

REPORT OF THE LUNDY MARINE NATURE RESERVE ADVISORY GROUP

By

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ABSTRACT

The topics discussed by the MNR Advisory Group during 2004 are summarised. They include the No Take Zone, fishing activities, diving activity, boat patrols, monitoring studies and a number of other topics.

Keywords: Marine Nature Reserve, Advisory Group, No Take Zone, fishing activities, diving activity, marine monitoring.

INTRODUCTION

The Lundy Marine Nature Reserve Advisory Group consists of representatives from a wide range of organisations, all of which have an interest in the waters around the island. 'Membership' during 2004 consisted of representatives from the following groups (though interested parties other than those listed here are welcome to attend meetings by invitation):

British Sub-Aqua Club; Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Devon Sea Fisheries Committee; Devon Wildlife Trust; English Nature; Environment Agency; Hartland Heritage Coast Service; Landmark Trust; local dive charter interests; local diving clubs; local commercial fishing interests; The Lundy Company Ltd.; Lundy Field Society; Marine Archaeological Interests; Marine Biological Association; Marine Conservation Society; National Trust; South-West Federation of Sea Anglers; Torridge District Council; Worldwide Fund for Nature (UK).

The Advisory Group was established in 1985 and until 1994 was known as the Lundy Marine Consultation Group. The Advisory Group has four main aims:

1. to provide a nucleus of expertise on the marine habitats and waters surrounding Lundy;
2. to provide a forum for exchanging views on present and proposed activities around Lundy;
3. to safeguard the interests of all those who use the waters around Lundy and its natural resources; and
4. to advise the Management Group of the Marine Nature Reserve / Special Area of Conservation.

Meetings of the Advisory Group take place twice a year. In 2004, meetings were held on 7 April and 4 October (the 19th and 20th such meetings of the Advisory Group and the 37th and 38th of the former Consultation Group) at the offices of Torridge District Council in Bideford. The agenda for each meeting of the Advisory Group varies

depending on what matters are of current interest, but always includes a 6-month report from the Marine Nature Reserve (MNR) / Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (whose boundaries are shared), given by the Warden (see Warden's Report elsewhere in this volume). Wherever possible, meetings of the MNR Management Group are planned to take place soon after those of the Advisory Group, so that relevant matters which arise during Advisory Group meetings can be taken up and discussed at Management Group meetings. Meetings of the Management Group during 2004 took place on 8th April and 15th October.

The main points which have been discussed by the Advisory Group during the year (other than those likely to be included in the Warden's Report) are summarised below.

THE NO-TAKE ZONE

2004 was the first year of the existence of the No Take Zone (NTZ) and saw the initiation of its monitoring. There are two main parts to the monitoring studies: firstly, the effects of the NTZ on commercial species (i.e. lobster, edible crab, spider crab, velvet crab and scallops); and secondly, the effect on long-lived sessile species on rock habitats, such as sea fans, erect sponges, erect bryozoans and dead man's fingers. Incorporated within the design of the monitoring programme are a number of control or reference sites, to allow comparisons to be made from 'fished' and 'non-fished' areas. For scallops, counts are being made inside and outside the NTZ boundary, whereas for lobsters and crabs the control areas are elsewhere on Lundy, on the north Devon coast (Hartland Point) and on the south Wales coast (Solva). Results from the first year of monitoring showed that the number of landable-sized lobsters caught within the NTZ was three times as great as those caught from the Lundy control sites, and also at Hartland and Solva. The NTZ monitoring programme is funded for three years and, if further funding can be found, it is hoped it will continue beyond this timeframe.

FISHING ACTIVITIES

No commercial fishing was recorded within the Marine Nature Reserve over the winter period (October 2003 – April 2004). During the summer months, four potting boats (*My Tara*, *Green Isles II*, *Walrus* and *Compass Rose II*) taking crab and lobster were seen regularly, with visits peaking in June. Pots were regularly laid up to the northern boundary of the No Take Zone (NTZ) and, on at least two occasions, within it - illegally. The Devon Sea Fisheries Committee were notified on both of these occasions and spoke to the skipper involved in the first incident, but because of the use of unmarked buoys, the second boat could not be identified. Trawling for squid and sole outside the protected areas continued in early summer as in previous years. Angling from the jetty (which lies outside the NTZ) continued to be popular with visitors staying on the island.

DIVING ACTIVITY

2004 proved to be a complete contrast to the previous two years with excellent weather during May and June getting the diving season started early. The weather then broke and despite plenty of fine periods, there were many forced cancellations of booked groups during July, August and September. Reports were received by the Warden of divers diving the (protected) wreck of the *Iona II* without a licence. Although this is prohibited, the Warden reported to the Advisory Group that because of the close proximity of the *Iona II* to the wreck of the *Robert*, it is almost impossible to tell which wreck is being dived.

PATROLS WITHIN THE MNR / SAC

Patrolling by the Warden and his assistant was much more frequent during the summer of 2004, both from land and on the water. A new (second-hand) RIB was delivered in April and this proved to be much more reliable than the one it replaced. It was also kept on a mooring for much of the season, making it easier and more straightforward to use when required. The increased presence of the Warden and/or his assistant on the water provided better dissemination of information about the MNR to the high numbers of visiting yachts and other vessels, as well as enhancing the protection of the NTZ.

OTHER MONITORING STUDIES

The programme designed to monitor the condition of the reefs within the Lundy candidate Special Area of Conservation, which was initiated in 2003, continued in 2004. Under the European Union's Habitats Directive, English Nature is obliged to undertake monitoring of a site's listed features¹ at least once every six years. A meeting to discuss possible further monitoring studies within the MNR was held in October 2004 between English Nature, the MNR Warden and Dr Keith Hiscock and Robert Irving of the Advisory Group.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A diving team from Wessex Archaeology completed surveys of the two protected wreck sites (*Iona II* and the Gull Rock site) in September. The wreck of the *Iona II* was found to lie just 30m from the wreck of the *Robert* (the distance had always been thought to be 50-70m!), which meant that the *Robert*, a popular recreational dive site, lay within the 50m exclusion zone surrounding the *Iona II*.

The seabed of the MNR / SAC was mapped using multibeam sonar by Hydrosurveys Ltd. as part of the Mapping European Seabed Habitats (MESH) project overseen by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. This should reveal greater detail than previously obtained of the island's near-shore bathymetry and the distribution of seabed habitat types.

¹ Besides reefs, the other listed features for the Lundy cSAC are 'subtidal sandbanks', 'sea caves' and 'grey seals'. It has not yet been decided when monitoring studies of these other features will be undertaken.

OTHER DISCUSSION TOPICS

The oil spill contingency plan for the island was enquired about and it was recommended that the Management Group revise the existing plan. Responsibility for this lies with the Environment Agency, together with English Nature.

It was suggested that the dive charter skippers who visit the island regularly might be able to act as voluntary wardens for the MNR / SAC. However, this suggestion was not considered to be viable due to Health and Safety implications, particularly with regard to fisheries legislation. The Devon Sea Fisheries Committee would be providing information sheets for the skippers of these charter boats, and their 'eyes and ears' reports would still be of great benefit to the Warden.

If there are any points which members of the LFS would like to see raised at future meetings of the Advisory Group, they should contact the Group's Hon. Secretary, Robert Irving, at the address given above.

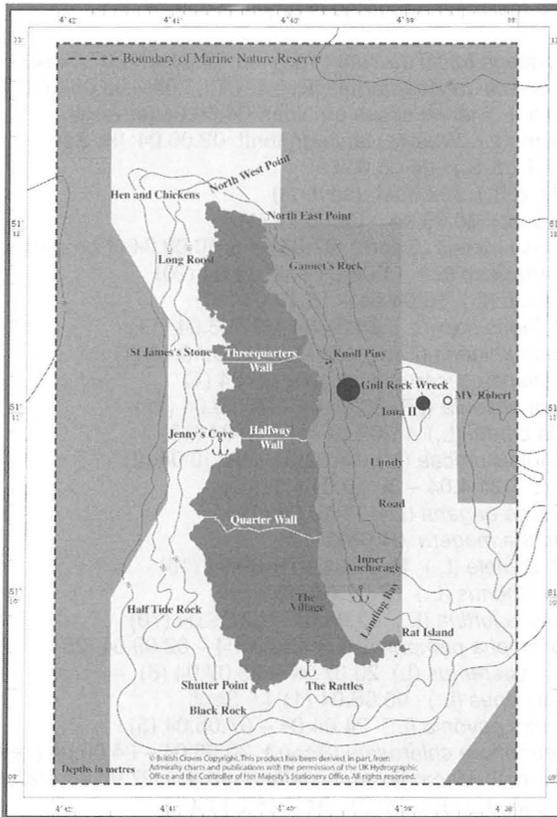


Figure 1. The Lundy Marine Nature Reserve zoning scheme. The dark area off the east coast is the No Take Zone. Reproduced with permission from English Nature.