

Minutes of Meeting

Meeting Title: Moray Firth Regional Advisory Group – Ornithology Subgroup (MFRAG-O)

Date / Time / Venue: 03 July 2015, 1030am – 3pm, SNH Battleby

Attendees:

MSS: Ian Davies (ID, Chair), Jared Wilson (JW)
 SNH: Erica Knott (EK), Catriona Gall (CG), Alex Robbins (AR), Glenn Tyler (GT, phone)
 JNCC: Sue O'Brien (SO, phone)
 RSPB: Aly McCluskie (AM)
 BOWL: Lis Royle (LR)
 MacArthur Green: Mark Trinder (MT)
 MORL: Catarina Rei (CR)
 Natural Power: Ross McGregor (RM)
 Royal Haskoning: Ben King (BK)

Apologies: Sarah Pirie (SP), MORL

Minutes taken by: Mark Trinder / Lis Royle

Agenda Item 1		Actions
Introductions	Introductions were made. CR highlighted that SP was not able to attend the meeting but provided an updated on tag development to be discussed later in the meeting (Agenda item 7).	
Agenda Item 2		
Purpose of meeting	ID – purpose of meeting: to discuss and further progress ornithological monitoring options for wind farms in the Moray Firth.	
Agenda Item 3		
MFRAG Ornithology subgroup Terms of Reference	<p>ID requested comments on the draft ToR. ID highlighted that the MFRAG-O ToR were in line with the MFRAG-MM ToR and that, as previously agreed, the MFRAG-O would be able to provide advice directly to MS-LOT.</p> <p>LR & CR noted that BOWL & MORL had some comments, which were in line with the comments provided for the MFRAG-MM ToR..</p> <p>SO confirmed that JNCC did not have any additional comments.</p> <p>ID requested the group to send any comments to Marine Scotland by 10th July.</p> <p>ACTION: All to provide comments on ToR by 10th July.</p>	
Agenda Item 4		
Actions from Previous meeting	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. MT to send HB Adam Cross' thesis concerning puffin photo ID monitoring. Completed on 29/06/2015 2. SO to circulate the final report from the JNCC demographic review once available. Completed on 30/03/2015 3. & 4. AR to report progress on designing the 2015 colony survey at E & N CC SPA, including an assessment of suitable survey methods. AR will provide update later in the meeting (Agenda item 4.1) 	

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5. Group to review list of existing datasets provided and identify any missing survey data. LR to discuss with Paul Thompson the list of datasets.
Ongoing
6. BOWL to develop survey monitoring proposal and submit to the group for comment (survey methodology based on concentrated effort May-July with more than 3 surveys over the 3 month period).
Completed and signed off
7. MT to undertake power analysis with different skewed data to experiment with variability.
Completed
8. SpORRAn ACTION - Discuss non-breeding bird use of wind farms and tagging technology progression.
Ongoing
9. BOWL to produce outline survey monitoring scope.
Completed
10. MT to undertake further Power Analysis to inform survey approach.
Completed and reported in survey scope.
11. SP to approach Catapult to discuss progress with tag technology and attachment methods.
Covered in the meeting (Agenda item 7)
12. JW to open communication with Liz Masden about tagging studies that have already been done and the current state of tag technology.
Ongoing (Agenda item 7)
13. AR to look into feasibility of undertaking pellet survey as a way of gathering suitable data.
Ongoing
14. RobM to produce MFRAG Ornithology sub-group Terms of Reference.
Completed
15. RobM to organise next meeting (within approximately three months).
Completed

Agenda Item 4.1

(New agenda item)
Update on SNH's counts of East Caithness Cliffs SPA and North Caithness Cliffs SPA

AR gave a summary of the ECC and NCC SPA colony counts which have been undertaken by and for SNH this summer (combination of contractor – Bob Swann and SNH staff).

These have gone well with only the Duncansby Head part of NCC not included due to difficulties in access (this will be surveyed in 2016). Approach over land was supplemented with access from boats and viewing cliffs from boats. Methods aimed to replicate those used for Seabird 2000 census.

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Identified possible monitoring plot locations for puffin, great black-backed gull and herring gull.

A good puffin plot in NCC which would be suitable for camera trap has been identified, but is located at far western end, so connectivity to Moray Firth likely to be low. Another plot was identified in ECC just off Dunbeath but suitability for monitoring needs further assessment.

It was agreed that AR would provide a summary of the survey for the group setting out the potential to monitor at the locations identified. The full results for ECC will be available in October. The NCC report will not be provided until 2016 to allow the final section of the SPA to be included.

JW pointed out that if the monitoring plots need a follow up visit to determine suitability this will need to be done by end of July 2015 before birds leave colony.

Discussion about suitability of monitoring plot and possible ringing sites.

CR and LR made it clear that H&S concerns would prevent the use of sites which could only be accessed by jumping from boats (i.e. not beach access), so this needed to be factored into site appraisal.

RM pointed out that the NCC location may not be so relevant to the wind farms as there isn't likely to be a high degree of connectivity. AR acknowledged this and stated that for the purposes of considering monitoring locations, a comparison between the ECC and NCC locations could be useful. CR noted that a distinction is required between research and requirements for monitoring under wind farm consents.

JW suggested that once SNH have provided further information on possible monitoring sites then the Developers should review and decide on site suitability and appropriate methods.

For PEMP it was agreed that final details of sites and methods are not required for initial submission, just an outline of proposed approaches and options.

Actions:
AR to provide information about the plot locations including a summary of the survey and an outline of the results to inform further discussions on the suitability of monitoring locations.

Agenda Item 5

BOWL & MORL
proposed
monitoring
programme
document

Post- Construction Monitoring

Project phasing and commencement of post-construction monitoring
Brief discussion on construction monitoring and the difficulty distinguishing between BOWL post construction and MORL construction phases as these may overlap.

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JW highlighted that the monitoring note only provided pre-construction monitoring information for BOWL and requested the note to be updated with MORL's pre-construction information.

There was general agreement in the Group that monitoring during construction is not a priority requirement as no significant impacts have been identified for this phase of development at either BOWL or MORL wind farm sites.

Discussions continued on the appropriate time to start post construction monitoring. JW indicated that MSS would be uncomfortable to delay post-construction monitoring until all wind farms (BOWL and the three MORL projects) have been built. EK advised that it would be appropriate to consider the value and reliability of data in making any decision.

LR noted that BOWL would start erecting turbines in June 2018, and finish 'phase 1' installation in late summer/ autumn 2018. 'Phase 2' turbine installation would commence in spring 2019 and finish in late summer 2019. ID proposed that the first post-construction aerial survey should be completed during the breeding season in 2019 (following installation of the first turbines and with a potential overlap with installation of the second phase of turbines). There was general agreement on this in the Group.

CR noted that MORL is not yet in a position to confirm their turbine installation programme.

Review and iteration of project monitoring

The group discussed how project monitoring would be co-ordinated and reviewed in the longer-term. It was agreed that the developers would continue to collaborate where possible, and all decisions should be documented for the public record and to ensure continuity if there are any changes in MFRAG-O membership. ID took action to investigate how to make documents publically accessible.

The iteration of project monitoring plans was also discussed as these will be live documents to be kept under regular review. MFRAG-O will act as the key forum in which to discuss monitoring requirements and co-ordinate activity across the developers to inform their individual project plans.

Duration of post-construction monitoring

This led into discussion over the duration of post-construction monitoring – this had not previously been addressed in MFRAG-O meetings so it was useful to start considering this and further discussion will be needed.

Colony Counts

MT queried who would be responsible for completing colony counts, and what the suitable frequency of counts would be. ID indicated that the starting assumption is that colony counts would be completed on a 6 year cycle, in line with SNH's current programme of site condition

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monitoring. However, EK noted that SNH is in the process of reviewing its monitoring programme (in light of increasing resource constraints) and will keep MFRAG-O informed on the outcomes from this.

The group then picked up the discussion from earlier – see agenda item 4.1 – with the key action for SNH to provide a summary note of the 2015 ECC and NCC colony monitoring, and to circulate a copy of the final report when it is available. JW queried whether the summary would include information on existing monitoring plots for kittiwake and gannet, and AR confirmed it would. ID queried if the locations were accessible from land and AR confirmed they are.

JW noted that he would review Adam Cross’s PhD report to assess what colony monitoring might be possible for puffin. ID advised that everyone should consider this report and the potential options for colony monitoring in order to further discuss this at the next meeting.

Gull population monitoring
The possibility to use Robin Sellers gull study as a basis to build population monitoring was discussed. JW indicated that the survey had not been conducted in a systematic manner and it was therefore difficult to know how representative the data are for the whole colony. His main aim is to ring chicks, not monitor the number of breeding adults. Discussion ensued on the possibilities of working with Robin, and the potential to supply him with rings. LR took an action to investigate whether there are any commercial/ data ownership/ HSE constraints within SSE.

While the key concern for gulls is collision impacts, which will not be a risk until turbines are operating, it was pointed out that understanding population trends will require monitoring prior to turbine installation. There was discussion on whose responsibility (developers or SNH) it was to undertake population monitoring which did not reach a conclusion. MT further acknowledged that adult colony numbers is more pertinent than productivity. AR noted that it would be useful to look into Robin’s data and determine if it is possible to build on it.

It was agreed that Robin Sellers should be invited to attend a meeting of the MFRAG-O to discuss his study and to try and build a working relationship with him. JW took an action to approach him. JW will also produce a brief summary of his work to date (as provided to JW) to inform the group prior to meeting him.

Gull tagging (both species)
It was agreed that there was no requirement to tag gulls before turbines are operating.
The commencement of tagging work was discussed in relation to BOWL’s construction phasing, to consider whether it would be better to plan work for the breeding season following completion of phase 1 or that following phase 2. LR indicated that fishing vessels might be used as guard ships during project construction at BOWL. As there is a risk of gulls being attracted to the guard vessels, the group agreed that it would be better to wait until all BOWL’s turbines have been installed (i.e. the close of phase 2) before initiating a tagging project –

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so this would be the 2020 breeding season.

MORL pre-construction surveys
MORL intend to use their existing baseline data in conjunction with a single year of pre-construction survey.
JW requested more details on the existing data and how MORL intend to use it. SO requested a power analysis to be conducted to help the group understand the plans. RM took an action to complete similar power analysis exercise as has been undertaken for BOWL.

It was requested that the discussion document should be updated to reflect the discussions and agreements reached at the meeting with a view to this being reviewed and signed off by the MFRAG-O before the next meeting.

Actions:
ID to investigate document storage provision and ensuring minutes and other key documentation agreed in the Group are made publically available.

JW to contact Robin Sellers to ask if he would attend an MFRAG-O meeting to discuss his gull work and attempt to develop links.

JW to produce summary of Robin Sellers gull study results.

All – to review Adam Cross’ PhD thesis on camera monitoring of puffin colonies.

LR to check whether SSE have any commercial/ HSE constraints in providing rings to Robin Sellers.

RM to undertake a power analysis to inform MORL’s pre-construction survey plans.

Developers (MT in first instance) to update Monitoring discussion document. RM and CR to add MORL timings and duration of monitoring information. Discussion document to be circulated to group for review and sign-off before next meeting.

Agenda Item 6

BOWL update on the pre-construction aerial survey campaign

MT provided a summary of the BOWL aerial surveys conducted to date in 2015.

Three surveys have been undertaken (29/5, 10/6 & 27/6). Weather has been problematic and finding weather windows was not easy. There was discussion on how long the surveys should continue if July weather is also poor. It was agreed that the cut-off should be the end of the first week of August (7th).

Analysis of the survey data will be provided in advance of the next meeting. This will be used to inform discussions on need for 2nd year of pre-construction monitoring.

Actions:

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MT to analyse and report on BOWL aerial surveys.

Agenda Item 7

Update on Tag development

CR provided the following update on SPoRRAN / Catapult discussions regarding funding towards bird tag development.

- Sarah Pirie (SP) has met with ORE Catapult three times to discuss the project. ORE Catapult have confirmed that the current timelines based on operational monitoring should give the market an opportunity to respond. MSS have met once to agree way forward. MSS have produced a route map in draft.
- Funding from ORE Catapult is unlikely, however, with sponsorship from developers to demonstrate the value to the offshore wind industry ORE Catapult would be able to project manage this and help to identify and bid for funding and use the other Catapults (e.g. satellite catapult etc.).
- ORE Catapult already liaising with Censys who are interested in the project
- Route map is in draft form with Catapult for comment
- To ensure that tags can be deployed UK wide feedback on the project will be sought at the UK level. This no longer an MFRAG project but forms part of the strategic element of the MF developers conditions.
- If agreed next steps are Market Assessment, Baseline Study and Prioritised Functional Spec which will be discussed with lead UK agencies.

JW is involved in organising a workshop on tag developments for addressing offshore wind industry questions to which MFRAG-O members will be invited. A discussion document summarising current information will be provided in advance of this meeting.

Actions:

JW to provide update on tag summary review and invite MFRAG-O members to workshop.

Agenda Item 8

AOB

CR to arrange next meeting in the first half of November.
Items to discuss at that meeting to include:

- BOWL aerial survey report (including power analysis to test the requirement for 1 or 2 years of pre-construction aerial survey monitoring. The monitoring report will also form part of the PEMP).
- MORL power analysis.
- SNH colony count report.
- Robin Sellers data summary review.
- Update to discussion document.
- Puffin PhD review on camera monitoring.
- Tag development summary.

If possible, Robin Sellers will also attend this meeting.