

Isles of Scilly Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Protected Areas Working Group

Minutes for meeting 2, Friday 26th March 2010 10:00

Attendees

Mike Hicks	(Chair and Chairman of IoS SFC)
Steve Watt	(Maritime)
Tim Allsop	(Diving, Charter boats and Chair of IoS Wildlife Trust)
Steve Hicks	(Boatman's Association)
Justin Williams	(MFA, Newlyn)
Dr Vic Heaney	(RSPB)
Rhiannon Pipkin	(Natural England)
Angie Gall	(IoS Wildlife Trust)
Kaydee Torbet	(res. For Trevor Kirk AONB)
Craig Dryden	(Chief Planning Officer)
Cllr. Richard McCarthy	(Renewable Energy rep)
Capt. Glenn Covell	(St. Marys Harbour and Duchy of Cornwall)
Robert Francis	(Chair of Fisherman's Association)
Nic Jenkins	(Fisherman)
Tom Hooper	(Finding Sanctuary)
Spike Searle	(Finding Sanctuary)
Alana Murphy	(Finding Sanctuary)

Apologies

Del Thompson	(Angling)
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The "Finding Sanctuary MCZ Group Handbook", Natural England's "Isles of Scilly Marine Special Area of Conservation Management Scheme" and the "Isles of Scilly Marine Conservation Zones and Marine Protected Areas Working Group Terms of Reference" were available for each group member on the tables.

Alana Murphy briefly discussed the contents of the "Delivering the Marine Protected Area Network – March 2010 draft Ecological Network Guidance" (ENG) and what has changed from the "Finding Sanctuary Interim Guidance" which the group were originally working from. There were no considerable changes in the latest draft of the ENG which would affect the Isles of Scilly zones that were being presented. The deadline for submission of comments on the draft ENG, 9th April 2010, was announced.

Tom Hooper congratulated the Working Group for their efforts so far. He then updated the group on the outcome of the February 11th Steering Group meeting. He explained the process of three iterations that the site recommendations will go through (below), followed by feedback from the SAP which will be given to the Steering Group and the MCZ Local Groups to further amend/comment on. Tom also explained protection and management levels should be explored in this meeting in order to recommend the sites within the context they were discussed in the meeting.

MCZ Local Groups → Inshore/Offshore Working Groups → Steering Group → Science Advisory Panel (SAP)

Tim Allsop presented the 12 sites he identified as being important with supporting photographic evidence. There was agreement within the group, including the Fisherman's Association who were positive towards Tim's work and the proposed sites. Sites included many of the habitats and species identified in the guidance as needing protection, and also some which could be considered nursery areas.

Tim is still awaiting the Natural England report on the sea grass study he helped carry out and as he is hesitant to include more patches of sea grass in the zones until he knows where the best sites are located as per the report. He expects to receive the report in the next few weeks.

Many of the site boundaries follow the 50m depth contour line, but in some areas are extended outward where Tim knows the depths are different from those that appear on charts. A question was raised as to policing and how a complex MCZ boundary may be difficult to follow. Straightening the lines was discussed and thought to be appropriate in some areas (e.g. top and bottom end of a tide swept channel where the sides are tight to the coastline), though on the most part, extending the MCZ boundary to the shoreline or following the 50m contour will be easiest for people to navigate with standard boat equipment.

A decision was taken to join together zones 3 & 6 and 10 & 11 to make two larger zones rather than four smaller ones. The rationale behind this was to increase the size of the two smaller zones to meet "minimum viable patch diameters" which are set in the March 2010 draft ENG. It was also decided during discussions in the meeting to extend zone 1, a small unique area, to encompass a large bordering patch of sea grass.

RSPB requested that we start looking at possible ways to protect bird species at this stage. Main concerns were seabird bycatch in nets and potential loss of food if for example sand eels became commercially fished in the Isles of Scilly. Attendees at the meeting agreed that future proofing the proposed MCZs was a good idea and it was agreed that no commercial sand eel fishing would be allowed, particularly in the zones near Western Rocks and around St Martin's. This would ensure a food supply for birds and not affect any existing fishing activity as sand eels are not currently caught at a commercial scale. It was felt that Scillies fishing has a low impact on bird life as extremely few birds have been caught in nets over the years.

It was discussed and agreed that the zone surrounding Old Town could be extended into the bay to encompass the intertidal habitat without causing much disruption to the activities carried out there.

It was highlighted that in areas like Tresco there may be a need to remove/repair/replace moorings which would disrupt the seabed at a local level. In Tim's experience of doing this, the disruption is small and the recovery of the area disturbed is fast.

The Fisherman's Association would like it noted that they are already going above and beyond what is required for conservation e.g. they voluntarily v-notch berried lobsters and return any lobsters with a carapace length of less than 90mm despite 87mm being the legal limit.

Further discussion on the subject of future proofing the proposed zones identified that possible activities such as intensive aquaculture, offshore renewables, building marinas or pontoons, installing/maintaining electric cables, etc would have high impacts on the proposed zones. It was pointed out that the Isles of Scilly is enclosed within an SAC and that many of those pressures would not be allowed to occur. Furthermore, in drawing the boundaries for the proposed zones, Tim tried to avoid areas of intensive use or with the need to be maintained (e.g. electric cables and pipelines) in order to protect the integrity of the zones.

The group would like to protect zones 6, 7, 8 and 9 from commercial kelp cutting as these are the most accessible areas for this to occur. In addition, the group would like to extend the boundary of these areas into the coastline to add extra protection. Concerns were also raised as to the potential threat from other forms of aquaculture which may be proposed in the future.

Natural England are working with the Isles of Scilly Sea Fisheries Committee to increase the Isles of Scilly Sea Fisheries District Methods of Fishing (Dredges) bylaw from 4 to 6 nautical miles.

The Fisherman's Association are not willing to support any form of no take zones around the island as they do not feel there is a need for this level of restriction. The chairman, Mike Hicks, wanted it noted that he would support the Fisherman's Association in challenging any attempt at putting such restrictions in place.

The Fisherman's Association would like foreign vessels to be subject to the same restrictions that apply to UK vessels. They would also like to see that there is some sort of ecosystem management put in place further offshore as damaging activities in these areas impact the Isles of Scilly undersea environment.

Agreements:

The Isles of Scilly MCZ and MPA Working Group are agreed upon the 12 sites put forward by Tim Allsop as proposed MCZs.

The group agreed that they are happy for Tim to continue to work with Finding Sanctuary in developing the proposal of the sites/providing evidence/etc and that Tim will be responsible for reporting back to the group any major changes in the location or boundaries of the sites or any additions or removals of proposed sites.

The Fisherman's Association have agreed to give up rights to mobile gear (towed gear, trawling, dredging, etc) in the zones identified in the meeting. All static gear will remain.

The MCZ and MPA Working Group are willing to support no commercial sand eel fishing in the areas proposed.

The three dive charters, professional and club divers on the Isles of Scilly have agreed not to collect any shellfish within the zones identified. They support the banning of shellfish collection within the zones.

2010 Meetings

It was decided that dates for further meetings in 2010 will be set when the MCZ/MPA group receive the project timeline and are able to plan around Steering Group meetings and SAP feedback.