

Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau European marine site - Case History

This case history has been prepared as a record of the work undertaken at Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau in establishing a management scheme on the European marine site as a means of sharing the experiences and good practice that has emerged from it.

A. General description and features of conservation importance

The Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) is located in northwest Wales. It is one of the largest of the marine SACs in the UK, straddling almost 230km of coastline and covering an area of over 96,500 hectares. The site extends from Penrhyn Nefyn on the north Llŷn coast to the mouth of the Afon Clarach (Clarach River) north of Abersytwyth on the west Wales coast.

The coast and land around the cSAC is already recognized for its importance to nature conservation and landscape protection with a number of existing designations including: Special Protection Areas, a National Park, National Nature Reserves (4), Biosphere Reserve, Ramsar site, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other candidate Special Areas of Conservation.

Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau qualifies as a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC) for the following Annex 1 habitats:

- Reefs
- Estuaries

These complex Annex 1 habitats support a large variety of marine wildlife communities of European importance.

The reefs of the cSAC are located predominantly around Pen Llŷn and in north Cardigan Bay. They are exposed to a wide variety of environmental conditions such as wave action, tidal streams and depth variation and, as a result, support many different marine communities reflecting the local conditions prevailing at any one location. There are two distinctive elements to the reef feature of the site: (a) the reefs around Pen Llŷn which are mainly of bedrock and boulders extending to depths of over 40m, and support a wide variety of floral (seaweed) and faunal communities; and (b) the Sarnau reefs which are unique shallow ridges of boulders, cobbles and pebbles that extend south-west from the coast into Cardigan Bay. The Sarnau are dominated by seaweed communities that form extensive stands across the reefs. The Sarnau are thought to be the remains of glacial moraines formed during the last glaciation.

The three estuaries of the cSAC are located along the Meirionnydd coast in the southern half of the site. These are the best examples of small, drying, bar-built estuaries in Britain and, with their mountainous catchment areas, have some of the lowest nutrient inputs of any estuaries in Wales. The three estuaries are predominantly sandy-sandy/mud and support extensive intertidal sediment communities and saltmarsh. There is a continuous gradient between clean sands near the entrance to the sea and mud or muddy sands in the sheltered landward extremes of the estuaries with the different sediment types supporting a range of different communities of worms, crustacea and molluscs. The estuaries form important nursery areas for a number of fish species and are designated nursery areas for bass.

The area of the cSAC is also important for other wildlife not included in the reef and estuary features including cetaceans (bottlenose dolphin, harbour porpoise and Risso's dolphin), grey seals, birds (breeding seabirds, divers, waders and wildfowl) and other littoral and sublittoral marine communities.

B. Socio-economic characteristics

The land area bordering the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau cSAC is mainly rural in character with a relatively low population density and a population that is dispersed throughout the surrounding area. The population of the coastal communities is approximately 48,000 but the number of people living in the main catchment area of the site is likely to be larger as this figure does not account for the inland communities who could be considered within the catchment area of each of the estuaries. A large proportion of the local population are first language Welsh speakers.

Aside from infrastructure services (e.g. health, education) the economy is based primarily on farming and tourism. Fishing (mainly with static gear - pots and nets), although carried out mostly on a part-time basis, is an important element of the economy for the coastal communities.

The coast and sea are an important asset attracting many visitors to the area. There are a number of developments supporting the tourism industry and these are located in the areas of the main coastal settlements. Key attractions of the Pen Llŷn and Meirionnydd coasts are the coastal landscape and natural beauty of the area, the amenity beaches and opportunities for watersports and recreational fishing. The main harbours are at Aberdyfi, Barmouth, and Porthmadog, with a relatively large marina development at Pwllheli on the south Llŷn coast. The inshore area by Abersoch on the south Llŷn coast, is an important anchorage and a popular boating location in the summer.

C. The Relevant and Competent Authorities

Relevant authorities:

Dŵr Cymru
Ceredigion County Council
Countryside Council for Wales
Crown Estate
Gwynedd Council
North Western & North Wales Sea Fisheries Committee
Powys County Council
Severn Trent Water
Snowdonia National Park Authority
Trinity House Lighthouse Authority

Competent authorities or owner/occupiers that have had a significant input to the scheme:

All of the above

D. Management Structures

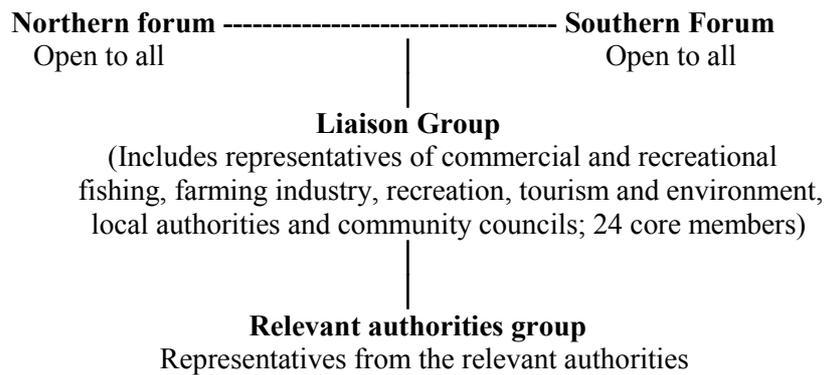
Prior to the submission of the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau site to Europe as a candidate Special Area of Conservation and the subsequent establishment of a relevant authorities group, there were no existing marine or coastal initiatives or projects linking the relevant and competent authorities. There was, and is, an existing management group for the Dyfi estuary biosphere reserve which is one of the estuaries of the cSAC but, other than this, there were no historical initiatives that involved the key partners across the area of the cSAC.

The Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau site was submitted to Europe at the start of 1996, and an initial meeting of the relevant authorities was organized later that year by the Countryside Council for Wales. At this meeting it was agreed that a relevant authorities working group for the cSAC should be established to address the management of the site. The role of Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau as one of the demonstration project sites under the UK Marine SACs project was also explained at the meeting and received

general support from the relevant authorities present. The relevant authorities group has met regularly since mid 1997.

Following a series of public meetings in 1999 and 2000 a Liaison Group made up of representatives of local interest groups and interested individuals together with community council and local authority representatives was established to work with the relevant authorities to develop a management plan for the site. The Liaison Group members were selected by consensus at the public meetings, to represent different interest areas and provide a conduit by which interested people can input their views into the developing management scheme. Open-to-all meetings provide a mechanism for a larger number of people to have an input to the management scheme and the cSAC.

Management structure:



E. Key Events

March – June 1995

Public consultation on Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau possible SAC.

October 1995

Following consultation, Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau recommended to Government as a candidate SAC.

January 1996

Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau submitted as candidate SAC to EC.

Early 1996

Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau cSAC put forward as a demonstration project site under the UK Marine SACs Project.

October 1996

CCW organizes initial meeting of relevant authorities. Discussion of responsibilities under the Habitats Directive and about the UK Marine SACs Project. Agreed to establish relevant authorities working group.

May 1997

Second meeting of relevant authorities group. Terms of Reference for group agreed. CCW provide secretariat for the group. Information paper about the cSAC presented to the relevant authorities by CCW. Initial work priorities for the group agreed. Discussion about providing information for the public; agreed to produce an information leaflet. Discussion about priorities for work on the sites as part of the UK marine SACs project. Relevant authority group continues to meet regularly (maximum 3 times a year).

August 2001

1997

Contract organized for survey of north Pen Llŷn reefs and broadscale mapping of sublittoral habitats around Pen Llŷn – studies to provide additional information about the SAC reef feature. CCW intertidal Phase 1 survey of the estuaries and intertidal of the Pen Llŷn and Meirionnydd coastlines.

January – October 1998

Initial draft of Regulation 33 information prepared by CCW and presented to relevant authorities. Briefing note about the cSAC prepared by CCW for other relevant authority staff and members. Discussion by relevant authorities about possible format of the management scheme.

Contracts organized for (i) review of human activities within and adjacent to the Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau cSAC and (ii) a study into the nutrient status of the Glaslyn/Dwryd, Mawddach and Dyfi estuaries. Both studies to be undertaken to support development of the management scheme.

Preparation and distribution of information leaflet about the cSAC to public and interest groups and organizations around the site. Aim of leaflet to publicise the cSAC and, through response to the leaflet, identify potential stakeholders and level of interest. Accompanied by press release and resultant press coverage on local radio and television.

Monitoring trails undertaken (as part of task 1.2). Compilation of information about relevant authority interests and responsibilities with the cSAC, including existing management and other plans.

November 1998

Relevant authorities prepare and distribute second leaflet about the cSAC and questionnaire to find out if people want to be involved with the management of the cSAC. Accompanied by press release and press coverage in newspapers and on local radio. Follow up advert in local newspapers to encourage responses to questionnaire.

January-Sept 1999

Structure and content of management plan agreed. Table of management response categories for activities agreed. Discussion about greater community involvement in the process – response to questionnaire poor but considered to indicate sufficient interest to require some sort of public meeting. Drafting of initial (background) sections of the management plan started.

Pair of display panels (A1 size) about the cSAC produced. Relevant authorities provided with copies.

Contract organized for study into surveillance and research requirement for physical processes affecting the estuary and Sarnau reef features of the cSAC. Study to be undertaken to support development of the management scheme.

Second year of monitoring trails undertaken (as part of task 1.2).

October 1999

Two public meetings held (one covering the southern part of the site and one covering the northern part of the site) – good response to both of these. Independent facilitator contracted to help run the meetings.

Meeting format involved having a smaller number of discussion groups feeding back to the main meeting.

Clear response that people wanted closer involvement in the management planning process. Meetings helped identify major stakeholders and level of interest in the site.

January – Feb 2000

Further public meetings held (one for northern part of site, one for southern part of site) – good response to both of these. Proposed liaison arrangements with public discussed and agreed. Liaison Group format agreed and representatives for this group nominated and agreed. Role of Liaison Group representatives is as a conduit between the wider public interests and the relevant authorities.

March – August

Drafting of management plan. Two meetings of Liaison Group with the relevant authorities to discuss drafts of plan as they were prepared. Input and comments from Liaison Group members to help develop the draft plan.

Sept - October 2000

Consultation on draft management plan. Colour summary of management plan circulated widely. Full plan sent to Liaison Group members and available to all on request. Further meeting of Liaison Group and relevant authorities to discuss the full draft plan. Further public meetings as part of consultation process. Very poor response to the plan consultation and the public meetings but those responses received were positive about the draft plan.

November 2000

Agreed by relevant authorities that the revised version of the management plan should be in the format of a time-tabled action plan to show more clearly the actions assigned to the appropriate organizations. Draft management plan to be used as a technical support document to the action plan.

Dec 2000 – May 2001

Preparation of action plan and distribution of English version to Liaison members. Management scheme process reviewed by the relevant authorities. Telephone survey undertaken to follow up on views of participants in the management plan process; aim of this was to help understand why there had been such a poor response to the consultation on the draft management plan and public meetings held in October 2000.

June 2001

Welsh version and bilingual summary of the action plan prepared and sent to Liaison Group members. Meeting of Liaison Group and relevant authorities; key issues are prioritization of the actions into a realistic work programme to implement the action plan, future funding and promotion and interpretation of the cSAC.

August 2001

Action plan summaries distributed to individuals and interest groups. Accompanied by press release and press coverage in local newspapers and on local radio.

F Budgets and resources

Approximate actual costs and staff time costs to develop and produce the management scheme

Category	Cost (£k)
Information collation	108.2
Project Officer - salary and T&S	59.7
Publicity and interpretation	9.5
Publication of management scheme	7
IT equipment	3.4
Total	187.8

G. List of key documents

Management scheme outputs:

1998. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau candidate Special Area of Conservation: Information provided in fulfilment of Regulation 33 of the Conservation (Natural habitats &c) Regulations 1994. Countryside Council for Wales.

2000. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau candidate Special Area of Conservation. Management Plan : consultation draft.
(Full plan and bilingual colour summary available)

2001. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau: Review of the management scheme process by the relevant authorities.

Telephone questionnaire (2001)

2001. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau : an outstanding site for marine wildlife. Action Plan for the candidate Special Area of Conservation.
(Bilingual full plan and bilingual colour summary available)

Publicity/Interpretation:

1998. Video - Underwater life of North Pen Llŷn.
(10 minute video set to music, produced from footage taken as part of the North Llŷn sublittoral survey (Bunker, 1998).

1998. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau candidate Special Area of Conservation : An outstanding site for marine wildlife (Bilingual colour leaflet. Brief background to the cSAC and the reef and estuary features).

1999. Pair of bilingual, colour, A1 size display panels about the cSAC based on the above leaflet.

1998. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau marine candidate Special Area of Conservation
(Bilingual colour leaflet and questionnaire to seek people's views/comments about the cSAC and their involvement).

Contract reports:

Bunker, St. P.D. 1998. Sublittoral survey of the North Pen Llŷn. CCW Contract Science Report No. 370.

Coastal Geomorphological Partnership. 2000. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau candidate Special Area of Conservation : Coastal processes surveillance and research requirements. CCW Contract Science Report No. 417.

Kennedy, K. 1998. Pen Llŷn a'r Sarnau SAC: Review of human activities. CCW Contract Report No. 98/5.

WRc. 1999. Nutrient status of the Glaslyn/Dwyrhyd, Mawddach and Dyfi estuaries – its context and ecological important. CCW Contract Science Report No. 339.

Sanderson, W.G., Holt, R.H.F., Kay, L., Wyn, G. & McMath, A.J. Eds. 2001. The establishment of a programme of surveillance and monitoring for judging the condition of the features of Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau cSAC: 1. Progress to March 2001. Bangor, CCW Contract Science Report No: 380 (UK Marine SACs Project), 350pp.

Cook, B. 2001. Section 1.3.1. Broad-scale mapping methods using RoxAnn™ in Welsh SACs. In The establishment of a programme of surveillance and monitoring for judging the condition of the features of Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau cSAC: 1. Progress to March 2001. W.G. Sanderson, R.H.F. Holt, L. Kay, G. Wyn & A.J. McMath eds. Bangor, CCW Contract Science Report No: 380 (UK Marine SACs Project), 350pp.

H REVIEW OF LEARNING AND GOOD PRACTICE

1. Information to support management schemes

Reports for surveys commissioned in the early 1980s by the Nature Conservancy Council covering areas of the reefs together with information from the Marine Nature Conservation Review surveys for the reefs and estuaries were available at the start of the project. While these provided information on quite a large part of the cSAC features, additional studies were undertaken during the time of the project in order to improve and expand the foundation of knowledge for developing the management scheme; these included biological surveys (the completion of the Phase 1 intertidal survey, the broad-scale mapping and north Llŷn sublittoral survey), a review of human activities throughout the site and studies to advise management related to the estuaries and coastal processes. The findings of the monitoring trials undertaken as part of task 1.2 provided further information about the reef and estuary communities of the site. This information also provides an essential basis for developing the conservation objectives for the site. Understanding about the features has increased significantly over the time of the project due to the studies mentioned above.

Development of the management scheme / plan may have been more effective if there had been (a) agreed government guidance about developing management schemes for marine SACs at the start of the process about and (b) an agreed nature conservation agency approach on conservation objectives for marine SACs. Lack of direction in the early years of the project did result in duplication of discussions and revisiting issues that turned out not to be relevant in the fullness of time.

2 Relevant authority and stakeholder structures

The initial composition of the relevant authorities group did not include all the necessary individuals and this caused problems while those joining the group later had to catch up with the earlier discussions. It took some time for the relevant authorities to understand their roles and responsibilities in the process and for different, potentially conflicting, sections of some authorities to recognize the requirement for a single authority view towards the cSAC and therefore the need for closer internal communication. The decision-making process over the first couple of years tended to be long-winded, involving considerable duplication of discussion amongst a disparate group of relevant authorities; perhaps not surprising given the lack of existing structures linking these organizations and variable levels of communication prior to the cSAC project.

There was initial confusion about whether or not there should be a lead-authority for the RA group, but these were eventually overcome by accepting that there were jobs to be done and appointing people to lead on these.

An initial decision to rotate the chairing of the RA group through the different members did not work well and was later changed to have an agreed chairperson, to be reviewed annually. The lack of a project officer has meant a considerable burden of work for one authority to provide the secretariat support for the group.

The role of CCW as lead for the UK Marine SACs Project in relation to the site meant that much of the burden of work fell to CCW officers to cover with a result that for much of the project duration, CCW were seen as a lead organization for the site, despite not wanting to specifically take on such a

role. The process of developing the management plan and consultation on the draft plan has helped to formalize the ownership of the management plan and subsequent Action Plan by the other relevant authorities, although there is still something of a tendency for CCW to be seen as the organization with responsibility to keep pushing the work along.

The nature of the site and the lack of existing initiatives or management structures covering the area of the cSAC as a whole made it difficult for the RAs to suggest possible structures for advisory groups of one sort or another. A number of possible models were discussed, but were not pursued due to a lack of knowledge about the potential stakeholders and their level of interest in the cSAC, and concern that a liaison structure might be created which could not be sustained in the long-term. It was not until the public meetings that any sort of liaison structure was established.

The issue of stakeholder participation was not addressed early enough in the process and, as a result, was a rather rushed process in the latter part of the project – but despite this it has been seen as a very positive stage in developing the management plan. The liaison framework that has evolved could have been initiated earlier and the Liaison Group, once established, has provided a useful vehicle for communication. There is, however, concern that the Liaison Group is not able to effectively communicate with the wide audience of interests around the site, and it is recognized that there may be many potential stakeholders who are not aware of the cSAC.

The Action Plan for the cSAC recognizes the importance of developing mechanisms to maintain, improve and expand communication with stakeholders and this is one of the key challenges for future site management.

3 Methods of relevant authority and stakeholder participation

One-to-one meetings: With several relevant authorities prior to the initial RA group meeting – primarily to provide an opportunity for general discussion about the Habitats Directive and Habitats Regulations. Would have been useful to have had more of these to discuss specific sections of the management plan, but this was not possible in the timescale.

Group discussions: Most of the discussions to develop the management plan and Action Plan have taken place in the RA group and Liaison Group. A smaller group of RAs was established to discuss specific issues relating to site interpretation and publicity and the arrangements for the initial public meetings.

Leaflets and questionnaire: Have provided a useful means of getting information out to people to promote the site and getting feedback about people's interest in and views on the site. The leaflets have been well received by people. However, although they were distributed using a broad-based mailing list and by providing copies at libraries and other centers it is not known how effective the distribution was in reaching potential stakeholders in the different 'catchments' across the site and how effective the leaflets have been in raising awareness about the site. The response to the questionnaire provided the basis for holding the initial public meetings.

Public meetings: An extremely useful way of seeking views, giving people a chance to voice their opinions, finding out more about the site and the activities taking place in it, getting useful information and suggestions for site management. All the public meetings were organized so that people broke into small discussion groups which reported back to the meeting as a whole. An external facilitator was contracted to help with the initial meetings and this proved to be very successful. As a result, links with the RA officers and community liaison officers within several relevant authorities were created.

Informal networks: Liaison between RA officers and others working on other European marine sites in Wales and wider has provided a useful means of sharing ideas and gaining advice. Wider exchange

of views involving all the RAs would be useful to help develop new views on the site and its management.

4. Process and content of the management scheme document

Prior to the cSAC management plan and Action Plan there were no existing initiatives which linked the many different organisations and interests across the whole area. However, there were, and are, a number of other plans and initiatives in existence around the site, e.g. for designated sites, biodiversity initiatives, shoreline management plans. The cSAC plans have tried to ensure that links to these existing plans are recognized to avoid unnecessary duplication as well as to strengthen the case for certain actions where it will promote more than one initiative. The cSAC plans, however, do not as yet, provide specific links to the timetables of other plans and initiatives, and this is something that will need to be addressed as actions are implemented.

The content and format of the management scheme and Action Plan were developed through discussion between the RAs and with the Liaison Group representatives. Some initial views were that the cSAC provided an obstacle to development and that the management scheme was only going to focus on what should be done to prevent certain activities taking place. Through the process of developing the plan these views have changed, and people now see the plan as a more positive tool that can be used to help justify actions linked to authorities' other responsibilities and as a basis for assisting the development of strategic plans for specific sectors. Public consultation on the draft management scheme and subsequent discussions have shown a high level of support. Part of implementing the Action Plan is to disseminate the plan more widely amongst stakeholders.

The management scheme provides a comprehensive coverage of activities within and around the cSAC, existing management and possible effects. Actions have been identified to address any shortfalls in the existing management regimes. Although there is agreement between the relevant authorities and others as to the actions required, there are several examples where the authority responsible is not able to commit resources to implement that action and, in most of these cases, there is as yet no timetable for securing this funding. Funding for implementation remains a key issue overall and a potentially major barrier to taking forward parts of the plan.

A possible fault with the Action Plan is its large scope. In seeking to address all issues at once and present this in one document the Action Plan could be seen as unworkably large. The RAs and Liaison Group have agreed that in order to take forward the plan, annual work programmes need to be developed that focus on a few key actions.

An area not addressed in the management scheme is the requirement for operational limits for activities – i.e. agreeing limits for activities so that these represent part of the description of favourable conservation status of the site, and any departure from these needs to consider the potential implications on the cSAC features. This is an important area of the site management that needs to be addressed.

5. Interpretation and publicity

Leaflets

Two full colour leaflets were produced. The first provided an overview of the interest of the site and why it had been selected. The second provided some more information about the reefs and estuaries but its main focus was the future management of the site and asked people to make their views known. Both leaflets were circulated widely and encouraged people to contact RA officers (details provided) for more information.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire asking people their views about the cSAC was circulated with the second leaflet. This provided important information that led to the initial public meetings being held.

Press coverage

The leaflets and questionnaire, draft management plan and Action Plan were each publicized by press releases. The questionnaire was also advertised through advert in local papers. The press releases led to radio coverage about the cSAC through interviews (Welsh and English) with RA officers and also two TV pieces about the cSAC which were broadcast on BBC Wales News. The public meetings were publicized by press releases and information broadcast through local radio stations (Welsh and English).

Display panels

Two A1-size display panels based on the first colour leaflet were produced and copies provided to a number of the RAs. These have been used widely at public and other meetings about the cSAC and at other venues such as local shows and displays.

Public events

The display panels and other information about the cSAC has been used by the relevant authorities at a number of public events to publicise the site.