



Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Relevant Authority Group (RAG) Annual Report 2014

1. Introduction

The Relevant Authorities for the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) launched their agreed management scheme for the site in August 2008. Work since then has focused as much as possible on management scheme implementation. A decision was taken to postpone the review of the SAC management scheme (due to take place in 2014) until 2015 in order to be able to take into account site condition monitoring information, and so target management actions towards those areas identified as contributing towards unfavourable condition/status. NRW had committed to produce site level condition reports by the end of 2014, but in the end were unable to fulfil this. This delay will have a knock-on effect to the RAG's plans for the Management Scheme review, and will need to be discussed early in 2015. This report summarises the period 01 Jan 2014 to 31 December 2014.

2014 was a year which focused on project work to fulfil specific management actions. Dominating was a project funded by the Welsh Government's resilient ecosystems fund "Guidelines for sustainable intertidal bait and seaweed collection in Wales". The project produced an impacts review desk study and a separate legislative review that included a case study looking into management options for The Gann within the Milford Haven Waterway.

Management of the intertidal has always been seen as problematic due to the overlapping powers of different managing authorities. This is further complicated in areas where there are multiple conservation designations.

The project clarified the regulatory regime and, with the help of case studies, gave

managers more confidence in negotiating the legal complexities found in the intertidal area. Possible solutions were suggested to resolve management issues at The Gann. A report into the impacts of bait and seaweed gathering activity identified at least 43 species being collected from the shores of Wales, and summarised the main known impacts of their collection on the environment and other users. The project concluded in December, although just before the year end an application was submitted to the resilient ecosystems fund to extend the project in order to follow up some of the recommendations.

In addition to project work, the RAG have also contributed to national work programmes with relevance to marine protected area (MPA) conservation including continuing liaison with NRW's LIFE Natura 2000 project and advising the newly formed Welsh MPA Management Steering Group (see below).

Although the RAG as ever has been trying to focus on practical implementation of site management in order to improve feature condition, finance and the future of the partnership have been a distraction this year. NRW contributions have significantly reduced and the means of accessing future NRW funding complicated by the need to submit a Joint Working Partnership Agreement in September. News came at the end of the year that this proposal had been partially successful but no further details were given, promoting even greater uncertainty. Due to financial uncertainty, the SAC Officer has been attempting to access other relevant



Bait digging holes at The Gann (*Sue Burton*)

funds as a means of taking forward the RAG work programme. A proposal to the Welsh Government Nature Fund was prepared, but the Fund closed early before it could be submitted.

Although funding for the RAG is crucial, national discussions on the future management of MPAs in Wales will also affect the Group. Some options exploring the pros and cons of local versus more regional approaches were being drafted at the end of 2014. The RAG hopes to be able to use their considerable experience to help inform this piece of work.

Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group (MHWESG)

The RAG continues their close association with the work of the MHWESG. The Group's major project for 2014 was to initiate routine sediment contaminants surveillance. To complete the historic baseline for this work, sediment samples were collected and analysed using both current and 'historical' (1970s – 80s) analytical techniques to enable integration and comparison of currently incomparable datasets. Routine annual wetland bird surveillance projects were continued. Surveys of invasive, non-native species were carried out by Bangor University's Centre for Applied Marine Sciences for the Port of Milford Haven and on Dragon LNG jetty piles by volunteer Seasearch divers. After 15 years at the helm of the Group as its Chairman, Captain Mark Andrews retired leaving a challenging role which has been filled by Roland Long, Pembroke Power Station, with Paul Howells of Dragon LNG in the wings to take over in 2 years.

LIFE Natura 2000 Programme

The LIFE Natura 2000 Programme (run by Natural Resources Wales and financially supported by the EU LIFE+ fund) has been extended into 2015. It will produce Prioritised Improvement Plans (PIPs) for the management and restoration of all Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Wales. Some plans will be site specific (e.g. for the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC), whilst other 'thematic' plans will cut across sites and focus on particular issues or themes (e.g. fisheries, climate change, marine litter). All plans will be produced by utilising data from the NRW Special Sites Database. The RAG has been helping NRW to populate this database throughout 2014, and will be consulted before PIPs are finalised in 2015. Whilst the SAC management scheme actions have helped to inform the database, not all actions will be taken forward in this way; for example the database does not include education and awareness or monitoring actions. It is intended that PIPs will be used when identifying funding streams to target on the ground action.

Welsh Government Marine & Fisheries Liaison

A joint meeting was held with the division and the RAGs for Cardigan Bay SAC and Carmarthen Bay & Estuaries EMS in January to discuss EMS management. Further liaison has occurred mainly via the Welsh MPA Management Steering Group and the South Inshore Fisheries Group. Expert staff have been involved in the bait project, and Welsh Government are routinely included in RAG correspondence.

Welsh MPA Management Steering Group: This Group first met on 27th March 2014. This Group, chaired by Welsh Government, is intended to take forward some of the recommendations from the CCW MPA review in 2012. Its purpose is to steer and champion effective MPA management, raising the profile of MPA management and increasing buy-in from management authorities and wider stakeholders across Wales.



Spiral tube worms *Bispira* sp. (Rohan Holt)

Welsh Government Consultations & Policy

Consultation on the Statement of Public Participation for the Welsh National Marine Plan occurred in 2014. This was intended to help provide information to support development of a Welsh National Marine Plan in 2015.

UK Policy

DEFRA consulted on proposals for the UK monitoring programmes for good environmental status between January and April 2014. The UK marine strategy part two was published in July 2014.

2. SAC Management Scheme Action Progress (Regulation 36 work)

Table 1 presents some of the main achievements from each relevant authority, and the relevant authorities collectively (the RAG), for 2014. These actions are of direct relevance to the SAC. They do not represent the sum total of SAC related work from each authority, but are examples of work done, often in connection with priorities for the year (see annual report 2013). It should be noted that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water are not included in this table as their SAC management actions, which are relevant to water quality and water abstraction, are covered within their day-to-day regulated operations.

Table 1: Main Relevant Authority Group Achievements 2014

| PMSAC Management Action | | Authority | Action(s) achieved |
|--|---|-----------|---|
| Living resources (including fisheries) | | | |
| LR 10+13 | <i>Develop and implement specific management measures to protect habitats and species of SAC features sensitive to commercial bait collection and recreational hand gathering</i> | NRW | Continued to work towards the resolution of bait digging and related fisheries management issues in the intertidal zone at The Gann, as part of the Welsh Government funded project, but also in addition worked towards producing a science report specific to The Gann to inform management action there. |
| | | PCNPA | Continued to liaise with PM SAC Officer and NRW in order to contribute to resolution of bait digging and related fisheries management issues in the intertidal zone through partnership working. PCNPA would like to thank and congratulate the SAC Officer for procuring funds for and project managing the 2014 bait digging/shoreline species collection impacts study and legal review. |
| | | PCC | Contributed to the WG-funded project 'Guidelines for Sustainable Intertidal Bait and Seaweed Collection'. Input to partnership working to address the bait digging issue within the SAC. |
| | | RAG | Successfully completed the Welsh Government REF funded project 'Guidelines for Sustainable Intertidal Bait and Seaweed Collection'. Two reports were produced and an end of project event held. An application to fund some extension work was submitted. |
| Water quality, pollution & waste disposal | | | |
| WQW 1 | <i>Manage general water quality and pollution to safeguard SAC features.</i> | NRW | During the summer and autumn 2014 NRW undertook a detailed investigation into elevated ammonia levels on the Pelcomb Brook which drains to the Western Cleddau just above the tidal limit. This was in response to concerns from DCWW regarding their intake at Crow Hill in Haverfordwest. The investigation established that there were several point and diffuse sources including agricultural, quarry, caravan park and animal boarding facilities. The co-operation of site owners was crucial in stopping these inputs; where appropriate, enforcement action was taken. |

| PMSAC Management Action | | Authority | Action(s) achieved |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------|--|
| WQW 7 + 8 | <i>Manage pollution response to safeguard SAC features</i> | PCC | Work undertaken to draft a shoreline / pollution response plan applicable to the site. |
| | | PCNPA | PCNPA continued to contribute to marine pollution contingency planning as and when appropriate. Following the retirement of Jane Hodges in July 2014, Sarah Mellor (Biodiversity Officer for PCNPA) will be the new contact point from the nature conservation side of contingency planning. |

Recreation

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|-------------------|--|-------|---|
| Rec 14.1.1 | <i>Exclude all anchoring and new moorings in areas of <i>Zostera</i> spp. (seagrass) and <i>Maerl</i> spp. (chalky seaweed) beds within the Haven.</i> | POMH | Continued to provide temporary buoyage to notify visitors of the no-anchoring zone at Longoar Bay. This is pending more permanent visitor mooring buoy deployment (note - dependant on external funding and management). Ensured that sublittoral <i>Zostera</i> and maerl sensitivities were integrated into the Waterway Recreational Management Plan and annual Leisure Users Guide (zonations, voluntary no anchoring areas etc). |
| | | RAG | The agreement between the RAG and the Milford Harbour Users Association for voluntary sensitive habitat zones to protect seagrass and maerl was promulgated, and visitor mooring buoys for Longoar bay pursued. |
| Rec 8+12 | <i>Continue to support the work of the Marine Code and Outdoor Charter groups</i> | PCNPA | PCNPA continued to provide practical and financial support for the Marine Code and Outdoor Charter groups, including Sustainable Development Fund support for Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum CIC's Caldey buoyage project, paving the way for additional signage projects at sea to protect marine wildlife. |

Information and data gathering

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|-----------------------|--|------|---|
| ID 1+3 | <i>Maintain and expand the knowledge base of the distribution and scale (and effects) of shipping and shipping-related (in this case 'vessel') operations sufficient to inform SAC management- in particular that of non-native 'alien' species.</i> | POMH | Presence of <i>Undaria pinnatifida</i> (Wakame) first record in July, and subsequently. Participation in INNS identification workshop. Continued to participate in the Bangor University led research project on movement of Introduced Non-Native Species (INNS) via leisure craft movements. Milford Marina settlement plates were deployed in April 2014. Facilitation of NRW Marine Scientist presence on Trinity House navigation aids maintenance visit (investigating fouling growth). |
| ID 1.1.5+3.2.4 | <i>Secure good quality data on alien species sufficient to adequately inform SAC management (should include recreational activity too)</i> | NRW | Marine Non-natives pathways project (LIFE funded) looked at the control of non-natives in marinas across Wales including Milford Haven and Neyland. Surveys took place at both marinas and a training course took place to raise awareness with industry (more planned in 2015). |

| PMSAC Management Action | | Authority | Action(s) achieved |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------|---|
| ID 13.1.1 + 14 | <i>Maintain and continue to expand the knowledge base on diffuse pollution sufficient to inform SAC management.</i> | NRW | The report <i>Environmental Pressures on the Milford Haven Waterway</i> was completed and circulated in January, with a particular focus on nutrients. This and supporting data was passed to Welsh Government to help inform the decision for a potential Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) designation for the Haven. NRW developed engagement with stakeholders to inform them of this and to look at flexible ways to regulate an NVZ should it be declared. NRW developed the idea for, and helped to instigate work on, an Eco-bank to be coordinated by Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum. |
| ID 22 | <i>Secure effective relevant data acquisition and usage sufficient to best inform SAC management</i> | RAG | Worked further on ensuring that all post 1995 historical data of relevance was entered into the Plans and Projects Inventory. All data was uploaded to the live system which remains password protected. The system is now 'workable' but still requires work to verify and keep up to date. This online system will aid both competent authorities and developers with Habitats Regulations Assessments. [Action also contributes to MRR 3-5] |
| ID various | <i>To secure good quality relevant data (in particular on PORTS, HARBOURS & SHIPPING and POLLUTION) sufficient to adequately inform SAC management.</i> | POMH | Continued to be fully supportive of and involved in MHWESG work to increase knowledge within the Haven. Monitoring in place to identify long-term climate change related trends (established flood risk monitoring equipment and protocols at Hubberston and Goose Pills and Milford Docks in line with climate change risk / adaptation reporting commitments - automated water level monitoring equipment installed and IT communication and data recording systems established). [Action also supports MRR 11.1] |

Resources

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|--------------------|---|-----|---|
| Res 2 + 4.2 | <i>Secure the resources (and use and build upon those existing) necessary to implement the SAC management scheme.</i> | NRW | NRW staff have managed to continue their good attendance at all RAG meetings and contribute to the work of the partnership as much as work load allows; staff time is dominated by case work and mandatory monitoring. An internal NRW Milford Haven Waterway co-ordination group meets bi-annually to coordinate all relevant work programmes undertaken by the three legacy bodies. This is in advance of the preparation of Area based statements. |
| | | RAG | Investigation of aquaculture projects that could offer benefits to the SAC. Good contacts were made and ideas discussed with various partners from academia, industry and conservation originally for Welsh Government's Nature Fund, but following early closure of the Fund, discussions widened to focus on European-funded projects. |

| PMSAC Management Action | Authority | Action(s) achieved |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Awareness Raising | | |
| AR 1 | <i>Raise level of awareness of SAC features with vessel users and what actions can be taken to reduce impacts.</i> | POMH Continued to maintain the profile of the SAC and encouraged responsible leisure user activity within the SAC via Milford Marina berth holder notice boards, newsletters, and management actions. |
| AR 6 | <i>Target specific users to reduce potential marine litter at source.</i> | POMH Continued to provide waste disposal facilities for 'Fishing for Litter' participants at Milford Dock. |
| AR 16 | <i>Raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC</i> | PCNPA PCNPA continued to develop its advocacy role, including review of the National Park Management Plan, responses to Welsh Government consultations involving marine issues, and contributing via Welsh Government's Marine Protected Area management steering group. |
| | | PCNPA PCNPA rangers continued to collect otter spraint for the SAC coastal otter research project, and increase awareness of otters in the sea with the general public through walks and events. [Action also contributes to MRR 2] |
| | | PCC Continued to raise awareness of marine wildlife via Pembrokeshire Biodiversity Partnership communications (Facebook page, newsletter etc.). Incorporated marine INNS work into the LBAP work programme. |
| | | RAG Continued to raise general awareness of the SAC and its needs, particularly through use of the SAC website, ad hoc enquiries, and expansion of the Marine Awareness Roadshows work to cover more schools (and key stage 1+2 pupils). A partnership with Darwin enabled a further 20 school roadshow visits. |
| AR 17+18 | <i>Maintain and improve internal and external communications about the SAC within and between relevant and competent authority organisations</i> | PCC Continued to Chair the RAG Partnership, including hosting and Chairing a joint RAG meeting with Welsh Government Marine and Fisheries Division in February 2014. |
| | | POMH Maintained close liaison with Welsh Regulatory mechanisms with relevance to the SAC. i.e. Welsh Marine Planning, Welsh MPA Management Steering Group, Single Body (NRW), WFD Second Cycle planning etc. Also continued to closely monitor the journey to ratification and eventual entry into force of the IMO Ballast Water Management Convention. Continued to closely monitor the emergence of any Ballast Water Best Practice Guidelines (MCA, DfT, OSPAR etc). Routinely included SAC description, sensitivities, and best practice within all Port Staff's Environmental Inductions. [Actions also contribute to MRR 10, PHS 13] |
| | | PCC Continued to raise awareness of and incorporate SAC management needs into Shoreline Management Plans, responses to Welsh Government consultations involving marine issues, and through WGLA representation on Welsh Government's Marine Protected Area management steering group. |

| PMSAC Management Action | | Authority | Action(s) achieved |
|---|--|-----------|--|
| | | RAG | Input into the LIFE Natura programme, and Welsh MPA Management Steering Group. In addition the SAC Officer continues to sit on the Welsh Government led South Inshore Fisheries Group. |
| Monitoring, review and reporting | | | |
| MRR 2 | <i>Effective/comprehensive knowledge of the condition of the SAC features.</i> | NRW | Intertidal monitoring work was fully completed (subtidal work was affected by 45% cut in the monitoring budget which allowed for maintenance only). A Pacific oyster survey was conducted in November. |

3. Routine Assessments (Regulation 61 work)

Authorities routinely deal with what are termed “plans and projects” (something that requires some sort of specific statutory consent, authorisation, licence or permission). When such “plans and projects” occur within or have the potential to affect the SAC, they need to undergo a Habitats Regulation Assessment. This is a formal step-wise process that should ensure that any effects to the SAC are considered, and that plans and projects only get the go ahead if they will not have an adverse effect on site integrity, and will not result in deterioration of SAC habitats or significant disturbance of SAC species. Under certain specified conditions, plans and projects with adverse effects on site integrity can go ahead provided that those effects are compensated through other measures.

Plans and projects have one of the biggest collective impacts on the SAC’s features. It is for this reason that the RAG, within the partnership, routinely exchanges information on current plans and projects, and seeks ways to locally improve the consenting process and ultimately to minimise any effects on the SAC. Plans and projects are not addressed in detail within the site management scheme because they are dealt with individually by RAG members through Habitats Regulation Assessments. The response to plans and projects is necessarily reactive, whereas conversely the SAC management scheme is proactive, looking at what improvements need to be made to current management, and identifying the information needed to better inform future management.

Dealing with plans and projects, such as large developments with multiple consents associated with them, can be time-consuming both for the consenting authority and for the nature conservation advisors, Natural Resources Wales.

Post 1995 data has been used to populate the RAG’s GIS-based Plans and Projects Inventory. This was uploaded to the inventory (which remains password protected) in 2014. Regular updates will be required to keep it a useful tool.

To access the Plans and Projects Inventory, users are directed to <http://www.pembrokeshiremarinesac.org.uk/english/manage/plans.htm>. The Inventory is hosted by the Wales Activity Mapping (WAM) website managed by the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum. The quickest way to get to grips with the project is to watch the demo video at <http://www.walesactivitymapping.org.uk/help-videos/>.

4. Site Feature Condition

As stated in the introduction, site feature condition has yet to be reported on a site level by NRW following the third reporting round to the European Commission in 2013. Indications are that Pembrokeshire Marine SAC features are unchanged or in some cases worse than when last reported. The RAG have not been given an indication of when the site level reports will be made available, but have been reassured that NRW consider this to be an important task and have been dedicating staff effort to it.

5. RAG priorities

Any review of work done is not complete without some forward planning. The RAG is continuously evaluating SAC issues, and priorities may change. Current priorities for each relevant authority and also joint RAG priorities for 2015 are summarised in Table 3. It should be noted that Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water are not included in this table as their SAC management actions, which are relevant to water quality and water abstraction, are covered within their day-to-day regulated operations.

Table 3: Relevant Authority Group Priorities for 2015

| Authority | Action | Action plan reference | Action ref. also a priority for: |
|-------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Natural Resources Wales (NRW) | Deliver site specific feature condition and status information to all relevant authorities in order to help inform RAG work and future management. | MRR 12.1 | |
| | Continue to work towards the resolution of bait digging and related fisheries management issues in the intertidal zone at The Gann. | LR 10+13 | PCNPA, RAG |
| | Follow-up work to bring Water Framework stretches feeding into the marine SAC up to good ecological status (making use of database of measures for improvement). Engaging with stakeholders in the consultation process for the West Wales River Basin Management Plan and consideration of the potential of a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone for the Daugleddau | WQW 2 | |
| | Intertidal and sublittoral monitoring work. | MRR 2 | RAG |
| | Seek to ensure that the RAG partnership continues to have strong local staff representation and financial support. | Res 2 + 4.2 | POMH, RAG |
| | Continue to input into and support the work of the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group (MHWESG) | ID various | POMH |

| Authority | Action | Action plan reference | Action ref. also a priority for: |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Port Of Milford Haven (POMH) | Ensure Port of Milford Haven Environment Manager successional planning includes: Relevant authority responsibilities and continued participation in SACRAG; Discussion on SAC Officer contract renewal and hosting/ line manager arrangements; Liaison between WG Marine Transition Programme Marine Protected Area Management Review and outcome for WG Support for MPA resourcing (personnel & monitoring). | Res 2 | RAG |
| | Monitor and encourage the forward MHWESG work programme, and provide feedback on where work can provide added value to the SAC management scheme. | ID various | NRW |
| | Continue to maintain the profile of the SAC and encourage responsible use within the SAC. Raise awareness of sensitive habitat zones within the Haven with recreational and commercial users. Ensure good staff awareness of the SAC and its management needs. | AR 1+17, Rec 14.1.1 | RAG |
| | Maintain close liaison with Welsh Regulatory mechanisms with relevance to the SAC to include Welsh Marine Planning, Welsh MPA Management Steering Group, Single Body (NRW), WFD planning, Wales Marine Strategic Advisory Group, Marine Transition Programme Stakeholder Group, etc. and also UK policy/legislation of relevance (e.g. ratification and eventual entry into force of the IMO Ballast Water Management Convention). Feedback as appropriate to SACRAG. | AR 18, MRR 10 | PCNPA, RAG |
| Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) | Formalise shoreline / pollution response plans and involvement, and provide EROCIPS type data for input to an appropriate database, following up ARCOPOL work. | WQW 7 + 8 | PCNPA |
| | Ensure continued commitment to Chairing the RAG, as well as appropriate specialist representation on the group. Build greater awareness of SAC issues throughout the Council, making better use of SAC Officer where possible. | AR 17 + 18 | POMH, RAG |
| | Relevant data (EIA/AA etc.) from plans & projects to be provided for inclusion in the RAG Plans and Projects Inventory. | ID 22 (also Misc 1) | RAG |
| | Link effectively to work on Local Biodiversity Action Plans where applicable. | MRR 1.1 | |

| Authority | Action | Action plan reference | Action ref. also a priority for: |
|---|--|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA) | Continue to contribute to the resolution of bait digging and ancillary management issues in the intertidal zone with partners and the local communities, by using in particular the 2014 bait collection study. | LR 10+13 | NRW, RAG |
| | Continue to provide support for the work of the Marine Code and Outdoor Charter groups | Rec 8 + 12 (+others) | |
| | Continue to develop/pursue advocacy role for the SAC and the site's conservation objectives e.g. through responding/contributing to policy consultations and in the general promotion of the National Park | AR 16, MRR 10 | POMH, RAG |
| | Continue to advocate for and to contribute to the development, review and exercising of all marine pollution contingency plans that are relevant to the SAC. | WQW 7 + 8 | PCC |
| Relevant Authorities Group (RAG) | "Broad-brush" review of management scheme. Evaluate compliance with and effectiveness of management actions. Make best use of data (particularly GIS-based) held by partners and maintain/build upon/share as appropriate. | MRR 8 | |
| | Promulgate findings of the WG-funded project 'Guidelines for Sustainable Intertidal Bait and Seaweed Collection', and seek to act on recommendations locally in order to manage bait digging activity at The Gann in particular. | MRR 3-5, LR 10+13 | PCNPA, NRW |
| | Seek to resolve ownership issues delaying the provision of visitor moorings at Longoar Bay, and raise awareness of the voluntary agreement to protect sensitive maerl and seagrass habitats within the Waterway. | Rec 14.1.1 | POMH |
| | Investigate European (Interreg or Atlantic Area) aquaculture funding proposal potential in order to promote a positive profile for the SAC and encourage aquaculture with bioremediation potential. | Res 2 | POMH |
| | Continue to raise general awareness of the SAC and its needs, particularly through use of the SAC website, and education projects. | AR 16 | POMH, PCNPA |
| | Complete the SAC otter research project, promulgate findings, and seek to build recommendations into the management scheme review. | aiding MRR 2 | NRW |
| | Seek to ensure that RAG knowledge and experience are best used to advance MPA management in Wales. Input into the LIFE Natura programme, and seek to ensure that resulting plans build upon the work of the RAG and benefit the SAC. Continue to advise the Welsh MPA management steering group. | AR 17 + 18, MRR 10 | NRW, POMH |

Sue Burton, Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer, 2015

For more information on the SAC including management documentation, see www.PembrokeshireMarineSAC.org.uk