

Notes of the Cardigan Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Liaison Group Meeting

10th December 2008, 7.30pm, Llanina Arms Hotel, Llanarth

CHAIR:

Cllr Gill Hopley

PRESENT & APOLOGIES

Those in attendance and apologies listed in **Appendix 3**

PRESENTATIONS:

1) A round up of the past year in the SAC by Ben Sampson, Cardigan Bay SAC Officer.

Key points covered:

- Change of SAC Officer: Annalisa Bianchessi left to take up a position with Rare Conservation in December last year and Ben Sampson began in March.
- SAC Management Scheme re-write (incorporating the 6 additional features) was completed and approved by the Relevant Authorities and is available on the SAC website. Many thanks to those that took part in the consultation process and made it the inclusive document that it is. There will be an annual review of actions and implementation - anyone with comments should contact the SAC Officer.
- Scalloping was briefly touched on because of the level of concern expressed in the spring over the massive increase in the number of boats active inshore. The Sea Fisheries Committees made a temporary closure within 3 miles of the shore to the south of New Quay.
- Oil and gas exploration licences - not granted because BERR's appropriate assessment concluded that not enough was known about the distribution of dolphins in Cardigan Bay to be certain that they would not be affected.
- The Boat Place saw record numbers of visitors through the summer, over 8000 in total.
- Thanks to a marine stewardship grant from the Crown Estate the SAC Officer had a patrol boat to allow him to speak directly to boaters using the site, primarily raising awareness of the designation and code of conduct. Most patrols targeted the area around Mwnt and Aberporth where dolphin activity is high and it is known that compliance with the code is generally lower.
- The SAC website, www.cardiganbaysac.org.uk has been updated with a new look and now includes a message board, allowing anyone with an interest in the site to leave comments. It is hoped that this will be widely used to pass on concerns over management, wildlife sightings etc.

2) An update on the Ceredigion Recreational Boating Management Scheme by Liz Allan, Ceredigion's Conservation Management Officer.

Key points covered:

- Ceredigion began to work on the issue of recreational boating with the establishment of the Marine Heritage Coast in 1992. Dolphin Watch highlighted issues that required attention, especially in communicating and promoting the code of conduct.

- The Recreational Boating Scheme was developed for an (unsuccessful) Objective One bid but funding was found for phase one from the Crown Estate's Marine Stewardship Fund. This allowed the development of the Boat Place, information panels at launch points and code of conduct leaflets. The overall aim is to demonstrate that boating and wildlife can coexist, with sustainable management catering for the needs of recreational boat users and the Bay's marine wildlife.
- Phase II runs from 2008-2010. So far it has provided a patrol boat for the SAC Officer, and plans are underway for improved information at launch points, promotion of marine wildlife tourism opportunities from land (a wildlife leaflet and guided walk programme in 2009) and the production of a recreational boating plan (RBP) in 2010.
- The RBP will address questions such as:
 - is change needed?
 - Are there sensitive sites that need extra management?
 - If so, what?
 - Are there sites where boating could be promoted more?
 - Should there be no go zones for boating?
- The timetable for the RBP is:
 - Public consultation: April-September 2009
 - Draft plan produced: October-November 2009
 - Discussion at Liaison Groups: December 2009
 - Plan finalised: January-March 2010
- The plan includes reviewing the Codes of Conduct (commercial trip boats and recreational vessels) and will address whether we still need two codes, if any changes are required; with an all Wales code being discussed does Ceredigion need something more specific?
- The current code has been shown to reduce the risk to dolphins from boats and has 90% compliance (98% from trip boats).

3) Bottlenose dolphin research update by Dr Mandy McMath, Senior Marine Vertebrate Ecologist, CCW.

Key points covered:

- Photo ID work gives the best population estimate. Both line transect and photo ID surveys show an increasing population, with the latest estimates showing around 200 animals. The discovery curve is still showing an increase in the number of animals identified - either not all the animals have been identified or there is a high degree of turnover.
- It is known that Cardigan Bay's dolphins range as far as North Wales and probably beyond, to the Isle of Man and the Solway Firth but there is no evidence of mixing outside the Irish Sea
- Reproductive rate is low, with females producing a single calf every 2-5 years, with around 20 calves born each year. The crude birth rates compare favourably with other populations.
- There is a strong seasonality to distribution, with numbers in Cardigan Bay far higher in the summer months and off North Wales in the winter months. The population is far more widely distributed in winter.
- Behavioural changes and skin lesions may be an indicator of health but no clear links have been established. There is evidence of a link between PCBs and

disease and the UK's highest levels in dolphins have been found in Cardigan Bay (possibly from Liverpool Bay?).

- Further work required:
 - A long series of population estimates
 - To determine the extent of exchange between this population and others
 - Survey and TPOD geographic coverage should be widened further
 - Increasing the number of aerial surveys would provide a valuable large scale snapshot
 - Insufficient information on gender
 - Detailed analyses of densities of prey species
 - Long-term effects of human activities

An update of the Fisheries in Cardigan Bay by Virginia Prieto, NWNWSFC Biodiversity Officer

Key points covered:

- Fishing issues in Cardigan Bay: Scalloping

Attention was given to a new **National Scallop Group** established to examine the problems that so as to agree on a strategy for the scallop sector on a national basis. A National Strategy is necessary so as to avoid displacement of vessels. Decisions must be taken on a national level with a long-term view. The NWNWSFC support it and hope for the integration of the SFCs and Wales Fisheries.

- Fishing issues in Cardigan Bay: Potting
- The maps that the committee sent out along with the Byelaw 12 authorisations (which illustrate the exclusion areas for scalloping) were thoroughly explained for last and current seasons.

Under the Wales Scallop Order (2005) you can fish for scallops anywhere in Welsh waters from the 1st of November to the 31st May. The NWNWSFC prohibit scalloping within three nautical miles of the shore in their district from 1st Nov to 31st Dec (Byelaw 12).

In March 2008 the Committee decided to close Area 1A (see appendix 1) for scallop dredging, as the fishing intensity increased to a level to be detrimental to the long-standing lobster and crab fisheries, a closure which remained in place until the end of the season. Area 2 and 2A remain closed in response to environmental concerns that scalloping would damage designated features within the SAC. The crab box enclosed area was explained. Included on the committee's map to inform scallopers where the concentration of pots would be found. It was a voluntary agreement ignored by some fishermen throughout the years. Prior to the start of the scallop season local pot fishermen, the SWFA and WFFA agreed a Code of Conduct to reduce gear conflict. Hence, the information on the committee's map has been superceded. This agreement will hopefully resolve gear conflict, as the NWNWSFC don't have legal powers to resolve gear conflict.

From 1st January the inshore areas of North Tremadog Bay have been subject to temporary closures to protect both shellfish and sensitive seabed features. On 1st Jan 2009, under Byelaw 12, the committee have decided to extend the area to encompass the whole of Area 3A (see appendix 2); to reduce the risk of damage caused by vessels in the event of the offshore areas becoming depleted of stock.

To protect the inshore lobster, crab and prawn fisheries, the committee have decided to close the inshore part of Area 1A from 1st Jan 2009; welcomed by fishermen as will offer the pot men protection and allow the local boats to continue scalloping between 1.5nm and 3nm.

- It was emphasized that the NWNWSFC review the fishing activity throughout the season and revise the temporary closures if fishing activity exceeds current expectations.
- A joint agency enforcement programme between NWNWSFC, SWSFC and WAG Fisheries has been agreed for the forthcoming season for a better management of the inshore fisheries.

A lively discussion followed, mainly focussed on the issue of scallop dredging, with questions answered by Martin Boyce, Principle Fisheries Officer with NWNWSFC. The decision to implement a temporary closure to scalloping within 1.5 miles of the shore in the southern part of their district from January 1st was not felt by the meeting to be sufficient and the overwhelming consensus was that this form of fishing is considered to be highly destructive and should not be permitted in a SAC at all. Anglers were concerned that stocks of demersal fish had been damaged by the habitat destruction, with knock-on implications for seals and dolphins; concerns were also raised about the damage to reef and sandbank features. It was queried why the precautionary principle appeared not to have been applied and a comparison was made with the oil and gas exploration licences, where BERR withdrew licence blocks in and adjacent to Cardigan Bay SAC from the licensing process because it was not certain that the integrity of the site would not be adversely affected.

Martin explained that the decision to close area 1A within 1.5nm of the shore was to protect crustacean stocks from damage and that an appropriate assessment of the scallop fishery had been approved by CCW. He emphasised that the Sea Fisheries Committees are able to close areas if required by the level of fishing activity but that they had no powers to restrict the numbers of permits issued. The Group was assured that their message would be communicated back to the NWNWSFC.

Ben Sampson agreed to be the focal point for anyone wishing to send their views in writing to the Sea Fisheries Committees and encouraged people to also use the discussion facility on the updated SAC website.

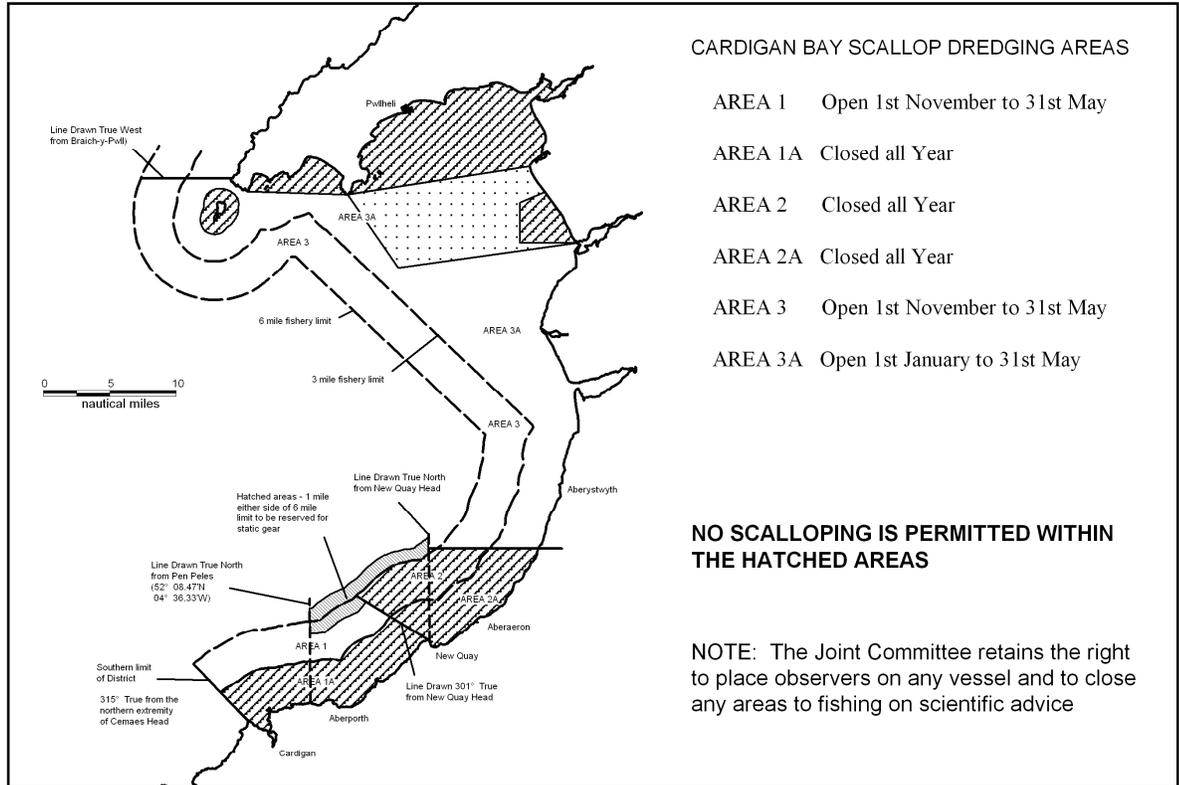
It was requested that another meeting be organised as soon as possible, focussing solely on the issue of commercial fishing within the SAC, including spokespersons from WAG Fisheries Branch who will be taking over responsibility for fisheries in Wales in 2010, and from CCW. **Action BS.**

Appendix 1.
NWNWSFC authorised and restricted areas for scallop dredging in Cardigan Bay 27
March - 31 May 2008



NORTH WESTERN AND NORTH WALES SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE
 AUTHORISED AND RESTRICTED AREAS FOR SCALLOP DREDGING IN CARDIGAN BAY
 DETAILS OF THE CLOSED AREAS ARE GIVEN ON ADDITIONAL MAPS

B



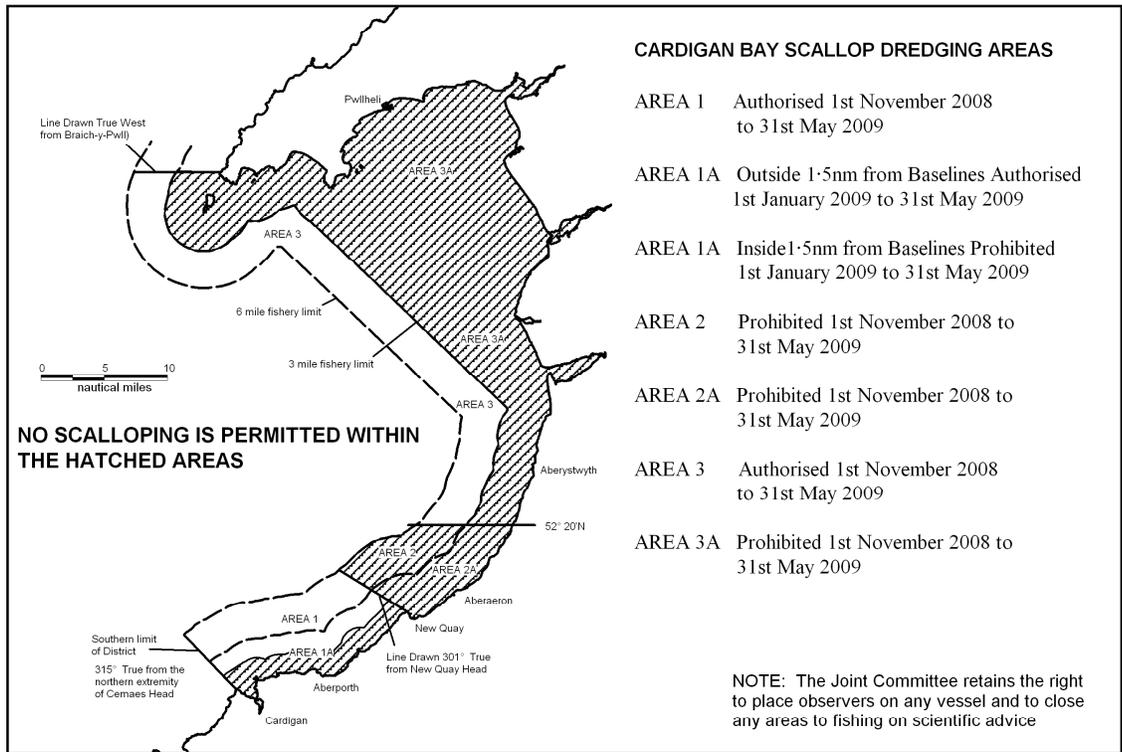
27th March 2008

Appendix 2.
NWNWSFC authorised and restricted areas for scallop dredging in Cardigan Bay
2008/9



NORTH WESTERN AND NORTH WALES SEA FISHERIES COMMITTEE
 AUTHORISED AND RESTRICTED AREAS FOR SCALLOP DREDGING IN CARDIGAN BAY 2008/9
 DETAILS OF THE CLOSED AREAS ARE GIVEN ON ADDITIONAL MAPS

B



CARDIGAN BAY SCALLOP DREDGING AREAS

- AREA 1 Authorised 1st November 2008 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 1A Outside 1.5nm from Baselines Authorised 1st January 2009 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 1A Inside 1.5nm from Baselines Prohibited 1st January 2009 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 2 Prohibited 1st November 2008 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 2A Prohibited 1st November 2008 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 3 Authorised 1st November 2008 to 31st May 2009
- AREA 3A Prohibited 1st November 2008 to 31st May 2009

NOTE: The Joint Committee retains the right to place observers on any vessel and to close any areas to fishing on scientific advice

15th October 2008

**Appendix 3.
Attendance list:**

Gill Hopley (chair)	Ceredigion County Council
Ben Sampson	Cardigan Bay SAC Officer
Liz Allan	Ceredigion County Council
Mandy McMath	Countryside Council for Wales
Jenny Higgins	Countryside Council for Wales
Virginia Prieto	NWNWSFC
Martyn Boyce	NWNWSFC
Sarah Lister	Friends of Cardigan Bay
David Thomson	Boat owner
Maggie Thomson	Boat owner
Roy Fenner	New Quay Harbourmaster Office
Bert Moore	Cwmtedu Bay Wildlife Organisation
Pauline Bett	Cwmtedu Bay Wildlife Organisation
Beryl Moore	Cwmtedu Bay Wildlife Organisation
Shane Alldred	Cwmtedu Bay Wildlife Organisation
Michael Beechey	Llangrannog Boating and Angling Club
Richard Wyn Thomas	Llangrannog Boating and Angling Club / Keep Wales Tidy
Ryan Beechey	Llangrannog Boating and Angling Club
Gari Jones	Llangrannog Boating and Angling Club
Mansel Beechey	Llangrannog Boating and Angling Club
Steve Hartley	Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre / Dolphin Survey Boat Trips
Janet Baxter	Friends of Cardigan Bay
Lyndon Lomax	Friends of Cardigan Bay
Sarah Perry	Cardigan Bay Marine Wildlife Centre
Terry Allen	Welsh Assembly Government
Glenys Higginbotham	Dolphin Watch volunteer
Les Higginbotham	Dolphin Watch volunteer
Mick Green	Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society
Danny Oldfield	QinetiQ
Chris Shipton	QinetiQ
Llwyd Edwards	Cardigan Town Council

Apologies:

Gethin James	Ceredigion County Council
Elin Jones	AM, Ceredigion
Jane Hodges	Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority
Trevor Theobald	Pembrokeshire County Council
Phil Coates	South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Kate Collins	Environment Agency Wales