

REPORT OF THE LUNDY MARINE NATURE RESERVE ADVISORY GROUP

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ABSTRACT

The topics discussed by the MNR Advisory Group during 2005 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, Special Area of Conservation, 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 2005 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, Devon Sea Fisheries Committee, Devon Wildlife Trust, English Heritage, 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 (UK), 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 2005, meetings were held on 20 April and 20 October (the 21st and 22nd such meetings of the Advisory Group and the 39th and 40th 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 2005 took place on 21 April and 21 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

2005 was the second year of the existence of the No Take Zone (NTZ) and saw a continuation of its monitoring. Whilst still being 'early days' as far as being able to draw any conclusions from the monitoring studies, the following results were presented to the Group:

1. The abundances of lobster were significantly greater inside the NTZ compared to the control sites near and far. In terms of size, individuals were slightly larger, but not significantly so.
2. The abundances of scallops were greater within the NTZ compared to adjacent sites but not significantly so. Scallops within the NTZ were slightly larger than at adjacent sites.
3. There is only one year's data for epifauna so it has been difficult to interpret the results. The large differences in mean abundance between the NTZ (Lundy's east

coast) and the control locations (Lundy's west coast) were overwhelmed by large amounts of variation at smaller spatial scales. Also, interpretation is complicated by the fact that the west coast habitat (a control site) is quite different from the east coast.

Subject to further funding, monitoring of the NTZ should continue for (at least) a further three years.

FISHING ACTIVITIES

Apart from a small amount of shore angling, there had been no fishing activity recorded within the Marine Nature Reserve over the winter period (November 2004 March 2005). The first pots were laid on 2 April but only one boat (from Cornwall) had set pots regularly throughout the summer. Sadly, in mid June, one string of pots was found within the No Take Zone (NTZ), within which all fishing is strictly prohibited, and clearly this had been done on purpose. As the pots were unmarked, it was not possible to identify their owner. The pots were subsequently confiscated by the Devon Sea Fisheries Committee. It is impossible to say how long the illegal potting had been undertaken in the area (to the north of Gannets' Rock), but the NTZ potting survey in 2004 found there to be a significant drop in the number of large lobsters from this area. In all other respects, the 'no take' byelaw is being well respected by all parties. Angling from the jetty (which lies outside the NTZ) continued to be popular with visitors staying on the island throughout the year.

DIVING ACTIVITY

Mixed weather during the spring and summer months led to several diving groups having to cancel their planned visits to the island in 2005. As a consequence, diving activity was at a reduced level when compared to recent years. Regular visits continued to be made by the local mainland clubs of Ilfracombe Sub-Aqua Club and Appledore Sub-Aqua Club. On 10 April, ten members of the former club took part in a '*Sargassum* hunt', removing as many individual plants of this invasive species of brown seaweed (commonly referred to as 'japweed') as possible from around the jetty area. This seaweed was first reported at Lundy (with certainty) in 1999 (Reach 2001) and at the time it was feared it would spread rapidly around the whole island. Fortunately, to date, it does not appear to have extended its range to much beyond the Landing Bay. Whilst being powerless to stop its dispersion completely, such 'active management' of removing pre-reproductive plants should assist in curtailing its spread.

LUNDY SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION (SAC)

At the start of 2005, the SAC was officially designated by the Secretary of State for the Environment (along with all other SACs in the UK) and as a result the prefix of 'candidate', which had been included in the title up until now, would be dropped.

MONITORING OF REEFS WITHIN THE SAC

'Reefs' are the main listed feature of the Lundy SAC and one of the requirements of the European Union's Habitats Directive (under which the SAC is designated) is that the condition of the reefs is reported on once every six years. This process was started in 2003 and continued into 2004. A report on the monitoring studies which have been initiated is due for completion by the end of this year (2005). Concern was expressed that the methods used in the standard reef monitoring protocol (which was being carried out at other marine SACs in England featuring reefs) would not provide the information that would indicate whether 'favourable conservation status' was being maintained. It was felt there was a strong argument that, because Lundy was not just an SAC but was also England's only Marine Nature Reserve, special provision should be made for adequate monitoring to be carried out.

SEA FAN STUDY

A party of Marine Conservation Society volunteer divers had visited the island in July to re-survey pink sea fans *Eunicella verrucosa* at selected sites off the east and west coast. They found that, generally speaking, the sea fans were in a better condition than they had been in 2001. In 2001 the average 'condition score' was 2.2 (out of a maximum score of 5, which would indicate pristine condition), whilst in 2005 the average condition score was 3.1. However, this figure is still lower than any of the other area scores in the MCS 2001-2 survey in south-west Britain. Dr Keith Hiscock of the Marine Biological Association informed the Group that the culprit for the demise of the sea fans had been identified as a bacterium *Vibrio splendidus* which was attacking the soft tissue of the fans. This 'disease' was now likely to have worked its way through the population, and this study appeared to confirm the gradual recovery of the population.

FLEXIBLE MOORING

A 'Seaflex' mooring was now in place in Gannets' Bay, some six years after first being discussed by the Advisory Group (see Irving, 2003). The mooring consists of four thick rubber cords rising from a two tonne sinker, joined to a single polypropylene rope to which a buoy is attached. The main advantage of this type of mooring was the reduction in disturbance to the seabed, as there was no chain which would create a circular clearing around the sinker as a result of the actions of wind and tide. It was hoped that, should this mooring be deemed successful, then others may be introduced into the Marine Nature Reserve.

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.

REFERENCES

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