

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 2025, the spring meeting took place on the evening of 7th May at the Clubhouse of the Ilfracombe Sub-Aqua Club in Ropery Road, Ilfracombe. This was the first 'hybrid' meeting of the Group, meaning that attendance was either in person or remotely via the on-line communications app MS Teams (thanks to hosting by the Lundy Company). There being no major technical issues, it was agreed this format should be adopted for all future meetings.

The autumn meeting was held on 27th October, also at the Ilfracombe Sub-Aqua Club. At this meeting it was agreed that, thanks to the generosity of Ilfracombe Sub-Aqua Club, all future meetings would be held at their Clubhouse, as not only could they host hybrid meetings but Ilfracombe was a more convenient location to reach for most members of the Group than Bideford. This second meeting was the 20th for the Advisory Group in its present guise and the 77th 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), at Forum meetings which take place soon after each of the aforementioned Advisory Group meetings.

Below is a summary of discussion points that were raised during both of the Advisory Group meetings held in 2024.

MSc thesis on the governance of the Lundy Marine Protected Area

During the spring and summer months of 2024, a postgraduate student from University College London, Theodora Stephens-Manassieva, undertook an MSc research dissertation on the governance effectiveness of the Lundy MPA entitled: *Ship-shape and Bristol fashion: an MPA success story in the Bristol Channel*. Her research involved a number of interviews with members of the Advisory Group, underpinned by a discourse analysis. Her study revealed that 'the Lundy MPA is managed through a top-down, government-led approach, but one that is greatly reliant on local leadership in particular. Statutory bodies and government agencies have played a central role in Lundy's management, which has been supplemented with partnerships with other key actors, such as fishermen, scientific researchers and local business operators.'

Request for information at the end of each diving season on which sites divers have visited

How many dives are taking place within the MPA each year and where are they taking place? In the original 1983 Marine Management Plan, a map was included showing where dives had been undertaken during the tenure of the first marine warden in 1978, but at present no records are kept of where divers are asking to dive within the MPA; these data would be really useful for the on-going management of the MPA. Information from dive groups staying on the island as well as

those being brought to the island from the mainland would be required. It was agreed this could all be possible without too much effort and would certainly prove useful. It would also be useful to have a record of numbers of divers snorkelling with seals, which is an activity often on offer during the divers' 'rest period' between dives.

Request for the Marine Management Plan to be updated

The latest version of the MPA's Marine Management Plan was published in 2017. It was hoped that the Plan would be reassessed and updated (if required) every five years, so an update is now overdue. Several parts of the Plan now require updating such as the inclusion of the latest Zoning Scheme (introduced in 2019); and the inclusion of HMS *Montagu* as a Scheduled Monument, also in 2019. An update on the current populations of seabird species is required too. Approaches to Natural England (as the lead managers of the MPA) to fund the cost of such updating have been declined, so this task remains on hold for the time being.

Use of drones within the MPA and over the island

An incident took place during the summer when a small drone was flown from a dive boat close to the shore and ended up crashing on to rocks, leading to the disturbance of a number of seals basking in the vicinity. The skipper of the boat in question pointed out that the MPA's Code of Conduct should include a policy on the use of drones within the MPA, which currently does not exist. It was agreed there was an urgent need for the policy covering drones flying from the island (which effectively bans all drone flying unless special permission had been granted) to be extended beyond the 100m buffer zone around the cliffs. As a consequence, it was agreed that the drone no-fly zone should include the whole of the MPA as well.

A short documentary film about Lundy's No Take Zone

As one of the projects that was undertaken during the Marine Festival (July-September 2022), a film was commissioned about the effectiveness of the No Take Zone off the east side of the island. The film was conceived and co-produced by Robert Irving, filmed and directed by Gareth Alvarez and Rob Whitney of North Devon Moving Image, and was sponsored by the Blue Marine Foundation.

The resulting 30 minute film, entitled *Safeguarding Our Seas: Lessons From Lundy*, had its first public screening on 26th April at the end of a one-day conference run by South-West Marine Ecosystems in Plymouth. The film's sponsors were very pleased that both John Balls and Ben Bengay, representing the North Devon fishing community, came down to Plymouth and were happy to speak at the end of the film about how the NTZ at Lundy has worked. Derek Green, Lundy General Manager, commented that he had been very impressed by the film and that it had had a very positive reaction from all those who had seen it.



▲ Holding screen for the film about Lundy's No Take Zone (North Devon Moving Image).

The film is now up on YouTube and is available for anyone to watch (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ecsil2ChwA8&t=556s>). At October's meeting, Lauren Parkhouse (D&SIFCA representative) informed the Group that a colleague of hers had shown the film at a meeting in Húsavík, Iceland looking at the benefits of setting up a No Take MPA in the local area. Closer to home, there were also screenings at the Appledore Book Festival on 18th September and at the Braunton Countryside Centre on 23rd October. A shortened 12 minute version of the film has been entered into the Edinburgh Film Festival, due to take place in April 2025.



▲ The underside of a 'berried' female lobster, showing a clutch of eggs. The female will hold onto the eggs, which may number from 8,000 to 40,000 depending on her age, for up to nine months. The eggs start off red and gradually turn black when ready for release. Berried lobsters must be returned to the sea unharmed: it is illegal to land them. (Photo: Robert Irving).

Concern raised over anchoring on sensitive habitats

At the October meeting, a discussion was held concerning how anchoring on sensitive habitats could be restricted in some way. Of particular concern was the potential disruption to pink sea fans: the hope was that, because of the fans' slow recovery from the infection which decimated their numbers almost 25 years ago, any activities which might be adversely affecting their recovery should be minimised.

The Assistant Warden, Tara McEvoy-Wilding, proposed that a narrow, shallow-water strip along much of the island's east coast, between 300 – 650m wide, could be designated a No Anchoring Zone. Most of the sea fans present on the east side of the island were found within this area. However, the charter boat skippers thought this was a little excessive as there were times when their divers or snorkellers were wanting to enter the water in small coves where they might encounter seals. It was here where they would want to anchor if there was no possibility of tying up to a mooring buoy.

The eventual compromise reached was that it was recommended the number of eco-moorings should be increased in popular locations, thereby allowing boats to moor instead of anchoring. The existing eco-moorings had proved popular with the skippers of these boats, the only concern being that there weren't enough of them! The Assistant Warden agreed to look into how this might be done, with Derek Green adding his support to the proposal. We hope next year's report will tell of a positive outcome to this situation.

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.