

# JNCC MARINE NATURA 2000 PROJECT GROUP MINUTES

TENTH MEETING 28<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2005

11:00 – 15:10 JNCC, MONKSTONE HOUSE

## AGREED MINUTES

### Present (around table):

Jan Pentreath (JP) (Chair) - Joint Committee

Malcolm Vincent (MV) - JNCC

Charlotte Johnston (CJ) - JNCC

Jim Reid (JR) - JNCC

Andy Webb (AW) (from item 7) - JNCC

Helen Baker (HB) (items 1-4 & 7-12) - JNCC

Kerry Howell (KH) (up to item 6) - JNCC

David Connor (DC) (up to item 6) - JNCC

Jen Ashworth (JA) (up to item 6) - EN

Nigel Buxton (NB) - SNH

Peter Clement (PC) (from item 5) - EN

Mark Tasker (MT) JNCC

Allan Drewitt (AD) EN

Joe Breen (JBr) EHS

### By video-link:

Sarah Wood (SW) - CCW

Sian Whitehead (SWh) (from item 7) – CCW

John Baxter (JB) SNH

### Apologies:

Wyn Jones - JNCC

Catherine Gray - CCW

Kirsten Ramsay - CCW

Mandy McMath – CCW

Adam Cole-King – CCW

Howard Platt – DoENI

Dan Laffoley - EN

Paul Gilliland - EN

Kate Bull - EN

Ian Bainbridge - Scottish Executive

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

JP welcomed the attendees. Apologies were noted as above.

### 2. Minutes of the 9<sup>th</sup> Marine Natura Project Group meeting 26<sup>th</sup> May 05 and matters arising

Minutes as sent out before this meeting were accepted as a true record of the meeting, to be put on the JNCC website. Action points were all either discharged or carried forward as action points from this meeting under the appropriate agenda items.

### 3. OSPAR

#### 3.1 Work on developing the UK contribution of sites to the OSPAR MPA network

The first tranche of Natura sites (all SACs) is almost ready to send to Defra. The draft UK list as detailed in paper MN2KPG9\_2\_OSPARN2K.doc submitted to the previous Marine Natura Project Group meeting in May still requires checking of the sites by Northern Ireland and Scotland. Once comments or confirmation of this list are received, CJ will update it, and pass on proformas and/or database to Defra for onward transmission to OSPAR by end of December 2005 as UK's first formal contribution towards the OSPAR network of MPAs.

Work to determine what further contribution may be required by UK by 2010 to complete our contribution towards the OSPAR network will start in early 2006. It will build on the work already done (see paper MN2KPG9\_1\_OSPART&D.doc) to identify for which of the OSPAR Initial list of threatened and/or declining species or habitats MPAs may be an appropriate measure for UK to take to address the threat.

**AP 10.1 JB and JBr to send comments on or endorsement of draft UK list to CJ by end of October.**

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### **3.2 Discussion on guidance for developing and assessing an ecologically coherent network of OSPAR MPAs**

CJ highlighted that there was a need to reflect discussions which took place yesterday at the UK OSPAR MASH pre-meeting, and that it would be likely to be changed in response to comments at MASH next week. There was little comment on the draft paper on assessment of the ecological coherence of the OSPAR network of MPAs.

### **3.3 Concept for assessing whether the management of OSPAR MPAs is effective in achieving their protection aims**

JA presented the work done so far for contribution towards OSPAR MASH. JB mentioned that he hadn't discussed the paper in detail with relevant SNH staff dealing with management day to day. JA confirmed that the work will be developed, and that it was important to be cautious in terms of how others might use the concept (both at a UK or international level).

There was a proposal to use the World Bank's score card approach. Defra is keen on this idea, and some comments have been received. The score card is to be presented as one potential tool for assessing management effectiveness, but there is scope for contracting parties to look further into other methods suggested (e.g. IUCN book, WWF report). The approach will initially be trialled at EN sites in Stour and Orwell.

## **4. EU and UK Marine working groups**

### **4.1 Update on work for the EU Marine Expert Group**

The last meeting of MEG was in May. The Commission is in the process of producing guidelines on the implementation of Marine Natura 2000 in Europe. The contributions from CJ and JR on locating and assessing sites for habitats, species and birds need a little more work; a new draft has been issued informally, the status of which is not clear. Agreement still hasn't been reached on the definition of sandbanks: this needs resolving before the guidelines are published.

### **4.2 Update on Habitats regulations**

The Offshore Regulations have not been forthcoming. They may be finalised in October 2006 after the Marine Bill is introduced.

### **4.3 Report on Natura and Ramsar Steering Committee & UK Marine Sub-Group**

The October meeting has been postponed and no new date has been set.

## **5. Selection of SACs for Annex I habitat interest features**

### **5.1 Update on 2005 survey programme for habitat SACs**

JNCC has done 3 surveys to date, in: North Anglesey (Report due April 2006), the English Channel (Report due April 2007), Rockall and Anton Dohrn (Report due December 2005).

English Nature (KB) referred to Angela Moffat's paper to the May project group meeting outlining EN's survey plans. Two pilot surveys have been conducted: one in the outer Thames (the subsequent survey report will be ready in Jan 2006), and one in Eddystone (where the acoustic survey has been completed, but the biological survey of the reef hasn't started yet). The methodology is based on habitat structure and function (as developed by Dr Chris Frid), though it is still in the early stages. A draft map has been produced with 21 areas of search for potential SACs, and in the coming years a more extensive survey programme will be developed. EN will have a better idea of survey plans soon. A new Project Officer is due to start (at EN); in the interim LJ is leading on this.

No update was available for habitat surveys by CCW.

SNH have begun habitat surveys (using diving, ROVs, acoustics and satellite images) in the Western Isles (including the Sound of Harris). However, they have encountered some problems with the weather.

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An interim report, summarising developments, is expected in December 2005. One preliminary conclusion is that harbour seal sites might be linked to habitat features in the Sound of Barra. SNH staff returned to the Isle of Mingulay where *Lophelia* mounds were successfully surveyed, and good video footage and acoustic mapping results were obtained. SNH now have a clearer understanding of the nature and extent of the area. Monitoring of Loch Creran (Serpulid reefs) and the Firth of Lorn was compromised slightly by bad weather conditions, but 95% of the monitoring proceeded successfully. SNH noted that it was difficult to identify whether there had been a significant impact on the reef due to scallop dredging. Work has been planned for next year to look specifically at the impact of this dredging on the Firth of Lorn.

Northern Ireland: Rathlin was surveyed for the first time since 1985. Need to report on what damage has occurred to sponges on the east of the island, as well as any disturbance to boulders (due to scallop dredging?). A new maerl bed with *Limaria* was found, along with a new habitat at around 225m on a gravel bed (*Sabella pavonina*). Free living *Caryophyllia* had been identified (from grabs) on gravel beds. They will be going back next year to assess the extent of these habitats.

An additional maerl bed has been discovered in Red Bay (off Antrim), which is likely to extend all the way down the Antrim coast. There are plans to conduct a survey project with Queens University to assess its extent.

Some good news was related regarding Strangford: two years since the ban on trawling, clumps have started to form (though no *Modiolus modiolus* are present as yet). The Restoration Committee will be meeting in 4 weeks time. A draft recovery plan has been drawn up but may need revising based on recent findings. Since trawling has been restricted, most fishing effort has been redirected into potting, which is not monitored or regulated. Further liaison with the fishing industry is required, as potting could have a significant impact on the food web. There is also some concern about the loss of *Ascophyllum*. EHS would like to see a no-take zone established around the last remaining *Modiolus* beds. In 2006, Strangford, Rathlin and Dundrum Bay will be the foci of surveying projects.

### 5.2 ICES advice to NEAFC on fishing restriction areas for coral protection at Rockall

MT presented work he had been involved with in his capacity as chair of the ICES working group on deep seabed habitats. NEAFC manage fisheries beyond European waters in the Northeast Atlantic, and had asked ICES for scientific advice on possible area closures at Rockall to protect cold water coral reefs.

There has been no full-scale survey of *Lophelia* reefs in Rockall (and there isn't likely to be), so proxy information had to be used. The key pieces of information used were:

- *Lophelia* records from scientific literature.
- Fishers' charts: An IFREMER fishing map indicates places that are not good for fishing (due to presence of coral), represented as circles to reflect a lack of accuracy. Jason H-S has records from two fishermen who have worked on the bank for a long time, and have identified areas they wanted to avoid.
- 2002 VMS data showing fishing patterns for all EU vessels. Russian vessels not recorded.

West Rockall mounds, Logacheff mounds (Ireland), Northwest Rockall, Haddock box (which was closed by NEAFC to protect the haddock stocks, although it was still heavily fished by the Russians and has little evidence of coral), and the Southern 'boot'. ICES has advised that all closures should be regarded as permanent, though it is still unknown whether NEAFC will accept this. NEAFC will be meeting in the autumn to discuss this, and the EC will also receive advice.

The ICES advice will be sent to NEAFC on Friday, and as the areas considered straddle 200nm zones it will also go to the European Commission (un-requested).

Further survey is needed for eastern Rockall (within 200nm). SEA 7 survey and FRS survey are planned for 2005, and a Dutch group are going to survey Rockall in 2006. A similar approach could be taken for Hatton Bank. Spanish surveys of Hatton Bank are planned for 2005 and 2006. The SEA7 survey found there was a great deal of *Lophelia* there.

JB commented that he had concerns with regard to the age of records. He would like more concrete evidence that the *Lophelia* reefs are still present. He highlighted that the VMS data doesn't distinguish

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between fishing and non-fishing vessels. This work was carried out by J H-S using VMS data from Scottish Executive, but there may be further difficulties obtaining this type of data for analysis in future. It is possible to get NEAFC data freely (for outside 200nm).

## **5.3 Report from Joint Nature Conservation Committee (habitat items)**

The Committee has approved the draft Conservation Objectives, in the format agreed upon by this group, for the 4 previously agreed sites (Wyville Thomson, Dogger Bank, Haig Fras and Scanner pockmark). The caveats proposed by EN need to be incorporated into the documents, comment on likely effects of climate change, and the presentation (e.g. removing typos, labels on maps) will be improved.

New offshore dSACs for North Norfolk sandbanks, Stanton Banks and Braemar pockmarks have been approved by Committee.

## **5.4 Forward plan for the completion of the UK suite of sites for Annex I habitat**

Updates on this timetable need to be sent to CJ by the end of October.

**AP10.2 Updates to timetable for identification of dSACs for Annex I habitat to CJ by end of October 05**

## **6. Selection of SACs for Annex II species**

### **6.1 Report from Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

Committee accepted the recommendation that no offshore areas 'essential to their life and reproduction' for bottlenose dolphin could be identified in UK offshore waters, and that therefore no dSACs would be identified for this species based on current data. Scans II survey has been done (MT) in the North Sea and some western waters. MT to email map (AP4).

**AP10.3 MT to email map showing SCANS II area to Project Group by end of October 05**

### **6.2 Update on considerations for a harbour porpoise site in Wales**

Mandy McMath circulated a relevant paper in June 2005. There is no additional information at present.

### **6.3 Update on progress with seal research**

Progress is being made on seal research. In terms of harbour seals, an update meeting with SMRU had to be postponed, so it is currently unclear what is happening on this. SMRU will update the Project Group shortly. In terms of grey seals' diet (on the East and West coasts), the draft reports submitted by SMRU are being revised. The range of species and their seasonal variation is interesting. SMRU will be circulating this when it becomes available.

SMRU carried out a harbour seal survey of the UK mainland, and the data is currently being processed. They are now looking for funding to complete next year's survey (N. Isles, W. Isles and S.W. Scotland). Will make up only 2<sup>nd</sup> complete survey. This will provide a better baseline from which to evaluate any changes to the harbour seal population.

## **7. Seaward extensions to seabird breeding colony SPAs**

### **7.1 Update on 2005 survey programme and forward plan for survey in 2006**

AW outlined developments of the 2005 programme for red throated diver in Orkney. Earlier methods tested included using a chain of observers, which didn't work so well and was particularly labour intensive. An interim report is due around the end of March 2006.

AW commented that a Manx shearwater paper would be put forward to the Committee in December 2005. This will wrap up colony extension guidance (as far as is possible at this stage), including guidance on Manx shearwaters. Three seasons of work have been completed to date.

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In the UK, four SPAs and one pSPA hold 90% of the global population of Manx shearwaters. Adults raft around the colonies and come ashore at night. Visual surveys were conducted, though due to poor light it was difficult to assess the limits of the aggregations. Consequently, radio telemetry at the three SPA sites was used. The data from Skomer Island has been analysed: 192 results from 15 birds (mostly to the north of the island) were obtained. In Rum, 282 results from 20 birds were obtained, mostly from the East and West of the Island. The analyses were conducted separately. In Bardsey, 390 locations were sampled for 30 birds. Some records needed to be disregarded as the birds were feeding underwater (which caused an irregular signal.) The range of the Manx shearwater extended 9km off Bardsey, and 4km off Skomer. AW suspects that their range is influenced by birds feeding close to the colony (not bothering to raft closer in). Guidance needs to go to the Project Group and the SPA SWG before going to Committee. CG highlighted that given that only one year's data was available for the three sites, it would be impossible to do the SPAs individually. However, this could be used for generic guidance. CG observed that this was an issue for SPAs covering large areas of sea.

AW to prepare a draft of a paper to Committee for December 05, which would be a summary of all seabird colony extension guidance so far, and those species for which generic guidance had been assessed as inappropriate. For Manx shearwaters, in three sites the birds are using at least 4km: in Rum they use 6km; and in Bardsey 9km. Therefore, a minimum area of 4km will be necessary, and this might need to be increased to 9km.

**AP10.4 AW to circulate a draft Committee paper summarising seabird colony extension guidance to Project Group members by the end of October 05**

### **8. Inshore aggregations of waterbirds**

#### **8.1 Update on survey and analysis including consideration of Thames Estuary**

AW reported on Thames inshore SPA survey, tests against SPA guidelines and identification of potential SPA boundaries (i.e. feature boundaries). The most important species was the red throated diver: of the 40% of species identified to species level, 99% were red-throated. Peak estimates were 11,089 in January 2003, which greatly exceeded the current population estimate for GB (1% = 50 birds). Four surveys exceeded the 100% British population estimate for wintering divers. Other species were also found to be important: great crested grebe, eider, scoter, and little gull. None of these exceeded 1% on a regular basis and only once did they exceed the 20,000 threshold. The peak mean red throated diver population was found to be 4300, which was substantially beyond the threshold of 50 individuals (although there was low confidence in the threshold). MCC 3000km<sup>2</sup> used range for breeding guillemots. AW looked at a more conservative estimate, covering a smaller area, and adjusted to a more realistic Great Britain population estimate for the red throated diver population. This led to the conclusion that red throated divers are aggregated in the greater Thames and we should be identifying SPAs for them. The Thames is the most important wintering site for this species in Great Britain and maybe even in Europe. Results suggested a large core 'wintering site' area, with the same criteria as those used in Liverpool Bay. This area would extend right out to the limit of the survey area; however few surveys have been conducted in the outer areas. There is some evidence that the eastern limit is ephemeral, and information from the Dutch coast indicates high and mobile numbers of these birds in the southern North Sea. More survey data is still needed, focusing on the outer areas, where the boundaries are unclear (due to uncertainties in the data). About 10% of the area is outside the 12nm limit.

### **9. Aggregations away from the coast**

#### **9.1 Update on analysis**

No progress has been made here.

### **10. Timetable of work and process for classification of marine SPAs**

#### **10.1 Timetable and progress on acquiring funding for marine SPA work**

**AP10.5 Project Group members to comment on timetable and progress on acquiring funding for marine SPA work to CJ by the end of October 05**

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## 10.2 Paper to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee - Process for the classification of marine SPAs

This was recognised as a complex area. A paper from HB and CT will be distributed for comment. Project Group members were reminded that the bulk of this paper addressed offshore sites only. CJ and HB will circulate this to the relevant government departments for comment on procedures with them.

### AP10.6 Project Group members to comment on draft Committee paper on Process for classification of marine SPAs (including flow diagrams) to HB by the end of October 05

## 11. Papers to groups

### 11.1 Papers to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in 2005/2006

There would be likely to be a paper to Committee recommending one or two new habitat dSACs to Committee in September 06

## 12. Any other business

### Summary of action points from 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of Marine Natura Project Group

Action point number	Action	Action by	Action on
10.1	JB and JBr to send comments on or endorsement of draft UK list to CJ by end of October.	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	JB, JBr
10.2	Updates to timetable for identification of dSACs for Annex I habitat to CJ	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	All SAC members
10.3	MT to email map showing SCANS II area to Project Group	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	MT
10.4	AW to circulate a draft Committee paper summarising seabird colony extension guidance to Project Group members	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	AW
10.5	Project Group members to comment on timetable and progress on acquiring funding for marine SPA work to CJ	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	All SPA members
10.6	Project Group members to comment on draft Committee paper on Process for classification of marine SPAs (including flow diagrams) to HB	30 <sup>th</sup> Oct 05	All SPA members