

## **Human Remains exposed on Shenick as storms bite into Skerries Coastline.**

HUMAN remains first discovered on Shenick Island almost a decade ago have become significantly more exposed following recent storms and spring tides, raising fresh concerns about coastal erosion on the Skerries islands and along the wider north Dublin shoreline.

Shane Holland, who runs Currachaí na Sceirí, said he returned to the same location on the east side of Shenick in recent weeks and found “a scattering of human ribs and broken bones in the clay of the newly collapsed embankment”, after “a chunk of maybe a metre had come off” in the high seas.

“It was upsetting,” he said, explaining that the original discovery came as a shock.

### **SKELETON**

“I discovered a domed bone protruding from the embankment... I was shocked but also sure it was a human skeleton,” Holland said. He reported the find to Gardaí in Balbriggan at the time, but said he initially met scepticism. “Despite them saying it’s probably a sheep, I said it’s definitely not,” he said. “In the end a week or two later a detective finally came out... saying, ‘Jeez it’s a human alright’.”

Holland said a subsequent survey established the remains were too old to be of interest for a criminal investigation and that the matter was then handled by archaeologists. He said Dr Karl Brady of the National Museum later wrote to him, describing the find as “interesting”, issuing a case number, and advising him “not to say much on it”.

However, Holland said the deterioration of the site in the wake of recent weather has brought the issue back into sharp focus. “Roll on 10 years and on a recent row with Currachaí na Sceirí myself and Aonghus Lynch happened upon the same site,” he said. “Look at it now...”

Holland said he has now written to the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), which has responsibility for protected wildlife sites. All Skerries Islands – Shenick, St Patrick’s and Colt – are designated as the Skerries Islands Special Protection Area (SPA), covering the islands and surrounding waters.

In a response, Holland said he was thanked for the updated information — but was taken aback by one detail.

“The North Fingal ranger... thanked me for my new information and said that despite meaning to make a trip to the Skerries islands he had never been on them, despite being the North Fingal Coastal ranger,” Holland said. “This information both shocked and annoyed me.”

## RESPONSE

Holland said he replied “in a gentle response”, offering to bring the ranger – and any colleagues – out to Shenick by currach. He said the ranger subsequently asked if the club could also take officials from the National Monuments Service.

Holland noted that Shenick can be accessed on foot at low tide, but warned that timing is critical. “I also said that it can be walked at low tide if careful to return in 30 to 40 minutes at low tide,” he said.

For Holland, the exposed remains are a stark illustration of a wider, fast-moving problem.

“The subject of coastal defences has with the recent storms and high tides become a big issue that must be addressed,” he said. He pointed to damage and erosion impacts not just on the islands, but along the mainland coast too – including Balbriggan and Portrane, and areas closer to home such as South Strand, Red Island and the Rush Road.

Coastal erosion is a long-recognised feature of the Fingal shoreline, with ongoing pressure from storms and wave action. Holland said he intends to use the planned visit by officials to highlight both the archaeological concern at Shenick and the broader vulnerability of the coastline.

“I am still looking forward to meeting these officials to show the issue relating to the human remains,” he said, “and also impress that... coastal defences... must be addressed.”

Holland also stressed that the club’s work on the islands has not been limited to rowing. Since 2017, he said, Currachaí na Sceirí rowers and local kayakers have been carrying out regular clean-ups on Shenick and the other Skerries islands, removing washed-up waste and debris.

“As locals since 2017 we have taken many tonnes of debris and rubbish... to help clean and preserve [the islands] ... an initiative we intend to continue,” he said. Currach na Sceirí has previously described its island clean-up work as being carried out in cooperation with Fingal County Council, with rubbish left at agreed points for collection.

Holland said the correspondence has also revived broader concerns he holds about protection of sensitive marine sites off the north Dublin coast — including Rockabill, home to internationally important seabird colonies.

BirdWatch Ireland, which has worked on Rockabill for decades, describes the island as hosting the largest European breeding colony of roseate terns.

Holland said he previously met the NPWS ranger on Rockabill in summer 2025, where they discussed the bird colony and “the potential negative impacts” of the proposed North Irish Sea Array (NISA) offshore wind farm.

## **PLANNING**

He pointed to the live planning process at An Coimisiún Pleanála for the NISA project, which includes extensive environmental documentation and a formal Further Information request running to 46 pages.

The Commission's correspondence shows the developer sought – and was granted – an extension to respond to that request, moving the deadline from 19 January 2026 to 14 August 2026.

Holland said he believes coastal communities should be kept better informed about such changes, and argued that agencies tasked with protecting conservation areas are under pressure.

“My conclusion... is that the government are so keen to force through nearshore windfarm projects all along the East Coast that many of the agencies deemed to protect our conservation areas are also being muzzled,” he said.

He added that he hopes the upcoming visit to Shenick will be an opportunity to “question this state of state care for our marine environment” – and to ensure the exposed remains, and the erosion that revealed them, are treated with the seriousness they deserve.