

Report of the Action group on Ramsar Status, to be presented to the Improvements Group meeting of 26th February 2008

Members of the group: Michael Marett-Crosby, Margaret Holland Prior, Jeremy Mallinson and Joey Brown. We were pleased to welcome Graham Evans and Mike Stentiford for our second meeting.

Introduction

This Action Group was asked to work on the statement of common ground that declared:

That Ramsar status for the St Aubin's area is included as a priority in the Island Plan Review 2008.

This report represents the results of our reflections to date.

1. What is Ramsar?

The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, is an intergovernmental treaty supporting the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. There are presently more than 1,700 wetland sites included in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. Ramsar sites gain a special conservation status, granted if the site fulfils any one of 9 qualifying criteria.

The UK is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention.

2. Ramsar in Jersey

Jersey has submitted wetlands to the Ramsar list via the UK government. There are at present five designated Ramsar sites in Jersey, and a further 5 sites proposed or designated in the other Channel Islands.

The five designated Ramsar sites in Jersey are the South East Coast from La Collette to Gorey, Les Minquiers, Les Écréhous / Les Dirouilles, Les Pierres de Lecq (the Paternosters) and St Ouen's Bay / Les Mielles. These are listed as sites UK 23301-23305.

The States rent the island's foreshore from the Crown Estate, giving the island control over its environment and full enjoyment of the facility. The lease establishes that the States will 'ensure the preservation of the environment and of the ecology both of the coast of the island and of each part of the entire archipelago of the Bailiwick.'

Key references to Ramsar and coastline protection in States documents are listed in the appendix to this document.

3. Ramsar and the St Aubin's Bay area

St Aubin's Bay is close to existing Ramsar sites. One option is to consider it an extension to the existing site at Les Minquiers, given that we share a single tidal system.

Proposals to create St Aubin's Bay as a Ramsar site are not new. Jersey's Coastal Zone Management Strategy includes at section 3.1 the expectation that 'those bays with intertidal flats and reefs including St Ouen's Bay, St Brelade's Bay and St Aubin's Bay should eventually be similarly designated.'

A report prepared for the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum in April 2005 lists extension of Ramsar status to the bay as a priority.

4. What would we be protecting?

The Bay is an internationally important winter feeding area for wading birds, and in particular for the pale-bellied Brent goose. This is one of three subspecies, much smaller in number than the more common dark-bellied Brent goose. They come here from Arctic Canada and overwinter exclusively at the western and eastern ends of St Aubin's Bay.

The geese depend in turn on the continued existence of the muddy foreshore and the sheltered harbour. Much of their feeding areas have been destroyed by reclamation at the St Helier end of the bay. The St Aubin's site is of huge importance to these birds, and supports a larger population than anywhere else in the UK. It is the farthest south that these birds migrate.

Other shorebirds like dunlin, sanderling and ringed plover also feed on the same muddy foreshore and in the harbour.

In a Position Paper of October 2004, the Jersey Environment Forum, commenting on the then Public Services Department Solid Waste Strategy, noted that 'St Aubin's has been identified as an important winter refuge for migratory birds.' These birds are sustained by a complex web of small marine organisms.

The report for the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum cited above notes that the bay supports extensive eelgrass beds and nurseries for fish as well as providing avian habitats.

The Jersey Biodiversity Report of 1988 found that the area now covered by the reclamation in the east (St Helier) end of the bay provided a home for over one hundred species before it became a home for rubbish instead. These tidal flats are lost forever.

A Ramsar listing for the bay establishes the absolute principle of the 'wise use of wetlands and their resources' in future planning for the bay. It does not prohibit use but encourages appropriate activities in the areas of tourism, outdoor recreation, education, water supply and fisheries production.

The application can be advanced under the second group of Ramsar areas (Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity) and in particular one of the following criteria laid down in Ramsar:

- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.
- A wetland should be considered internationally important if it supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.

5. How would St Aubin benefit?

Support of this application is an unambiguous statement of commitment to the environment and to the preservation of the bay. It recognises the possibilities of environmentally sensitive tourism and might open educational opportunities. It protects one of the most precious assets we have, drawing attention to it and encouraging its wise and wider appreciation.

The application process would be a real source of local effort and engagement with the foreshore area. The community would gain a clearer sense of the variety of species on our doorstep and how we might protect them. Events and displays can be created to highlight the application process.

The education opportunities presented by the application are huge. Many primary and secondary schools can access the St Aubin's Bay area. Information and resources can be made available for study and exploration of the intertidal environment. Tourists would also benefit from this – guided 'moon walks' would allow visitors and locals alike the chance to experience the life of our bay at night.

Funding is available through the States Ecology Fund. A community application for Ramsar status is exactly what this fund aims to support, as indicated in the appendix to this document.

A successful application would be a huge source of local pride. It would establish St Aubin's Bay as a destination of choice in the minds of locals and visitors and strengthen the international profile of the area.

6. What are the next steps?

This proposal requires wide consultation. The way forward must include:

- An ecological, biological and physical overview of the area.
- Careful study of the bird population. The Société Jersiaise Bird section has a large body of evidence that we could use.
- Centrally, we will need a local group to be a conduit for information, ideas and developments.
- Discussions with key people, including Mike Freeman at Environment, Tony Paignton at the Société Jersiaise, the Brent Goose Research Group in Ireland and Glynn Young at Durrell. Mike Stentiford has already offered to help as much as he can.
- The clearly articulated political will to make it happen

Above all, a Ramsar application for the bay needs a clear statement of intent from those who live close to it and treasure it. It needs, in short, to start somewhere. That is the opportunity that the Improvements Group and Parish Assembly now have.

APPENDIX

Notes on The States Environment Division Policy Statement and Environment and Planning Business Plan 2008

The Environment Division Policy Statement:

1. "The Division supports the States objective of ensuring a better quality of life for everyone, both now and for generations to come. This means creating a better and safer environment both in Jersey and internationally.and ensuring a high quality environment that can be enjoyed by all."
2. **Ecology Fund:** "The Jersey Ecology Fund is a financial resource available for whole or partial support of local environmental projects."
3. **Eligibility:** "Surveys of marine environment, perhaps to be carried out as part of, or in conjunction with, undergraduate or postgraduate studies." "Participation in British and European projects, such as biological studies."
4. **Jersey Environment Forum:** "Established by the Environment and Public Services Committee in June 2003 to bring together the views of all those who have a stake in Jersey's environment." The JEF comprises 12 members (including the chairman) who are to represent collectively the broad range of environmental issues that Jersey faces ..."
"The expertise covered by the members encompasses the following: (inter alia)
 - * Conservation of the environment at a detailed scale, species and habitats, common and rare.
 - * The place that Jersey has in a global system and the obligations this brings..
 - * The need to build awareness of environmental issues, especially in young people."

5. **Marine Management:** “Jersey’s coastline is an ecological area of international importance, as recognised by Ramsar designation. Our coastal zone is under pressure from development and the draft Coastal Zone Strategy aims to set out policy to protect this valuable area.”

See: “Making the most of Jersey’s Coast”,

CZMSummaryofPolicyDirectionsConsultation.pdf.

“The official consultation concluded on 13th February, 2006. However we are happy to consider any further comments.”

Management of the coastline: Page 5. “Where they exist, individual regulatory systems for the coastline include: Landscape conservation. Wildlife conservation. Near shore recreation.”

6. **Jersey’s Coastal Zone Management Strategy Coastal Defence.**

1. Jersey’s Coastal Defence Page 6. “Jersey is constitutionally a dependency of the British Crown. The States of Jersey rent the foreshore from the Crown Estate at a cost of £4,500 per annum. to give the island control over our environment and the public full enjoyment of the foreshore. The purpose stated within the lease is “....*to ensure the protection and the preservation of the environment and of the ecology both of the coast of the island and of each part of the entire archipelago of the Bailiwick.*” It (the States Coastal Zone Management strategy) agrees that the foreshore should be maintained and preserved for all to enjoy. The Lease is renewed every 25 years.”

2 “**The Marine and Coast Atlas** for Jersey is a project to locate, obtain and digitally collate marine and coastal information along the Jersey Coast: The Atlas will provide a resource to the public and private sector to enable accurate assessment for coastal and marine management in Jersey, based on sound information and data.

7. Jersey's Coastal Zone Management Strategy Awareness and Education.

3.1 Bays with inter-tidal flat and reefs: *"The South East coast is a Ramsar area, and most of the rest of this character type (i.e. those bays with intertidal flats and reefs including St Ouen's Bay and St. Aubin's Bay should eventually be similarly designated"*

"Even minor developments such as temporary beach kiosks and navigation aids are proposed within the Appraisal to be sensitively designed and located." "Therefore, as stated within the Island Plan 2002, there is no capacity for change apart from sustainable management of renewable resources."

9.2 Strategic Plan 2005 – 2010: The Plan seeks controlled growth by introducing government policies designed to minimise the impact of this growth and to help enhance the existing environment .

9.3 Pressure for Large Scale Land Reclamation: *"It is still conceivable that there will be pressure to provide additional land reclamation to deal with the Island's waste at some point in the future. Land reclamation results in diminishing species diversity and alters coastal processes. What action can be taken to avoid further reclamation? Would it be viable to export our waste? If reclamation is unavoidable,how can the Planning and Environment Department ensure minimum impact upon marine biodiversity and the surrounding environment both visually and non-visually?"*

8. Jersey's Coastal Zone Management Strategy Marine Biodiversity.

1. Marine Biodiversity of the Coastal Environment.

“The marine biodiversity of the coastal environment is one of Jersey's most important assets. However, it is an asset in two halves – on the landward side, its value is well recognised, protected and appreciated. In the sea, the picture is much less clear: important areas exist, but the biodiversity of the marine environment up until recently has been poorly understood.”

2. Marine Biodiversity in the Coastal Zone and Who Regulates it. Page 13 and 14 of this “topic paper” lists the International conventions, Treaties, Directives, Instruments, States legislation and grant planning decisions which apply to this subject.

2.2. Island Plan M3 – Marine Biodiversity: “The Planning and Environment Department will strongly support the aims and implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy in all marine areas.” **Policy M6. Marine Sites of Special Interest: “*The Planning and Environment Department will safeguard and help manage the most valuable marine environments by designating them as Sites of Special Interest.*”**

“Those sites of international importance for waterfowl will be notified for designation as Ramsar sites. The Planning and Environmental Department will consider the designation of these special areas as a Jersey Marine National Park to highlight their importance and the need for sustainable management. The Planning and Environment Department will consult with other Committees, agencies and stakeholders in the course of designating Marine Sites of Special Interest.”

2.3 Perspective Seven, Aim Four: “to Protect the Natural and Built Environment whereby the States pledge to ‘conserve and enhance habitats and species’ as well as ‘ensuring that unpolluted air, clean water and uncontaminated land exist as a basic right for all.’”

(Note than land fill, or land reclamation from any source is potentially contaminated and a particular risk for marine and wildfowl life)

Strategic Aim Four points out that: "Few Islanders would disagree with the desire to preserve ..

conserve and enhance the natural habitats that make Jersey unique (p. 81).

The Plan pledges that the States will 'implement policies to protect all habitats, species and special places.' "Success indicators will be no further loss of species or habitats and an increase in the incidence of marine and terrestrial species. Proposals for achieving improving trends in these indicators will be in the form of the development and implementation of Species Action Plans and Habitat Action Plans."

3. Protected Areas: "The exceptional marine environment of Jersey is an area of intense activity, where complex interactions between physical, biological, social and economic systems are constantly taking place. *The intertidal zone in Jersey is of international importance. The overall extent and character of the rocky reefs and intertidal sediment flats is found nowhere else in Europe (Kindleysides 1995).*"

3.1. Sites of Special Interest (SSI): "275 hectares of ecologically important habitats in Jersey are protected with SSI status and 10 additional sites, totalling 210 hectares are proposed SSIs of which half are already managed for nature conservation by the Environment Department and the National Trust for Jersey. *Of these five are located on the coast and include wetlands, maritime heath and sand dunes are among the most important sites for nature conservation in Jersey.*"

3.2 Ramsar Sites: "Worldwide there are 138 contracting parties who have designated 1,327 wetland sites with a total area of 112 million hectares. In Jersey, the Southeast coast from La Collette to Gorey has

been designated as a wetland site of international significance and is an excellent example of how Ramsar's policy of wise and sustainable use can work well. *Under the Ramsar banner, there have been no restrictions placed on existing practices and the ecology of the area has remained largely unchanged, whilst it has strengthened our international profile and provided a real source of local pride.*"

5.5. Disturbance of Shorebirds: "Monitoring of populations of shorebirds on the Jersey Ramsar site shows that, although there are large inter-annual variations there is a declining trend in both the Grouville Bay populations and an increasing trend in the St. Aubin's Bay population. There are concerns that disturbance from aquaculture activities and recreational activities, like dog walking and kite surfing may be affecting waders' numbers by reducing their feeding efficiency."

5.6. Land Reclamation: "*Land reclamation is a major threat to the Jersey shoreline; approximately 50 hectares of intertidal land has previously been reclaimed in St. Helier Harbour, (some of which was reclaimed as a partial solution to the problem of solid waste disposal in the island), leading to losses of internationally important non-recreational marine tidal sediment flats, rocks and reefs. Marine pollution could devastate these areas and land based pollution could also have deleterious effects, not least on the economically important shell fish farming in Grouville Bay.*"

5.7. Pollution Nutrient Enrichment: "The local marine habitat is exceptionally rich in species and water quality is generally considered high. However, there is still a threat, particularly from anthropogenic (man made) sources of pollution. High quality marine waters are vital in underpinning both tourism and the fisheries industry. Marine pollution could devastate bays with intertidal flats and reefs...."

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Our Environment is ALL LIFE.....Freely PROVIDED Originally, Naturally Pure, Beautiful & Sparkling in Great Abundance for all to Enjoy, Blossom & Grow. Thus whilst this Beautiful Earth is 'Our Home' we too are Naturally responsible individually & collectively, for Truly Caring for 'Our Home'.

Let Us be Practical as We look & See 'HOW' 'We WILL' best Nourish & Care for The Air & all within It; the Water & all within It; the Ground & the Land, Trees, Plants, Flowers & Minerals; the Birds & the Bees; Humanity & Our Communities; indeed All Life as All IS SACRED. For it is quite clear that without a Pure Environment NOTHING will really Prosper, Blossom & Grow & KNOW that The Climate Changes are Demonstrating this Simple Truth.

So Let us Live and Be in Harmony with Life.....What are the Best Services & Forms of Caring We can provide??????? Let Us Set GOLDEN STANDARDS of Respect and Care for all Life & Demonstrate What Can Be Done and Enjoy, Enjoy, Enjoy.

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