



Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Relevant Authority Group (RAG) Annual Report 2016

1. Introduction

The Relevant Authorities for the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC) have been a multi-sectoral partnership dedicated to joint working to improve SAC feature condition since 1999. The agreed management scheme for the site was launched in August 2008. Work since then has focused as much as possible on management scheme implementation. Due to funding issues particularly over the last 2 years and total withdrawal of funding from NRW this year, work has necessarily become more project orientated as the RAG have needed to explore use of different funding grants to take forward active SAC management implementation. This report summarises the period 01 Jan 2016 to 31 December 2016.

Whilst contributions to national work are seen to be essential and of long-term benefit to the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC, this does reduce the ability to progress the RAG's site-based work programme. However, even with the necessity to chase alternative funding, positive practical implementation of site management in order to improve feature condition continues, albeit not necessarily in a prioritised way. Many actions (highlighted in PIPS too) are possible for the RAG to deliver but not without additional resource.

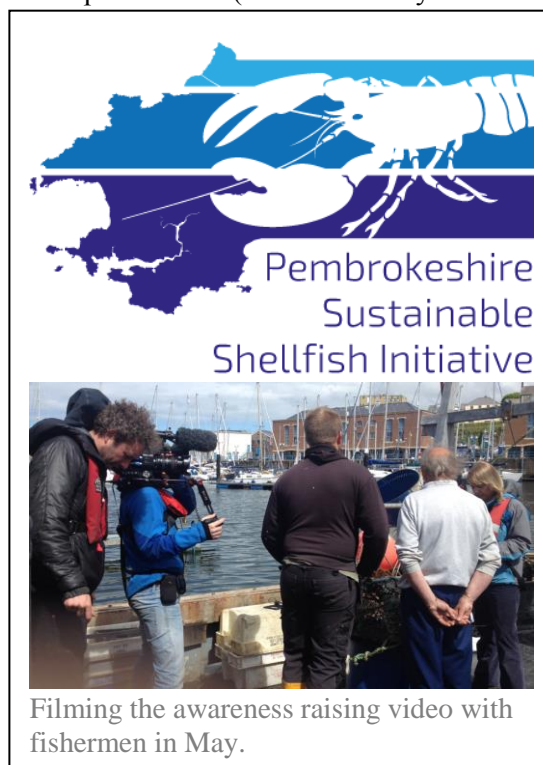
The RAG continues to work closely with Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum (PCF) and this year has welcomed input from PCF into the Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative.

Practical marine management implementation – GRANT FUNDED PROJECT WORK (Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative).

The application for a sustainable shellfish pilot initiative (encompassing ghost fishing, escape hatches and gear tagging) submitted to the Welsh Government's Sustainable Development Fund (administered by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority) was approved in January.

The project is a partnership between the RAG, West Wales Shellfisherman's Association Ltd and local fishermen and aims to raise awareness and understanding, amongst the fishing industry and coastal managers, of the environmental and economic issues associated with ghost fishing of static gear, and of voluntary measures to improve fishing sustainability. Take-up by fishermen was better than expected and 21 volunteers were recruited. World Animal Protection (members of the Global Ghost Gear Initiative) agreed to support the Pilot, aiding awareness raising and video production. Gear trials started in April with biodegradable elements fitted to pot hooks and installation of escape hatches. A short film was produced to raise the profile of the initiative to other fishermen. This was well received. The film can be found on YouTube using the search terms Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish. Information on the project, and a link to the video, is available at www.pembrokeshiremarinesac.org.uk/pssi.html

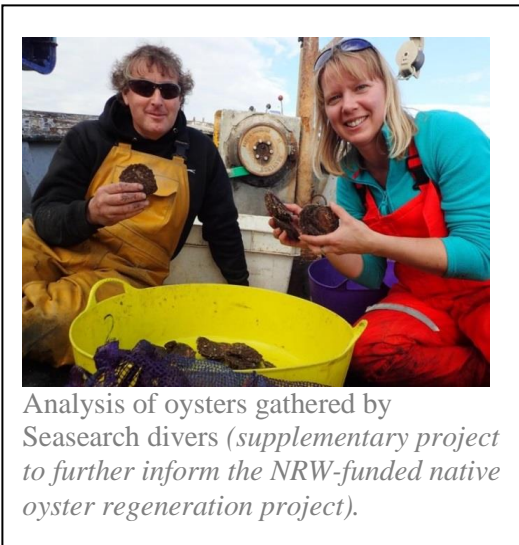
The first biodegradable 'weak link' element to be trialled (split rings) did not last as well as had been initially hoped. 'Ghost buster' hog-rings however (rated for 12 months) were holding out well. Escape hatches proved popular and various methods



of incorporating a biodegradable element to panel installation were trialled. The project is due to finish in July 2017.

Practical marine management implementation – GRANT FUNDED PROJECT WORK (Milford Haven Native Oyster Regeneration Project Phase One – current status and practicalities).

Although not the recipient of the NRW competitive grant for this project, the RAG have worked with West Wales Shellfisherman’s Association Ltd, and the SAC Officer was commissioned to project manage the Native Oyster project. The main aim of the project is to gather evidence needed to support a local Native Oyster regeneration programme. The official project start date was June 1st but much preliminary work was necessary to secure suitable marine licences. By the end of the year, a management steering group had been formed for the project encompassing statutory bodies, fishermen and environmental and community interests. A science advisor and fieldworker were contracted, project methodologies agreed, and fieldwork was well underway and gathering useful data.



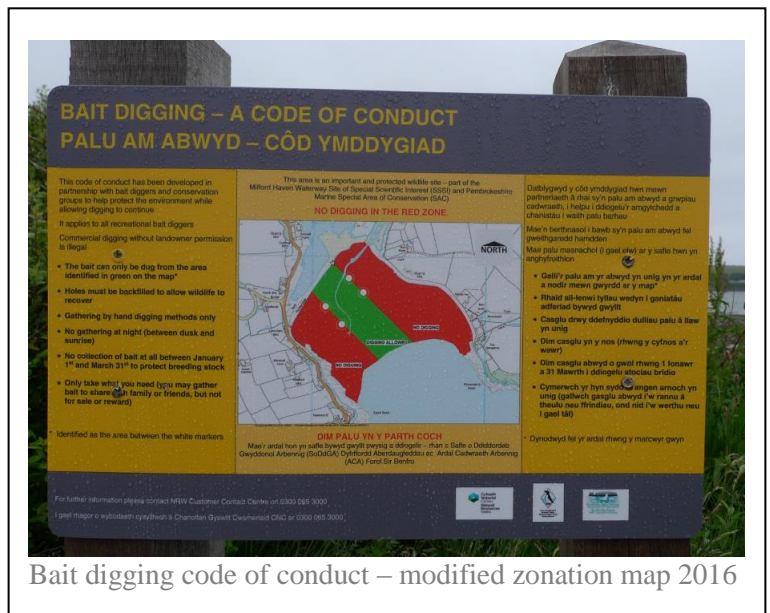
Analysis of oysters gathered by Seasearch divers (*supplementary project to further inform the NRW-funded native oyster regeneration project*).

The project will conclude in June 2017 with a project report detailing practical considerations for native oyster regeneration specific to the waterway to be used for the implementation of the “Milford Haven Native Oyster Regeneration Project Stage Two” which will seek to significantly improve the condition of native oysters (considered to be a component of the *Estuaries, Large shallow inlets and bays, and Reef* features of the SAC).

The SAC Officer secured a separate grant from Biodiversity Solutions Ltd. to fund a parallel project intended to supplement data gathering for the native oyster project. This involved the use of voluntary citizen science Seasearch divers and, by working with local fishermen, some very useful quantitative data was gathered to inform native oyster regeneration work. An independent Seasearch report of the work was in draft by the end of December.

Practical marine management implementation – mudflat improvements.

Partnership working in 2015 concluded that a modification of the bait digging code would benefit feature management on the site, and so the voluntary code was modified and new signage installed on site in 2016 (paid for by the RAG). NRW started the process towards recommendation for statutory management measures (the pursuit of a byelaw) in 2016. The RAG continue to work with NRW, PCNPA, users and local interests to raise awareness of the code, the impacts of bait digging, and to ultimately secure improvements for the site. The SAC Officer assisted NRW with monitoring work on the site in August.



Bait digging code of conduct – modified zonation map 2016

Practical marine management implementation – seagrass improvements.

The voluntary sensitive habitat zone developed by the RAG and local users remains in place to reduce impacts to seagrass (and maerl) from anchoring and mooring. Visitor buoys situated outside the seagrass bed in Longoar Bay were serviced at the start of the main season and continue to be well used and reduce instances of recreational anchoring. Monitoring work and awareness raising efforts have however not been possible due to limited resources.

RAG Finances

Disappointment over rejection of the NRW competitive grant funding at the end of 2015 and the subsequent ‘justification’ received, led the RAG to lodge a formal complaint with NRW over the outcome of the grant and the related decision to re-allocate the unallocated funding to other purpose within NRW. RAG members felt that NRW had unfortunately put in place procedures (obstacles) that were counterproductive to relevant authorities making marine SAC improvements. RAG members met with NRW to discuss future funding on June 24th, but events on that day (BREXIT) rather overshadowed the meeting! There was some reassurance from NRW that mechanisms to fund partnerships were being carefully considered, but the RAG would need to wait until 2018. The financial year 2016-17 was therefore the first year (since 2000) of the RAG’s existence that the statutory nature conservation advisor had not input financially (although NRW staff still continue to be heavily involved in RAG work).

All other RAG members continue to successfully contribute financially to the Group to enable joint working to continue. However there is concern that, with the withdrawal of essential funding from NRW, other RAG members will find it harder to justify their future financial contributions. It is hoped that the situation can be resolved before a negative knock-on effect occurs.

LIFE Natura 2000 Programme Actions / Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Management Scheme Review

The outputs of this NRW led project were used internally by NRW in 2016 to aid prioritisation of work on SACs. The actions, developed in association with stakeholders and partners, to address pressures (issues) and threats (risks) on sites are stored in the NRW-hosted Actions Database. Outputs of the Programme included site-specific Prioritised Improvement Plans (PIPs) and general Thematic Action Plans (TAPs). PIPs provide a summary of proposed actions to 2020 and beyond, to address high and medium priority issues and risks which are preventing site features from reaching favourable condition. They do not cover remedial actions which are already in place or ongoing management activities, nor do they cover monitoring or education and awareness actions. For these reasons the actions are far less numerous than those within SAC management schemes.

To obtain a complete picture of all actions required on the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC, the PIP and relevant TAPs should be considered alongside the management scheme for the site. In reality, due to the Programme drawing extensively on the knowledge of the RAG and the existing agreed management scheme, many actions are duplicated, or would have been reflected in an updated SAC management scheme if one had been recently produced (this has not been the case due to the absence of site condition reports). However a light-touch management review took place for the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC in early 2016 and focused on the prioritised actions published in the Summary Management Scheme 2008 (targeted at the general user and wider public). Input into the LIFE Natura 2000 Programme had already resulted in many discussions highlighting actions achieved or outstanding from the 2008 Management Scheme document. Due to financial uncertainties, a decision was taken not to produce an updated glossy summary management scheme, but instead to focus on being clear about what actions the RAG felt were needed and could be realistically achieved, to flag actions that would need additional resource, and to follow-up opportunities to fund these through separate means should they arise.

Welsh Government Marine & Fisheries Liaison

A joint meeting between the division and the RAGs for Cardigan Bay SAC and Carmarthen Bay & Estuaries European Marine Site (EMS) was due to take place on 20th May to discuss EMS management.

Unfortunately Welsh Government regrettably had to postpone this; staff changes meant that the meeting would be unlikely to take place until 2017. Marine Protected Area related work liaison took place mainly via the Welsh MPA Management Steering Group; nothing of note to the RAG was produced in 2016.

The SAC Officer was asked to sit on a Marine Biodiversity Restoration and Enhancement Task & Finish Group, chaired by Welsh Government; the first meeting was in July. The ultimate goal of this Group was to identify existing and potential restoration and/or enhancement projects for a “top 10” list of habitats/species through careful consideration and transparent process. By the end of the year, the “top 10” habitats/species had been identified, with Native Oyster being number one, followed by seagrass beds and coastal saltmarsh. Further discussion and consideration of relevant projects to restore/enhance these would follow in 2017.

Fisheries related liaison took place mainly via the SAC Officer attending the South Inshore Fisheries Group until October 2016 when Welsh Government took the decision to suspend the IFGs and move to a Task & Finish group approach to more efficiently help inform and drive priority work streams. Members were thanked for contributing to the IFGs for the last 6 years, and were assured that they would continue to receive regular progress reports on delivery of Welsh Government priorities.

In addition to these formal liaison routes, Welsh Government is routinely included in RAG correspondence.

Notable Consultations / Policy / Information of relevance to SAC management.

- The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Welsh Government) received Royal Assent on 21 March 2016. It delivers against Welsh Government’s Programme for Government commitment to introduce new legislation for the environment. Of particular note is:
 - Part 1 (Sustainable management of natural resources) which enables Wales’ resources to be managed in a more proactive, sustainable and joined-up way. It focuses on the opportunities Wales’ resources provide.
 - Part 5&6 (Fisheries for shellfish and marine licensing) which clarifies the law in relation to shellfisheries management and marine licensing.
- Formal consultation on proposals for possible new Special Areas of Conservation for harbour porpoise, and Special Protection Areas for seabird feeding areas took place by Natural Resources Wales on behalf of Welsh Government (pre-consultation took place in 2015).
- The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) by Natural Resources Wales was launched in October 2016. The report assessed the extent to which natural resources in Wales were being sustainably managed, and recommended a proactive approach to building resilience. Importantly, the report linked, for the first time, the resilience of Welsh natural resources to the well-being of the people of Wales.
- A Scallop fishery consultation (Welsh Government) took place for Cardigan Bay in February and proved to be controversial. After considering the responses, Welsh Government concluded that evidence indicated that some scallop fishing activity was possible with no significant impact on SAC features and no adverse impact on the integrity of the SAC, and as such in October the Cabinet Secretary announced that a flexible permitting scheme would be introduced.
- Nitrate vulnerable zones (NVZ) consultation (Welsh Government). September to December 2016 saw consultation on the existing measures for reducing water pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources.

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 2016. 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 2015). 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.

With consideration to the outputs of NRW's LIFE N2K project (the Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Prioritised Improvement Plan and relevant Thematic Action Plans), an additional column is included which indicates where links to these exist. Note that because many Management Scheme actions fall outside the remit of PIPS/TAPs (see earlier), some actions here are additional to those included in LIFE N2K outputs. Relevant TAPs include Access & recreation (AccRec), Flood & coastal erosion risk management (Flood), Diffuse water pollution (Diffuse), Marine litter (Litter), Air pollution: nitrogen deposition (Air), Marine fisheries (Fisheries), Non-native invasive species & pathogens (INNS), and Climate change and habitat fragmentation (Climate). There is also a set of five Cross-cutting Action Plans (Cross) which identify strategic actions relating to capacity-building activities to facilitate direct action to manage and restore Natura 2000 features.

Table 1: Main Relevant Authority Group Achievements 2016

PMSAC Management Action	Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?
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 Developed and successfully completed the application for a new dredge strategy 2017-2021, taking into account the needs of the SAC.	will link to TAP INNS 1.2+1.6 in 2017

PMSAC Management Action	Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?
Living resources (including fisheries)			
LR 6.3	<i>Consider the best means to enhance populations of native oyster (<i>Ostrea edulis</i>) throughout the Milford Haven Waterway</i>	RAG Project managed a new project - the Native Oyster Regeneration Project Phase One (NRW funding to WWSFA Ltd). SAC Officer was brought in to liaise with local fishermen and academics as well as local stakeholders. Successfully recruited contractors to carry out the fieldwork and negotiated acceptable fieldwork methodology and permissions. Additionally secured extra funding for Seasearch divers to supplement the fieldwork. The project was due to conclude in June 2017.	(Not in PIP as considered better to pursue as a project), restoration in TAP Climate restricted to woodlands.
LR 9 (+AR 6.4)	<i>Minimise effects to SAC features by lost gear (e.g. by 'ghost fishing')</i>	RAG Worked successfully with the local fishing industry on a new project - the Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative (SDF funding). Good participation from fishermen and a well-received project video to spread awareness of the potential to modify gear to reduce impacts of ghost fishing and improve sustainability. Gear modifications were carefully managed with the trial continuing into 2017.	TAP Litter 1, relevance to PIP, TAP Fisheries 3
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 Implemented modifications to the voluntary bait digging code of conduct at The Gann and worked with stakeholders to raise awareness of the changes. Installed new site markers including white concrete blocks (design agreed with stakeholders including local sailing and boating clubs). Monitoring of the site has continued. This has included engagement with those parties not observing the voluntary code. A draft byelaw was written for consideration by NRW's Regulatory Business Board.	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)
		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 updated signage for the 2016 season.	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)
		RAG Continued to liaise with NRW, PCNPA and stakeholders in order to contribute to management of bait digging at the Gann. Aided modification of the code of conduct and financed updated signage for the 2016 season. SAC Officer helped with epifaunal monitoring survey work.	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)

PMSAC Management Action	Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?
Water quality, pollution & waste disposal			
WQW 2	<i>Manage agricultural run-off to safeguard SAC features</i>	NRW Follow-up work to bring Water Framework stretches feeding into the marine SAC up to good ecological status continued, with NRW working in this area through its incident response, Bathing Water programme, development planning consultation, permit compliance and targeted farm visits. NRW engaged with stakeholders in the consultation process for the West Wales River Basin Management Plan and provided advice to Welsh Government regarding the potential for a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone for the Daugleddau. Work continued on priority Water Framework Directive (WFD) catchments. A project on Winterton Marsh visited every farm in the area as well as DCWW assets, engagement with the Community Council and private sewage systems. A water quality sampling programme also identified elevated nutrient hotspots and prioritised follow up farm visits where a series of measures were drawn up e.g. improvements to farmyard effluent management. NRW are partners with Planed, DCWW and the farming community in Building Resilience in Catchments (BRIC) which is a pilot in climate change management for farms. The project seeks nature fund money to enable three priority catchments initiatives to be undertaken, these being Pelcomb Brook, Llys y Fran and Winterton (building on the initial WFD work detailed above) It is hoped that BRIC will enable visits to 50 farms (with voluntary agreement from the farmers). The project funding bid has been submitted by Planed to Welsh Government.	PIP, TAP Diffuse (multiple actions)
WQW 7 + 8	<i>Manage pollution response to safeguard SAC features</i>	PCC The Dyfed Powys Local Resilience Forum (DPLRF) Shoreline Pollution Plan (due to be completed and signed-off in 2017), the DPLRF Hazardous Substances Minor Incident plan and the DPLRF Recovery Plan all describe the arrangements to respond to and recover from a pollution incident in order to prevent &/or minimise impact on the public and environment especially sensitive receptors such as the SAC. The Hazardous Substances Minor Incident Plan was used during a Bank Holiday pollution incident on the Milford Haven Waterway.	PIP
		PCNPA PCNPA continued to contribute to marine pollution contingency planning as and when appropriate.	PIP
Recreation			
Rec 8+11	<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. The Marine Code helps protect wildlife through voluntary codes and seasonal access restrictions, developed through the Outdoor Charter Group which also provides training.	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)

PMSAC Management Action		Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?
		RAG	The RAG continues to work closely with PCF with regards to marine recreational activity (the Pembrokeshire Marine Code in particular).	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)

Information and data gathering

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	A new MHWESG collaboration agreement was developed, agreed and signed by all parties. This collaboration enables the partnership to let contracts and hold insurance on its own account and places the partnership in the best place to pursue useful SAC related data.	relevant to Cross (Integration 1)
		NRW	NRW continue to contribute to the work of the Milford Haven Waterway Environmental Surveillance Group (MHWESG). In 2016 contracted work included sediment macrobenthos data analysis and review, and a seagrass review.	relevant to Cross (Integration 1)

Resources

Res 2 + 4.2	<i>Secure the resources (and use and build upon those existing) necessary to implement the SAC management scheme.</i>	PCC	Successfully applied for and secured funding from Welsh Government's Single Revenue Fund to supplement RAG work, helping to ease the impact of current lack of funding from NRW. Considerable liaison with NRW over funding issues on behalf of the Group including a visit to meet NRW Directors in Cardiff in June.	relevant to Cross (Finance)
		POMH	Increased accounting and procurement support was provided to the SAC Officer to aid multiple grant output requirements (relating to SAC project work).	relevant to Cross (Finance)
		RAG	The RAG was successful in pursuing the resources needed to implement several projects of relevance to SAC management. This meant that RAG funds could be prolonged, buffering any impacts from reduced core funding by NRW. Continued pursuit of Wales-Ireland Interreg support for an aquaculture project was undertaken by the SAC officer and Port.	relevant to Cross (Finance)

PMSAC Management Action	Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?	
Awareness Raising				
AR 16	<i>Raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC</i>	PCNPA	Continued to raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC, particularly through Discovery Ranger work. 25 sessions including crabbing and rockpooling were run in 2016 for a range of audiences.	relevant to Cross (Communication 5)
		RAG	Continue to raise general awareness of the SAC and its needs, particularly through use of the SAC website, and ad hoc events and enquiries.	relevant to Cross (Communication 5)
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 commitment to Chairing the RAG and aiding the SAC Officer, as well as appropriate specialist representation on the group.	relevant to Cross (finance)
		PCC	PCC continued its advocacy role raising awareness of SAC management needs, both separately and through the Welsh Local Government Association, by responding to Welsh Government consultations involving marine issues, and contributing to the Welsh Government's Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group.	relevant to Cross (various)
		POMH	Continued routine work to encourage responsible use within the SAC, making use of staff across the organisation (e.g. Water Ranger, marina staff). This includes continued provision and increased monitoring of waste reception facilities at Milford Docks, Milford Marina, Pembroke Port and Pembroke Dock Ferry Terminal, with waste disposal via a separate contractor. Waste was segregated and recycled wherever possible.	relevant to Cross (various)
		PCNPA	PCNPA continued its advocacy role, including responses to Welsh Government consultations involving marine issues, and contributing via the Welsh Government's Marine Protected Area Management Steering Group. PCNPA also routinely comment on Marine Licensing consultations.	relevant to Cross (various)
		RAG	The SAC Officer input into several Welsh Government Groups (South Inshore Fisheries Group, Marine Biodiversity Restoration and Enhancement Task & Finish Group) to ensure that RAG knowledge and experience were best used to advance MPA management in Wales. Multiple members of the RAG continued to sit on, and advise, the Welsh MPA Management Steering Group.	relevant to Cross (various)

PMSAC Management Action	Authority	Action(s) achieved	PIP / TAP?
Monitoring, review and reporting			
MRR 1.1	<i>Link effectively to local Biodiversity Action Plans where applicable</i>	PCC Collaboration over relevant marine-focused Local Biodiversity Action Plans and related work, in particular considerable input to the Native Oyster regeneration project.	relevant to Cross (various)
MRR 2	<i>Effective/comprehensive knowledge of the condition of the SAC features.</i>	NRW Intertidal and sublittoral monitoring work undertaken including intertidal epifaunal monitoring at The Gann to study impacts of bait digging and the voluntary code.	TAP AccRec 2
MRR 8	<i>Keep the SAC Management Scheme under constant review</i>	RAG In the absence of site condition reports from NRW, the RAG undertook a "broad-brush" review of the SAC management scheme. This considered information provided during NRW's LIFE 2K project, what went into the PIPs and what didn't. Rather than a glossy public document, this remains a reference for RAG members to keep track of site actions.	relevant to Cross (integration)
MRR 10	<i>Ensure that the SAC is taken fully into account in the preparation and review of all policies, plans and initiatives.</i>	POMH The Environment Manager has attended numerous external liaison groups, taking the opportunity to raise awareness of the needs of the SAC and enhance opportunities to utilise and build upon the work of the RAG. E.g. Development of the Draft Marine Plan, and MPA Management Steering Group discussions.	relevant to Cross (various)

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 2016 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 site level reporting information will be made available. 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, with adequate resources, 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 2017 are summarised in Table 2. 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. The table below also draws upon the light-touch management scheme review conducted early in 2016, and as for Table 1 includes a column to refer to LIFE Natura 2000 outputs.

Table 2: Relevant Authority Group Priorities for 2017

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:	PIP /TAP?
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.	<i>Res 2</i>	POMH, RAG	relevant to Cross (Finance)
	Provide site specific feature condition and status information to all relevant authorities in order to help inform RAG work and future management.	<i>MRR 12.1</i>		-
	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. Further pursue the byelaw and resources required for enforcement.	<i>LR 10+13</i>	PCNPA, RAG	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)
	Maintain intertidal and sublittoral monitoring to aid assessment of the condition of the SAC features against the conservation objectives.	<i>MRR 2</i>		-
	Follow-up work to bring Water Framework stretches feeding into the marine SAC up to good ecological status including incident response, Bathing Water programme, development planning consultation, permit compliance and targeted farm and sewage treatment site visits. NRW and partners are awaiting Welsh Government to decide on NVZ designations in Wales and the result of the BRICs project bid.	<i>WQW 2</i>		PIP, TAP Diffuse (multiple actions)
	Maximise the effectiveness of actions taken to manage the SAC by ensuring good integration between delivery of PIPs/TAPs and the SAC management scheme.	<i>R 4 + MRR11</i>	RAG	Cross (integration)
	Facilitate and support the delivery of marine non-native species awareness and reporting through collaborative working with the SAC Officer, Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum and the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership.	<i>PHS 13+14 /AR 1</i>		TAP INNS 1.1
Port of Milford Haven (POMH)	Complete the biosecurity risk assessment needed in association with the dredge strategy (this was a condition of licence by NRW).	<i>PHS 6.0</i>		TAP INNS 1.2+1.6
	Provide RAG with a 'state of' report for Port waste to capture what facilities are available and where, and to aid identification of any areas that could be enhanced in order to contribute to improvement of SAC feature condition.	<i>PHS 12</i>		links to PIP

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:	PIP /TAP?
	Liaise with DEFRA to contribute to climate change forward planning with respect to environmental protection (including of SAC features).	<i>MRR 11</i>		TAP Climate (multiple actions)
	Seek to resolve the core funding issue for the RAG by pursuing suitable agreements with NRW as the RAG's hosting organisation.	<i>R 2</i>	NRW, RAG	relevant to Cross (Finance)
	Continue to try to influence Welsh Government to secure long-term statutory contributions to SAC management by attending cross sectoral groups such as WMSAAG, WGMPASG, EU Exit Roundtable etc.	<i>AR 18, MRR 11</i>	PCNPA, PCC, RAG	relevant to Cross (Finance + Integration)
Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC)	Joint working to complete a local biodiversity action plan for Native Oyster, seeking to improve Native Oyster numbers within the Waterway and so improve SAC feature condition.	<i>MRR 1.1</i>	RAG	(Not in PIP as considered better to pursue as a project), restoration in TAP Climate restricted to woodlands.
	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.	<i>AR 17</i>		relevant to Cross (Finance)
	Finalise and publish the Dyfed Powys Local Resilience Forum (DPLRF) Shoreline Pollution Plan and ensure appropriate involvement with the West Wales Environment Group. Provide EROCIPS type data for input to an appropriate database, following up ARCOPOL work.	<i>WQW 7 + 8</i>	PCNPA	PIP
	Ensure continued commitment to fund the RAG. In addition, work to resolve funding issues with NRW on behalf of the Group.	<i>Res 2</i>		relevant to Cross (Finance)
	Continue to develop/pursue advocacy role for the SAC and the site's conservation objectives e.g. through responding/contributing to policy consultations, participating in the Welsh Government Marine Protected Areas Management Steering Group and other inputs either as a single Local Authority or via the Welsh Local Government Association.	<i>AR 18</i>		relevant to Cross (Integration)
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 local communities.	<i>LR 10+13</i>	NRW, RAG	PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:	PIP /TAP?
	Continue to provide support for the work of the Marine Code and Outdoor Charter groups.	<i>Rec 8+ 12 (+others)</i>		PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)
	Continue to develop/pursue advocacy role for the SAC and the site's conservation objectives e.g. through responding/contributing to policy consultations, participating in the Welsh Government Marine Protected Areas management steering group and in the general promotion of the National Park.	<i>AR 17+18</i>	POMH, PCC, RAG	relevant to Cross (Integration)
	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.	<i>WQW 7+8</i>	PCC	links to PIP
	Continue to raise awareness of local marine wildlife within the SAC and increase knowledge of the condition of the SAC features.	<i>AR 16, MRR 2</i>	RAG	relevant to Cross (Communication 5)
Relevant Authorities Group (RAG)	Resolve problematic issue of 3rd party dna analysis of spraint samples and finalise conclusions from the coastal SAC otter research project.	<i>aiding MRR 2</i>		-
	Successfully complete the Native Oyster Regeneration Project Phase One (NRW funding to WWSFA Ltd).	<i>LR 6.3</i>		(Not in PIP as considered better to pursue as a project), restoration in TAP Climate restricted to woodlands.
	Successfully complete the Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative (SDF funding).	<i>LR 9 + AR 6.4</i>		TAP Litter 1, relevance to PIP, TAP Fisheries 3
	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.	<i>AR 17 + 18</i>		relevant to Cross (various)
	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.	<i>Rec 14.1.1</i>		links to PIP, TAP AccRec (multiple actions)

Authority	Action	Action plan reference	Action ref. also a priority for:	PIP /TAP?
	Continue to raise general awareness of the SAC and its needs, particularly through use of the SAC website, and education projects.	<i>AR 16</i>	PCNPA	relevant to Cross (Communication 5)
	Seek to maximise the effectiveness of actions taken to manage the SAC by ensuring good integration between delivery of the SAC management scheme and PIPs/TAPs.	<i>R 4 + MRR11</i>	NRW	Cross (integration)

Sue Burton, Pembrokeshire Marine SAC Officer, July 2017

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