COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE
Committee of Ministers
Comité des Ministres

Resolution CM/ResDip(2008)1
on the revised regulations for the European Diploma for Protected Areas

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 20 February 2008
at the 1018th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)[1]

Appendix 5: Model plan for annual reports

Annual report for the year ....

Annual reports should describe the changes that have taken place since the previous year in dynamic terms of management and function and not be limited to basic data. Any new text or map introducing a change in the situation of the area should be attached to the annual report.

State: United Kingdom

Name of the area: Fair Isle National Scenic Area

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas:

Report year: 2024 Number of years since renewal: 4

Central authority concerned:

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Fax:

e-mail:

www:

Authority responsible for its management:

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[1] As amended by Resolution CM/ResDip(2014)2 on 2 July 2014 at the 1204th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.
Internet : http://www.coe.int/cm

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 As noted in the 2023 report to the Council of Europe, the adoption of the new Fair Isle management plan 2022-2032 by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) Board of Trustees in June 2023 formally completes Condition 1.1 for renewal of the European Diploma. The publication of this document marks a shift in the working relationship between NTS and island community bodies in several areas, particularly with regards to housing and environmental protection. The change in emphasis within the management plan, in line with the strategic three pillars of activity driving the organisational aims and objectives of NTS, is already evident on the ground. Whilst NTS continue to retain all landlord and management responsibilities for the isle aerodrome, existing housing and the protection of sites of archaeological and cultural importance, Fair Isle Development Company will now take the lead in developing new housing and energy generation projects in collaboration with NTS.

Progress has also been made to the stated management plan aim to better understand the potential for crofting as a land management tool to support and increase the conservation value of terrestrial habitats on the island. In June 2024 the Head of Nature Conservation for NTS visited Fair Isle along with other members of the nature conservation team, including the Senior Nature Conservation Officer Farmland to familiarize themselves with the site, meet local residents and conduct preliminary observations relating to habitat and species-specific management. With regards to the Fair Isle demonstration and research marine protected area (drMPA) NTS continue to be an active member of the MPA Steering Committee, with funding committed to various research projects undertaken through the 2024 fieldwork season. A good working relationship exists between NTS and Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation (FIMRO) and it is anticipated that discussions regarding potential funding commitments for the 2025 season between the MPA project officer and NTS will commence in late 2024/early 2025. The NTS have also been involved in active research on Fair Isle in 2024, with a team of NTS researchers led by the Senior Seabird Officer successfully undertaking a shag *Gulosus aristotelis* tagging project in the spring. This project was identified as a research priority by the MPA Steering Committee and its findings in conjunction with other research projects undertaken in 2024 will feed into the upcoming review of the MPA research priorities document.

1.2 The threat posed by climate change to Fair Isle's seabird populations in particular, but also to coastal archaeological sites and transport infrastructure is highlighted in the 2022-2032 management plan, with completion of a climate vulnerability assessment for the island a stated objective. The first climate vulnerability assessment for NTS-managed sites was recently completed for St Kilda, and whilst no date has yet been set for a similar process for Fair Isle, delivery on this objective across the organisation is now underway. Baseline data gathering undertaken through the MPA and long-term seabird monitoring by Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) on behalf of the Joint Nature Conservancy Council (JNCC) collectively contribute to an understanding the current functioning of the Fair Isle inshore marine environment. This in turn should help identify negative changes in ecosystem health, with the potential for the identification and testing of mitigation measures. It is well understood that with regards to the impact of climate change on seabirds any local management measures are likely to be focused on supporting breeding productivity and to a lesser extent overwintering survival, since the key drivers of declines relate to global changes in ocean temperature and salinity.

1.3 NTS remain committed to improving awareness of the Diploma and to supporting both the existing award and its renewal in due course as outlined in the 2022-2032 management plan. Discussions relating to the Diploma were held with relevant islanders both before and after the site management staff transition in the summer to ensure continuity relating to the award process.

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 Commercial licenses for shellfish within the six-mile limit of Shetland waters are issued by the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation (SSMO). SSMO currently hold Marine Stewardship Council accreditation for the king scallop and brown crab fisheries in Shetland. Species of relevance to Fair Isle within this fishery include brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*) and European lobster (*Homarus gammarus*). SSMO confirmed in discussions with FIMRO and the MPA Project Officer in 2024 that no new shellfish licenses are currently being issued due to the status of brown crab stocks in recent years and it is likely that this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future. In recent years only one vessel has fished commercially for crab and lobster within Fair Isle waters, though several islanders lay small numbers of creels for personal consumption. It appears that the skipper of the commercial vessel fishing around Fair Isle in recent years is unlikely to continue to do so as a consequence of downsizing his vessel. Therefore, it is likely that commercial fishing for shellfish around Fair Isle will cease unless another vessel moves into the area. This is deemed unlikely due to vessel size fuel restrictions associated with steaming from Shetland to Fair Isle to fish. This situation will be closely monitored.

It should be emphasised that no recent baseline stock level data exists for brown crab or European lobster stocks in Fair Isle inshore waters. In discussion with the North Atlantic Fisheries College (University of Highlands and Islands Shetland) it was confirmed that current sampling protocols to determine stock levels across Shetland at a given point are to collaborate with a supportive commercial vessel allowing for observer sampling trips. Once a baseline population level has been determined, a maximum sustainable yield for the fishery can be calculated. This is not at present an option for Fair Isle as no such commercial vessel is available. FIMRO are currently investigating alternative options for sampling on a smaller scale with support from a Fair Isle resident who fishes recreationally and in discussion with the SSMO. At least one island resident already practices v-notching female lobsters, which protects the lobster population by preventing sexually mature lobsters from being caught, as it is prohibited to fish for or land a lobster with a visible V-notch. It has also been proposed that FIMRO could obtain and distribute v-notching equipment to other islanders who catch lobster for personal consumption if relevant community members were happy to participate in this.

It remains of concern to FIMRO that feedback from recent Council of Europe assessments of the diploma report continues to emphasise consideration of a ban on fishing and catching of lobster in part or all of the MPA area, which is not necessarily integral to the implementation of a sustainable shellfish fishery in Fair Isle waters, particularly given the requirement to remove the imposition of no-take zones from the MPA proposal prior to approval and designation. It would be very useful for FIMRO and NTS, who both wish to uphold and maintain the diploma award for Fair Isle, if further information could be provided by those involved in the annual assessment process as to what actions would be considered progress in this area and the rationale governing the implementation of these actions.

2.2 In addition to the request for further information relating to the consideration of no-take zones outlined above, NTS and FIMRO also wish to request additional information from, or discussion with, the assessment panel of experts regarding the inclusion of the Fair Isle drMPA area within the award boundaries. The primary concern expressed by FIMRO is that such an inclusion will circumvent the successful current management structure of the MPA Steering Committee, thus posing a risk to its effectiveness, without a clear understanding of the benefits to be obtained by such a change. Decision-making with regards to the MPA requires the voluntary co-operation of a number of stakeholder organisations representing the community, commercial fishing interests, conservation NGO's and local government. The formal nature of declarations under the Diploma would appear to run counter to the flexibility required to work collaboratively within the differing and broad range of core objectives held by these organisations. To make progress on this recommendation further information on how the assessment panel of experts view inclusion of the MPA within the award area as being implemented would be helpful, particular with regards to how management of the MPA is overseen and whether the panel of experts would view themselves as sitting above the MPA Steering Committee in relation to management decisions through the use of Diploma conditions and recommendations. Nevertheless, NTS are keen to reaffirm the value of the land-based Diploma award and do not wish non-declaration of the marine area to be an impediment to the renewal of this award.

2.3 As referenced in Section 1.1 responsibilities for housing management and provision on the island have changed following adoption of the NTS Management Plan 2022-2032. NTS will continue to fulfil their duties as landlords for existing accommodation, but Fair Isle Development Company (FIDC) will now lead on any renovation of premises with non-domestic uses, restoration of derelict properties or development of new housing. The process of revising the FIDC constitution to facilitate this change in role was completed in early 2024. Membership approval was granted for FIDC to pursue housing-related projects on the island and are making progress on the feasibility stage of these projects, with a view to accessing external funding for renovation costs. There are some challenges to accessing funding in a timely manner relating to the ageing-out of supporting documents (a reflection of the length of time it has taken to identify a way forward on housing) but these are the subject of ongoing conversations and it is hoped resolution can be found in this area. Some progress has been made on completing priority works on existing properties following completion of the NTS housing condition survey in 2024.

2.4 No progress can be made in improving the visibility of the European Diploma via the new bird observatory until such time as the building is completed. FIBOT anticipate a further revised completion date in 2025 and it would then be appropriate for NTS to discuss installation of information relating to the Diploma at the Observatory. It is anticipated that the original diploma document will remain on display in the Fair Isle Community Hall where it has hung since it was awarded.

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.

Angus Murray was appointed to the post of Operations Manager for Canna, Fair Isle and Shetland in June 2024, following the retirement of his predecessor, Sheona Leonard.

Katie Cubbon was reappointed to a new position as Research Officer in August 2024 at the end of the MPA Project Officer contract, following a success bid to the Coastal Communities Fund for a new three-year community-led marine monitoring and citizen science programme pilot scheme project. This is supported by match funding from NTS and NatureScot. The post is jointly managed by NatureScot, who provide organizational support, and FIMRO.

MPA projects supported by NTS funding through the People's Postcode Lottery and other sources that were completed in 2024 include the 2024 inshore fisheries survey, the benthic habitat mapping project and the shag tagging project. Discussions between NTS and the MPA project officer in late 2023 enabled the transfer of funds to support the advance purchase of cetacean acoustic monitoring equipment, with deployment of the first device in Fair Isle inshore waters in the summer of 2024. At a smaller scale NTS also supported the purchase of additional Shorewatch equipment for land-based cetacean surveys. Internally-funded NTS research into Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in seabirds on Fair Isle continued, with blood and faecal sampling of puffins *Fractercula arctica* ongoing.

In early 2024 it emerged that the lead contractor for the new bird observatory was entering administration. After a hiatus during administration proceedings, construction work continued throughout 2024, with FIBOT taking direct control of the project.

Progress on the island ferry replacement project has also been hindered by a sharp increase in projected costs. With the bulk of the funding coming from UK government at a fixed level, the project has been scaled back significantly, with Shetland Islands Council supporting a greater proportion of the overall cost. Previously it had been hoped that a replacement vessel would have roll on-roll off capacity, enabling a greater weight and variety of cargo to be handled, but this is no longer possible and planned changes to the Fair Isle harbour area restricted to changes to the slipway and noost area. Some modifications to the pier at Grutness in Shetland to enable the boat to access the harbour in less favourable weather will also go ahead.

Fair Isle Electricity Company continues to face challenges relating to the maintenance of the wind turbines and the increased demand for power on the island. A funding bid to support the installation of additional solar panels close to the bird observatory to ensure its power needs were met without disadvantaging the isle community was a success, with infrastructure works planned for 2025.

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.

No changes to the boundaries of the Fair Isle Scenic Area have been made.

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.

No additional information provided

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The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e. year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

7.1. Cultural heritage
7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage

7.2. Socio-economic context
7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

8. Education and scientific interest

8.1. Visitors – Information policy
8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)

8.2. Scientific research
8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
8.2.2. Scientific publications

9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

10.1. Improvements made
10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
10.1.5. Waste management
10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems

10.2. Management
10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
10.2.3. Internal policing measures
10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

11. Influence of the award of the Euroean Diploma for Protected Areas