

## **Loch nam Madadh European marine site: Case History**

This case history has been prepared as a record of the work undertaken on Loch nam Madadh in establishing a management scheme on the site as a means of sharing the experiences and good practice that have emerged.

### **A. General description and features of conservation importance**

Loch nam Madadh European marine site is a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) on account of two interest features:

- a) large shallow inlets and bay, and*
- b) lagoons.*

Both these features of conservation interest are noted to be amongst the best examples of their type in Europe. Additionally, *lagoons* have heightened conservation significance given that they are the only UK marine habitat with an EC conservation 'priority' status.

Loch nam Madadh cSAC, *lagoons and large shallow inlet and bay*, together show the complete transition from small sheltered freshwater lakes to moderately exposed fully marine conditions. Transition across the conservation features occurs within a total area of 2157 hectares, which is subdivided by 21 large islands and over 200 smaller islets and intertidal reefs. The mouth of the bay is 1.5 kilometres wide, and the maximum depth in the bay is 40 metres.

The large intertidal and subtidal surface areas of the convoluted coastline, islands, islets and reefs, coupled with the varying depths, hydrodynamic and salinity regimes, have allowed an extremely diverse group of marine biological communities to become established.

### **B. Socio-economic characteristics of Loch nam Madadh**

Loch nam Madadh (or Lochmaddy) is situated on the northeast coast of North Uist, one of the Western Isles in north western Scotland. The community around Loch nam Madadh is small and has strong attachments to the sea and land. The site supports a small but locally important creeling fishery. Boats from outside the local area occasionally undertake benthic trawling and dredging. There are three aquaculture enterprises. *Ascophyllum* seaweed harvesting was an important local industry, but has currently stopped due to a lack of markets. Small crofting communities are dispersed around the site.

### **C. The Relevant and Competent Authorities for Loch nam Madadh European Marine Site**

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- The Commissioners of Northern Lighthouses
- Crofters Commission
- The Crown Estate
- Forestry Commission
- Maritime and Coastguard Agency
- North of Scotland Water Authority
- Scottish Executive Development Department (Transport Group)\*
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (Agriculture Group)\*

- Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department (Fisheries Group)\*
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- Western Isles District Salmon Fishery Board
- Western Isles Enterprise\*

\* competent authorities that have had a close involvement in the development of the scheme.

## **D. Management Structures**

Relevant authorities, competent authorities and stakeholders met to oversee the development of the management scheme through a single group. Western Isles Council took the lead role, through the project officer, for coordinating these meetings and chairing them. The meetings were open to participation from wider stakeholders. Approximately ninety individual stakeholders have been involved in discussions surrounding the development of the management scheme and of these, a core group of twenty people has regularly attended public meetings.

During the later stages of the management scheme, the relevant authority and stakeholder groups have become formalised. Management of the European marine site is now coordinated via the Loch nam Madadh European marine site Management Group.

This group is composed of the fourteen listed relevant and competent authorities and four representatives of the stakeholder interests, namely; North Uist Community Council, Fish Farming Industry, Scottish Crofter's Union (North Uist Branch) and the Western Isles Fishermen's Association. The management group is a constituted body that has undertaken to meet at least once per year, to review the management action plan for Loch nam Madadh European marine site. Collectively the group has no legal powers but should be able to assist in the co-ordination of the legal functions of each of the relevant and competent authorities that are members.

Prior to the annual meeting of the Management Group (usually the night before) the Loch nam Madadh European Marine Site Forum will meet to hear about, and discuss the management activities of the relevant and competent authorities within the European marine site. The Forum is an open public meeting, allowing anyone with an interest in the loch to offer advice and guidance on the management of the European marine site. The Forum has no legal powers but will produce and convey the "Recommendations of the Forum" to the Management Group who are constitutionally required to consider these recommendations while reviewing their management action plan.

## **E. Key Events**

### **1995-1998**

Consultations on the proposed SAC were initiated by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in spring 1995. The site was confirmed as a candidate SAC in October 1996.

### **Spring 1998 - Autumn 1998**

A project officer was appointed in May 1998. The project officer organised and undertook one-to-one meetings with relevant authorities, stakeholders and public meetings to raise awareness of the site, the stakeholders' concerns and to inform the conservation objectives and operations advice.

### **Spring 1999 - Summer 1999**

First formal advice on conservation objectives and "Operations requiring consideration by relevant authorities" issued by SNH. This drew on the list of operations and their likely impacts

on the various features identified at public meetings. Draft advice was given by SNH to a meeting of the relevant and competent authorities in April 1999. Those present generally accepted the advice and the details were circulated to the other authorities. Wider consultation on the advice was undertaken through local newsletters and a public meeting in July 1999.

### **Autumn 1999**

A workshop attended by a mixed group of stakeholders and authorities was held in September 1999 to further explore the likely interaction of the users of the loch and the conservation features. SNH's non-statutory advice that accompanied Regulation 33 was issued with maps of the current extent of operations within the loch. The participants made judgments about how the various activities should be managed in order to maintain the conservation interests. Outputs from the meeting were distributed to all interested in the use of the site.

### **Winter 1999 - Spring 1999**

The project officer prepared a draft management scheme drawing on the outputs of the previous discussions and workshops. Relevant and competent authorities commented on the general contents of the management scheme during this period. The draft was discussed at a public meeting of stakeholders in April 2000.

### **Summer 2000 - Autumn 2000**

The new management structures for the site were confirmed, with meetings of both the Loch nam Madadh European Marine Site Management Group and the European Marine Site Forum. Final revisions and endorsements of the management group were made through these groups.

## **F. Budget and Resources**

The costs associated with developing the management scheme are as follows:

<b>Category</b>		<b>£k</b>
Information collation	SNH survey	140
Project officer - salary and T&S		60
Project officer - overheads	accommodation, training	6.8
Publicity and interpretation	Video, SNH leaflet	15
Publication of management scheme		4
IT equipment		2.2
Total		228k

In addition to the above costs, relevant authorities have each contributed to the development of the scheme. The contributions have been predominantly staff time.

## **G. List of key documents**

- Acoustic survey (1996)
- Local newsletter
- Loch nam Madadh underwater video.
- Loch nam Madadh leaflet
- European marine site website
- European marine site information map, summarising the management scheme
- Draft: Loch nam Madadh EUROPEAN MARINE SITE: Draft information provided by Scottish Natural Heritage's in preparation for the advice given under Regulation 33 (2) of The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994, November 2001

- Management scheme (December 2000)

## **H REVIEW OF LEARNING**

### **1. Information to support management schemes**

There is a reasonable quantity of information on the distribution and quality of biological features at Loch nam Madadh European marine site. The most useful information was collected through acoustic surveys carried out in 1991 and 1994. This information was used to underpin the justification for the site's selection. An additional survey was undertaken in 1996 and further surveys undertaken primarily to assist in the development of monitoring techniques but in addition contributed to the knowledge of the extent and quality of the interest features.

The survey reports were useful in providing evidence for the biological importance of Loch nam Madadh in its own right. The main shortcoming has been the lack of similar data for sites containing similar features that made it difficult to justify to potential objectors why Loch nam Madadh was selected over and above other sites.

**Role of Science.** Scientific information provided by a specialist research group at the initial consultation stage did a great deal to overcome the perceived conflict between fishermen and seals, when it was made clear that seals did not substantially feed on commercial fish stocks.

This issue was more significant for neighboring sites, rather than Loch nam Madadh – though it led to blanket objections by the fishermen's organisation and the local authority to all the European marine sites. The use of scientific information, and the appointment of a project officer bringing local jobs to the community, helped remove these general objections.

**Role objectives and operations advice.** There was initial concern, particularly from the project officer, at the use of the term 'operations likely to cause damage and disturbance', which was considered to promote conflicts in much the same way as the term PDOs (Potentially Damaging Operations) had done for SSSIs: too negative and restrictive.

### **2. Relevant authority and stakeholder structures**

The adoption of a single group to oversee the development of the management scheme reflected the equal interest of relevant authorities and stakeholders in the site. Officials are also members of the community. Furthermore, as the functions of individual relevant authorities and competent authorities only cover specific sectoral issues, the wider stakeholder community was felt to be better able to consider cross-sector issues than specialist relevant authorities.

An open group including the four key relevant authorities manages the European marine site, and whilst there were concerns that an open group might not be able to 'do business', it was agreed at a public meeting that such a structure was best. The group meets twice a year to report on European marine site management scheme progress and discuss related issues, and is open to all interested individuals. A report of the group's deliberations will be circulated to the wider community.

The role of certain competent authorities has been critical in the success of the scheme. Western Isles Enterprise for example has a key influence over whether any future development will take place in the area, on account of its grant functions.

### **3. Methods of relevant authority and stakeholder participation**

**Initial consultation.** The Scottish Office decision not to formally consult licensed fishermen arguably alienated these key stakeholders from the outset. Major objections raised by local authority and fishermen's organisations subsequent to the consultation, related to a nearby European marine site which had been designated for grey seals. Formal public meetings were held during European marine site consultations at which national nature conservation agency representatives explained the European marine site designation and presented slides illustrating the conservation features.

Some stakeholders objected vigorously at these meetings but these were very much a minority and not accepted as representative by other stakeholders.

The local representative of the nature conservation agency attended a Community Council meeting to discuss the European marine site, and a project officer from one of the Firths Initiatives gave a presentation at a subsequent Community Council meeting to illustrate how effective community-based management approaches can be.

Surgeries were held at which people could drop in to discuss issues raised by the European marine site consultation.

**Meetings.** Meetings, whether face-to-face or through workshops, were held with as many relevant authorities and stakeholders as possible. They were a key part in building partnerships and developing trust within the site.

North Uist has a proliferation of rural development and self help groups. Meetings, particularly in the winter, are a contemporary part of the local culture and social scene. However, the majority of meetings focus on very local issues that generally have human self or community interest at heart.

Taking this knowledge on board, it was relatively easy to attract significant numbers of stakeholders to European marine site meetings, given these sites offered a potential threat to their livelihoods, and for others, a potential threat to future economic development. Those with an exclusive interest in the nature of the marine environment were in a clear minority at most meetings and workshops.

Key factors in making these workshops successful were:

- using methods for securing maximum participation of stakeholders so that their input was as constructive and productive as possible;
- quickly redistributing information following meetings to ensure the continuity of interest;
- making meetings open to relevant and competent authorities. These groups found it helpful to discuss local conservation issues and the local delivery of their service.

**Relevant authority partnership building approaches.** A 'signpost table' was used to describe the specific responsibilities of different relevant authorities in relation to the different activities that occur within the European marine site. This serves as a tool for stakeholders to identify the relevant authority in question concerning specific issues/activities, and as a means of allocating tangible roles to relevant authorities.

**Stakeholder participation-building approaches.** Statutory conservation in the islands generally has a bad press and a key theme of the Loch nam Madadh project has been to try and avoid the

negative sentiment, the “*thou shalt not*” language and the feeling of outsiders telling locals how to go about their business.

This has been difficult given the origins of the European marine site are clearly distant and statutory. However the positive support for the management process has perhaps resulted from trying to offer positive outcomes to the stakeholders. In their terms this means maintaining their rights and opportunities for sustainable development.

Early on in the development of the scheme, the project officer ran an informal community workshop. This included a slide presentation of the marine conservation features, and presentations by a local fisherman, an outdoor pursuits operator and a fish farmer (presented by the project officer) about their activities.

Participatory appraisal techniques were then employed whereby participants were offered an opportunity to express their initial opinions about the SAC anonymously. They were asked to write down one positive and one negative statement about the European marine site proposal, and to put forward ideas as to the future possibilities that the proposal might offer.

The main fear was that the European marine site would upset the *status quo*, increase restrictive bureaucracy and limit new economic developments. But it was also recognised that it could promote green tourism and provide a secure sustainable base for economic development activities.

Several other rural development initiatives had recently employed participatory appraisal workshops, with similar positive results. However it will be important to avoid duplication and ‘participatory appraisal-fatigue’.

A formal community workshop was subsequently held which was also attended by a number of relevant authorities. Findings from the earlier participatory appraisal workshop were discussed. The participants were then split up into sub-groups (of random mixture) to discuss the activities that occurred in the loch and how these could influence the physical/chemical/biological components of the loch.

The information exchanged at this meeting allowed the project officer to gain a better understanding of the stakeholder and relevant authority views and knowledge of the site and also the different activity interactions that existed. This information was subsequently used by SNH to inform their advice on operations.

One factor felt to be particularly important in the success of the workshops was avoiding the use of representatives and/or the formation of interest specific groups. Stakeholders associated with the loch generally have many interests/jobs. It was thought inappropriate to gather local knowledge from ‘interest based groups’ or from ‘representatives’ who may have been ‘required’ to take a particular angle on discussion issues. The process was designed to allow understanding of the European marine site to be as widely held as possible. To achieve this, workshops were open public gatherings and people were organised in mixed groups.

The objectives and operations advice was widely circulated (120 stakeholders and organisations); but very little feedback was gained, and the subsequent public meeting was poorly attended. This suggests that the iterative process of developing the advice, and involving the local stakeholders, was beneficial in reducing fears about the advice.

Some stakeholders appreciated the tourism potential of the European marine site designation, and an emphasis is being placed on this sort of potential for tangible benefits as a means of generating stakeholder support for the European marine site.

**Role of the project officer.** The project officer adopted a strong community-based approach with an open single-tier management structure, although the national nature conservation agency did have some reservations as to the potential of such an approach. The fact that some of the project officer's family were from nearby was helpful in gaining his acceptance within the community.

#### **4. Process and content of the management scheme document**

Stakeholder and relevant authority input was achieved at the early stage of developing the management scheme document through the workshop held in September 1999. This identified a number of operations that were perceived to require the most significant management measures e.g. scallop dredging, trawling and salmon farming. These were further discussed with the respective relevant and competent authorities and with the operators – the fishermen and the fish farmers.

As previously outlined, the Regulation 33 advice was developed after the 'operations and their impacts' were examined by the stakeholders and authorities (via workshops and discussion). SNH built on this information and added their non-statutory advice, which generally supported many of the stakeholder's perceptions of what impacts the various listed operations could have on the marine environment.

The relevant and competent authorities were in general adamant that their resources would only stretch to supporting the minimum of service requirements for meeting their statutory functions. Therefore, the management actions listed in the management scheme are in general, as per relevant authority/competent authorities core functions, with a few exceptions. For example, where extra information/activity is thought to be crucial for the European marine site management to be effective. e.g. fisheries.

The drafting of management measures in general fell to the project officer who mainly reiterated the core-functions of the relevant authority/competent authorities and any other proactive elements of management that could be easily achieved. Relevant authority/competent authorities were helpful in providing this information. Although complex, management issues in Loch nam Madadh are mostly non-threatening to the European marine site, therefore maintenance of the current site management (i.e. *status quo*) was considered sufficient.

#### **5. Interpretation and publicity**

The site has been a focus of much discussion within the local community and in the local press. Initiatives to promote interest in marine life e.g. glass bottomed boat, have been useful in transforming the negative sentiment of imposed legislation into a more positive sustainability or rural development context.

A slide presentation employed to illustrate European marine site conservation features (marine life) at the initial public meetings to discuss the proposal was generally well received and provided an opportunity for informal discussion between stakeholders and the project officer.

A glass-bottomed boat was chartered for one and a half days to enable people to see the marine life at first hand. 281 locals, including many school children, went on these trips that did a great deal to foster interest. There was also a tank exhibition of marine life in a nearby market building over the same period, which was accompanied by slide shows, interpretive panels and videos.

Early public meetings also identified the need for a 'publicity group'. This group has provided a way into longer-term community involvement and interest in the site, spawning a number of

initiatives likely to be of a lasting contribution to the community, including a Society of the Sea and a European Marine Site Interpretation Centre.

Other media used to interpret and raise awareness of the site included a local newsletter, a colour leaflet illustrating the conservation features and introducing the European marine site, a video and website. Local radio, TV and papers were particularly important in publicising meetings and progress and have been an effective means of communicating with a small, close-knit community.