

Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation Management Group Meeting Minutes

Location:	Via Microsoft Teams
Date:	17 September 2021
Time:	10am
Attendees:	Members Doreen Bell, Scottish Water, Previous MFSACMG Chair (DB) Nathan McLaughlan, NatureScot, MFSACMG Chair (NM) Andrew Goldie, Port of Cromarty Firth (AG) Secretariat Natalie Palmer, Moray Firth Coastal Partnership, MFCP (NP)

Minutes

- **Apologies**

- Daniel Sutherland, Police Scotland
- Ken MacLean, Port of Inverness
- Ben Leyshon, NatureScot

- **Approval of last minutes**

Approved.

No matters arising.

- **Handover of Chair**

Chair of group handed from Doreen Bell to Nathan McLaughlan

- **MFSACMG records clarification**

The minutes of the following meetings are on file:

14 December 2016

7 June 2017

20 April 2018

23 August 2019

Financial funds available are £5,572 according to the restricted fund record held by MFCP.

The Management Scheme was prepared in 2016. The Management Group needs to decide if it wishes to review the document; what would this entail, what resources would this take and what would the benefits be? NM to review the document to understand if it requires updating.

- **Future Secretariat Role**

MFCP to provide secretariat services on a no cost basis, but additional work to be discussed and negotiated. A service level agreement is to be prepared between MFSACMG and MFCP to define the role of secretariat more formally. NM and NP to action for approval by the group.

- **MFSAC Future Focus**

- NP explained that the Chanonry Point Action Group and WDC volunteer, Sarah Taylor MacDonald had been in touch with the SAC Management Group to ask for support in relation to an increase in marine tourism this year due to 'staycations' and a subsequent increase in incidents of cetacean disturbances in the Moray Firth, particularly at Chanonry Point. Incidents involving pleasure boats and paddle boarders have been recorded and investigated by Police Scotland. The 'Rude to Intrude' WDC campaign is a social media and on the ground campaign (involving educational notices at local tourist spots) to address this issue. NM advised that NatureScot are aware of issues arising during the pandemic. There has been an increase in visitors to the area, and a cost reduction in sea vessel equipment – canoes, kayaks and paddleboards, which has meant that there is more likelihood of disturbances to a number of marine and terrestrial species. NatureScot have been

involved in setting up Codes of Conduct for certain nature reserves. A positive approach i.e. education is preferred to prosecution. Funding has been made available to Police Scotland to erect more signs around the Moray Firth. Dan Sutherland is the lead and he is liaising with the Chanonry Point Action Group and Whale and Dolphin Conservation on this.

- AG noted that there have been safety and navigational problems reported by the Port of Cromarty Firth. Swimmers crossing from Cromarty to Nigg – shipping operations subsequently being impacted. Not easy to enforce. Need to create behavioural change.
- DB – Scottish Water have noticed increased use of inland waterways for swimming. There are also safety issues at these sites.
- **MPA Demonstration and Research Site**
NP – in the past the MFP and the MF SAC MG considered the possibility of creating a D&R MPA in the Moray Firth. This would aim to develop the area as an exemplar for marine wildlife tourism.
NM to discuss this with Ben Leyshon prior to the next group meeting to understand the proposal in more detail.
- Other members, reinvigorate the group
 - Ardersier Port – NM to approach
 - Network Rail – DB to provide a contact

MoD defence infrastructure local contact in Tain to be contacted

Would also be helpful to have representatives from Marine Scotland, SEPA and Highland Council.

Whale and Dolphin Conservation a charitable group, are interested in attending a future meeting. NP to contact them to invite them to a future meeting. It was noted that whilst WDC could present an item at a future meeting, at present they cannot be a full member as they are not a 'relevant authority' under the terms of the 'Regulations'.

- **Members Updates**

Port of Cromarty Firth (AG) – An application for Phase 4 of the extended Port area has been submitted. There are some technical issues on the harbour side.

The UK cruise industry has returned.

The Freeports (Opportunity Cromarty Firth) initiative is awaiting a decision on competition from the Scottish Government. There is to be 10 freeports in the UK, 1 is to be in Scotland (originally 2 proposed). The Thames has been announced as the first approved freeport in

the UK. The designated areas will receive tax and national insurance incentives. The Cromarty proposal is viewed as a positive way forward for the Highlands.

Phase 5 of the Port extension has been subject to discussion. It will involve larger wind turbines – blades up to 180m long.

Scottish Water (DB) – There is work on combined sewer overflow (CSO) in relation to spill events and Sewage Related Debris. The inappropriate disposal of products can cause pipe blockages, a new customer awareness campaign is being developed to replace Keep the Water Cycle Running! Campaign. Scottish Water are involved with the review of the Marine Litter Strategy and development of actions. We work with others to influence policy on Single Use Plastic (SUP), including wet wipes that contain plastic. We have a data sharing agreement with the Marine Conservation Society. Data shows a sharp increase in wet wipes washing up on beaches since 2011.

Scottish Water are working on net zero emission targets for 2035, as well as biodiversity net gain elements. Turning previously tenanted farms into woodlands. Providing other sites around reservoirs for planting.

Work at the Ardersier water treatment plant is ongoing.

NatureScot (NM) - advised that the Special Protection Area for wintering offshore bird species (including diving waterbirds such as grebes and goldeneye ducks) roughly follows the SAC boundary. The consideration given to these species is similar to that given to marine mammals. There is newly published suitable management documentation on the NatureScot website.

- **Any other business**

NP to ask for member updates in advance of future meetings

- **Date of next meeting and Chairperson**

February 2022

BL as Chairperson (following NM secondment to Highland Council as a Biodiversity Project Officer)

Actions (26 January 2022):

Task:	Allocated to:	Timeframe:	Incomplete/Partially Complete/Completed:
General review of management scheme to determine whether update required	NM	February 2022	Incomplete
Secretariat service level agreement draft	NM and NP	February 2022	Complete Circulate with the meeting papers
Demonstration and Research MPA proposal – more information required from Ben Leyshon	NM	February 2022	Incomplete
Potential new members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ardersier Port - Network Rail As well as existing members to be given another opportunity to attend: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MoD, Tain contact - Marine Scotland - Highland Council - SEPA 	NM, DB, NP	February 2022	Incomplete Covered in agenda
Chanonry Point Action Group to be invited to attend next meeting	NP	February 2022	Complete
Future member updates to be requested prior to the meeting	NP	February 2022	Complete
Set up next meeting	NP	February 2022	Complete