Marine and Coastal Partnerships in Scotland

Strong foundations, shared futures

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1. | Foreword

Scotland's seas and coasts are among our most valuable natural assets. They sustain rich and diverse ecosystems, support livelihoods and wellbeing and are an important part of our heritage. Our seas will continue to play a vital role in our future, underpinning communities, economic activity and environmental resilience. However, it is clear that the pressures on our marine environment are increasing, from growing demands on marine space to the impacts of climate change and nature loss.

It is in this context that effective collaboration is more important than ever. Bringing together different perspectives and expertise is essential to building a shared understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing our marine area, and to supporting informed, evidence-based planning to help shape a sustainable future for our seas.

Marine and Coastal Partnerships in Scotland: Strong Foundations, Shared Futures tells the story of some of the organisations that help make that collaboration possible.

Across Scotland, a network of statutory and voluntary partnerships bring together individuals, local authorities, communities, businesses, environmental organisations, researchers and many others with a shared interest in the future of our seas. While these partnerships differ in structure, geography and remit, they are united by a common purpose: creating opportunities for people to work together, share knowledge and shape better outcomes for the places they know best.

Together, they can help deliver Scotland's ambitions for the marine environment. They can support ecosystem health, encourage economic prosperity and increase social inclusion and wellbeing. Just as importantly, they create the connections, trust and shared understanding that underpin long-term management of our seas and coasts.

Marine planning remains an important part of this picture. While national-level ambitions are guided by Scotland's National Marine Plan, these can be delivered and applied at a regional scale through Regional Marine Plans. The adoption of Scotland's first Regional Marine Plans for Shetland and Orkney marked a significant milestone for marine planning, demonstrating the value of regional leadership, partnership working and community informed planning. We now have the opportunity to learn from this first step, improve our approach and drive progress across the whole of Scotland.

The lessons and case studies shared within these pages demonstrate what can be achieved when we work together. They showcase the dedication, innovation and commitment found across Scotland and highlight the strong foundations already in place.

Above all, this publication is a testament to the commitment of the many organisations, communities and individuals who give their time, expertise and energy to these partnerships.

Ruairidh Anderson,
Regional Marine Planning Manager, Marine Directorate

2. Setting the scene

Our seas and coasts are facing a period of unprecedented change. New and existing marine sectors are anticipated to develop, grow and diversify, creating competition for space and resources. Combine this with commitments towards net zero, mitigating and adapting to climate change and the restoration and regeneration of biodiversity, and the challenges faced become daunting.

Meeting this task requires more than just policy, but cohesive and strategic action underpinned by evidence. Trusted organisations capable of bringing people together, providing evidence and resolving competing interests are essential infrastructure for achieving these outcomes.

This publication explores how our marine and coastal partnerships help Scotland navigate these challenges and sets out why we believe they will become increasingly important in the years ahead.

2.1 Regional Marine Planning Forum

The Regional Marine Planning Forum (RMPF) was established in 2024 following the Scottish Government's response to the final report by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee (ECCLR) from their Inquiry into the Development and Implementation of Regional Marine Plans in Scotland.

The RMPF consists of representatives from Marine Planning Partnerships, Local Coastal Partnerships, Local Authorities and other public bodies such as NatureScot. The forum brings together relevant stakeholders and expertise to share learning, exchange best practice and support collaboration between Scottish Government and regional partners to inform the future development of regional marine planning and associated guidance.

The RMPF operates within a wider landscape of organisations, partnerships and networks with interests in Scotland's marine and coastal environment. While many of these organisations, or bodies, also contribute to the delivery of marine and coastal management in Scotland, and often work closely and share common interests with forum members, the insights and lessons presented in this publication relate specifically to the perspectives and experiences shared by its participating members.

Therefore, for the purposes of this document, the term marine and coastal partnerships, or simply "partnerships" refers to the relevant Local Coastal Partnerships and appointed delegates for regional marine planning functions as set out below.

2.2 Marine Planning in Scotland

Marine planning in Scotland's waters (out to 200 nautical miles) is governed by the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. Together, these Acts establish the statutory framework for marine planning.

Marine planning can be a powerful tool for managing our seas. It can support sustainable management by providing a framework for balancing environmental, social and economic interests when decisions are made about the use and development of marine areas. Predecessors to statutory marine planning, including the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative (SSMEI) and the **Pilot Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Spatial Plan**[1], helped test plan-led approaches to marine management and, in particular, demonstrated the value of place-based and collaborative approaches to planning.

The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 introduced a new era for the management of Scotland's seas, providing the legislative basis for a formal, tiered system for planning and management. The **National Marine Plan**[2] (NMP) provides an overarching strategic framework for marine planning in Scotland and guides decision-making. At a more local level, Regional Marine Plans (RMPs) can be adopted for Scotland's coastal waters (from 0 to 12 nautical miles out to sea). These waters are divided into eleven Scottish Marine Regions, where RMPs can provide a local approach to planning whilst remaining consistent with the NMP and relevant terrestrial planning frameworks.

2.3 Marine Planning: Regional Partners

The 2010 Act provides powers for Scottish Ministers to delegate regional marine planning functions for a marine region to a nominated party. RMPs are therefore delivered by the appointed delegates but adopted by Scottish Ministers. To date, the appointed delegates have either been a Local Authority or a Marine Planning Partnership (MPP). An MPP can vary in size and composition depending on the area, issues to address and the existing groups.

The first MPPs were established in the Clyde and Shetland Islands marine regions, while Orkney Islands Council was established as the sole delegate for their region.

Along with their duties on behalf of Scottish Ministers to develop a RMP for the relevant marine region, delegates must discharge relevant functions after RMP adoption. This includes becoming a statutory consultee in the marine licensing process and overseeing the implementation and monitoring of their plan. Accordingly, they will regularly review the effectiveness of the objectives and policies within their RMP and amend if required or requested by Scottish Ministers.

Each delegate can be supported by an advisory group comprising representation from a range of local stakeholders including industry, environment, recreation and the community.

Shetland Islands Marine Planning Partnership

The Shetland Islands Marine Planning Partnership (SIMPP) was delegated the relevant functions relating to marine planning in 2016. The SIMPP is a collaboration between Shetland Islands Council and the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) Shetland. **The Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan**[3] was formally adopted by Scottish Ministers in December 2025.

Clyde Marine Planning Partnership

The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP) was established in 2016, largely from the membership of the previous Firth of Clyde Forum and was delegated the relevant functions relating to marine planning in 2017. The draft Clyde Regional Marine Plan is currently being developed and further details and updates relating to the development of the Clyde Regional Marine Plan can be found on the **CMPP website**[4].

Orkney Islands Council

Orkney Islands Council (OIC) was given direction in 2020 to act as the sole delegate for regional marine planning functions for their marine region. **The Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan**[5] was formally adopted by Scottish Ministers in February 2026.

2.4 Local Coastal Partnerships

Local Coastal Partnerships (LCPs) became widespread in Scotland in the 1990s. Scottish Natural Heritage's 'Focus on Firths' initiative (in 1993) provided financial support and led to establishment of Forums in the Forth (1993), Clyde (1993-4), Solway (1994), Moray (1996) and Tay (1997).

In the late 1990s, Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) was adopted as an EU-wide policy, which led to further funding streams for several of the partnerships. In 1996, the Scottish Coastal Forum (SCF) was set up by ministerial invitation to encourage debate at a national level on coastal issues.

LCPs were set up to encourage an integrated but non-statutory approach to economic, environmental and social development in coastal areas. The organisations aim to facilitate diverse stakeholder engagement and deliver local projects on topics of importance to their area and are currently partly funded by the Scottish Government.

Moray Firth Coastal Partnership

The Moray Firth Coastal Partnership (MFCP) was established in 1996 and works across around 800 km of coastline, from Duncansby Head in Caithness to Fraserburgh (Aberdeenshire), encompassing 32 ports and harbours that support key industries. MFCP is an independent coastal charity and partnership with a unique overview of the entire Moray Firth coastline to connect knowledge, inspire collaboration and support projects that strengthen coastal environments, communities and the local blue economy.

East Grampian Coastal Partnership

The East Grampian Coastal Partnership (EGCP) was set up in 2005 covering a varied area that includes three major ports, all key hubs for the energy and fishing industry, and a diverse range of coastal habitats. EGCP has delivered major projects on coastal literacy, marine litter, mapping, heritage and wildlife.

Tay Estuary Forum

The Tay Estuary Forum (TEF) is a voluntary, non-statutory LCP established in 1997, dedicated to promoting the wise and sustainable use of the Tay Estuary and adjacent coastline. The Forum region extends from the tidal limit of the Firth of Tay at Scone, to Fife Ness and to the River North Esk on the Angus coastline. The area includes four local authorities and is home to over half a million people. It encompasses a diverse range of environments rich in biodiversity, including three estuaries: the Tay, Eden and Montrose Basin.

Forth Estuary Forum

The Forth Estuary Forum (FEF) was established in 1993 as a result of Scottish Natural Heritage's "Focus on Firths" initiative. It spans the coastal region from Fife Ness in the North (where it meets Tay Estuary Forum) to Dunbar in East Lothian and includes the Forth Estuary to its tidal limit at Stirling. The Forth Estuary Forum champions sustainable development of the Firth of Forth and acts as an independent, neutral mediator facilitating critical communication across a diverse network of stakeholders.

Solway Firth Partnership

The Solway Firth Partnership was established in the early nineties as a cross-boundary initiative to develop a joint management strategy for the sustainable development, protection, and use of the Solway Firth between Scotland and England. It is now an independent charity delivering core functions around marine litter, invasive non-native species, and community projects.

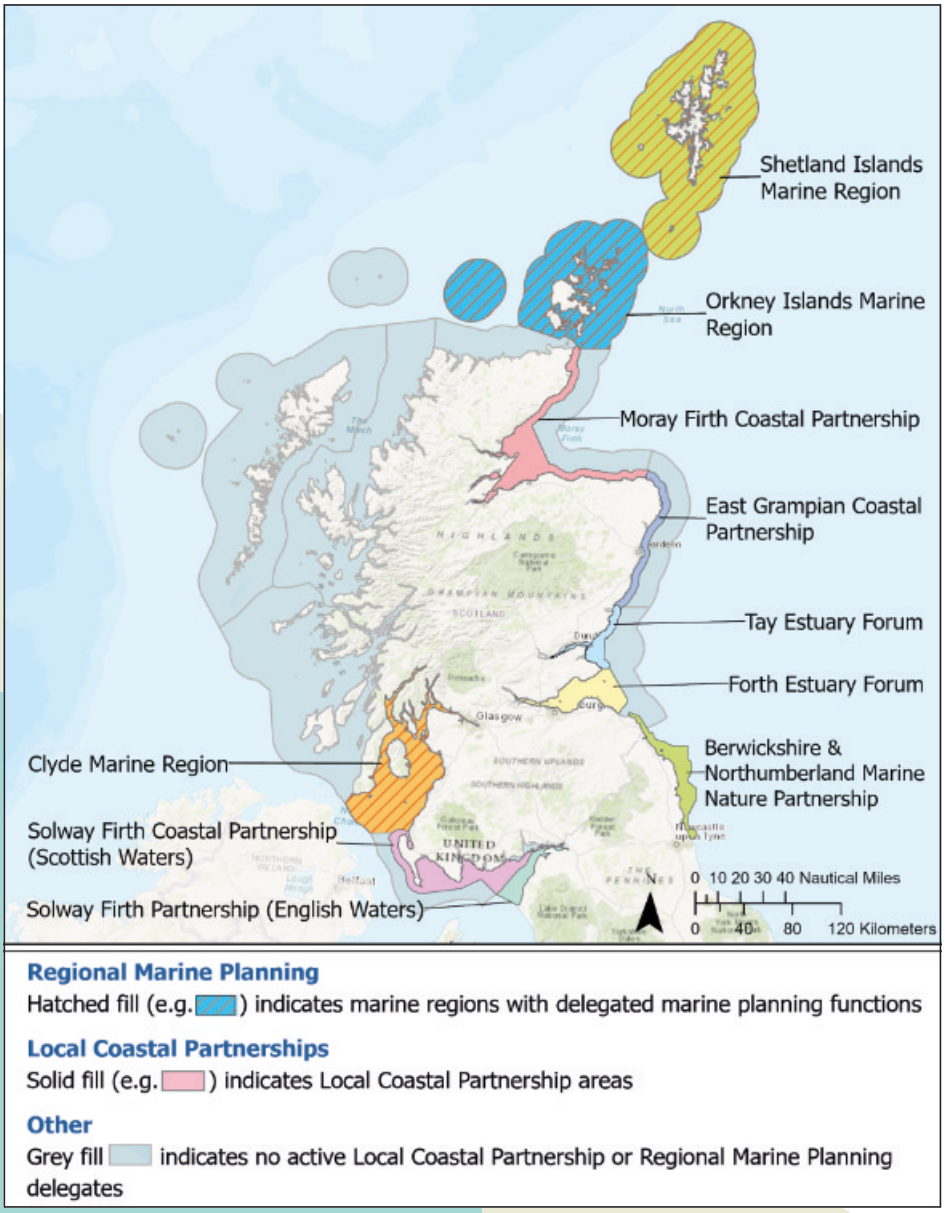
2.5 Invitational Members

Within the RMPF, there are several attendees who are closely linked to the work of both the LCP members and those with marine planning functions, adding value to the work of the forum. Therefore, the following are considered invitational members of the forum for attendance, sharing meeting information and contributing (including to this publication) as appropriate:

- NatureScot
- Crown Estate Scotland
- Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership

Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership

The Berwickshire and Northumberland Marine Nature Partnership was formed in 1999 and comprises a range of nearly thirty organisations who are working together to manage the suite of inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) found between Fast Castle Head in Scotland down to the River Tyne in England, and to raise awareness of their importance.



Map of marine and coastal partnerships in Scotland. Daniel Morris.

3. Strong foundations

Decisions about how our seas are used have become more complex, with environmental, social and economic priorities needing to be balanced in ways that were rarely required in the past. Marine and coastal partnerships provide an established platform for sustainable marine management. They help support the delivery of national and international objectives in ways that are locally relevant, trusted and cost-effective.

By bringing together public bodies, communities, industry, researchers and environmental organisations, our partnerships create capacity, expertise and delivery networks that single organisations often struggle to maintain alone, whilst ensuring that local perspectives are reflected in decision-making. Through engagement with communities they strengthen the connection between local interests and national policy, championing regional priorities by ensuring that management approaches are understood within the context of each area's unique environment, economy and heritage.

This regional focus allows marine and coastal partnerships to provide the coordination, trusted relationships and local knowledge needed to translate policy into practical action. It helps organisations work more effectively together, reducing duplication, building consensus around sustainable solutions and maximising the value of public investment where resources are limited.

One of the greatest strengths of Scotland's marine and coastal partnership network is its longevity. Decades of collaboration and adaptation, often despite fluctuating funding, have helped maintain focus on shared long-term priorities [1]. This continuity has also fostered trust, strengthened relationships, and built valuable institutional memory [1].

3.1 Success in diversity

The current marine and coastal partnerships are diverse in their structure, governance and hosting arrangements, whether statutory or voluntary. Some are embedded in local authorities or academic institutions, others in private companies or charitable organisations. The strength of these partnerships lies in their role of linking regional stakeholders with a shared interest in creating a more sustainable future for their marine environment, ensuring a diverse range of interests and expertise are represented.

They all effectively support sustainable marine management and demonstrate that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' model for success. Whilst LCPs do not have statutory planning functions, they are well-positioned to support locally relevant implementation of national policies and strategies.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
Regional Marine Planning in Shetland and Orkney

In Shetland the unique partnership between a research institute and a local authority has helped to leverage funding to fill identified data gaps at a scale that facilitates regional decision-making. Data gaps were initially highlighted within the 'Shetland Marine Region Action Plan', published after the development of the 'Shetland State of the Environment Assessment'. In Orkney, the presence of the appointed delegate for regional marine planning has also supported inclusion of the region in a number of research projects led by the locally based campus of Heriot Watt University International Centre for Island Technology.

For both Orkney and Shetland, Advisory Groups were established to provide expert guidance and advice from a range of local stakeholders, including environmental organisations, industry, recreation, academia and public bodies. Advisory Groups ensure a wide range of knowledge and interests are reflected in the marine planning process, and they continue to meet beyond the publication of the regional marine plans, to support plan implementation.

The presence of these advisory groups also supports partnership working between organisations. For example, in Shetland the presence of the Shetland SSMEI pilot, and subsequent SIRMP led to the identification and accurate mapping of biogenic habitats (maerl, seagrass, horse mussels) to support fisher-led management measures. Once mapped, the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation (SSMO) implemented a series of areas closed to scallop dredging. These areas were then mapped and included within the SIRMP and protected via policy.

3.2 Partnership working bridges boundaries

Marine and coastal partnerships are essential for addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing our coasts and seas. To be effective, they must bring together diverse organisations, expertise and policy interests across geographical and administrative boundaries. **By working together in this way, partnerships can achieve more than any one organisation could alone.**

This cross-boundary work is demonstrated via Regional Marine Plans, which are aligned with the relevant terrestrial planning frameworks, including National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and Local Development Plans [2], and the unique role The Solway Firth Partnership has in supporting cross-border working.

> *"The Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan is the result of extensive research, dialogue, and consultation. Following the plan's publication, regional marine planning continues to enable our collaboration with the Council so that marine development can deliver social and economic benefits for Orkney communities."*

- Sandy Kerr, Orkney Renewable Energy Forum (Director) and member of the Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group

Climate change is creating new risks for coastal communities. Marine and coastal partnerships in collaboration with local authorities, environmental bodies, researchers and government agencies can help address climate change adaptation and climate risk-related management. Regional marine plans can reflect spatial opportunities and constraints based on flood risk maps and coastal erosion[6], while LCPs can help provide strategic regional oversight and act as a bridge between catchment, coast and sea. Marine and coastal partnerships can address source-to-sea connectivity by supporting data gathering, knowledge-exchange and collaboration between catchment-based initiatives, coastal communities, and marine stakeholders.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Tay Estuary Forum (TEF) and Flood Risk

In the early 2000s, the broad regional information base obtained by LCPs was identified as vital in informing the creation of district level flood management plans, leading to close, lasting involvement of the Tay Estuary Forum with Local Authority Flood Liaison Advisory Groups (FLAGs). TEF assisted in the creation of the Angus and Fife Shoreline Management Plans and remains active on SEPA's Tay Area Advisory Group, which coordinates local water management, protection and planning through regional frameworks. TEF also undertook a **study**[7] in 2024 looking at changing pressures and prioritisation of water management in an increasingly competitive coastal- marine planning space.

> *"The Forum provides a vehicle for utility service providers to share the practical issues arising from the marine planning regulations with a diverse audience. This is a vital feedback system that enables meaningful consultations to refine and amend how they are drafted and applied"*
>
> **- David Wishart, Catchment Tay Ltd**

In 2025-2026, TEF helped gather research input to Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessments (CRVAs), commissioned by Dundee City, Fife and Angus Councils. This demonstrated the important role LCPs can play in providing regional oversight, alongside locally specific input in order to link work conducted by Local Authorities to create scenarios for dealing with climate extremes and identify common risks that could be tackled more effectively in partnership.

Newly emerging, collaborative, multi-sector initiatives, such as **Water Resilient Dundee**[8], help facilitate further cooperation towards tackling year-round, intense precipitation (storm) events and combined flooding impacts. Promoting open communication channels on such topics will be essential in a changing climate and evolving planning and policy arenas.

3.3 Sharing good practice

The history of the marine and coastal partnerships demonstrates the importance of knowledge-sharing in supporting continued learning, refinement and improvement of approaches to every aspect of marine management. Learning and sharing of good practice between partnerships has underpinned many of the projects shared throughout this document. The relationship of partnerships with government and its agencies also positions them to share lessons and promote methods that have been successful. In this way, innovative approaches and solutions can be trialled at the regional level and used to inform development of national strategy. The establishment of the Regional Marine Planning Forum provided an opportunity to further improve knowledge-exchange and collaboration between regions and with national partners, capitalising on the successes and learning from individual and shared challenges.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Sharing Learning in Biosecurity Planning

Marine invasive non-native species can have significant impacts on the environment and the economy but can be challenging to control or eradicate once established. Preventing arrival and quickly identifying new invasions underpins successful management. In 2010, the Action Plan accompanying the Firth of Clyde Marine Spatial Plan identified the need for a guiding framework for marine non-native species management. This led to the development and publication of the **Clyde Biosecurity Plan**[9] in 2011, and a training and awareness programme to help develop a network of industry monitors to keep an eye out for invasive species.

With the development of the Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011, the Clyde Forum felt there was a need for further guidance, leading to the commission of a literature review and biosecurity planning guidance document [3] [4], delivered by the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS). These documents have now been adopted as best practice or have informed biosecurity planning approaches across UK administrations. The Firth of Clyde Biosecurity Plan is an example of the influence regional action can have in promoting and sharing best practice and feeding back to shape national policy.

This work also prompted the recognition of a need for regional plans across other partnerships, leading to biosecurity plans for the Solway Firth (2013, reviewed every 3 years) and the Shetland Islands (2015), and informing the development of the Orkney Islands Council's Ballast Water Management Policy (2013). In each case, best practices from other marine regions were integrated with local knowledge to identify regional priorities and create a plan addressing local risks and pathways [5]. The shared learning, experience and best practice between the partnerships, national organisations and beyond, has been critical to progressing management of marine invasive species in Scotland.

> *"The Shetland Biosecurity Plan resulted in the uptake of biosecurity planning as part of development applications, as well as enhancing awareness among the community and stakeholders and prompting better monitoring and recording of marine invasives. Data and learnings are shared via the Scottish Marine INNS working group, to inform wider reporting, the development of guidance, and support emerging sectors such as restoration."*
>
> **– Rebecca Giesler, Shetland Islands Marine Planning Partnership**

4. Local knowledge for better decisions

Marine and coastal partnerships help to reveal what national oversight can miss by providing trusted locally relevant evidence. While national datasets and assessments remain vital, they cannot always capture regional priorities or emerging issues. By combining scientific evidence, local knowledge and long-term monitoring, partnerships help create a more complete understanding of Scotland's seas which allows decisions to be based on evidence that is locally relevant, trusted and fit for purpose.

4.1 Identifying evidence gaps

Effective management of our marine and coastal assets relies on a wide range of evidence, from environmental monitoring and economic data to local knowledge, recreation patterns and cultural values. From a planning perspective, this can often require significant stakeholder engagement to identify available data and information. The development of regional initiatives has made it apparent that few national data sets exist which represent local or regional interests such as inshore fisheries, recreation, community and cultural values [6] [7].

Understanding what makes a region distinct forms part of the role marine and coastal partnerships can play in supporting just and effective decision-making. This reflects and builds on earlier work carried out by all Local Coastal Partnerships in better understanding sectoral interactions, creating regional Sectoral Interactions Matrices (SIMs) as a measure for sustainable management of increasingly competitive coastal and marine spaces [8]. Through this work, data gaps were identified, raised and addressed, framed within the regional context and character.

Marine and coastal partnerships are not simply data producers and custodians; they act as a bridge between communities, researchers and decision-makers, ensuring locally generated evidence, including citizen science, informs management and planning. Their local knowledge can help identify gaps, inaccuracies or limitations in national datasets that may only become apparent at a regional scale, while providing a platform for dialogue between stakeholders and public authorities.

This places partnerships in a unique position to connect regional stakeholders with national decision-making [8], supporting place-based management and helping to identify and address evidence gaps through targeted data collection and long-term monitoring programmes. Continued data collection and identification of evidence gaps is crucial for both current and future marine management and will require adequate resourcing both regionally and nationally. Marine and coastal partnerships are well placed to develop processes to fill knowledge gaps and develop long-term monitoring programmes, as demonstrated within this section.

> *"Collecting, collating and verifying data has been a pivotal part of developing a marine plan for our region. Engagement with the local community and stakeholders has allowed us to identify data gaps, errors in national data sets and prioritise data collection relevant to our marine region. This has allowed us to support a range of processes where detailed accurate data has been pivotal. For example, we have worked with the local inshore fishing industry to identify and protect vulnerable seabed habitats"*
>
> **– Rachel Shucksmith, Shetland Islands Marine Planning Partnership**

4.2 Establishing baselines and monitoring change

Baseline and monitoring data helps identify emerging issues and provides a way to measure progress towards environmental, social and economic goals.

For example, several of the partnerships have produced regional 'State of the Environment' assessments, bringing together evidence from a range of sources to build a shared understanding of environmental condition, trends and pressures in their marine region. These assessments not only inform regional policies, guidance and investment priorities, but provide information to help avoid or mitigate potential conflicts/issues in early stages of development or management plans.

Data gaps highlighted within State of the Environment Assessments for Shetland, Clyde and **Orkney**[10] were summarised and published in a formal 'Environmental Action Plan' in Shetland and embedded within the Clyde State of the Environment Assessment (section 7)[11], helping to direct action within the regions. The resulting research and data collection has not only supported marine planning but has supported informed marine management across a wide range of topics.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Local Coastal Partnership Regional reviews

The formal process of conducting State of the Environment Assessments as part of the marine planning process also inspired several LCPs to revise and update regional reviews. Informed by **Scotland's Marine Atlas**[12], and marine region assessments by the Clyde, Shetland and Orkney, these regional reviews provide high-quality data and local information to support future-management.

Solway Firth Partnership – SOLWAY REVIEW

After acknowledging that the evidence base underpinning the local area was becoming dated, the Solway Marine Information, Learning and Environment (SMILE) Project was launched to update the 1996 'State of the Solway Review'. Completed in 2021, the project used innovative communication methods to gather pan-estuary information, learn from stakeholders and promote a better understanding of the Solway Firth ecosystem.

Through provision of high-quality data and local information, the SMILE Project secured the foundations for a cross-boundary ecosystem approach to support the future management of the Solway Firth. The resulting Solway Review online platform can be explored at **www.solwayfirthpartnership.co.uk/solway-review**.

East Grampian Coastal Partnership – 'State of the Coast'

Initially published in 2009, the State of the East Grampian Coast Report was an assessment of social, economic and environmental factors for the area and aimed at informing future-management of the region. The report continued to be used by planners in the Local Authority more than a decade later, demonstrating the lasting value of accessible regional evidence.

Acknowledging the ever-changing landscape and evolving use of our seas, the East Grampian Coastal Partnership launched a second phase of the project in 2025, aimed at updating their approach to more easily evolve as new data became available and provide more information accessibly. This led to the launch of the State of the Coast website, a wide-ranging resource that features annually updated information sheets covering 250 topics focussing on social, economic, environmental and biodiversity indicators as well as legislation, funding opportunities and a guide to organisations responsible for the coast.

Understanding the role this information can and should play, the partnership produced a State of the Coast Summary Document that is being used by local agencies and public authorities, such as in schools, to help make the information accessible and encourage engagement.

For more information see **www.stateofthecoast.scot**.

4.3 Data that is fit for purpose

The availability and accuracy of data can significantly influence how it is interpreted and used in decision-making. Regional prioritisation of data collection can help ensure data is timely, regionally relevant, and at a scale suited to decision needs. This data can inform both local and national processes, such as the identification of areas suitable for restoration or detailed mapping of fishing grounds in areas where there are competing uses and potential conflicts.

Evidence is most useful when it reflects the scale of the decision being made. National datasets are valuable for strategic planning, but more localised or site-specific decisions often require more detailed information. Consideration of this aspect of scale is also essential when implementing mitigation or management measures or assessing cumulative pressures [9].

It is important that, wherever possible, data is fed into national open-access databases to facilitate use of data by public authorities, developers, decision makers or members of the public. The development of national databases and repositories such as **GEMS**[13] and **NMPi**[14] have provided a pathway for regional data created or collated by marine and coastal partnerships to be entered into national portals.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
Firth of Clyde - Seascape/Landscape Assessment of the Firth of Clyde

The Firth of Clyde Marine Spatial Plan (2010) identified that limited guidance was available to local authorities and developers about the impacts of new development on the coastal and seascape character of the Firth. To address this gap, a strategic assessment of the coastal landscape and seascape of the Clyde was carried out, resulting in the publication of the '**Landscape/Seascape Assessment of the Firth of Clyde**' report in 2013 with accompanying spatial data layers published on NMPi[15].

The assessment addressed a recognised evidence gap by providing a consistent understanding of the character and qualities of the Firth of Clyde. This evidence continues to support planning and development decisions by helping decision-makers understand how proposals may affect valued coastal and seascape areas.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Marine Spatial Planning Addressing Climate Effects (MSPACE) Programme

The Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan is a UK case study within the **Marine Spatial Planning Addressing Climate Effects (MSPACE) programme**. The MSPACE programme was co-designed to drive forward the implementation of climate-smart marine spatial planning in the UK. It utilises state of the art analyses of climate change impact modelling projections to consider how climate change will affect the conservation, fisheries and aquaculture sectors and what opportunities there may be to better prepare these sectors for climate-driven change through adaptation.

The modelling evidence enabled the identification of refugia areas, where ecosystem components support fisheries and aquaculture, and where protected species and habitats exhibit long-term resilience to climate change. Through extensive stakeholder engagement and the co-development of knowledge and evidence, MSPACE co-developed solutions for adaptation focused on refugia, exploring their economic feasibility, and how they can best align with regional and national economic, social and nature goals.

The project produced **recommendations for marine policy**, whilst mapping areas within the Orkney Islands Marine Region that could be prioritised for different uses in response to a changing climate. The project is recognised by the UN as part of the Ocean Decade, and its activities have extended into regions in Europe, the Caribbean region and South Africa.

MSPACE was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council and Economic and Social Research Council and demonstrates how marine planners can collaborate with academic partners to help find solutions to the challenges of climate change.

> *"Our seas are becoming busier, with important priorities for climate, nature, food, energy and economy competing for space and requiring difficult trade-off decisions. At the regional scale in particular, there is renewed recognition that spatial approaches – underpinned by appropriate evidence and data - could improve our planned use of Scotland's seas. Regional data can be more targeted, with the detail necessary for spatially resolved decisions, and can engage stakeholders at a scale relevant to them. The MSPACE project is a useful demonstration of a planning tool at regional scale, promoting solutions to complex issues at the nexus of climate change, nature restoration and sectoral adaptation."*

- Cathy Tilbrook, Head of Sustainable Coasts & Seas, NatureScot

4.4 Local circumstances inform evidence collection

Evidence collection is most effective when it reflects how people actually use the marine environment. Approaches that work well in urban or mainland areas may not capture the full picture in rural and island communities.

For example, where the collection of data is relating to recreational use, the approach taken in rural and island areas may need to differ from that of a mainland coastal community. Capturing this type of representative data can be challenging in rural and island communities as, typically, they have higher levels of non-commercial recreational use, where activities take place independently or within small local clubs, and where recreation takes place over relatively large areas compared to the population size.

Regionally important activities may also not be represented in national datasets. Standardised metrics for valuing access to recreational space done at a solely national level may risk underestimating the importance of the activity in rural areas, or place greater importance on tourism than local use.

Marine and coastal partnerships can help facilitate cost-effective data gathering, by sharing their own knowledge of their regions, identifying funding for projects, or directly carrying out work to solve local data challenges, resulting in enhanced evidence to support marine decision-making.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Orkney Islands Council - Marine and Coastal Recreation Survey 2022-2024

The Orkney Marine and Coastal Recreation Survey was carried out between 2022-2024 to address data gaps on recreational use of the coastal and marine environment, and as part of the development of the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan. The survey had an excellent response rate with over 200 responses and resulted in over 550 areas mapped for 22 different recreational activities.

The survey benefited from using an online, interactive mapping tool that allowed respondents to zoom to areas they use for their activities and identify them on a digital map, before answering a series of questions about their activities. This allowed OIC to capture spatial information at a high-resolution for the areas people use, as well as providing relevant contextual information on why people choose to go to specific areas and how seasonal changes affect popularity.

The survey filled an important evidence gap by capturing activities that are often underrepresented in national datasets. As a result, the OIC Marine Planning team now have a much clearer understanding of how local people use Orkney's coast and seas and can continue to keep this data up to date.

4.5 Making local knowledge visible

Not all evidence can be measured through environmental surveys or economic statistics. Understanding how communities value and use the coast is equally important for effective marine planning.

Whilst the environmental and economic value of the coast is often included in documents, policies, statements and plans, and relevant decision making, capturing the cultural heritage and values of a region is challenging. **Marine and coastal partnerships highlight the value of bringing local knowledge into decision-making and place-based action.**

The partnerships often gather information that falls across different knowledge types, from scientific evidence to lived experience and traditional knowledge. They collaborate on projects and research into how to better approach capturing qualitative data, local and traditional knowledge, and how to integrate diverse values into decision-making. Examples range from participating in and facilitating stakeholder networks, to community mapping work and establishing and maintaining local environmental records and local stakeholder engagement.

Other elements of data creation, such as mapping, can help to visualise competing demands and assess the implications of new uses or management measures on both the environment and existing users. Some knowledge types and values do not lend themselves to spatial mapping but their visibility in decision-making can be supported through publication of reports, guidance, or other communication strategies.

Additionally, local monitoring of the marine environment can inform national and international assessments, informing national reporting to bodies such as OSPAR and ICES.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Shetland – a community shaped by the sea- understanding community value and the use of the shetland coastline

In recognition of the value lived experience brings, the Shetland Coastal Character Assessment (SCCA) sought to provide a useful context for considering cultural heritage and values within Shetland [10]. To supplement the SCCA, community surveys were undertaken to provide a link between physical characteristics and values. This helped to further the understanding of values and provided background information and evidence relating to the Shetland sea and coast.

By linking community views with the physical characteristics of the coastline, the project provided a richer understanding of the cultural importance of Shetland's marine environment and the benefits it provides to local communities. This information was gathered to help facilitate strategic and project level planning which considers the range of uses and benefits provided by the coast and sea [11].

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Invasive Species Monitoring

The development of regional biosecurity plans led to the collection of baseline data and the establishment of regional marine invasive non-native species monitoring programmes for Shetland (2012), Orkney (2013), Solway Firth Partnership (2016) and East Grampian Coastal Partnership (2020).

While each region has taken a different approach to marine invasive species monitoring depending on local resource and risk, these programmes now represent the longest running routine surveys of marine INNS in Scotland.

Together, these programmes demonstrate how locally coordinated monitoring can deliver benefits far beyond individual regions, contributing to Scotland-wide evidence gathering, national reporting obligations and cultivating internationally recognised research expertise.

5. Connecting communities with decisions

In light of the challenges we face, sustainably managing the marine environment will require difficult decisions to be made regarding the use of our seas. These decisions are far more effective when communities can understand, influence and have confidence in them.

Marine and coastal partnerships help connect national policy with local experience and priorities. While the partnerships operate within national policy frameworks and strategic direction, they provide a mechanism for regional knowledge, experience and practical considerations to inform national policy and decision-making. **Through dialogue, marine and coastal partnerships can identify regional priorities, encourage action and help to resolve or manage disputes[8].**

Participatory processes are key to success in this, helping to ensure decisions are informed by both scientific evidence and local experience, creating a more complete understanding of regional priorities. Partnerships can facilitate mutual learning and help to communicate the rationale and potential benefits of marine management and governance decisions to local communities, government and other stakeholders. These processes can strengthen the trust and confidence in marine governance, build trust between stakeholders and increase understanding and acceptance of decisions.

Statutory management processes frequently occur over long timescales (e.g. 5-10 years) and are associated with assessments and consultation documents which are technical in nature and sometimes long and inaccessible [12]. Communication strategies can ensure information is

tailored to specific audiences, and multiple approaches to communication can assist in widening participation and the development of just and effective management approaches. This can include translating national strategies into regionally relevant formats and acting as hubs to share information in a variety of ways.

5.1 Building Understanding and Participation

Effective communication can provide clear pathways for communities and stakeholders to understand how, when and where they can participate, and how their knowledge, views and evidence can contribute to marine planning and management.

Marine and coastal partnerships are an important part of empowering communities to understand marine issues, ensuring that their voices are heard and making sure decision-makers at all levels fully understand any locally specific concerns.

In doing so, communication can move beyond information dissemination to support both Ocean Literacy and Process Literacy. Put simply, these terms refer to an understanding of how the ocean functions and the influence we have on this, and an understanding of how marine decisions are made, who is responsible and how people can get involved.

Importantly, a contemporary definition of 'ocean literacy' combines these concepts. It goes beyond knowledge and education to reflect the importance of behavioural, experiential and participatory engagement with coasts and seas, but also includes governance processes like marine planning. Our marine and coastal partnerships already deliver projects and processes that contribute to improving ocean literacy locally. At a national level, they help further action by informing the work of the Scottish Ocean Literacy Coalition, which in turn aims to steer the delivery of the ocean literacy outcome and delivery actions in Scotland's Blue Economy Vision.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Translating and sharing Knowledge

Local Coastal Partnerships such as the Tay and Forth Estuary Fora have long been regarded by local authorities as important conduits for raising public awareness around climate change impacts, such as fluvial and coastal flood risk and wider sustainability issues. The Moray Firth Coastal Partnership's 'Our Firth, Our Seafood' initiative supports local fishermen and fish merchants to promote sustainable local seafood choices for consumers, while their '**Our Firth, Our Seashore**'[16] project delivers marine education workshops and mini documentaries to educate and inspire young people to care for the sea on their doorstep. The Solway Firth Partnerships coastal guides help locals explore the natural and cultural heritage of the Solway coast. The Solway Firth Partnership also exemplify translating scientific and technical information into accessible forms, through their publication **series**[17] and UHI Shetland have also developed **videos and guides**[18].

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
Solway Firth Partnership – Tidelines

The Solway Firth Partnership produces a magazine – Tidelines – twice yearly in Spring and Autumn which is available both electronically and as printed copies distributed across tourist information centres, libraries and coastal visitor centres on both sides of the Solway. Tidelines covers news from the partnership and the local area, updates on projects and partner projects, and highlights marine issues both regional and wider. Energy developer RWE provide an insert on occasion, ensuring communities stay informed on the Robin Rigg wind farm in the Solway.

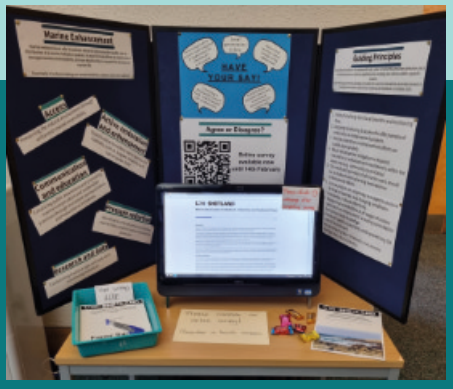
5.2 Local voices shaping regional priorities

What matters most in one part of Scotland may not be the same elsewhere. Priorities are not necessarily spatially uniform across Scotland's seas, or even within individual marine regions.

By bringing local people together with relevant organisations or experts, our partnerships help identify regional priorities and inform actions that support sustainable and equitable use of the marine environment.

Fundamental to achieving good outcomes in this space is effective participatory processes. When done right, these methods can facilitate two-way knowledge exchange, bringing scientific and technical evidence together with local, experiential and community knowledge. This can support mutual understanding between stakeholders and help identify areas of shared interest, potential conflict and opportunities for collaboration.

The Borderlands and HLF funded SCAMP project (Solway Coast and Marine Project) is a strong example of strategic, embedded engagement. This includes the integration of a group of high profile local creatives to widen the engagement potential and combine science, community and arts throughout the lifetime and outputs of SCAMP. The project also includes an education strategy, formalising avenues for everyone to access marine learning. There are also volunteer opportunities, as well as events and workshops, opening the hidden underwater world of the Solway to a wider audience.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: UHI Shetland – MREAP

UHI Shetland brought together community and marine stakeholders to develop a document to guide **Marine Restoration and Enhancement Action in Shetland**[19]. By incorporating local knowledge and priorities, it identifies potential restoration opportunities tailored to Shetland's unique environmental and socio-economic context.

A key focus is on the co-creation of guiding principles, ensuring that restoration and enhancement efforts align with local needs while supporting ecosystem resilience and sustainable marine management. Through collaboration, the project identifies priority areas for restoration, explores innovative solutions, and develops practical actions to enhance Shetland's marine environment.

5.3 One size doesn't fit all

Engagement works best when it reflects local circumstances. In this, it is clear that marine and coastal partnerships are best placed to understand the communities they serve, and can tailor activities to local geography, culture and capacity, helping more people take part in decisions that affect them.

Local context can present different challenges to successful engagement with relevant stakeholders and local communities. In regions like the Clyde, with several local authority areas and large associated urban populations, it can be harder to identify 'representative' communities than in less populated geographically distinct areas like Orkney and Shetland [13].

The fundamental importance of engagement to the regional marine planning process has meant that Marine and Coastal partnerships have made significant efforts to develop engagement strategies tailored to their local context. For example, the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership leveraged funding from the European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to develop novel techniques to engage the public in marine planning. Public dialogue workshops were held specifically targeting audiences that represented the diversity of the Clyde Marine Region and had not previously engaged with marine planning.

> *"The Clyde Regional Marine Plan will set out the vision of a healthy, resilient and productive marine environment, one that supports thriving communities, enables sustainable development, and protects the natural and cultural assets that make the Clyde Marine Region unique. As the pressure on marine space continues to grow, and the twin challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss continue to deepen, our responsibility to ensure the sustainable management of the Clyde Marine Region has reached a critical point. The CRMP represents a significant step forward in that endeavour. It offers clarity, direction and a shared purpose, helping to ensure that the choices we make today contribute to a sustainable and prosperous future."*
>
> **- Prof. Anthony Gallagher, CMPP Chair**

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Orkney Islands Council - Stakeholder engagement and consultation on the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan (OIRMP)

Often, national policy implements a 'one size fits all' approach; however, one size doesn't always fit, particularly in an island context. Orkney Islands Council were therefore committed to ensuring that local communities had the opportunity to directly engage with the plan-making process and have their voices heard. In addition to the statutory 12 week-consultation on the draft OIRMP, the wider community and stakeholder engagement process aimed to engage as diverse an audience as possible with events organised over several years across the different stages of the planning process.

Orkney Islands Council designed engagement activities tailored to each island community's needs, running from the morning into the evening, to suit different groups such as young people, schools, businesses, fishers, mariners, and community organisations to name a few.

The consultation and engagement process has provided valuable information and local knowledge that informed the preparation of the final plan, supporting assessments, spatial guidance, and ongoing marine management in Orkney. This helped to create a regional marine plan shaped by Orkney Communities and wider stakeholders.

Orkney's Regional Marine Plan consultation was recently selected as a **Case Study of Best Practice**[20] from a Local Authority by the Improvement Service.

5.4 Valuing cultural heritage and identities

Scotland's coastal regions are shaped not only by their natural beauty but by the people, traditions and industries that have depended on them for generations.

Our coastal heritage encompasses our fishing communities, marine industries, archaeology, historic landscapes, traditional skills, local stories, and cultural identity, and delivers significant social and economic benefits. Understanding what people value about the coast and sea is essential for effective marine management as it affects how proposals are perceived and helps guide how communities are engaged. Not all values can be mapped or measured, but they can still influence how communities respond to change.

Marine and coastal partnerships help capture these connections, ensuring local identity, heritage and community values are reflected in conversations about the future of our seas.

For example, UHI Shetland's involvement in the Diverse Values project and the **Scottish Wildlife Trust's Oceans of Value**[21] project in Orkney, both used novel approaches such as the Community Voice Method to capture the different values members of the island's community place on the marine environment.

Integrating intangible cultural heritage into defined datasets or statutory processes is not always possible, but celebrating and exploring cultural heritage can bring other benefits. Heritage projects can bring people together across generations, improve well-being, reduce social isolation and strengthen the connection between people and the sea. Celebrating coastal heritage through focussed projects creates a sense of place and belonging, fostering pride within communities and encouraging people to become active stewards of their environment. The Solway Firth Partnership for example has a long history of delivering place-based heritage projects, with highlights including exploring the meaning of place names in 'Coastwise', spotlighting local fishing industry stalwarts in 'Fishing Faces', and coastal archaeology and tales through 'Rhins Revealed' and 'Kirkcudbright Views'.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Moray Firth Partnership - The Gansey Project (2011-2012)

The Gansey Project focused on preserving the heritage of the east coast fishing communities through the traditional knitted fishermen's jumpers known as 'Ganseys'. The project documented and collected distinctive Gansey patterns unique to individual coastal communities, where designs had historically been passed down through generations, used for both warmth and identification. More than 40 patterns were recorded and are now preserved within the Scottish Fisheries Museum. The initiative became a significant cultural project, receiving widespread recognition and publicity, including national television coverage, and led to further exploration of the connections between Scottish coastal communities and those overseas.

5.5 Inspiring future Generations

Young people already have a stake in Scotland's seas and will live longest with the consequences of decisions made today. Youth engagement is therefore an essential component of inclusive and forward-looking marine planning.

Young people are not only future users or stewards of the environment, but current stakeholders with interests, experiences and perspectives that can contribute to planning and management decisions now. Creating meaningful opportunities for young people to engage can bring different perspectives and experiences into consideration while helping future generations to develop their understanding of marine issues and governance processes.

> *"Young people's knowledge about the marine environment and economy is remarkably well informed and their feedback has helped shape the preparation of the OIRMP and ensure local priorities are captured."*
>
> **– Daniel Morris, Marine Planner at Orkney Islands Council**

Early engagement can also support the development of ocean and process literacy, enabling young people to understand both the marine environment and how decisions affecting it are made. This can help strengthen the inclusiveness, legitimacy, and longer-term resilience of marine governance by ensuring that the perspectives of those who will experience the long-term consequences of today's decisions are represented in planning processes.

There are numerous examples of supported youth engagement from across the marine and coastal partnerships. These include place-based education resources for schools, such as the Solway Firth Partnership's 'Sea Chests' which supported primary school pupils to discuss issues around single-use plastics by bringing coastal litter into classrooms. Other examples range from delivery of workshops and public events, to developing participatory processes to engage young people in marine management.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Shetland Youth Voice – Nature and Environment Workshop

As part of the Mission Ocean funded Project BLUE CONNECT UHI Shetland engaged with young people via the Shetland Youth Panel, running workshops with young people aged 12-25. These workshops sought to enhance young people's knowledge on marine mammals and marine monitoring and understand young people's ocean literacy levels. They also gathered young people's views on how they wished to be better engaged in the management and monitoring of Shetland's marine environment, and the most appropriate way to connect with them.

6. Empowering communities through participation

Managing the ever-increasing pressures on our marine environment requires active participation from those who live, work, and invest in our coastal areas.

Across Scotland, the work of the marine and coastal partnerships has demonstrated that communities are incredibly motivated by local sustainability, are driven by finding solutions to local issues and that they are ambitious in what can be achieved.

The partnerships do not just create a space for people to participate through formal engagement and consultation processes; they actively foster connection and responsibility for the sea while developing real-world sustainable solutions to marine environmental challenges. They help communities understand, prepare, and respond to challenges such as climate change, coastal erosion, flooding, biodiversity loss and increasing development pressures, strengthening the resilience of coastal communities.

As such, the true value of marine and coastal partnerships cannot be measured by their project results alone. Their ability to mobilise volunteers and build local capability means investment often delivers benefits far beyond the initial resources committed. Their lasting value lies in the relationships, skills and community capacity they develop and create.

> *"SFP help us to see past the plastics and connect to the landscape we clean. They offer support in an often overwhelming task and have become a true part of our beachy family. Everything they bring is very much appreciated by the whole group. Their support has helped us achieve far more than we would have done by ourselves and broadened our horizons."*
>
> **- Beach cleaner with ONus (Oceans Need Us)**

A common feature of partnership projects is that they combine learning with action. Communities are not only asked for their views but are given opportunities to participate through citizen science, education programmes and practical conservation activities. This collaborative approach supports locally relevant, fair and effective management and delivery.

6.1 Solving data gaps with community science

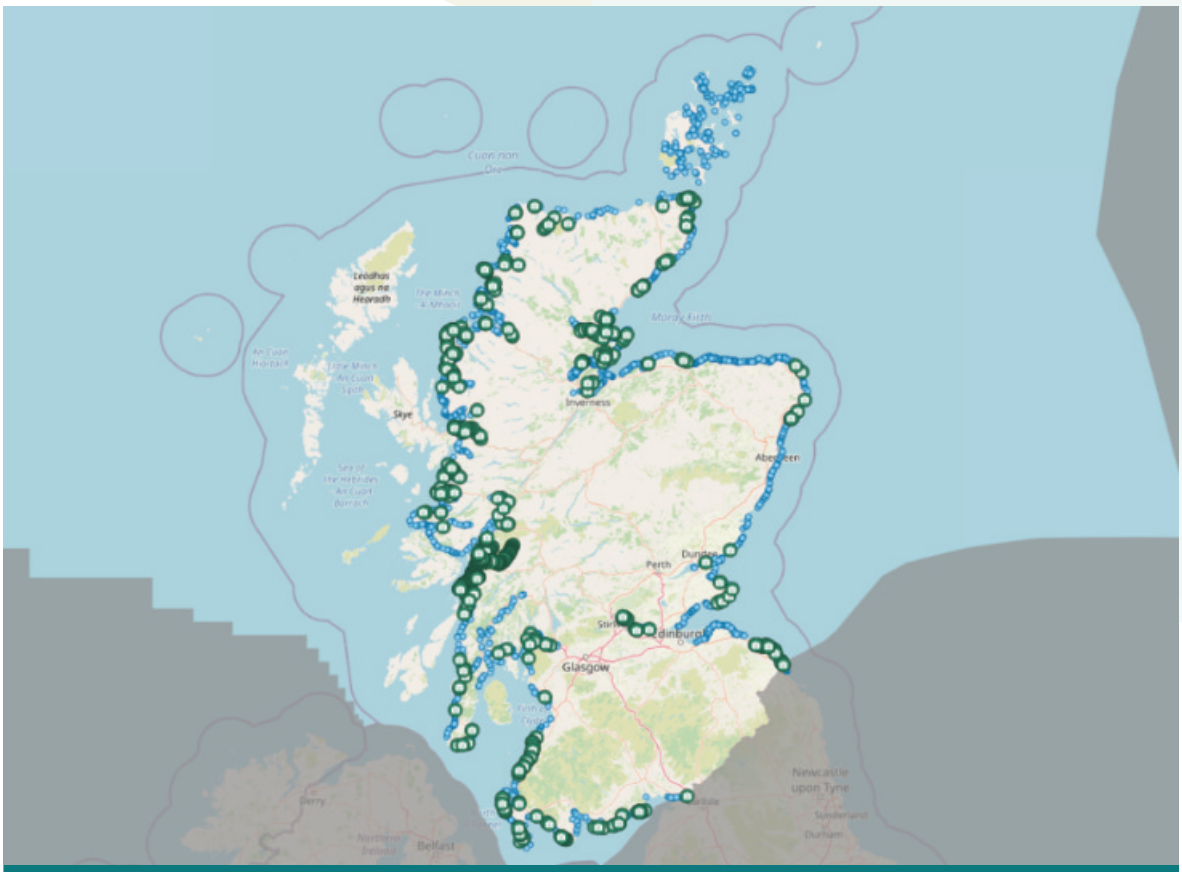
The regional focus of marine and coastal partnerships positions them to identify barriers and challenges to local environmental management and to work with national and local partners to resolve them. This knowledge-exchange role can help local communities and stakeholders to test novel and emerging technologies and approaches, contribute to national monitoring programmes, and share lessons learned.

Community science projects can help address data gaps and enhance understanding of marine environments and the pressures they face. By actively involving local people these initiatives foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility, improve ocean literacy, and create a sense of community that supports social inclusion and well-being among participants.

Examples are wide ranging, from the Tay Estuary Forum's role in coordinating and monitoring coastal change over time, to the East Grampian Coastal Partnership's work with NorthLink ferries to monitor cetaceans along the Aberdeen-Northern Isles route. The Moray Firth Coastal Partnership is playing a key role in coordinating surveys and ensuring community monitoring of the new introduced invasive slipper limpet feeds into national databases.

"SCRAPbook showed just how much can be achieved when volunteer expertise, community science and strong local coordination align. Civil Air Support delivered the aerial capability and high quality imagery, while Moray Firth Coastal Partnership provided the essential bridge between data collection, coastal communities and practical action. MFCP's skill in convening partners, trialling an approach locally, and then helping to scale it across Scotland illustrates the real value of Local Coastal Partnerships in turning good ideas and volunteer effort into meaningful environmental outcomes."

- Civil Air Support Scotland



PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Moray Firth Coastal Partnership - SCRAPbook Project (2018-2022)

To address the challenge of where to focus marine litter clean-ups, it is necessary know where on the coast litter accumulates. The Moray Firth Coastal Partnership worked with the Scottish wide volunteer pilot organisation Civil Air Patrol (now Civil Air Support) and the Marine Conservation Society to launch Scotland's Coastal Rubbish Aerial Photography (**SCRAPbook**) project. During 2018 and 2019 and partly repeated in 2022, aerial photography was collected by light aircraft around the coastline of Scotland to identify macro litter washed up. A coordinated team of citizen scientists assessed the images for data intensity and litter types, producing a spatial dataset and a map of litter intensity.

While the initial project was developed to focus clean-up efforts in the Moray Firth, the inclusion of the Solway Firth and East Grampian LCP led to the roll-out of the project across mainland Scotland. The project provided robust spatial data to inform national and local decision-making to support litter removal. Using such a strong volunteer base, it also provided a very cost-effective means of obtaining a big outcome of coastal litter removal, advancing Scotland's commitment to protecting biodiversity by reducing the impacts of plastic pollution on marine habitats and wildlife.

The Solway Firth Partnership has been monitoring these beaches continually since then, and carried out a targeted series of visits and monitoring of 25 specific 'collector' beaches identified in the original SCRAPbook project in 2026 to document change.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Shetland - Communities as data collectors

The presence of the Shetland Environmental Action Plan has helped direct data collection in the Shetland Marine Region, supporting future policy review and refinement. Shetland's large marine area and challenging offshore location has necessitated the development of innovative and responsive data collection methods, created through collaboration between community members and UHI Shetland researchers.

Small drones have been used to track harbour porpoise aggregations bringing new insight to shore-based observation collected by volunteers in partnership with the Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) Shorewatch programme. Drones have also been used to map declining seagrass beds, with local snorkellers and kayakers supporting on-the-ground verification of observations. As part of the Mission Ocean EU Blue Connect project, thermal drones are being used to detect seal haul-out usage, and volunteers are being trained to capture and catalogue photos to identify Risso's dolphins.

This data directly addresses data gaps, and feeds back into improving the quality of the evidence-base available to stakeholders and decision-makers through the data included in the Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan, to help ensure impacts on priority species and habitats can be minimised.

*Funding for these projects includes the Heritage Lottery Fund, NERC, Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF), EU funded Blue Connect project, Shetland Community Benefit Fund, and the Nature Restoration Fund.

6.2 Mobilising direct action for marine enhancement

Across Scotland, marine and coastal partnerships are helping communities take practical action to improve their local coastlines and seas. Collaboration and active participation in sustainable behaviour fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility, instilling a deeper sense of connection with the marine environment. Locally led initiatives are also frequently characterised by higher levels of acceptance, support and participation than national approaches.

Coastal and marine regions often face shared environmental threats that transcend local boundaries, making collective action more effective than isolated efforts. Marine and Coastal partnerships help to ensure that community-driven action is not only locally meaningful but also feeds into and is shaped by wider regional and national priorities, such as the **Scottish Biodiversity Strategy**[22], Marine Litter Strategy, and **Scottish Action Plan for Invasive Non-Native Species**[23].

Marine and coastal partnerships record of delivery spans topics such as coastal change, marine litter, invasive species, sustainable seafood, and coastal restoration. Importantly, these projects are not stand-alone, they represent continued effort to raise funding, coordinate action, and learn from successive projects to deliver regionally appropriate solutions. This experience and learning stand marine and coastal partnerships in good stead to tackle emerging and future challenges.

Orkney's regional marine plan has established policies to enable the delivery of coastal and marine enhancement measures as part of development consenting processes. Orkney Islands Council is working with stakeholders to publish guidance that will help developers to deliver enhancement and restoration for a broad range of habitat types, including native oyster reefs, seagrass meadows and watercourses.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Solway Firth Partnerships – CLEARCoasts

The CLEARcoasts project, led by Solway Firth Partnership in collaboration with partners, is exploring new ways to support saltmarsh recovery on the Solway. Restoration trials have been launched using Biodegradable EcoSystem Engineering (BESE) lattice mats to stabilise and restore saltmarsh.

The Solway Firth's strong tidal currents and wave action are a perfect test environment for this approach. The CLEARcoasts team, supported by volunteers, installed the mats over 2025-2026. The interventions are now in a long-term monitoring programme, while CLEARcoasts continues exploring other factors impacting the Solway's salt marsh.

Importantly, CLEARcoasts is a low-cost, scalable, and community-led approach avoiding barriers associated with expensive top-down schemes. As climate pressures from sea-level rise, coastal erosion, and biodiversity loss continue to escalate, low-impact techniques like this are becoming vital. The CLEARcoasts Project is not only helping restore critical habitats on the Solway—it is also contributing local evidence and practical insights to inform saltmarsh restoration across the UK.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Moray Firth Coastal Partnership - Seashore HUB

Marine litter detrimentally impacts marine wildlife and ocean health, society, and industries that are reliant on our coastal and marine environment. Seashore HUB was established in 2025 to develop a collaborative approach to beach cleaning across the Moray Firth coastline by bringing together communities, organisations, and businesses to support cleaner coastal environments.

The 11 HUB locations established along the Moray Firth coastline provide accessible beach clean equipment, enabling volunteers to collect marine litter and data and contribute to community science initiatives.

Each HUB is supported by a local ambassador responsible for coordinating regular beach cleans and ensuring the safe disposal of collected waste. Between 2024 and 2025, over a six-month period, the project delivered 34 beach cleaning events and removed more than 1.7 tonnes of litter from local coastlines.

This programme of work has demonstrated that combining community engagement, education, citizen science and local leadership can create a sustainable model for tackling marine litter - delivering immediate environmental improvements while building long-term stewardship.

Mullock bay beach clean – Mike Bolam

Slouchnamorroch – Stuart McNeil

6.3 Education and participation

Stewardship of the marine environment is best supported when education and awareness raising is combined with empowerment of local communities to identify and implement solutions [14]. Much of the success of marine and coastal partnership projects lies in this holistic approach to tackling sustainability challenges.

Marine and coastal partnerships have supported the public, local corporations and young people to learn about their local environment, maritime heritage, and the critical challenges facing our seas. By combining this awareness raising with opportunities to participate in restoring and protecting our seas, projects help build connection to and responsibility for the sea.

The work of partnerships to create sustained action to address marine litter is perhaps one of the best examples of this holistic approach in action. Through workshops to identify regional strategy[24], provide education on the issues surrounding marine pollution[25], direct coordination of coastal clean-ups, support monitoring of litter types and hotspots, and empower local champions and volunteers, the LCPs have delivered across all themes[26] identified in the **Marine Litter Strategy**[27] to create lasting change.

In the future, it will be important for marine and coastal partnerships to engage with and inform the work of the **Scottish Ocean Literacy Coalition** in delivering against the Ocean Literacy outcome in **Scotland's Blue Economy Vision**.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
East Grampian Coastal Partnership (EGCP) - Turning the Plastic Tide (TTPT)

The EGCP '**Turning the Plastic Tide (TTPT)**' project first started in 2018, following workshops and coastal surveys led by the EGCP. To date, the project has facilitated a total of over 400 organised beach cleans, which have directly engaged more than 10,200 volunteers across local communities, schools and corporate partners. Through these collective efforts, over 155 tonnes of litter have been removed from the East Grampian coastline.

Turning the Plastic Tide delivers beach litter and marine education talks at local open days, festivals, schools, and within business settings, aiming to inspire individual as well as collective action. In March 2026, a part-time education officer was employed to strengthen outreach, delivering workshops to over 3,000 school children within the first six months.

A particular strength of the project has been through creating sustained collaboration with local industry and corporations. In April 2026, a major energy company returned for their third consecutive year to support TTPT activities, and together with strong support from Fraserburgh Harbour, worked to remove large quantities of rope, over 60 tyres and a total of 5.1 tonnes of litter from Cairnbulg.

> *"Through OEUK's Environment Forum, we've supported several Turning the Plastic Tide beach clean events and have seen firsthand the difference these initiatives make, especially at Cairnbulg. The events are well organised, rewarding to take part in, and provide a tangible way for companies to contribute to environmental improvement. It's encouraging to see so many organisations come together through the East Grampian Coastal Partnership to help protect and enhance our coastline."*
>
> **- Caroline Brown, OEUK**

Marine litter surveys across 25 beaches help monitor the success of the project. Since 2017, they have shown a sustained decline in litter on the beaches covered by the project. The work has led to the project being officially recognised at the Inspiring Aberdeenshire Awards in 2025, a testament to the impact local communities can make through sustained effort.

6.4 Cost-effective delivery on national priorities

Community action is most effective when it can be sustained over time. Marine and coastal partnerships play an important role in securing funding, coordinating partners and attracting investment that enables local projects to grow and deliver lasting benefits.

Marine and coastal partnerships offer a cost-effective way to deliver national priorities by aligning resources, expertise and investment around shared goals. The evidence provided by Scotland's marine and coastal partnerships indicates that relatively modest investment can often unlock substantial additional value. Through established networks, partnerships can mobilise volunteers, convene organisations and deliver outcomes that would often be difficult, more expensive or simply impractical for existing organisations or public bodies to achieve when acting alone. In this way, partnerships do not merely deliver projects, they increase the return on their investment.

Working in collaboration with a wide host of partners, marine and coastal partnerships have raised funding for bigger and more impactful projects that help deliver on government priorities. The marine and coastal partnerships have successfully secured funding from the European Maritime Fisheries Fund, **Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund**, EU Horizon, Marine Fund Scotland, the National Lottery, national and international research grants, government agencies, charities, industry, and national park authorities.

Marine and coastal partnerships will need to continue to respond to changing funding landscapes, to help overcome the public finance funding gap for nature protection, restoration and recovery. Voluntary schemes such as the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund[28] are creating opportunities for locally led marine enhancement projects, and there is growing interest in mechanisms for driving investment in nature. These workstreams are likely to be of increasing relevance to the work of marine and coastal partnerships.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHT:
Solway Firth Partnership – SCAMP (Solway Coast And Marine landscape connections Project)

SCAMP is a multi-million-pound drive to restore nature along 210 miles of Dumfries and Galloway coastline, from Gretna to the Rhins of Galloway. It aims to revive coastal and shallow-marine habitats above and below the waterline. Working with landowners, businesses and local partners, SCAMP will use practical conservation to connect habitats and develop a more resilient Solway coast.

Nature-based solutions will also help communities prepare for climate change and rising seas. Restored habitats and sustainable management will deliver lasting environmental, social and economic gains—healthier ecosystems, stronger communities and new opportunities for sustainable local development.

In 2026, NatureScot named SCAMP Landscape Connections one of just nine national exemplar restoration projects. Its fast-paced development phase runs to the end of 2026, preparing for an eight-year-plus delivery programme. More than £9 million is secured, or in the pipeline, with seven partners working across multiple habitats for maximum impact.

The Solway Firth Partnership was key to the development of SCAMP, providing the foundational expertise upon which it was developed. SFP hosts the SCAMP Innovation in Restoration team— leading on oyster, saltmarsh and seagrass restoration across the project, as well as marine litter action.

7. Shared futures

The future will be shaped not by any one organisation, sector or community, but by what we achieve together. By building on the strong foundations already in place, marine and coastal partnerships can continue to help create a future where people, nature and sustainable developments thrive side by side.

7.1 The next decade of change

Given the challenges well established throughout this document it is likely that, across the next 10 years, Scotland's marine environment is facing greater change than at any point in our recent history.

The alteration of our ecosystems, our coastline and our patterns of use will continue. Delivery on already stated ambitions, such as Net Zero and Nature Positive, will bring in new approaches and new considerations. Nature recovery targets will likely require restoration at larger and longer-term scale than anything we currently plan for.

Alongside all this, the challenge is being met at a time when all organisations and public bodies are being asked to do more with finite resources.

It is in this context that effective marine and coastal partnerships are not just a desirable addition but are becoming an increasingly important part of delivery.

7.2 Shared responsibility for Scotland's Seas

Scotland's seas are entering a period of significant change and the challenges faced are complex and interconnected. Responding to them will require not only effective policy and planning, but also collaboration, participation, shared ownership and action at every level.

Marine and coastal partnerships have a vital role to play in bridging these scales, helping to ensure that action taken nationally can be delivered effectively on the ground, while local experience continues to inform future policy and planning.

7.3 Connecting Local and National Ambitions

Furthering empowerment of and engagement with communities has been a long-standing commitment of Scottish Government to improve local democracy. Throughout this publication, we have evidenced a common theme: **better outcomes are achieved when knowledge, evidence and experience are shared.**

The flow of information should not be one-directional. Future marine planning and management must be informed not only by national policy objectives, but also by the experiences of communities, businesses, coastal stakeholders and those who use and manage Scotland's seas every day. Marine and coastal partnerships provide an important link between local, regional and national decision-making, creating a more responsive and adaptive approach to marine governance.

7.4 Supporting a Just and Climate-Ready Future

Mitigating, adapting to and building resilience to climate change is a central challenge of our times and cannot be overemphasised. It is inevitable that the period of change upon us will create both opportunities and challenges for coastal communities.

In this context, the role of marine planning and coastal management is critical to delivering mitigation of (e.g. renewable energy, industry decarbonisation, blue carbon), adaptation to (e.g. infrastructure design, coastal protection, adaptive management, altering fishing methods and target species) and resilience against (e.g. early warning systems, natural flood management, ecosystem health & genetic diversity) the impacts of climate change. Planning and managing these changes successfully requires more than technical solutions alone. It requires meaningful participation, trusted relationships and a clear understanding of the impacts of change.

Marine and coastal partnerships are uniquely placed to facilitate these conversations, helping to build consensus, manage competition [8], identify opportunities to help regions prepare for and respond to climate change.

Our partnerships actively contribute to delivering aspects of **Scotland's Climate Change Plan**[29] and **Adaptation Plan**[30] and are particularly well-positioned to support the preparation of Coastal Change Adaptation Plans, by engaging local communities in the difficult conservations that will need to take place.

7.5 Building on Strong Foundations

In our marine and coastal partnerships, Scotland already possesses a valuable network of organisations and communities committed to the sustainable management of our seas and coasts.

Formal regional marine planning provides the framework for plan-led decision-making at a regional scale, while Local Coastal Partnerships complement this by connecting people, organisations and communities. The collaboration between these elements helps to address issues that extend far beyond formal planning processes but remain critical to achieving marine planning objectives.

Together they form a system that is greater than the sum of its parts and, as we look towards the next steps for marine planning and management, it is our belief that these partnerships will only become more critical to effective delivery.

7.6 A Shared Future

The future envisioned by the Regional Marine Planning Forum is one in which Scotland's marine and coastal communities are active participants in shaping the decisions that affect them. A future where local knowledge and scientific evidence are weighted and valued fairly. A future where collaboration is recognised not as an optional extra, but as an essential component of effective marine governance, policy and action.

The challenges facing our seas are shared. The solutions must be shared too.

But challenges do lie ahead. In order to continue the work set out in this publication, our marine and coastal partnerships need to continue to be supported, strengthened and delivered more widely across Scotland. More investment is required in collaboration, in supporting meaningful participation, in enabling our partnerships to meet a rising demand for their time and services.

Scotland can and should build on the strong foundations already in place.

8. Closing statement

Lessons learned over the past decade demonstrate that marine and coastal partnerships offer a unique ability to bring people together to address the complex challenges facing our seas and coasts. These challenges are best addressed when national support and strategic direction are combined with local delivery, knowledge, strong collaboration and meaningful, lasting community engagement.

The Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee identified the critical importance of combining government leadership, partnership working and community participation in effective coastal and marine planning. The committee recognised the governance and resource challenges facing regional partnerships in continuing to deliver our work, and to expand work in wider coastal communities across Scotland. The RMPF very much welcomes the Scottish Government commitment to addressing the committee recommendations and we look forward to continuing to work together to build our capacity and enhance the partnership network.

This publication reflects on the many ways that our partnerships make a significant difference across Scotland. We offer cost-effective ways to deliver national priorities and provide the platform for shared ownership of the complex challenges we all face. While the places, priorities and projects may vary, the work being undertaken and the value provided by focusing effort around a shared commitment is undeniable.

Our partnerships embody a responsive and adaptive approach to coastal and marine governance. We create opportunities for innovation that would be difficult for individual organisations to achieve alone. Building this capacity within our planning and management structures is perhaps the most important "lesson learned" of all. Ensuring experienced, strategic delivery of both legislative and locally driven activities within Scotland's marine regions is crucial. Marine and coastal partnerships understand how to facilitate and uphold the two-way nature of these processes, between national ambition and local action.

We know that the years ahead will not be without challenge. As we progress towards Public Sector Reform, it should be recognised that our partnerships are part of the solution, as we embody efficient, cost-effective and collaborative service delivery.

Sustaining and strengthening our partnerships will require continued commitment, support and investment. Adequate resourcing is key to successful outcomes and to ensure skilled professionals remain at the helm of partnerships, enabled by Scottish Government and relevant agencies' support and direction. Having seen what has already been achieved we are confident that our partnerships have vital collaborative roles to play in both delivery and enabling functions of marine planning.

As we look ahead, we do so with optimism for our shared future and with the belief that by continuing to work together we can build on these foundations for the benefit of Scotland's future seas, coasts and communities.

Regional Marine Planning Forum

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UHI Shetland; Marine Spatial Planning -
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