

FLEET STUDY GROUP

Minutes of the 80th meeting of the Fleet Study Group, held at the Dorset Wildlife Trust HQ, Brooklands Farm, Forston, near Dorchester, on the 19th March 2004.

Present: John Whittaker (Chairman), Dennis R. Seaward, Rachel Waldock (EN; Minutes), Lin Baldock, Edward Green and Don Moxom (Ilchester Estates), Patrick O'Sullivan, Geoff Poole, David Bucke, Derek Dorsett, and Peter Tinsley (DWT). The meeting welcomed Geraint Weber (University of Plymouth) to give a formal presentation on his work (Item 10), after the close of official business.

1. Apologies for Absence: these were received from Richard Edmonds, Jeanne FitzPatrick and Sue Eden.

2. Notes of Last Meeting: (79th of 21st November 2003). Accepted as a true record.

3. Matters Arising:

The next Dorset Coast Forum meeting would be held on 12th May 2004 in Swanage. JW would make every effort to attend.

"Hurricane" - the Ilchester Estates have refused permission for its excavation from the bed of the Fleet, near Langton Herring.

A resumé of Don Moxom's presentation "Downtern", given at the last meeting, was handed out.

4. Reports from Representatives:

(4.1) Fleet Annual Meeting - this was held on the 16th February 2004. JW felt that the FSG should always have a representative at these meetings. Luckily, Lin Baldock who attends in her own right, agreed also to represent the FSG. She kindly reported on proceedings. Matters covered included: Lin Baldock - litter on Chesil beach; Swanherd's report - swan population reported stable; Claire Buckerfield (FWAG) - gave a presentation on the Fleet Hinterland Project; Ed Harland - gave an update on physical measurements and relating data to the Little Tern's lack of success; Oyster farm - it was aiming to realign; Fleet visitor centre - maybe upgraded as part of a World Heritage Site initiative.

(4.2) Joint Dorset Marine Committee - a meeting was held on the 2nd March 2004 and again Lin Baldock, who was attending, was thanked for her willingness also to represent the FSG. She reported that the Portland Wind Farm was the main issue of discussion of relevance to the Group (see also Item 7, below).

5. Current and Recently Completed Research:

Lin Baldock was particularly concerned with the CASI data produced by Pooley & Bamber (2000) in their report for English Nature and especially the "supervised results" for the eastern part of the Fleet (i.e. SE of the Narrows) for November. Their map implies that there are extensive areas of *Zostera*, *Ruppia* and *Lamprothamnium* between the Narrows and Smallmouth, which we all know is nonsense! Her concern was that when they (some unknown contractor appointed by EN) come to do the next assessment of the Fleet as an SAC, there will be an apparent decline in its "favourable condition". She said she knew how this came about: there was never ground truthing

of the data east of the Narrows when the initial survey was carried out (clearly evident from their report to EN). Results have been extrapolated from the West Fleet, which had proper coverage but as we know, has such very different habitats. LN said she planned to map the subtidal habitats in the eastern part of the Fleet in order to give an accurate picture of the present situation. The subtidal tide-swept community and the subtidal coarse sediment communities are extensive in the area and are among the features selected by EN in their designation of the Fleet as an SAC.

Plymouth University - Patrick O'Sullivan and his students were still much concerned by the nutrient loading of water bodies. He wanted to continue his work on the Fleet if funding could be secured.

6. Research Proposals

Professor John Murray of Southampton University hoped, with JW, to instigate a seasonal ecological study of the Fleet foraminifera. [A reconnaissance was planned for May 2004, but due to illness has had to be postponed].

7. Portland Harbour Matters: This was primarily concerned with the Wind Farm Proposal and was reported on by RW. The DTI view is that the windfarm is an offshore farm and must await the Strategic Environmental Assessment for the SW, due to be undertaken in 2006/2007. Plans therefore are put on hold for the present.

8. Future Meetings

16th July 2004 - West Yard Abbotsbury. It was still hoped that Professor Denys Brunsdon would give a formal presentation, on his ideas on the formation and morphology of the Fleet and Chesil Beach, but JW reported that there was a strong possibility that he would be unavailable at the time. If this was indeed the case, he hoped to arrange another speaker.

It was agreed that these formal presentations (initiated by DRS), following on from the official business of the FSG, have been very informative and a great success. DRS now suggested that for one meeting a year anyone might be allowed to bring along slides etc. that would be of interest to the FSG, but be not necessarily enough for a full presentation. Perhaps we could therefore designate, such a meeting each year in advance - a "Look and Tell" event, with slides, posters, publications, etc.

9. Any Other Business

Fleet Bathymetry - The only detailed bathymetric map of the Fleet was produced by Messrs Wimpeys for the CEGB Nuclear Power Station survey in the 1970. A new survey, using state-of-the-art techniques, was urgently needed for comparative purposes and some discussion took place on how the work should be taken forward and by whom.

DB reported that a 'footpath' had appeared to the holiday chalets at the top end of the Narrows. It needed monitoring.

RW reported that the MOD were removing the bases of the sheds on Chesil Beach which may, in turn, help predation problem of the little terns by foxes.

PT reported that April 6th was the lowest daytime tide of the year. He would be organising beach surveys and helpers were urgently needed.

EG said that the Western Relief Road was not now included in the Dorset Structure Plan and was less and less likely to happen.

Chesil Beach Survey Points - DRS reported that this project was still well worth undertaking, in spite of current availability of GPS, etc. There was a possibility that

EG (through the Fleet & Swannery Trust) could fund it but what he needed was a good case, including the *raison d'être* from Malcolm Bray's talk. JW undertook to provide this.

IVth Fleet Symposium Proceedings - the Editor of *Aquatic Conservation* had agreed to take a number of papers as part of a themed issue on the Fleet. Most had been refereed (or were being refereed). There were still problems but it was hoped to proceed in the near future.

10. Presentation. The formal presentation after the meeting was given by Geraint Weber (University of Plymouth), entitled "Hindcasting of nitrogen and phosphorus loads upon fleet lagoon (1866-2002), using an export coefficient approach". [An Abstract had been provided with the Agenda].