

LUNDY MARINE PROTECTED AREA ADVISORY GROUP REPORT

Robert Irving (LMPAAG Secretary)

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 (D&SIFCA), Historic England, the Lundy Field Society, the Marine Biological Association, MARINELife, local nature conservation groups, commercial fishing interests, dive charter boat skippers, local dive clubs and local sailing clubs.

2021 was another unusual year due to the continuing restrictions related to the Covid pandemic. Both the spring and autumn meetings of the Group were held on-line, via the video conferencing platform Zoom, kindly hosted by Derek Green. The first meeting took place on the evening of 25th May and the second on 4th October. Robert Irving, in his role as Secretary to the Group, reported what had been discussed at these meetings to the Lundy Management Forum at their meetings which took place on 26th May and 4th November.

Below is a summary of topics that were raised and discussed during both meetings.

Reports from the island

Further to the Conservation Team's report elsewhere in this edition, items of particular interest to Group members included the following:

- The good spring tides at the end of March/start of April saw the repeat monitoring of intertidal sites (funded by Natural England), including the cup coral monitoring in the Devil's Kitchen. Whilst the number of Devonshire Cup Corals *Caryophyllia smithii* had remained stable, the number of Scarlet-and-Gold Star Corals *Balanophyllia regia* showed a marked increase, from 191 in 2020 (which had been an 11% increase on the previous year) to (a record) 232 in 2021. What are thought to be two new sites for the *Balanophyllia* coral have also been found within the Devil's Kitchen, so the species seems to be doing particularly well at the moment. On behalf of Natural England, a series of five rockpools within the Kitchen were also re-assessed, the first time this has been done since 2015. The study of these pools was initiated by Keith Hiscock and Robert Irving in 1984.
- The appearance of five Pacific Oysters *Magallana gigas* (a non-native, invasive species) early in the year on the south side of the Landing Bay raised concern. Keith Hiscock was surprised that the larvae had managed to get over to Lundy, as the larval lifespan is believed to be about 14 days and they were thought to be entirely intertidal. However, he assumes the closest source of a parent oyster must be the north coast of Devon. The species was originally allowed to be farmed in this country as the waters were considered too cold for its spat to survive. This has proved not to be the case and in the sheltered waters of South Devon, the species has become the dominant intertidal species in places. The agreed policy for those found at Lundy was to kill individuals by destroying their shells, to avoid any possible increase in numbers.
- Regarding the appearance of other non-native species, Keith Hiscock had come across the Pom-pom weed *Caulocanthus okamurae* (originally from east Asia) in the Devil's Kitchen, and the encrusting Red-ripple Bryozoan *Watersipora subatra* (which has a global distribution) from a small cave on the north side of Rat Island. Keith further expects the brown alga Wakame *Undaria pinnatifida* to make an appearance at Lundy soon, probably attached to the Jetty pilings.

News from Natural England

Mel Parker (NE Marine Lead Adviser, South West) explained at the May meeting that Natural England had no immediate plans to undertake any subtidal monitoring of the SAC. [It has since been decided, however, that some subtidal monitoring studies will take place in September 2022.] Such monitoring was last undertaken in 2014/15. Natural England's outlook was now to prioritise their resources on a risk basis (mostly from anthropogenic sources) and as Lundy was fortunate to escape from many of the pressures experienced by mainland coastal sites, the island's MPA was assessed as being a low priority.

Mel also explained that the priority assessment of sites by Natural England is now being done at a national level and not – as in previous years – at a regional level. It was of concern to some that the island's long-term marine data sets would be adversely affected by this change in policy.

Mel moved to a new position within Natural England towards the end of 2021, with her place as Marine Lead Adviser being taken by Sophie Hare. Mel had represented Natural England on the Group for 12 years and was warmly thanked by the Chair for her contributions to the Group over this period of time.

News from D&SIFCA

Lauren Parkhouse (Environment Officer) reported that, following an assessment of Inshore Vessel Monitoring Systems (IVMS) data over the past year, she had found no activity at all in the north-east corner of the MPA during that time. This is an area where boats with demersal mobile gear were permitted. By comparison, during the previous year (2019) there had only been five days of activity within the same area, involving just a single turn-around sweep of a vessel towing gear.

Early in 2021, the Warden had reported a possible infringement within the MPA's north-eastern border by a scallop dredger *Emily-J*. The vessel had been observed with her gear down, although for some reason had had her IVMS tracker turned off. Following advice from D&SIFCA, the Warden had contacted the vessel to find out what she was up to. The skipper explained he was having engine trouble and had come into the Landing Bay. Suspecting the vessel may have been actively dredging for scallops (a banned activity within the MPA), D&SIFCA staff began an

*Devil's Kitchen at low tide
(photo: Dean Jones).*



infringement investigation. By October's meeting, this matter had still not been resolved. The initial description was that the vessel was "sitting on a dredge at anchor" rather than it being actively fishing. This is classified as an 'infringement' but not a 'fishing infringement'. A court case took a further 12 months to resolve, with the skipper eventually being fined for an infringement within the MPA.

Lastly, Lauren brought to the Group's attention a project to be undertaken by Ocean Mind, a company which conducts fisheries surveillance around the world. They have been asked by Defra to look at five sites in the UK to investigate the efficiency of their surveillance techniques with regard to fishing activity, and Lundy is one of these chosen sites. The techniques could include satellite monitoring and fixed-wing drones, with the trial period starting in 2022.

News from Historic England

In the early part of the year, Terry Newman took over from Hefin Meara as the Historic England representative on the Group. Terry informed the Group as to who had licences to dive on the two Protected Wreck sites within the MPA. Later on in the year, concern had been raised about possible non-licencees diving on the Gull Rock wreck site. Unfortunately, there was insufficient detail of the incident to take it any further, but it was as well to know that other users of the MPA were keeping their eyes open for such incidents.

News from the North Devon Biosphere Reserve

At the Group's October meeting, Andy Bell of the Biosphere Reserve explained he had put in an application to the government's Communities Recovery Fund and to the Environment Agency's 3-SEAS fund, for funding to help with a number of projects. These included the compilation of a Marine Nature Recovery Plan for North Devon (to include Lundy); a project reviewing the management of the MPA (to be contracted out to Plymouth University); and an assessment of the blue carbon resource of North Devon's coastline.

The Biosphere Reserve had also arranged for another skipper accreditation training course (Lundy's own WISE scheme) to be run. This time around, it would be on-line (on Google Classroom) so that skippers could undertake the course at a time of their own convenience. By completing the course, boat skippers obtain a certificate and are able to display the course logo on their boat. The intention will be for them to repeat the course every two-three years.

News about the Lundy Marine Festival

By early summer 2021 it was agreed that the situation regarding the status of the Covid pandemic in England was improving and that restrictions to contain the disease were gradually easing. Consequently, it was decided that the Marine Festival, which had been due to take place during the summer of 2020, would run from mid-July until mid-September 2022. 2022 would also mark the 50th anniversary of the Lundy MPA (which had started out in 1972 as a voluntary marine nature reserve), so there would be an opportunity to celebrate this milestone too, which seemed appropriate.

Robert Irving agreed to act as Co-ordinator of the Festival. By the end of 2021, preparations for the Festival were well underway. Applications had been submitted to a number of grant-awarding bodies; possible sponsors were being approached for funding; projects were being drawn up with specific groups being invited to get involved; publicity opportunities were identified; dive boats were reserved; and the Festival's website, which had been created two years previously but had been put on hold, was further developed.

If there are any matters which LFS members would wish to have addressed at the Advisory Group meetings, Robert would be happy to raise them on your behalf: Robert@sea-scope.co.uk