

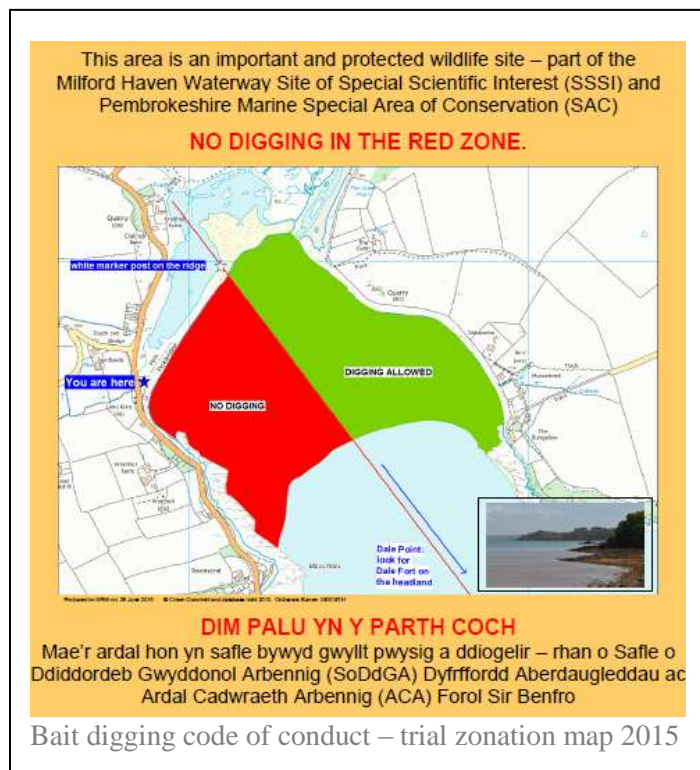


Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Relevant Authority Group (RAG) Annual Report 2015

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. Due to site level condition reports still remaining incomplete and therefore not being able to be made available by NRW in 2015, the RAG took the decision to simply conduct a broad-brush review of the management scheme, rather than a detailed overhaul, until such time as site condition monitoring information became available and was able to confidently inform management direction. This report summarises the period 01 Jan 2015 to 31 December 2015.

The SAC Officer was increasingly involved in national-led work throughout the year. This primarily included NRW's LIFE Natura 2000 project and input to the Wales MPA Management Steering Group chaired by Welsh Government (more detail below). Whilst these contributions were seen to be essential and of long-term benefit to the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC, the RAG's site-based work programme was negatively impacted. The same can be said for securing resources for the work of the partnership. However, even with the distractions of finance and the future of the partnership, positive practical implementation of site management in order to improve feature condition still continued.



Practical management implementation – mudflat improvements. At the beginning of 2015 work was dominated by the project funded by the Welsh Government's resilient ecosystems fund "Guidelines for sustainable intertidal bait and seaweed collection in Wales". A follow-on extension to the original application was undertaken to take advantage of a REF underspend. The extension enabled greater work on the case study looking into management options for bait digging on mudflats at the Gann within the Milford Haven Waterway.

Further work following up some of the legislative review recommendations was undertaken, and a stakeholder workshop held where it was agreed to develop a bait digging code of conduct for the area. The RAG helped to facilitate the code development, guided by NRW, and funded signage to trial the code during 2015 (including zoning the beach into 'dig' and 'no dig zones'). NRW began the process of investigating a byelaw or statutory

instrument to provide a legal basis to the code in the future. In the meantime, use of a code of conduct enables practical testing of the agreement. Further meetings were held towards the end of 2015 to discuss the code trial. Consideration of monitoring information (compliance and biological), including a complete review of the available science by NRW, concluded that a modification of the code would benefit feature management on the site. The RAG will continue to work with NRW, PCNPA, users and local interests in 2016 to secure improvements for the site.

Practical management implementation – seagrass improvements.

The Port of Milford Haven successfully overcame perceived liability issues with their insurers and accepted ownership of two visitor buoys for Langoar Bay. The RAG secured funding for the buoys through seagrass collaboration work with the Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC Officer. As well as encouraging vessels not to anchor in the area of seagrass, the mooring buoys have been a welcome resource for local and visiting boats. Langoar Bay is included within a voluntary sensitive habitat zone where there is an agreement with recreational users to avoid anchoring and mooring in order to safeguard maerl and seagrass beds.

RAG Finances

All RAG members continue to successfully contribute financially to the Group to enable joint working to continue. Following the lengthy submission to NRW for a Joint Working Partnership Agreement in 2014, news eventually came in March that only a fraction of the grant would be forthcoming (“the same as last year” even though that had been deemed a temporary reduction). This was accompanied by news that JWP’s would not be continued as a funding mechanism. In July a new NRW competitive grant was launched based around the aim of Natural Resource Management with a focus on the Natura 2000 network of designated sites in Wales; this was considered to be a perfect fit for RAG work. A detailed but conservative application was submitted in September. The RAG was informed at the end of the year that the application had not been successful.



Langoar Bay visitor buoys (*Water Ranger, Port of Milford Haven*)

Due to future financial uncertainty, the SAC Officer has been attempting to access other relevant funds as a means of taking forward the RAG work programme. Assistance was given to the West Wales Shellfisherman’s Association Ltd for their NRW competitive fund application for a native oyster regeneration project (involving collaboration with the RAG); this application was successful and is due to start in June 2016. Applications to the Welsh Government Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate Small Scale Project Fund were submitted in collaboration with suitable relevant bodies, but no marine projects were funded through this route in the end. In December an application for a sustainable shellfish pilot initiative (encompassing ghost fishing, escape hatches and gear tagging) was submitted to Welsh Government’s Sustainable Development Fund (administered by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority).

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 2015 was to complete a comparison of historical and contemporary analytical techniques for sediment contaminants to enable integration and comparison of currently incomparable datasets. Laboratory analysis of samples collected in 2014 was finished within 2015 without problems. Both Cefas and University of Plymouth delivered high quality datasets on hydrocarbons and metals respectively despite the challenges of employing no longer accredited laboratory techniques and, because of safety issues, having to find substitute solvents for the historical methods. The data is being analysed by David Little, who has developed a correlation of Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons determined by the current and old methods and is working to generate a single ‘corrected’ timeline for oil concentrations over the period since 1978. Routine annual wetland bird surveillance projects were also continued. A review of the Group’s collaboration agreement revealed concerns regarding member’s third party liabilities and field work projects were temporarily suspended pending resolution. In the meantime the Group has let contracts for desk studies to review

sediment macrobenthic data collected during the last decade and a review of the status of eelgrass, *Zostera* species, in the Haven.

LIFE Natura 2000 Programme

The RAG contributed significantly in 2015 to the LIFE Natura 2000 Programme (run by Natural Resources Wales and financially supported by the EU LIFE+ fund). RAG members, and the SAC Officer in particular, worked with NRW staff and provided input to enable production of a Prioritised Improvement Plan (PIP) for the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC as well as inputting to other 'thematic' plans of relevance (e.g. fisheries, climate change, marine litter, invasive non-native species). The deadline for input was the end of August. Plans produced by utilising data from the NRW Special Sites Database were distributed in the autumn. 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 European Marine Site (EMS) in March to discuss EMS management. Further liaison has occurred mainly via the Welsh MPA Management Steering Group and the South Inshore Fisheries Group. In addition Welsh Government is routinely included in RAG correspondence.

Welsh MPA Management Steering Group: The Group (first convened in March 2014) spent much of 2015 considering future options for MPA management across Wales and examining the functioning and impact of current RAGs. Much time was spent in providing information to the Group to inform their discussions. The general outcome was that local site-based management supported by national frameworks was the optimal model, but this was resource heavy, and adequate funds to fully implement the model across Wales were unlikely.

Relevant Consultations & Policy

- Water Framework Directive Draft West Wales River Basin Management Plan- the second-cycle draft plan was open for comment until April, as were regional flood risk management plans.
- Proposals for possible new Special Areas of Conservation for harbour porpoise, and Special Protection Areas for seabird feeding areas were put forward for pre-consultation by NRW on behalf of Welsh Government in March, with the formal consultation planned for the end of the year (this was subsequently delayed until 2016).
- Well-being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Welsh Government) became law at the end of April.
- A snapshot of the State of Wales' Natural Resources (by NRW) reported that important Welsh marine natural resources had been lost or were in serious decline.
- Environment Bill Consultation (Welsh Government).
- The 'fitness check' for EU nature legislation (Birds Directive, Habitats Directive).
- The Milford Haven Waterway Recreation Plan (Port of Milford Haven) was reviewed in 2015.
- Wales' Marine Evidence Report (WMER) was published in October and provides an overview of the status, use and potential future of our marine natural resources. The report will inform the drafting of the first marine plan for Wales – the Welsh National Marine Plan.
- The RAG have input via NRW into a DEFRA anchoring and mooring impacts review. The review has highlighted some of the work of the RAG as a case study. In this way, the experience and best practice of the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC RAG has been shared, not only within Wales, but across the UK.

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 2015. 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 2014). 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 2015

PMSAC Management Action		Authority	Action(s) achieved
Ports, harbours & shipping			
PHS 6.0	<i>Develop, implement and maintain under review an integrated dredging strategy to minimise requirement for and effect of dredging and identify most appropriate best practice and also address dredge spoil disposal.</i>	POMH	Continued to implement the five-year Maintenance Dredging Strategy for its last year in 2015. Looking ahead to development of the next dredging strategy.
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	Working in partnership, continued to work towards the resolution of bait digging and related fisheries management issues in the intertidal zone at the Gann. Completed and circulated a science report specific to the Gann to inform management action there. Agreed a voluntary code of conduct and zoning with stakeholders and trialled this during 2015. Undertook monitoring work to establish current condition with the help of volunteers and also carried out compliance monitoring. Reviewed the code with other partners and stakeholders in the winter with a view to introducing code modifications in 2016.
		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. In support of a code of conduct and zoning at the Gann, PCNPA installed signage and markers, and have aided review of the code for the 2016 season.
		RAG	Successfully completed the extension to the Welsh Government REF funded project 'Guidelines for Sustainable Intertidal Bait and Seaweed Collection'. Followed up with facilitating some of the report recommendations and working with a stakeholder group to develop, agree and test a code of conduct including zonation of digging. Aided monitoring and late in 2015 held a meeting to review the code.

Water quality, pollution & waste disposal

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.

Recreation

Rec 14.1.1	<i>Exclude all anchoring and new moorings in areas of Zostera spp. (seagrass) and Maerl spp. (chalky seaweed) beds within the Haven.</i>	POMH	Agreed to take on ownership of the Longoar Bay visitor buoys, enabling their installation in order to discourage anchoring within the seagrass. The visitor buoys have been very successful and proved to be popular with visitors during the 2015 season.
		RAG	In support of the voluntary sensitive habitat zone code to protect seagrass and maerl, funding for visitor mooring buoys for Longoar bay was secured through collaboration with Pen Llyn a'r Sarnau SAC seagrass work. Efforts to persuade a partner to own the buoys resulted in the Port stepping forward and thereby allowing buoy deployment and successful usage by recreational vessels.
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.

Miscellaneous Activity

M 1	<i>Manage development to safeguard SAC feature.</i>	PCC	Taking proactive steps to further the conservation objectives for the site by proactively discussing restoration plans with developers.
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Information and data gathering

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	The Marine Non-natives pathways project (LIFE funded) continued in 2015 to look at the control of non-natives in marinas across Wales including Milford Haven and Neyland (where surveys took place). A training course took place at Orierton to raise awareness of marine INNS with industry.
ID 13.1.1 + 14	<i>Maintain and continue to expand the knowledge base on diffuse pollution sufficient to inform SAC management.</i>	NRW	NRW provided information to Welsh Government for consideration of a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) designation for the Waterway.

PMSAC Management Action		Authority	Action(s) achieved
<i>ID various</i>	<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.

Resources

<i>Res 2 + 4.2</i>	<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. In light of the decision in the end not to utilise the Joint Working Partnership grant applied for to fund the RAG, NRW have been able to maintain the status quo by providing the same temporary funding as in 2014.
		POMH	Successful smooth transition to new Port of Milford Haven Environment Manager with continued participation in RAG, and SAC Officer hosting/ line managing, as well as aiding pursuit of RAG funding issues on behalf of the RAG with NRW.
		RAG	Funding stream investigations and subsequent submission of multiple project applications to pursue the resources needed to implement SAC management. These included submissions to NRW, Welsh Government and the Sustainable Development Fund administered by PCNPA. Further pursuit of European funding too focusing on Wales-Ireland Interreg support for an aquaculture project led by the Port.

Awareness Raising

<i>AR 1</i>	<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. Routinely included SAC description, sensitivities, and best practice within all Port Staff's Environmental Inductions.
<i>AR 16</i>	<i>Raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC</i>	PCNPA	PCNPA continued to develop its advocacy role, including responses to Welsh Government consultations involving marine issues, and contributing via Welsh Government's Marine Protected Area management steering group.
		PCNPA	Continued to raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC, particularly through Discovery Ranger work.
		PCC	Continued to raise awareness of marine wildlife via Pembrokeshire Biodiversity Partnership communications (Facebook page, newsletter etc.). Joint working to update 'state of' marine species locally.

PMSAC Management Action		Authority	Action(s) achieved
		RAG	Continued to raise general awareness of the SAC and its needs, particularly through use of the SAC website, ad hoc enquiries and talks, and completion of the Marine Awareness Roadshows 2014-15 academic year provision.
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 Chairing a joint RAG meeting with Welsh Government Marine and Fisheries Division in March 2015. Pursued RAG funding issues on behalf of the RAG with NRW.
		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.
		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.
		RAG	Significant input to the Welsh MPA Management Steering Group in order to clarify RAG functions, highlight the positive contribution made by the RAG to SAC management, and respond to future MPA management options within Wales. 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 and subtidal monitoring work was completed.
MRR 10	<i>Ensure that the SAC is taken fully into account in the preparation and review of all policies, plans and initiatives.</i>	RAG	Extensive input into the LIFE Natura 2000 programme in order to complete a detailed Prioritised Improvement Plan for the SAC as well as inputting into multiple thematic action plans.

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 are required to keep it a useful tool. These have not been possible in 2015 due to other work pressures.

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

The situation regarding reporting on site feature condition at a site level by NRW remains unchanged since last year. This concerns information 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 reported for the second round. The RAG have not been given an indication of when the site level reports will be made available, but are aware that NRW consider this to be an important task and have been dedicating staff effort to it. It is noted that as time passes, the reports will become more out of date. In the absence of site condition monitoring information, it is not possible to confidently target management actions towards specific areas identified as being able to contribute towards maintaining or improving feature condition/status. However RAG members have a good understanding of the main issues for the site and through liaison with site-based NRW staff are able to tackle areas in need of improvement.

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 2016 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 2016

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:
Natural Resources Wales (NRW)	Seek to resolve RAG funding issues by exploring ways of funding local SAC improvements using the experience and expertise of the RAG.	Res 2	POMH, RAG
	Provide site specific feature condition and status information to all relevant authorities in order to help inform RAG work and future management.	2MRR 12.1	
	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
	Continue to build upon and learn from the work done to date on the resolution of bait digging and related fisheries management issues in the intertidal zone at The Gann in order to gain improvements in feature conservation status.	LR 10+13	PCNPA, RAG
	Continue to input into and support the work of the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group (MHWESG)	ID various	POMH
Port Of Milford Haven (POMH)	Review of the Port's Maintenance Dredging Strategy.	PHS 6	
	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)	Work to resolve funding issues with NRW on behalf of the Group.	Res 2	NRW, 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 County Council (PCC)	Work to resolve funding issues with NRW on behalf of the Group.	Res 2	NRW, RAG
	Link effectively to work on Local Biodiversity Action Plans where applicable.	MRR 1.1	
	Ensure continued commitment to Chairing the RAG, as well as appropriate specialist representation on the group, and funding. 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
	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
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.	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	
	Improve working relations with the fishing industry and seek SAC improvements through implementation of new funded projects including the Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative (SDF funding) and the Native Oyster Regeneration Project Phase One (NRW funding to WWSFA Ltd).	ID 5	
	Seek to ensure that RAG knowledge and experience are best used to advance MPA management in Wales. Utilise and build upon the LIFE Natura 2000 programme to secure improvements for the SAC. Continue to advise the Welsh MPA management steering group.	AR 17 + 18, MRR 10	NRW, POMH

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:
Relevant Authorities Group (RAG)	Continue to raise awareness of recreational codes of conduct within the SAC including the bait digging code at The Gann and the voluntary sensitive habitat zone within the Waterway. Maximise opportunities for feature improvements.	Rec 14.1.1	NRW, PCNPA, 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

Sue Burton, Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer, 2016

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