

LUNDY MARINE PROTECTED AREA ADVISORY GROUP REPORT

Robert Irving (LMPAAG Secretary)

The Lundy Marine Protected Area Advisory Group (LMPAAG) provides a forum for 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 and Severn Inshore Fisheries and 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 and local dive clubs.

The Group holds two meetings each year. In 2023, the spring meeting took place on the evening of 3rd May at the Clubhouse of the Ilfracombe Sub-Aqua Club in Ropery Road, Ilfracombe. The autumn meeting was held on 17th October on board the MS *Oldenburg*, tied up alongside the quay in Bideford. This meeting was the 18th for the Advisory Group in its present guise and the 75th since its first meeting as the Lundy Marine Consultation Group back in 1985. In my role as Secretary to the Group, I report the key points raised at these two meetings to the Lundy Management Forum (consisting of all organisations with responsibility for the overall management of the island), which takes place soon after each of the Advisory Group meetings.

Below is a summary of topics that were raised during both Advisory Group meetings.

Accreditation Scheme for charter boat skippers

A Marine Wildlife Aware Accreditation Scheme, aimed at the skippers and crews of charter boats bringing divers, snorkellers, and visitors to the island, was initiated by former Warden Beccy MacDonald-Lofts in 2015. Since then, there have been single training days held on the mainland each spring, though these were not held during the years of the Covid pandemic. The scheme, which is overseen by the North Devon Biosphere Reserve, encompasses a day of training covering marine wildlife identification, how to behave when close to seabirds and grey seals, how to record and report sightings, and how to follow the MPA's Code of Conduct. Once skippers have attended a training day, they can advertise they are an Accredited Operator and are included on a list of certified skippers recommended to be used for visiting the island. (see: www.northdevonbiosphere.org.uk/accreditation-scheme).



An online version of the course was developed during the pandemic, and 2023 saw the resurrection of the in-person version of the scheme with a training day held on 9th March.

About 30 charter boat skippers and crew members (as well as some other interested parties) attended the course which was conducted by Beccy MacDonald-Lofts. The Warden, Rosie Ellis, later commented that it was good to see so many taking part as it shows that the scheme is being taken seriously.

◀ Logo of the North Devon Marine Wildlife-Aware Accreditation Scheme.

University Research Projects

There were three student MSc studies relating to the MPA carried out during 2023. These were undertaken by Tara McEvoy-Wilding (University of Exeter) who investigated the effectiveness of a new non-invasive sampling method for surveying benthic infauna; Lara Winsloe (University of Exeter) who studied the parental care of the Herring gull; and Theodora Stephens-Manassieva (University College London) who investigated how the island's Marine Protected Area is managed. Natural England has confirmed they do not plan to supervise any Lundy-related student studies during 2024, due to their limited in-house team capacity only now allowing just one student project to be supervised per year.

Keith Hiscock, Chair of the Advisory Group, pointed out during the October meeting that in his lectures to Masters' students at the Marine Biological Association in Plymouth, he used the example of Lundy and of this Advisory Group as part of how the management of MPAs should be done. He used the Lundy MPA Management Plan as the only example he could find in England of a structured marine management plan with goals, objectives, and tasks. Lundy certainly ranks highly in setting a good example in this field. Robert Irving believes that there is a lot more that could be done, with potential projects having to be 'put on hold' by a lack of funding.

The appointment of Marine Wardens

Following the success of having two volunteer wardens specifically appointed to help with the Marine Festival during the summer of 2022, it was pleasing to note the appointment of a volunteer assistant marine warden to the island's Conservation Team for the summer of 2023. Nao Szulc, a marine biology student from Exeter University (Penryn campus), was present on the island during the main family holiday period, from 13th July until 27th August, undertaking snorkel safaris, rockpool rambles, and filling diving cylinders. Another student volunteer, Nicola Dunkin, acted as a seal warden from 1st August until 7th October, coinciding with the grey seal pupping season. Towards the end of 2023, Tara McEvoy-Wilding was appointed as the new Lundy Assistant Warden and will take up her post in spring 2024. Tara was one of the two volunteer Marine Festival wardens during the summer of 2022 and her marine biological expertise will be greatly welcomed by LFS members.

Scaffolding poles at Brazen Ward

Back in February 2018, whilst repairs were being undertaken on the stone platform at Brazen Ward (a Scheduled Monument dating from the Civil War period), a particularly strong storm occurred which popularly became known as the 'Beast from the East'. As a result of the exceptionally strong wind, some steps made from scaffolding poles were blown away from their supporting structure and strewn over the surrounding rocks. Some of the twisted wreckage was later recovered from rockpools in the intertidal whilst other sections had become wedged in amongst large rocks below the low water mark.

This incident was first reported to the Group by Derek Green at the meeting in April 2018 (see Irving, 2019). He pointed out that the removal of the wreckage from the subtidal areas would not be a straightforward procedure as several had become wedged into crevices and their overall weight was considerable. However, it was agreed that the removal of the wreckage should be attempted whenever a suitable opportunity arose.

At the 2023 meeting in October, it was asked if the wreckage had since been removed. The answer came back that it had not, and it was now the considered opinion that it should not be. The cost of doing so would be prohibitive (amounting to over £7,000), requiring a commercial diving team to be on-site for several days, together with heavy lifting equipment which was likely to cause further damage to marine life which had now grown over the buckled poles. It was agreed that the

wreckage should be treated in the same way as any other shipwreck, i.e. left to decay naturally, forming an additional habitat to be colonised by marine life over time.

A short documentary film about Lundy's No Take Zone

As part of the Marine Festival in 2022, a film was produced about the MPA's No Take Zone, which covers an area of 3.3 km² off the island's east coast. The film was sponsored by the Blue Marine Foundation (who intend to use it to support their campaign to promote Highly Protected Marine Areas) and was filmed and directed by Gareth Alvarez and Rob Whitney of North Devon Moving Image. At the Group's May meeting it was reported that the film was in the final stages of editing and at the October meeting it was announced that a preview screening of the finished film would take place in Ilfracombe in November. Consequently, on the evening of 28th November, an invited audience of 60 (all of whom had had some input into the film in one way or another) were invited to the screening at the Limekiln Café close to the harbourside in Ilfracombe. The intention is to have a public screening of the film at the South-West Marine Ecosystems Conference in Plymouth in April 2024, after which Blue intends to make it freely available for all to see via YouTube.

A request to use the Lundy MPA name to help promote a cosmetic product

Following an article I had written in early 2022 for the Marine Conservation Society's magazine about celebrating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the MPA at Lundy, I was contacted towards the end of 2023 by a Corporate Partnerships Manager at MCS asking if I could assist one of their corporate supporters to do some filming at Lundy. The party in question turned out to be a UK-based international cosmetics company who were developing a new skincare product based on the culture of planktonic diatoms. The company was keen to use diatoms netted from the waters of the country's longest-established MPA, and to feature the name of the Lundy MPA on the product's containers.

Unbeknown to me at the time, it turned out that the filming in question had already taken place but that a second visit was being sought. The intention would be to emphasise the conservation ethos of the island. Several plankton samples, found to contain suitable diatom species for 'growing on', had also already been collected from within the MPA. I agreed to present the request of the company to the October meetings of both the Advisory Group and the Management Forum and to inform them of the outcome.

A conversation with the Lundy General Manager Derek Green revealed that this was the fourth time in the past year that a cosmetics company had wanted to use the Lundy 'brand' to endorse their products. All of these requests had been turned down on the basis that it smacked of 'greenwashing' by the companies and that this latest approach should be viewed as trying to enhance the company's green (or perhaps blue) credentials. Following due consideration, representatives of both the Advisory Group and the Management Forum agreed that the request to make a promotional film at Lundy be denied and that it be made clear the name of the Lundy MPA should not be used to help promote any product.

News from Natural England

Following a short, weather-curtailed field visit (two days) in September 2022 by Natural England marine biologists to assess the condition of the habitat features of the Lundy Special Area of Conservation (SAC), each stipulated feature and sub-feature was determined to be in favourable condition, with 'varying degrees of confidence'. The habitat features in question are the intertidal and subtidal rocky reefs (level of confidence: low); submerged or partially submerged sea caves (level of confidence: low); and 'sandbanks which are slightly covered by seawater all the time' which, in the case of Lundy, are taken to include the muddy sediments off the island's east coast (level of confidence: medium). Note that Grey Seals, the fourth named feature of the SAC, were not included in this assessment.

Despite the levels of confidence in these assessments as being low or medium, each of these three habitat features was allocated '100% favourable condition' status by Natural England (Natural England, 2023). However, the two marine biologists who sit on the Advisory Group, Dr Keith Hiscock and Robert Irving, queried these assessments as they appeared to be both misleading and inaccurate. Indeed, Keith wanted to point out that, in his role as editor of the marine life sections of the SW Marine Ecosystems report for 2022 (Hiscock & Earll 2023), he concluded that: 'overall, Lundy's shore and seabed marine life is in poor condition', reflecting a reduction in the number of species and their overall condition and/or abundance.

The condition assessments of the SAC's listed features must be undertaken at least once every six years. In this latest assessment round, the cut-off date for assimilating data relating to each feature/sub-feature was 31st December 2022. This meant that the study of the populations of the Sunset Cup Coral at the Knoll Pins, undertaken during the summer of 2022 and reported on in mid-January 2023 and which showed a continuing decline in the numbers of individual corals, was not considered. Neither was the assessment of the condition of Pink Sea Fans carried out during the Marine Festival, as well as anecdotal evidence of a decline in various anthozoan species, including other corals and colonies of Red Sea Fingers. Representatives of the Ilfracombe Dive Club were also disappointed not to have been asked for their views about the overall condition of the SAC at the time of the field visit. Natural England responded by saying the results of other surveys would be taken into account during the next round of condition assessments.

News from D&S IFCA

D&S IFCA byelaws allow bottom trawling to take place on an area of subtidal sand in the northeast corner of the MPA. The Group was informed that two vessels completed four trawls in that area between 23rd June and 23rd August 2023. The longest trawl was for 29 minutes. This level of activity was below the baseline level set in 2019, so no check of the impact of the trawling activity was required under the Habitat Regulations.

A Belgian trawler, the *Windroos* registered in Zeebrugge, was reported to the IFCA by the island's Warden on 3rd July 2023 as being present within the No Take Zone with its net gear in the water over the side of the vessel. Being underway, it could have been actively fishing although the skipper later explained his crew were washing the net, that it was well clear of the seabed, and that it was not fishing at all. Whilst this explanation was eventually accepted by the IFCA's enforcement team, 'gear-streaming', as it is known, is still an offence (the relevant bylaw states that all gear should be lashed down or stowed when a vessel is within a Marine Protected Area). However, the enforcement team was unable to obtain sufficient circumstantial evidence (such as date, time, location etc.) to enable prosecution proceedings to be taken forward, even though photographs and video recordings had been made at the time. As it was, the vessel in question was too large to be granted a licence to fish within the D&S IFCA's waters and would require a licence from the Marine Management Organisation. It was thought to have been at Lundy whilst sheltering from rough weather. It was reassuring to know however



▲ The Belgian trawler *Windroos* under way within the No Take Zone, with a net (hidden) lowered over its starboard side, photographed from the island. (Photo: Joe Parker).

that not only did members of the Conservation Team spot this activity at the time but that several members of the public reported it to the Warden as well.

News from Historic England

Following some misunderstandings last year regarding permissions for individuals to dive on either of the two protected wrecks within the MPA, the Warden had prepared a spreadsheet which she had sent out to the local dive clubs and charter skippers for those intending to undertake dives under the Lundy Company's licence. This had been done in agreement with Terry Newman (Maritime Archaeologist at Historic England) and should help streamline the way the system works. The Nautical Archaeology Society (under the guidance of their Education Manager Peta Knott) held a Protected Wreck Day (PWD) in June, following on from four successful inaugural PWDs held during the Marine Festival in 2022. The plan had been for divers to undertake 'guided' dives (i.e. with laminated labelled diagrams) on the SS *Iona II* protected wreck and the HMS *Montagu* scheduled monument. Unfortunately, south-westerly winds meant that it was not possible to dive on the *Montagu*, so an alternative dive on the MV *Robert* off the east coast was undertaken instead. It is hoped these Protected Wreck Days will become an annual occurrence in the future.

Use of an underwater fluorescent marker by Historic England to deter thefts from Protected Wreck sites

Terry Newman informed the Group at the October meeting of a plan by Historic England to add forensic marking to valuable underwater artifacts associated with the country's 57 protected wrecks. The project has been 7-8 years in the making, most of that time being spent creating a suitable gunk-like substance that will work underwater. What has been created is similar to 'smart water' used to deter thieves from stealing items above water. The new product will be invisible underwater but will show up under ultra-violet light. It remains stuck to anything that touches it. Its chemical signature also makes the product site-specific, meaning it can tie the theft of an object (or even just of someone's presence at a site if they get gunk on themselves) to that site.

Terry explained that the product had been developed by the marine archaeology company MSDS (partly run by Alison James who used to represent Historic England on Lundy's MPA Advisory Group). He added that the Gull Rock protected site at Lundy could well be suitable for the use of this product, as several artifacts from that site had already gone missing since it was first discovered in 1968. It is likely that sites where the product will be applied over the coming years will be kept secret so that would-be thieves would be unaware of which sites have been treated and which have not.

Your input

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@sea-scope.co.uk.

References

Hiscock, K. & Earll, R. (eds) 2023. *South-west Marine Ecosystems Report for 2022*. Marine Biological Association of the UK, Plymouth. DOI: 10.17031/7kfv-tq71.

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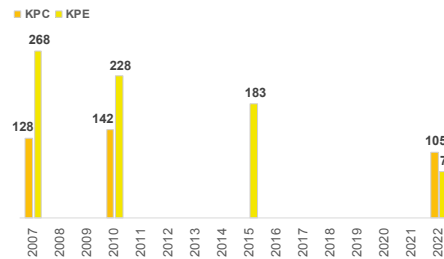
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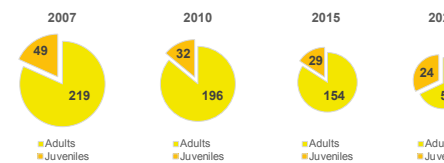
▲ Two Sunset Cup Corals *Leptopsammia pruvoti* joined at their bases, Knoll Pins, Lundy (Photo: Paul Kay).

THE LUNDY MARINE FESTIVAL 2022 - a correction.

In the account of the 2022 Lundy Marine Festival written by Robert Irving in the 2022 Annual Report, one of the figures was reproduced with part of it missing, for which the editor apologises. Robert has kindly supplied a correction, which appears below.



▲ Figure A. Total no. of Sunset Cup Corals by year (2007-2022) and by site. [KPC = Knoll Pins Cave; KPE = Knoll Pins East.]



▲ Figure B. Number of individual cup corals (adults and juveniles) from the Knoll Pins East site, 2007-2022.

'The figure in question (on p. 29 of the 2022 AR) related to the number of Sunset Cup Corals (*Leptopsammia pruvoti*) present at two monitoring sites at the Knoll Pins from 2007 until 2022. Unfortunately, the numbers for 2022 were missed from the histogram. The complete figure (Fig. A) is reprinted left. A second figure (Fig. B) is also included here which provides a clearer explanation of the study's conclusion'.

'Figure A shows that populations of the Sunset Cup Coral have continued to decline at both monitoring sites at the Knoll Pins. The Knoll Pins East site is most dramatic in its decline. Figure B separates out the 'adults' from the 'juveniles' at the Knoll Pins East site. The total number (as indicated by the size of the pie charts) drops over the years but note that the proportion of juveniles is higher in 2022 (at about 33%). It is hoped this might indicate the downward trend in numbers is starting to level off'.

Robert Irving
12th March 2024