

## FLEET STUDY GROUP

**Minutes of the 86th meeting of the Fleet Study Group**

**Held on:** 18th March 2006 at 2:30pm

**At:** the Estate Office, West Yard Abbotsbury

**Present:** John Whittaker (chairman), Lin Baldock, Richard Burden, Sue Burton, Ken Coombe, Karl Crowther, Derek Dorset, Sue Eden, Ed Harland, Danuta Kochanowska, Don Moxom, Geoff Poole, Dennis Seaward.

**Apologies for Absence:** Richard Acornley, Kevin Donnelly, Jeanne FitzPatrick, Patrick O'Sullivan.

**Minutes of the last two meetings** (84th: 15-Jul-05 & 85th: 18-Nov-05) were accepted as a true record.

**Matters Arising:** None.

John Whittaker pointed out that the membership of the FSG needs reviewing to ensure that relevant organisations were represented. He thanked Dennis Seaward for providing the minutes of the last two meetings and Don Moxom for collating the paperwork for this meeting.

### Reports from Representatives

**Dorset Coast Forum:** John Whittaker provided a brief update of the last Winter 2005 meeting. Minutes of these meetings are available on-line at <http://www.dorsetcoast.com/index.jsp?articleid=20997>

**Joint Dorset Marine Committee:** Lin Baldock reported on the last JDMC meeting held on 23-Jan-06. Portland Port Authority is preparing a scoping document in relation to the proposed port expansion involving the reclamation of about 9ha of land and some deepening of berths. Some baseline ecological survey work has already been undertaken. Concern has been expressed over issues of water quality in connection with this development (EN and others, especially shellfisheries interests).

Discussion continued over the storage of gas under Portland. A desk study has been completed and the dispersion of high salinity effluent modelled. This is to be pumped for ~8years at 230g/litre. The conclusion was that temperature would be slightly above that of ambient seawater and that salinity would fall to "an acceptable level" very soon after discharge. The JDMC felt that the progress of the impact assessment needed to be carefully followed by someone with appropriate expertise.

The need was highlighted for the provision of a sensitivity map for Portland Harbour with numerous developments pending, driven by the successful Olympic bid. EN/DERC have actioned this (see below).

A Sensitive Catchment Farming Officer has been/is to be appointed to cover the Frome, Poole Harbour and Fleet catchments. The post is to be funded by EN (Natural England) and the Environment Agency.

**Annual Fleet Management Meeting:** Don Moxom reported. Water quality and its adequate monitoring were highlighted as being of great importance. The Management Plan for the Fleet is progressing.

**Sensitivity Map for Portland Harbour:** Sue Burton explained that time has been allocated to review the ecological information already held by EN and DERC for the area. Bridget Betts of the Dorset Coast Forum has been tasked to identify forum members to be invited to contribute. It is

proposed that the format will follow that used by the recent summary provided for Chichester Harbour.

### Strategic Monitoring Programme

John Whittaker and Sue Burton provided a summary of progress. Monitoring would include annual aerial photography of the coast, deployment of wave buoys, and studies on sediment processes. The programme is to start in the summer of 2006. FSG members were encouraged to contribute suggestions for monitoring and for subsequent use of the data. There will be an opportunity to re-evaluate the programme on an annual basis in the light of the results of the monitoring.

It was suggested that the data is to be collated and held by a university; Plymouth, Bournemouth, and Southampton were mentioned.

John Whittaker had forwarded a paper prepared by Malcolm Bray giving the monitoring aims and topics for consideration from the FSG viewpoint. JW assured the meeting that the Alan Carr bench marks are to be formally tied into the survey programme.

### FSG Web Site

Ed Harland is now in charge of the web site. He reported that the old site, set up by Peter Dyrinda, hosted by Swansea University has now gone. He asked what was needed on the new site? A web site name is required. The web site also needs to be hosted somewhere. Done independently this incurs a cost. JW is to investigate the possibility of the Natural History Museum hosting the new web site. Software is required to manage the site cost ranging from ~£30 up to £400+ depending on functionality. A broadband connection will be required to upload the site, though it may be possible to undertake maintenance using a direct dial connection.

### Avian 'Flu

Don Moxom reported that Dave Wheeler (Abbotsbury Swanherd) had been in contact with the Wildfowl and Wetlands trust at Slimbridge about this. The outcome is that 10 pairs of swans from the Fleet have been isolated in a barn where it is hoped they will rear offspring. This proactive action is required because, as has been pointed out by Professor Chris Perrins, the swans have some genetic and behavioural peculiarities.

The bio-security at the Swannery has been reviewed and the staff given appropriate training. Sue Burton pointed out that there is a DEFRA help-line for people to report dead swans and other wildfowl.

### Recent Research

John Whittaker reported that **Patrick O'Sullivan** has completed a paper on the nutrient budgets of the Fleet which is being considered for publication by *Saline Systems*, an electronic journal. One of his students is completing analysis of "swan poo". Update to be provided in July.

John Whittaker reported that and **Alasdair Bruce**, through **Kevin Donnelly's** Abbotsbury Heritage Project, had carried out coring in the Fleet above and below the "Causeway". Eight shallow cores were taken at 100m intervals from just east of the Causeway, westwards to opposite Bum Point, close to Chesil Beach. Initial analysis of the ostracods has showed a freshwater signature in all of the cores, between a depth of 13 and 28cm. It has also been shown that the "Causeway" wall has a vertical eastern and a stepped western face. There was speculation as to the purpose of the structure and what the freshwater "event" might mean.

Sue Burton reported that **EMU** had recently completed a survey of the intertidal communities of the Fleet. The report is now with EN.

Lin Baldock reported on the survey of beached seafans (*Eunicella verrucosa*) and anthropogenic litter being carried out on a quarterly basis by **Julie Hatcher** (Purbeck Marine Wildlife Reserve Warden) and **Steve Trehwella** assisted by a number of volunteers. Huge numbers of seafans were found on a 500m length of beach at Wyke Regis during the last two surveys (600+ and 300+). It is feared that these colonies may be derived from Lyme Bay where it is known that the scallop fishery has impacted on the subtidal reefs dislodging the epifauna. Sue Burton reported that action is in hand to minimise

the impact of this fishery in Lyme Bay. The seafan is included as a priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

### **Future Meetings**

21 July 2006

19 November 2006

16 March 2007

Venue to be advised. Venues put forward included Weymouth College, Weymouth & Portland Borough Council, English Nature – Slepe Farm. John Whittaker/Don Moxom to investigate possibilities.

### **Any other Business**

Richard Burden (consultant working for EN) is currently updating the Action Plan for the Chesil and the Fleet European marine site. The FSG was asked for input. It was suggested that Richard Acornley's proposals for water quality monitoring should be forwarded to RB. RB to circulate action plan. Diffuse pollution had been identified as the main problem at an earlier meeting.

JW reiterated the point that water quality is critical for the Fleet and needs protection and management.

Updating of the catalogue of the Fleet Study Archive was identified as a need.

Don Moxom expressed concern that the West Fleet had "lost its special interest status". With the implementation of various agri-environment schemes around the Fleet how do we measure and monitor change? Integration of monitoring activity is vital.

### **Presentations**

Karl Crowther gave an overview of the survey of the vegetated shingle plant communities on Chesil Beach. His consultancy had been commissioned by English Nature to undertake this survey in July 2005. The report: National Vegetation Classification Survey of Annex 1 Listed Species at the Chesil and the Fleet SAC, Dorset is held by EN and may be available on disc to FSG members.

Danuta Kochanowska (DERC) reported on DERC's marine habitat and species mapping and recording schemes.

The meeting concluded at approximately 17:40.

[Minutes prepared by Lin Baldock, March 2006]