

Minutes of the 115th Fleet Study Group meeting held on 20th November 2015

Present: Ed Harland (EH, chair), Don Moxom (DM), Alan Holliday (AH), John Dadds (JD), Kevin Donnelly (KD), Steve Feist (SF), Charlotte Bolton (CB), Simon Pengelly (SP), Jessica Mead (JM), Matt Doggett (MD), Jonathan Cox (JC, minutes).

The meeting welcomed Frank Cox of Portland Port as a new member.

Apologies: Lin Baldock, Jon Bass, Steve Hales, Nick Owen, Rachel Waldock, Mark Smith.

Minutes of the 114th meeting: Approved.

Matters arising: FSG website domain name has yet to be obtained. Surveyed marker posts on the beach – suggestion to carry out long-term study, request to members to be sent.

Reports from representatives:

Dorset Coastal Forum: Next meeting will be on 3rd December. The cost to attend the meeting has increased to £50, which may deter attendance.

Portland Harbour Consultative Committee: September meeting cancelled, next meeting will be December 8th.

Research Reports: JB has published a paper in the Proceedings of the DNHASoc regarding underwater light trapping of invertebrates in the Fleet. The reference is:

Wills, N., Bass, J.A.B. & Jones, J.I. 2015. Underwater light-trapping of mobile invertebrates in the Fleet lagoon. *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society* 136, 30-37.

Chesil Beach & Fleet Nature Reserve update, by DM

An intertidal survey within the Fleet has been carried out this year by IECS, from Hull University.

A student from Bournemouth University is studying sediment in the Fleet.

DM has produced a document regarding boat navigation within the Fleet which should aid navigation by those carrying out research in the mid and upper Fleet.

DM has produced a summary of access locations along the landward side of the Fleet and Chesil Beach, and presented a map showing these locations. This will be of particular use at times when emergency access is required, for example pollution incidents. This map has been incorporated into the Dorset County Emergency Plan.

There are still many washed up cigarette packets on the beach despite the clearing operation, the packets originated from containers lost overboard from the container ship Svendborg Maersk during a storm in February 2014.

A scoping report clarifying 'who does what' management on Chesil Beach is being produced by Footprint Futures. The work is commissioned by the Chesil Beach Centre (DWT), Chesil & Fleet Nature Reserve, Crown Estate and Weymouth & Portland Council.

A Recreational Guide is being produced by DM for Chesil Beach and the Fleet, clarifying for management what is allowed, what is allowed with consent, and what is not permissible.

There are some 'grey' areas, for example foraging.

Further derelict and abandoned small boats have been removed from the margins of the Fleet.

Coastal access: An objection has been lodged by Ilchester Estates, and Natural England comments have been received regarding this objection. A planning inspector has visited.

Fleet Observer glass-bottomed boat: The ownership of the boat has been transferred to DWT.

One of the remaining original lerret rowing boats has been moved to Castletown on Portland, where it will be maintained and exhibited as a tourist attraction.

Community Seagrass Initiative by Jessica Mead

A presentation was given showing the results of a survey this year of the seagrass in the Fleet, using Natural England methods as employed in previous surveys in 2002, 2007 and 2014. The survey recorded the % cover of *Zostera marina*, *Z. noltei*, Foxtail Stonewort *Lamprothamnion papulosum* and Tasselweeds *Ruppia* spp., and also recorded the presence or absence of the mollusc *Rissoa membranacea*. Three transects were selected for recording from those recorded in previous years, and surveys were carried out in June, August and October this year. The results showed some sizeable decreases in the cover of *Z. marina* and in particular Foxtail Stonewort, an important Schedule 8 species, but it is possible some of the differences between the 2014 data may be due to short-term population fluctuations. Seagrass near Langton Hive was coated with a thick covering of algae and sediment in summer, but this had gone by October.

Other observations made during the survey included Broad-nosed Pipefish (sometimes known as Deep-snouted Pipefish), and the sea slug *Ackera bullata* occurring in hundreds.

Good results were obtained using a Go-Pro camera towed underwater behind a kayak, the camera taking a photo once every ten seconds. This process provided good photos of the Seagrass beds.

Channel Coastal Observatory SW Region Monitoring Programme

Results have shown that most beaches in the SW lost beach material in the 2013/14 storms, but that more than half the beaches studied had since showed considerable recovery of material. Beaches at Fistril Bay (Newquay) and Sidmouth had recovered well, but by contrast the beach at Sennen had shown no signs of recovering lost material. Recovery of sand lost from dune systems will take much longer.

Dr David Graham of Loughborough University had led a study of the impacts of the storms on Chesil Beach, using a digital Gravelometer that photographs the beach surface and uses

a computer to analyse the size of the pebbles. The aim was to show the impact of the beach reconstruction work on the pebble size distribution. The data is available in the university data repository.

Natural England Technical Advisory Group Business

No NE representatives were present.

FSG Field Days

A report covering activities during the litter surveys carried out during Field Days in 2013-2015 is in preparation and expected to be completed by the end of 2015. The 2015 site was re-visited in September and further pictures taken and species identified.

Members are asked to consider ideas for possible activities during a 2016 Field Day.

AOB

SP: NE has sent out a draft conservation package for MCZ for comments, and is looking for evidence regarding the Bass feature of the Ramsar notification. A funding application has been made to carry out an annual small fish survey in the Fleet, to be carried out in spring and autumn using a fine mesh seine net, with possible opportunities for collaborative work with FSG.

JC: Dr Pat Doody, who used to work for the Nature Conservancy Council and Joint Nature Conservation Committee, is working on a Then-and-Now publication, possibly a book, on coastal sites he used to work on in the 1980s and 90s, including Chesil & Fleet. Suggestion made to refer him to the old photos on the FSG website.

MD: Discussed potential uses of his drone carrying a camera for work at Chesil Beach and the Fleet, and may demonstrate at a future meeting.

Future meetings and venues

March 18th 2016 – At Chesil Beach Centre, to be confirmed.

July 22nd 2016 – At Ilchester Estate offices, Abbotsbury, to be confirmed.