wales

- 7 dedicated members of staff & £230k worth of contractors
- Covering Marine & Estuarine, Freshwater & Wetland, Terrestrial environments and Species across Wales.
- Engagement of stakeholder representatives

The aim and scope of the project:

- “To develop a strategic programme for the management and restoration of SACs and SPAs in Wales for the period 2014-20 and beyond. It will be prioritised, detailed, costed and agreed by relevant stakeholders.”

JK noted that she was the marine coordinator.

Project aspirations:

- Enable Wales to make significant progress towards bringing N2K site features into favourable condition and help meet its commitments under the European Habitats and Birds Directives.
- Provide a basis for obtaining improved levels of funding from all possible sources, and to integrate N2K funding into other financial instruments and policy areas.
- Identify key gaps in evidence and management.
- Bring together stakeholder representatives in the public, private and voluntary sectors to pool the best available knowledge and expertise and obtain the maximum level of approval and support.

Project Objectives:

- Gather data/information to create a sound evidence base.
- Review current funding arrangements and identify potential new sources of funding (via a major contract).
- Produce an overarching, strategic Programme for N2K sites in Wales.
- Facilitate effective communication to ensure maximum awareness of the project and its outputs.

How to keep in touch?

- Website
- Newsletters
- Output reports

For further information you can go to <http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-landscapes--sites/the-life-programme/life-natura-2000.aspx> or contact JK at jennifer.kelly@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk.

Discussion / questions:

- People were still unsure what the project was, what the money was being spent on and what the outputs would be.

JK explained that the project aims to improve the delivery of management and funding of Natura 2000 sites; to make significant progress towards bringing designated site features into Favourable Conservation Status. The money spent will primarily cover costs for the staff involved, the improvement of an IT tool to ensure the longevity of information collected in the project, a significant contract to identify new funding streams to allow greater access

to funding, and a series of smaller contracts to address key evidence gaps identified. The overarching project output is the 'Strategic Programme of Work for Wales'; a costed and prioritised national level plan for action across all Natura 2000 sites (both SPA & SACs (marine, terrestrial and freshwater)). This will be underpinned by improved information on sites and features, which will inform individual Action Plans for sites and themes (E.g. Diffuse Pollution, All-Wales Marine issues). Beyond the outputs of the Programme, both the Strategic Programme of Work for Wales and the Action Plans will also inform the Prioritised Action Framework, a significant co-funding initiative of the European Commission, aimed at increasing the level of funding to Natura 2000 sites.

- There was concern that this would lead to more no take zones.
JK noted that was not the intention or purpose of the project.
- The group asked what would be the benefit to Wales and what impact would it have on users.
JK explained that the primary aim is to make significant progress towards bringing features into favourable condition.
- It was noted that this project intends to cost actions to draw down funding. A question was raised noting that issues may change significantly between now and 2020. If actions are not noted does that mean that they won't be implemented?
JK replied stating that it would be a live database that can be updated. This will protect the work beyond the life of the project.
- The group questioned how expensive it would be to maintain the database considering that it cost 1 million to set up.
JK stated that NRW maintain the database financially as it is part of the corporate IT systems and will continue to do so into the future.
- The group asked if they were the stakeholder representative noted in the presentation.
JK explained that due to time constraints it would not be possible to meet with all stakeholders. The project would work with stakeholder representatives. She noted that AH could represent the Liaison Group.

Action: *JK to attend the next Liaison Group meeting to provide AH with regular updates that she can forward to the group.*

Action: *JK to bring an example of 'refined data' to the next meeting.*

7 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) update

AH gave an update on MCZs in Welsh waters.

AH explained that earlier this year, the Welsh Government began a consultation process wrt 10 potential highly protected MCZ site options. Almost 7,000 responses were received, including a response from this Liaison Group.

A few months ago the then Environment Minister, John Griffiths (Alun Davies has now taken over), announced a period of additional work as part of the consultation process into designating

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) in Wales. As part of this work a task and finish group was set up to draw up some recommendations wrt MCZ designation in Wales. To aid this process a stakeholder group was also set up to help inform the task and finish group. The task and finish group was primarily made up of people who had not been involved in the process to date. Councillor Gareth Roberts from Gwynedd Council is on the stakeholder group representing local authorities in the north. AH was asked by Gwynedd Council to attend the meetings with him. PLAS was well represented with Mike Parry (representing tourism) and Bob Lowe (representing WYA) also attending meetings. After four stakeholder meetings the task and finish group have drafted their recommendations for the new minister. These recommendations are due to be sent by the end of the month. The chair of the stakeholder group is keen for the group to meet with the minister once he has had the recommendations.

There main recommendations of the review are to:

- Take a different approach to using the MCZ power where the level of protection and site management is determined on a site by site basis following a risk-based approach to meet any shortfall in the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network.
- Undertake a comprehensive review to determine the role and potential benefits of sites with higher levels of protection to improve its understanding of whether there is a role for such sites in managing Welsh seas.

There are then a number of recommendations relating to the way the consultation was conducted, the legal obligation to designate MCZs and the approach in other UK administrations.

The main messages / recommendations wrt next steps:

- Use the MCZ power, as necessary, to contribute towards achieving an ecologically coherent network of marine protected areas by the end of 2016
- Better manage and resource the MPA network we already have. This should be done through implementing CCWs review of MPA management and the Welsh Fishermans Association's Striking the Balance. AH noted that the two documents were similar in nature and came up with similar recommendations, she added that this was very positive
- Review stakeholder engagement arrangements as part of an integrated marine governance structure to support effective policy making and delivery at a community level in Wales.

A letter was sent out from the chair of the stakeholder group (Peter Davies) to the minister highlighting some of these points.

Discussion / questions:

- The group asked JK how the LIFE project was going to ensure that the recommendations from the MCZ work was considered with the LIFE project.
JK stated that it was not within the projects remit. The project will work with international designations and this will inform MCZ work.

Action: AH to ask how the MCZ stakeholder list was drawn up.

8 Marine Policy Review

LK gave an introduction to the Marine Policy Review.

The Environmental and Sustainability Committee of the National Assembly for Wales were set up in 2011 with a remit to:

- examine legislation;
- hold Welsh Government to account by scrutinising expenditure, administration and policy matters relating to the maintenance, development & planning of Wales' natural environment and energy resources.

The purpose of the marine policy inquiry was to look at progress by Welsh Government in implementing various areas of marine policy work, specifically:

- assess progress made by the Welsh Government in relation to implementation of the Marine Act 2009 with particular regard to the marine conservation and the marine spatial planning powers of the Act;
- assess progress made by the Welsh Government towards the achievement of its European obligations in the marine environment (including work related to e.g., Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the Birds Directive, the Habitats Directive, the Bathing Water Quality Directive and the Water Framework Directive).

The committee have made 13 recommendations overall in relation to 5 key themes:

1. Priority & resources
2. Marine Spatial Planning
3. Marine Protected Areas
4. Marine licensing
5. European Directives

Action: AH to send WG response to the recommendations once they become available.

9 Natural Resources Wales (NRW)

LK gave a short presentation on NRW.

On 1 April Natural Resources Wales will bring together the work of the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales, as well as some functions of Welsh Government.

Their purpose is to ensure that the natural resources of Wales are sustainably maintained, used and enhanced, now and in the future.

They will work for the communities of Wales to protect people and their homes as much as possible from environmental incidents like flooding and pollution. They will provide opportunities for them to learn, use and benefit from Wales' natural resources.

They will work for Wales' economy and enable the sustainable use of natural resources to support jobs & enterprise. They will help businesses and developers to understand and consider environmental limits when they make important decisions.

They will work to maintain and improve the quality of the environment for everyone. They will work towards making the environment and natural resources more resilient to climate change and other pressures.

10 Sarn Badrig Monitoring

LK gave a presentation regarding observed changes to part of the reef communities of Sarn Badrig over the period 2010-12.

In 2010 a dramatic shift in community structure was observed at the monitoring station on the Sarn Badrig reef. After a very cold winter of 2009/10 there was a massive blue mussel *Mytilus edulis* spat fall in the spring of 2010 that completely swamped the *Halidrys* community which was the typical community that has been present at the Sarn Badrig monitoring site from 1998-2009. The 2010 mussel spat event has caused a massive interruption of what had been viewed as a persistent community on the reef. The wide spread nature of the event and the fact that it is known that mussel spat falls can be very variable from year to year means that there is absolutely no reason to suspect that this is anything other than a natural event. This may be a ‘regular’ event occurring at infrequent intervals, but is not something that has been picked up in over 10 years of monitoring this part of the SAC. This highlights the importance of having regular monitoring and establishing a time series of data.

Discussion / questions:

- MB mentioned that he had seen it happen 4 or 5 times over 20-25 years. He asked where the monitoring station was.
LK explained that the station was on the outer 3/4 of the reef, quite a distance from the protected wreck site.
- RS noted that Ireland had no seed mussel in 2009/10.
- RO asked if this meant that the site was failing in 2011.
LK explained that data should cause you to ask questions and look into it in more detail. Assessments on feature condition / status are done every 6 years.
- MB asked how NRW monitor the site.
LK explained that they use quantitative quadrates, abundance and diversity. NRW staff and external contractors collect the data. LK noted that it was expensive.
- BMJ noted that natural changes in sedimentation do occur.

11 Fisheries project

AH explained that unfortunately Jodie Haig couldn't make the meeting.

Action: AH to send out information about the project.

12 Any issue of concern or interest

BMJ – asked if there were any areas that have been identified for renewable energy.

Action: AH to check if any work has been carried out to identify possible areas for renewable energy.

RQ – requested a copy of the Sarn Badrig presentation.

Action: *AH to send the Liaison Group a copy of the Sarn Badrig presentation.*

MB – noted that CADW did a side scan of the reef.

13 Time and date of next meeting

Include N2K reporting, LIFE project and MCZ update on the agenda.

Time and date to be confirmed.