

# REPORT OF THE LUNDY MARINE PROTECTED AREA ADVISORY GROUP

The Lundy Marine Protected Area Advisory Group (LMPAAG) provides a forum for the discussion of all matters relating to the island's waters and shores. The Group includes representatives from the island (the Lundy Company/Landmark Trust), Natural England, the Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority, Historic England, the Marine Management Organisation, the Lundy Field Society, the Marine Biological Association, MARINELife, local nature conservation groups, commercial fishing interests, dive charter boat skippers and local dive clubs. The Group meets twice a year: in 2015 it met on 22 April on board the MS *Oldenburg* alongside Bideford Quay, and on 6 October at the Ilfracombe and North Devon Sub-Aqua Club, Ilfracombe. October's meeting was the 60th meeting of the Advisory Group, which started out life as the Lundy Marine Consultation Group in 1985. The Lundy Field Society provides the secretariat for the LMPAAG.

A variety of issues were brought to the attention of the Group and discussed during the two meetings held in 2015. These are summarised below:

## **Diving on the protected wreck of the *Iona II***

Firstly it should be pointed out that, as from 1 April 2015, English Heritage (who are responsible for all Protected Wreck Sites around the English coastline) has now been renamed as Historic England (HE). Last year, readers will recall that a Dive Trail and accompanying booklets (which could be taken under water) were produced to assist with the interpretation of this historic wreck site. The interpretive material was very well received and was highly commended at the Association of Heritage Interpretation awards in November 2015, in the category of a target audience.

At the April meeting, members were informed that the means by which a licence has to be obtained from HE by those intending to dive on the *Iona II* wreck had changed. Unfortunately, the new requirements proved impossible to apply so no dives were actually undertaken on the *Iona II* wreck site at all in 2015, and the interpretative material that had been so well received was not used.

Once this problem was raised at the Advisory Group meeting in October, Historic England soon realised there was no point having unworkable requirements for the issuing of their licences. A couple of months later, the Group were informed that HE had amended their licensing procedure. A single licence would now be held by the island (the Warden) and all of the charter skippers would be named on this one licence. The names of divers diving on the wreck could then be passed on to the Warden after each dive, and these would be submitted at regular intervals back to HE.

## **Funding the Warden's time**

As a result of financial cut-backs within Natural England, their contribution to funding the Warden's post on Lundy has had to be stopped. NE had funded the position fully since the designation of the Marine Nature Reserve in 1986, with part-funding from The Landmark Trust in recent years. The Warden's post will now be largely funded by The Landmark Trust (c/o the Lundy Company) with a contribution from the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority (D&SIFCA). As reported elsewhere in this volume, the LFS has also made a financial contribution for the year 2015/16.

## **Marine Conservation Advice packages**

During the autumn, members of the Advisory Group were invited to comment on two draft Marine Conservation Advice packages which have been compiled for Lundy by Natural England. One is for the Marine Conservation Zone (consisting of Supplementary Advice for conserving and restoring the site's feature – spiny lobster) and one is for the Special Area of Conservation (consisting of Site Information; Supplementary Advice for conserving and restoring the site's features; and Advice on Operations). Both of these packages are due to be finalised by the end of March 2016.

## **New byelaws for Potting and Diving**

The Group were informed by the D&SIFCA that the two new permitting byelaws for Potting and Diving were signed off by the Secretary for State on 17 March 2015 and so now are in force. There is a pot limit for recreational purposes of five pots per permit holder, and a daily catch limit of two lobsters and three crabs; and of 15 scallops per diver. Note, however, that in the spirit of the Marine Protected Area, several of the charter boat skippers will not allow their divers to bring shellfish back on board after a dive. The conditions of the permit also state that all deployed gear must be marked (i.e. be able to be identified on the surface). Permits are issued to individuals as well as to boats. For a diving group, this means that anyone wanting to take shellfish during their dive has to have a permit – the licence for the boat will not cover them.

## **New speed limit for vessels**

A new speed limit of five knots within 100 metres of the coastline (introduced as part of the Code of Conduct for minimising disturbance to grey seals) has been in force and largely adhered to during the 2015 summer (see last year's Annual Report). The Warden reported that there had been an increase in the number of jet-skis visiting the island during the summer. Apparently a change to the insurance conditions for these craft now allows them to venture up to 15 miles offshore (from five miles), so Lundy falls within their reach. There had also been a noticeable increase in the number of visiting Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boats, fast leisure craft and paddle boards.

## **New wildlife accreditation scheme**

Charter boat skippers are being encouraged to take part in a new wildlife accreditation scheme (created by the Warden in association with the North Devon Biosphere Reserve), which involved attending a day's training in marine wildlife conservation. The scheme is linked to the national WiSe scheme (Wildlife Safe) and most of Lundy's regular visiting skippers have already attended the course.

## **Sublittoral monitoring of the SAC**

In order to assess the condition of various notable features of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC), a number of monitoring programmes are in place which are undertaken at least once every six years. As part of the Habitats Directive, the status of these features are then reported to the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (by Natural England), who in turn have to submit them to Brussels as part of a UK-wide assessment. In 2014, it was the turn of the sublittoral aspects of the rocky reef feature to be assessed, requiring the use of diving as a means of access.

The sub-features/tasks in question were: (1) kelp forest communities; (2) vertical and overhanging circalittoral rock; (3) subtidal bedrock and stable boulder communities; (4) the density and condition of sea fans; (5) photographic survey of sunset cup coral populations; (6) the maximum depth of foliose algae; and (7) assessment of the change in sessile epifaunal

communities inside and outside of the Lundy No-Take Zone. Frustratingly for those contracted to undertake this work (PML Applications Ltd, Plymouth), the poor weather during the summer of 2014 meant that some of the tasks had to be postponed until 2015. At the time of writing, the results of this work are still being written up.

### **MARINELife sightings on trips to/from Lundy on MS *Oldenburg***

Volunteers belonging to the charity MARINELife have been recording marine mammals and seabirds once a month on the *Oldenburg's* crossings between Bideford/Ilfracombe and Lundy. During 2015 they spotted a total of 20 species of seabird and six species of marine mammal. Common dolphin were again the most numerous cetacean observed (150), with regular sightings of harbour porpoise (51). Most of the seal sightings (184 grey seal; 2 common seal) were of animals around Lundy, but some were observed further offshore. Bottlenose dolphin numbers (seven) were low during the summer, but interestingly there were three minke whale sightings, each one observed around midway between Ilfracombe and Lundy.

If there are any matters which LFS members would wish to have addressed at the Advisory Group meetings, I would be happy to raise them on your behalf.

ROBERT IRVING  
Honorary Secretary  
Lundy Marine Protected Area Advisory Group  
March 2016