

## Council of Europe 2021 Report: Extended report for National Trust for Scotland

**1. Conditions:** List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. by 2022, review the 2010-2019 management plan, as was foreseen in 2018, and elaborate a new management plan to secure the continuous development and management of the Fair Isle Scenic Area;
2. consider, in the above-mentioned management plan, the conditions and recommendations of the appraisal report and include specific provisions dedicated to climate change and how to address this issue in relation to the long-term conservation of endemic species and species of birds;
3. make more extensive use of the European Diploma logo in all information material and brochures and explain the relevance of the diploma wherever useful;

### 1.1 Review of the 2010-2019 management plan and development of new plan.

Significant disruption to work schedules in consequence of COVID-19 has delayed management planning across the organisation. However the National Trust for Scotland are aware of the 2022 deadline contained in the above conditions and the planning team intend to deliver the plan during 2022.

### 1.2 Provisions in the management plan in regard to climate change and the long-term conservation of endemic species and species of birds.

As noted above the development of a new Fair Isle Management Plan has been slightly delayed. Nevertheless, the wealth of long-term data sets available for Fair Isle puts the Isle in an excellent position for identifying changes to the biota in response to climate change and will facilitate the planning of appropriate conservation measures.

### 1.3. Increased use of the European Diploma logo in information material.

New individuals at both NTS who commission this report and, on the island, who produce the material for the report became involved this year. We are not aware of what previous publicity has been undertaken in this regard. To pick this up next year we have engaged with the NTS media team to initiate appropriate media, time lined in for summer 2022, this will include both awareness raising of the European Diploma and use of the logo in media. I understand that the European Diploma logo is displayed on the island on the school building.

**2. Recommendations:** List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. consider a ban on fishing and catching of lobsters within the marine protected area or at least in a scientifically defined area;
2. consider the inclusion of the marine protected area into the European Diploma site;
3. enhance the housing-related quality of life through appropriate measures, mainly concerning renovation and restoration; take into consideration the peculiar conditions of local businesses and improve working conditions through the installation of appropriate manufacturing locations;
4. give the European Diploma a prominent place at the entrance of or inside the new bird observatory.

### 2.1 Consideration of a ban on fishing and catching of lobsters within the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research Marine Protected Area DR MPA or other scientifically defined area.

Following the appointment of a DR MPA Project Officer in 2020 a key focus of the post has been the development of a research and project plan for the marine protected area. This plan, developed in consultation with DR MPA Steering Committee members and the local community, lays out the strategy for delivering on DR MPA objectives from 2021-2024, through identification and prioritisation of research projects, details of implementation time-frames and evaluation frameworks and summaries of core principles for the ongoing operation of the DR MPA, covering governance, working relationships with partners, management and decision-making and communication. Whilst currently in draft format, it is expected that this document will be signed off by the DR MPA Steering Committee in late 2021.

The key project of relevance to this recommendation within the plan is the Shellfish: V-notching and tagging project that encompasses lobsters *Homarus gammarus* and brown crabs *Cancer pagarus*. It is intended that setting up a V-notching and tagging programme will provide stock assessment and fishing pressure data at a local level that can be used to inform subsequent management in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The project also aims to improve collaboration specifically with the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation, a DR MPA Steering Committee partner with regards to research on shellfish management in the area, and with the local community to ensure traditional fishing activities can be continued on a sustainable basis. This project is currently scheduled to begin in 2022.

Other projects of broader relevance to fishing within the DR MPA area contained within the plan include: Inshore Fish survey, Sandeel: Baseline Survey and Shark Tagging: NOAA Cooperative Shark Tagging Programme. A range of seabird monitoring projects will also further inform understanding of the impacts of fishing on the Fair Isle coastal ecosystem.

## **2.2 Consider the inclusion of the marine protected area into the European Diploma site.**

Whilst substantial progress has been made in the development of a fully realised research strategy following the appointment of a DR MPA Project Officer, the project is to all intents and purposes still at a relatively early stage with regards to deliverables. Given the early development of the project it has not been thought appropriate to include the Fair Isle DR MPA within the European Diploma boundaries as yet, but a National Trust for Scotland action has been raised to consult with the DR MPA Steering Committee on this subject in 2022. Given the DR MPA relies on voluntary cooperation of a wide range of scientific, charitable, community and fisheries bodies, the agreement of the steering committee would be required before any formal proposal is made to the EU.

## **2.3 Enhance the housing-related quality of life through appropriate measures, mainly concerning renovation and restoration; take into consideration the peculiar conditions of local businesses and improve working conditions through the installation of appropriate manufacturing locations.**

“Housing need reports” have in the past been commissioned by the Fair Isle Development Company but it has not yet been possible to progress a concrete funding application for the improvement of housing stock on the Isle. A shift in focus to other key community projects, namely the urgent need for a replacement Fair Isle ferry, led to a hiatus in the housing activities of the Development Company after this point.

In late 2021 it would appear that there are grounds for optimism that sustained progress on improvements to the existing housing stock and addressing identified housing needs may be possible. With the relaxation of COVID-related workplace restrictions, the pace of repairs and upgrades to National Trust for Scotland properties on the Isle has significantly increased through 2021. Recruitment of a new Headteacher to the primary school on the island has resulted in agreement by Shetland Islands Council to carry out necessary renovations to the Schoolhouse property, which will commence in early 2022. Pressure is also being exerted by the local community to ensure the Health Board undertake the necessary repairs to the Nurse’s house ahead of a new permanent isle nurse arriving in early 2022, although at time of writing it is unclear when work on this property will commence.

Fair Isle Development Company, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the National Trust for Scotland are currently in discussion with a view to creating a three-year funded post: “Fair Isle Development Officer”. There is broad agreement on the creation of this post and the prioritisation of support for housing projects as part of the remit of the job description. Discussions on the development of this post

served to emphasise that changes in operating conditions within the relevant partner organisations were such that renewed focus on housing was warranted. It is anticipated that the development and recruitment process for this position will commence early in 2022.

Separate to this process is a community options appraisal, supported by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, for the Fair Isle Kirk, which was closed by the Church of Scotland in 2018, as part of a wider programme of church closures across Shetland. At a community meeting in November 2021 it was agreed that the options appraisal route should be pursued to determine whether a funding bid for community purchase of the Kirk could be developed. Whilst there is some concern about the placing of the Kirk on the open market, given the community connection to the building and in particular the locally-commissioned stained glass windows it contains, it is acknowledged that any community buyout application must stand a high chance of succeeding and remaining a sustainable project into the future. Several proposals under discussion for alternative community uses of the building relate to some form of housing and workspace provision for Isle residents, but there is considerable uncertainty surrounding this project.

Also of relevance is the now completed Scottish Government consultation on Island Bonds, a policy which aims to target depopulation in the Scottish islands by awarding £50,000 to 100 young people and families wishing to move to or remain within isle communities to support house purchases, business start-ups and other similar projects. A letter of support for the policy and an invitation to consider Fair Isle as a case-study area was submitted to the consultation on behalf of the community in recognition of the need both to support young couples already resident on the Isle and to attract new residents. One couple living on the Isle have taken on Pund croft, which has been uninhabited for many years, have obtained grant funding to create a new workshop to support their textile business and are in the process of restoring the derelict croft house.

#### **2.4 Give the European Diploma a prominent place at the entrance of or inside the new bird observatory**

In early 2021 Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) announced the failure of the proposed rebuild project due to the unacceptably high costs of tenders received. New plans were submitted in late 2021 and it is envisaged that if successful the rebuild should be completed in October 2022. Discussions regarding siting of information relating to the European Diploma are unlikely to take place prior to confirmation that the rebuild process is underway in spring 2022.

**3. Site Management:** List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

National Trust for Scotland management structure with regards to the Fair Isle European Diploma site has changed in respect of Jeff Waddell, “Senior Natural Heritage Advisor” has taken over as the lead officer responsible for the site from Alan Barrow “Estate Surveyor (North)”. Previously collection of data for the report was contract out to Fair Isle resident Nick Riddiford. Unfortunately, this year Nick’s health did not permit him to undertake this duty and the work was contracted out to Fair Isle residents David & Susannah Parnaby, who are both heavily engaged in community and conservation work on the island.

A DR MPA project officer, Martha Thomson, was appointed in late 2020, initially on a one-year contract that was subsequently extended for several months to end in January 2022. Funding applications to renew the post are underway and broad agreement has been reached on how the post will be managed strategically and on a day-to-day basis to ensure employment is compliant with relevant legislation without impacting on the delivery of the project within the community.

Holly Paget-Brown was appointed as maternity cover for the Biosecurity for LIFE project officer for Shetland and Orkney in April 2021 and visited Fair Isle in September to promote awareness of the project, detail actions community members could take and distribute rodent monitoring equipment to interested residents.

Other significant staffing changes took place in spring 2021, with the redundancies of the permanent warden and administrator of Fair Isle Bird Observatory, due to the failure of the tender process to rebuild the observatory, which was previously burned down by a fire in March 2019. Whilst seasonal staff, volunteers and board directors undertook much of the seabird and migration monitoring work, there was some impact on the timing and scope of activities usually undertaken. Furthermore, the absence of permanent staff on Fair Isle during the winter months has impacted on monitoring work that would take place in this period; grey seal *Halichoerus grypus* pup counts are one example of this. A company, IDMH have been appointed to rebuild the bird observatory and work is planned to complete in October 2022.

With regards to terrestrial habitat management, the key change has been alterations to the common grazing in the north of the island. Rather than each croft maintaining and being responsible for individual shares on the hill, a proposal was adopted in summer 2021 to change to a system of shared flock management. Responsibility for selecting a constant number of replacements from amongst the year's lambs will be taken by the grazings' committee, with these kept separate on specific grazing land over the winter and returned in the spring. This will enable the committee to improve flock quality, to restrict the transfer of disease between hill grazings and crofts and to more effectively regulate stocking levels.

As yet no specific management changes to the marine environment have been applied as part of the DR MPA project. Small numbers of crabs of several species and European lobster *Homarus gammarus* are taken through creel fishing for personal consumption by Isle residents, with three small boats also fishing for their own consumption in the inshore waters around Fair Isle during the limited days of suitable weather in summer.

**4. Boundaries:** Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

**5. Other information:** List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.