MEM Summer Placement by Monika Van Wyk - 2009

Marine Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidelines for the Isle of Man

Placement with Wildlife and Conservation Division of DAFF, Isle of Man Government.

The flexibility of the York University MEM course in allowing you to find your own placement or choose one from a list of varied offers is ideal for finding one that interests you. I found mine by talking to Dr Fiona Gell who guest-lectured at York on the marine ecosystem of the Isle of Man. I had experience in surveying and reporting on terrestrial Ecological Impact Assessments (EcIA) and wanted to do work in defining marine EIAs as different from terrestrial EIAs, as this seemed to be a grey area in practice.

I wanted to produce something that would be useful and implemented in practice. Having a strong marine EIA framework is important for the Isle of Man as 87.5% of its territory is under the ocean. Sustainable development of the marine environment is thus paramount. The Isle of Man has high levels of marine biodiversity and contains species not found elsewhere in the Irish Sea or British Isles. Internationally it is renowned for sightings of basking sharks and cetaceans. There are economically important herring and scallop fisheries and ecologically valuable horse mussel, sea grass and maerl beds. It contains a marine reserves where trawling for scallops is banned.

In the first week of my placement I interviewed various marine stakeholders on the Isle of Man for their opinion of the EIA process there. After this I conducted a lengthy literature review to document examples of accepted best practise for EIA at the international level.

Currently marine EIA is evolving by incorporating concepts such as Ecosystems Based Management, Adaptive Management, Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services, Integrated Coastal Zone Management and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) into the process.

This placement sharpened my analytical and information synthesising skills as I needed to incorporate new approaches towards EIA into guidelines for the process in the Isle of Man. The placement also exercised my negotiation, collaboration and consultation skills as I had to work with various stakeholders (mostly remotely as I was predominantly based in York for this work), who all had different requirements, time schedules and contrasting ideas and perspectives.

I chose the York University MEM course above others as it offered a summer placement. The placement is important as it provides you with the opportunity of experiencing and participating in how the marine environment is managed in the “real world”. It also provides you with feedback on how you performed in a working environment in your chosen field and helps you establish useful contacts. I thoroughly enjoyed this placement as it was interesting, challenging and allowed me to broaden my knowledge on marine EIA in practice.

Dr Fiona Gell may be contacted at: Fiona.Gell@gov.im and I can be reached at monika8@email.com