

HARNESSING COMMUNITY-LED MARINE CONSERVATION IN SCOTLAND

FAUNA & FLORA INTERNATIONAL'S MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROJECT
CASE STUDY (2011 – 2022)



PHOTO: ARDNAMURCHAN CHARTERS LOCH SUNART © ANDY JACKSON (CAOLAS)

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ABSTRACT

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has focused on providing support to local communities delivering conservation on the ground since 1994. Since this time, we have initiated a range of community-led conservation approaches in projects around the world, largely within the Global South, in places ranging from Belize to the Zanzibar archipelago in Tanzania. During this time, FFI has learned that investing the time and long-term strategy into developing legitimate, localised, approaches, and working to strengthen the institutional capacity and abilities of local conservation groups, in turn helps to bring about significant biodiversity benefits.

In 2011, upon the invitation from a new Scottish partner, the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), FFI started to work in Scotland, initially¹ through providing support to COAST in their local conservation work within the waters off the Isle of Arran. From this initial relationship, a wider community-led conservation initiative was co-created between FFI and COAST, which sought to significantly further the protection of Scotland's marine environment. From the initiation of the project, FFI was intent not to shape any specific conservation agenda in Scotland, understanding that this would undermine the individual, localised, agendas it could then support across the coast. Our operational agenda, therefore, was to enable community-led marine conservation, and to test the applicability of our community- and partner-focused approach, as used elsewhere in the world.

In 2014, this work was shaped to enable a full-time staff member to deliver support to a burgeoning number of community-based organisations (CBOs) engaging in marine conservation in local coastal areas. FFI's support to CBOs in Scotland sought to catalyse and harness the role of community-led action within Scottish marine conservation, by helping to share the knowledge and experience of existing community conservation initiatives (notably COAST), and by facilitating the evolution of other like-minded, extant or aspiring, CBOs seeking to take similar action in Scotland.

As a result of this shared initiative, there is evidence of increased conservation capacity, and demonstrable on-the-ground conservation impact, within individual localities across Scotland's coast, as well as increased representation of community voices for decision making. A key outcome of FFI's engagement in Scotland has been the emergence of a Scottish 'Coastal Communities Network' (CCN), a dynamic forum that has harnessed the power of a combined voice for local communities to engage on issues of shared concern within marine protection. CCN has subsequently created opportunities for coordinated and community-led influence upon marine management - leveraged from previously small and unconnected coastal communities.

In recognising the inherent complexities in designing and navigating nuanced community-led conservation interventions, this project case study aims to give insight into the timeline, approaches, methods and results behind FFI's 'Marine Community Support Project' in Scotland. The case study also poses some discussions points, in conclusion, so as to generate ongoing conversations in this space. It is hoped that this case study will provide a detailed and useful example of the potential role for community-initiated, and community-led, conservation approaches within the UK context.

¹ At this time FFI also began to offer direct institutional development support to a newly formed organisation the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT).

INTRODUCTION

1.1. GLOBAL CONTEXT

Community-based conservation, or community-led conservation, is increasingly being adopted as part of on-the-ground solutions to biodiversity loss around the world. Community-led conservation approaches celebrate the fact that local people living close to biodiversity may have their own knowledge base and cultural references with nature, and through sensitive and tailored support, and appropriate external recognition of this understanding, can be key to identifying solutions that address both conservation *and* development needs. Community-based conservation proponents² make the case that biodiversity loss is in fact a social issue that operates in an economic, political and cultural context, and thus the solutions to this biodiversity loss are held within the democratisation of conservation approaches, and through the leadership and/or cooperation of Indigenous peoples and local communities/IPLCs.

There is a growing body of evidence³ to support the belief that community-led solutions to the global climate and nature crises are more effective, less contentious, and reap the best returns for nature and people. For example, Indigenous peoples' and local community/IPLC conserved territories have played a significant role in the Convention on Biological Diversity programme of work on Protected Areas⁴, on the Aichi Targets⁵, and on the UN Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030⁶. Despite this clear influence, approaches, such as those based on Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures/OECMs continue to face challenges, across many global contexts, in relation to tenure, top-down policy, and a suit of inequalities and injustices⁷.

It is increasingly recognised that conservation, in trying to retain nature and vital ecosystem services for the common good, can impose burdens on those living closest to the biodiversity being conserved, restricting options and development pathways⁸. In some parts of the world, a traditional approach of statutory conservation delivery, means decisions about conservation areas are made by government officials⁹, and local people may not be consulted, may be displaced from traditional lands, and may not be adequately compensated for lost opportunities or lost land rights¹⁰. For some, these traditional approaches, often based on statutory administrative systems, developed under colonial rule, and often funded or supported by international conservation structures, can be considered post - or neo- colonial¹¹.

In fact, many of the issues around community representation in decision making, and issues over historical land rights, are equally pertinent in a Scottish context. As conservation and development approaches have both evolved hand-in-hand, we have seen the case being made¹² for increased participatory engagement of communities in conservation work (in line with a standard ladder of participation¹³).

² Berkes, Fikret (2021) Advanced Introduction to Community-based Conservation.

³ WWF, UNEP-WCMC, SGP/ICCA-GSI, LM, TNC, CI, WCS, EP, ILC-S, CM, IUCN, The State of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' Lands and Territories: A technical review of the state of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Communities' lands, their contributions to global biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services, the pressures they face, and recommendations for actions Gland, Switzerland (2021).

⁴ See <https://www.cbd.int/protected/pacbd/>

⁵ See <https://www.cbd.int/sp/targets/>

⁶ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>

⁷ Kothari, A. and Neumann, A (2014). 'ICCAs and Aichi Targets: The Contribution of Indigenous Peoples' and Local Community Conserved Territories and Areas to the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-20'. Policy Brief of the ICCA Consortium, No. 1.

⁸ Berkes, F. (2004). Re-thinking community-based conservation. *Conservation Biology*, 18, 621–630.

⁹ Kiwango et al (2017) 'Levels of community participation and satisfaction with decentralized wildlife management in Idodi-Pawaga Wildlife Management Area, Tanzania'. *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*.

¹⁰ Robinson, et al. 'Incorporating Land Tenure Security into Conservation', *Conservation Letters*, June 2017, 00(0), 1–12.

¹¹ Jacobs, Lara A. et al (2022). Unsettling marine conservation: Disrupting manifest destiny-based conservation practices through the operationalization of Indigenous value systems. *Parks Stewardship Forum* 38(2): 275–304.

¹² Bennett NJ, et al (2021) Advancing Social Equity in and Through Marine Conservation. *Front. Mar. Sci.* 8:711538.

¹³ Arnstein, S. (1969) 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35.4: 216–224.

FFI, in its previous incarnation as the Fauna & Flora Preservation Society, delivered a range of UK projects, in many cases focused on particular species or groups (for example, bats, hedgehogs and toads), however, the rise of other conservation groups within the UK meant that FFI chose to focus its efforts elsewhere and stopped working directly in the UK in 1994 (re-engaging again in 2011 following the approach from COAST). FFI did not necessarily see the same community-led approaches it was becoming increasingly involved in elsewhere being actively applied in the Scotland, or wider UK context, and thus saw the opportunity to test the applicability of some of the learning gained in our global work at home.

FFI Global Case Studies: Ya'axché Conservation Trust

The increasing independence of our long-term partner in Belize epitomises how FFI's approach is enabling legitimate locally-based conservation entities (with strong community links) to become more effective custodians of their own natural heritage. Ya'axché Conservation Trust was founded in 1998 by a consortium of local leaders, to manage the recently established Golden Stream Corridor Preserve. This biologically rich, culturally significant and economically valuable watershed was saved from destruction thanks to generous funding from Halcyon Land & Sea, and the legal title was transferred to Ya'axché. In the intervening two decades, with FFI support, Ya'axché has evolved from a handful of committed individuals to a flourishing and nationally recognised leader in conservation and sustainable development.

In 2008 the Belize government selected Ya'axché to co-manage the 40,000-hectare Bladen Reserve, one of the most biologically rich areas in Central America. Four years later Ya'axché's executive director, Lisel Alamilla, was appointed Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Sustainable Development, a prime example of what FFI hopes to achieve by helping to nurture in-country organisations.

Source: www.fauna-flora.org/approaches/conservation-capacity/nurturing-our-partners/

FFI Global Case Studies: Community management of rare baobabs in Madagascar

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) and partner Madagasikara Voakajy have been working with communities in the north and west of the country to protect baobabs. In the north, two species (Perrier's baobab and Diego's baobab) are restricted to small ranges and small populations that are threatened by habitat loss and climate change. These threats are exacerbated by increasing incidences of forest fires and the fact that few seeds in the wild grow to maturity. In the west of the country, Grandidier's baobab is similarly threatened by fire and by demand for baobab fruit.

The aims of the project are to protect the remaining populations and habitats of all three threatened baobab species, enhance regeneration to support healthy populations in the long term, and ensure that community fruit harvesting of baobab products is sustainable. Our core approach has focused on helping communities secure co-management rights over important baobab habitat and aiding the development and implementation of this management. To date, the project has worked with three communities to secure over 10,500 hectares of baobab forest in Madagascar and to strengthen bushfire management. Work has also included researching the impacts of fruit harvesting on Grandidier's baobab, supporting communities to collect, process and sell Grandidier's fruit products sustainably, and planting all three threatened species in the wild.

Source: www.fauna-flora.org/projects/community-management-rare-baobabs-madagascar/

FFI Global Case Studies: Implementing effective marine resource co-management in the Pemba Channel Conservation Area

Of the two islands making up the Zanzibar archipelago, the less populated and developed Pemba Island hosts some of the richest marine biodiversity in Tanzania and the east African coast in its extensive reefs and mangroves, including turtles, dolphins, dugongs and occasional whales. It is also one of the main sources of subsistence and income for its relatively remote communities, who have witnessed reduced fish catches due to overexploitation and damaging fishing practices – such as the use of destructive drag-nets.

FFI began work at the end of 2014 and, through partnership with local NGO Mwambao and several mobilised local communities, has implemented the island's first temporary octopus-fishing closed areas in 2016. These were established in order to improve octopus stocks, build support for local marine conservation, and to contribute to the successful management of the sea-scape level Pemba Channel MPA (PECCA). Building on these first local successes and with an enhanced partnership, FFI has started to expand these activities to other communities on the island while empowering fishing committees and institutions at several levels, with the aim of more effective marine management across Pemba supported by community access to better and fairer markets for their catch. The government of Zanzibar supported the approval process for community-led marine management for the first time in 2017 by holding a Fishers Executive Committee meeting, where representatives of all fishing communities in the Pemba Channel were present. Both Kisiwa Panza and Kuku's closure plans were approved.

[Source: www.fauna-flora.org/projects/implementing-effective-marine-resource-co-management-pemba-channel-conservation-area/](http://www.fauna-flora.org/projects/implementing-effective-marine-resource-co-management-pemba-channel-conservation-area/)

The above project has focused on facilitating a wider national network of community organisations through Mwambao Coastal Community Network, building capacity within local community institutions; supporting co-management infrastructure within central government; developing and implementing sustainable financing mechanisms for marine protection; and developing and implementing benefit sharing systems. Co-management has (on paper) been established for some time in Zanzibar, and indeed Tanzania, but it hasn't been enacted like this on the ground, and with regards to fisheries management, therefore Mwambao acts to guide government and local agencies on best co-management practice.

1.2. SCOTTISH MARINE CONTEXT

Research over recent years has evidenced wide-scale, ecological degradation within Scotland's seas, with the Scottish Marine Assessment 2020 (SMA2020) confirming worrying declines in vulnerable species and habitats, and highlighting that pressures associated with bottom-contact and pelagic fishing continue to be the most geographically widespread, direct pressures across the majority of Scotland's marine environment¹⁴. Prior to this, the State of Nature Report for Scotland in 2019 had already confirmed that Scottish waters, including the seafloor itself, were not meeting 'Good Environmental Status'¹⁵.

Across much of Scotland's inshore waters, *Nephrops* (prawns) and scallops are largely caught by mobile bottom-towed gear, a catching method which significantly impacts seabed integrity and associated biodiversity complexity¹⁶. The Firth of Clyde, off Scotland's west coast, represents a well-evidenced example of marine ecological decline. In 2010, the overall status of the Firth of Clyde was highlighted in a

¹⁴ <https://marine.gov.scot/sma/>

¹⁵ State of Nature Report, Scotland (2019). <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2019-10/State-of-nature-Report-2019-Scotland-full-report.pdf>.

¹⁶ Howarth et al *Effects of ecosystem protection on scallop populations within a community-led temperate marine reserve - 2015-Howarth-et-al-Ecosystem-protection-benefits-scallops-in-a-community-led-marine-reserve-1.pdf* (arrancoast.com).

paper entitled 'The Ecological Meltdown of the Clyde'¹⁷, which drew attention to the apparent collapse of the Clyde ecosystem, through a comparison of historical data to current catches. It showed a clear shift from a diverse mixed fin-fish fishery, to a fishery almost entirely dominated by shellfish (predominantly *Nephrops* and scallops), and suggested that the lifting of a ban on trawling in inshore waters (in 1984) could have played a significant role in this. Around the coasts of the Clyde, and beyond, seeing this degradation at first hand angered local residents, and as a result they started to mobilise and organise themselves in attempts to secure protections to halt these marine biodiversity declines.

Within Scotland, marine conservation has traditionally been led by the state, with industry bodies having significant influence within decision making – for example, commercial fishing industry groups have traditionally dominated fisheries policy via Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups¹⁸, with few opportunities for locally-scaled community-based organisations to influence decisions which also affect them.

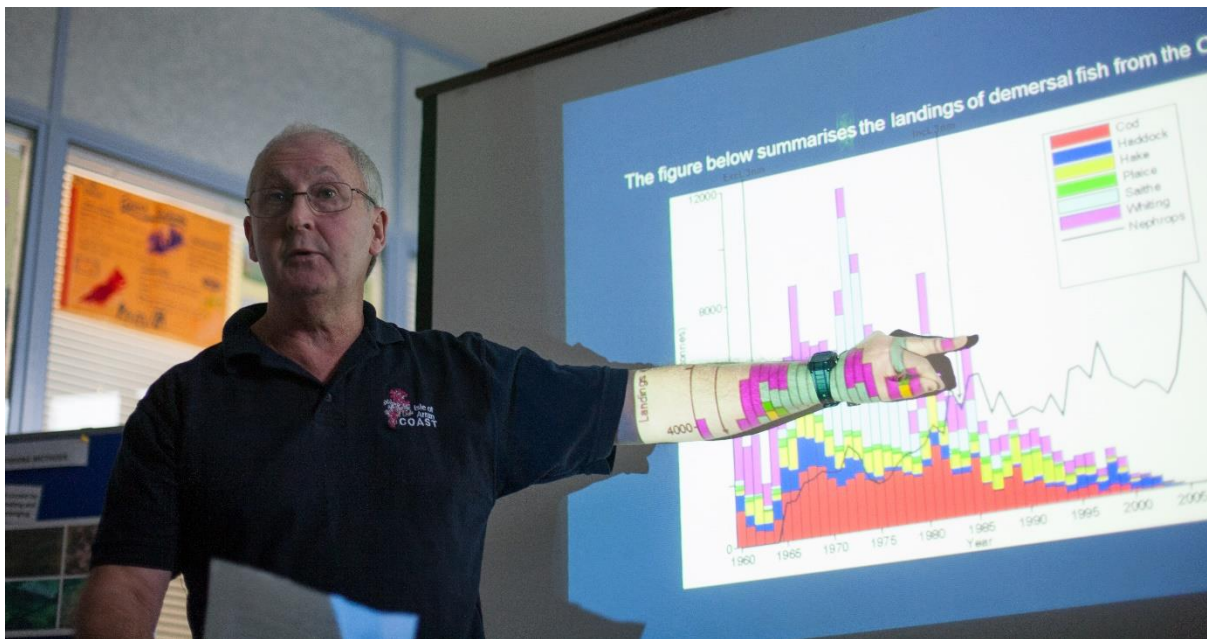


PHOTO: HOWARD WOOD, COMMUNITY OF ARRAN SEABED TRUST (COAST) © GOLDMAN PRIZE

However, from 1995 onwards, a group of residents came together on the Isle of Arran (which would later come to form the Community of Arran Seabed Trust - COAST) to establish a small 'No-take Zone' within their local bay¹⁹. After thirteen years of effort from the community a reserve was secured in 2008, via the Inshore Fisheries (1984) Act – the Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone. This subsequently prevented the extraction of any natural resources from the 2.67km² area.

COAST's bottom-up model significantly demonstrated the potential of community-led approaches in Scotland. In the succeeding decade, the potential for community participation was embedded within Scottish Government policy frameworks for ecological regeneration and recovery within inshore waters. From 2010, legislative development paved the way for national Marine Protected Areas which allowed for third parties, including CBOs, to propose sites, either as 'Nature Conservation MPAs' or as 'Demonstration & Research MPAs' (the latter also requiring non-state leadership and management, once designated). In addition, more laterally, CBOs across Scotland are specifically able to adopt devolved seabed management

¹⁷ Thurstan, RH & Roberts, CM 2010, 'Ecological Meltdown in the Firth of Clyde, Scotland: Two Centuries of Change in a Coastal Marine Ecosystem', PLoS ONE, vol. 5, no. 7, e11767, pp. 1-14.

¹⁸ [Regional Inshore Fisheries Groups | Marine Scotland Information.](#)

¹⁹ Whiteside, K (2017), 'Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone' Story Map, accessed via [Story Map Cascade \(arcgis.com\).](#)

arrangements through seabed leases from Crown Estate Scotland, including for nature conservation purposes²⁰. In practice, however, harnessing these potential avenues for participation has proved complicated and burdensome. Interested CBOs seeking to engage with these opportunities need to be legitimately organised (and often constituted), and the task of implementing these management measures requires them to have access to necessary resources and, sometimes, external technical expertise.



PHOTO: HOLY ISLE AND THE LAMLASH BAY NO-TAKE ZONE, ISLE OF ARRAN © COAST

2. CASE STUDY: FFI'S MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROJECT IN SCOTLAND

2.1. FFI'S INITIAL ENGAGEMENT AND PROJECT DESIGN IN SCOTLAND

FFI started working in Scotland in 2011, upon an introduction from Callum Roberts (at the time, a marine academic based at the University of York) to COAST. By 2011, COAST was a well-established community-led organisation, and had been bolstered by their success in achieving the No-Take Zone designation. The previous year (2010) COAST had held a seminar to inspire and share their experience with other community groups who might be interested in taking similar measures.

FFI initially funded PhD research, led by the University of York, into the Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone²¹ in 2011 to collect ecological data on the status of key species and benthic habitats within the site, after the cessation of all fishing (with a specific interest in measuring recovery linked to the cessation of dredging and trawling). Four consecutive years of dive survey data and underwater video footage demonstrated that the number of species, number of individuals, and overall biodiversity was already greater and more complex inside the No-Take Zone compared to the surrounding area. This included commercially important species such as cod and haddock, otherwise considered largely absent in (commercial quantities) from the Firth of Clyde due to overfishing, as well as an abundance of priority features including maerl, sponges, and feather stars.

²⁰ See <https://www.crownstatescotland.com/our-projects/local-management>.

²¹ Howarth et al *Effects of ecosystem protection on scallop populations within a community-led temperate marine reserve - 2015-Howarth-et-al-Ecosystem-protection-benefits-scallops-in-a-community-led-marine-reserve-1.pdf* (arrancoast.com)

Over this period FFI developed a strong relationship with COAST, providing bespoke advice and support as requested. From discussions with COAST over this period, the need to support other communities to take similar action, with regards to their own marine protection issues, was also identified. In recognising the significant impact that COAST’s actions had in effecting marine conservation decision-making in Scotland - but recognising their wish, as a community organisation, to remain focused on their own locality - FFI partnered with COAST to establish a new project focused on delivering tailored support to other Scottish communities also seeking to influence marine conservation and management in Scotland.

Since 2010, interest in receiving peer support from COAST was already evident from other communities (for example, from individuals across Argyll, and from Fair Isle, Shetland), and by 2012 it was clear that there was value in providing a wider set of CBOs a dedicated support service, with the opportunity to learn from COAST’s experiences. At this point, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation showed significant trust in supporting the flexible model being proposed by FFI, allowing the development of a project approach that fitted the needs and agendas of nascent communities, rather than requiring a tight focus upfront. The John Ellerman Foundation also came on board, thereafter, to offer underpinning costs to the project.

In 2014, the ‘Marine Community Support Project’ was launched and a dedicated ‘Marine Community Support Officer’ (now ‘Community Support Specialist’) was recruited. The role was employed by FFI, primarily to reduce pressure on COAST, however COAST’s then Chairperson was deployed as an external mentor for the Marine Community Support Officer between the initial years of the project (2014-2017), and other active NGOs in Scotland²² were consulted and brought into a virtual project advisory group, alongside COAST, to create a clear facility for regular dialogue. FFI’s project model was three-pronged: built on bespoke support and mentoring directly to Community-Based Organisations (CBOs); information and experience sharing (which would initially be focused on COAST’s experience); and supporting communities to connect and network directly with one another, to take shared action.

FFI’S (ORIGINAL) THREE-PRONGED APPROACH IN SCOTLAND

- 1) Providing bespoke support and mentoring to community-based organisations (CBOs) as they gain their own confidence;
- 2) Actively brokering relationships between CBOs through direct information, skills, and experience sharing;
- 3) Supporting CBOs to coordinate shared action through building a community network and underpinning its development.

2.2. PROVIDING BESPOKE SUPPORT AND MENTORING TO COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS

2.2.1. ROAMING MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER

Central to FFI’s initial approach was a dedicated, roaming, ‘Marine Community Support Officer’ who could deliver tailored advice and dedicated technical support to CBOs, based on their own specific agendas, needs and aspirations. The need for this kind of engagement was first demonstrated to FFI through

²² The National Trust for Scotland, the Marine Conservation Society, the RSPB, Environment LINK’s Marine Group, the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. After the project launch, two government agencies also joined the PAG: Marine Scotland and NatureScot.

requests from the Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative (FIMETI), who were at a critical juncture in proposing a Demonstration & Research MPA, and requested dedicated support from FFI to help them move through the lengthy process (see Local Case Studies).

In designing a flexible, facilitatory community support role to underpin its work in Scotland, FFI was able to offer tailored support to a number of marine-focused community groups, as they began to form and solidify in response to marine management policy changes at that time. FFI identified that a role like this was able to substantially invest in the capacity building and empowerment of the CBOs themselves, and was able to foster long-term relationships with key individuals, and support them in moving at the speed relevant to each individual CBO. Since 2014, FFI has now delivered various lines of support to over 25²³ different coastal community groups across Scotland.



PHOTO: SEAGRASS AT LOCH EIRSHORT © RICHARD LILEY (PROJECT SEAGRASS)

A key entry point to building relationships with CBOs, FFI's Marine Community Support Officer was able to initially access responsive, diverse, and technical advice from within the wider FFI organisation or from elsewhere (including the project advisory group), to meet the specific needs identified for each CBO. This could range from technical support, such as accessing appropriate specific habitat or species management information for conservation plans, to accessing advice on start-up funding and fundraising for organisational development, or accessing direct training or external training opportunities for community members to develop relevant skills.

Through this approach, FFI was able to then further support CBOs with strategy and organisational development, facilitation, and relationship building, supporting them to build their own local visions or strategic plans for conservation. The role was able to support individuals in organisational development

²³ This includes the 21 members who currently make up the Coastal Communities Network, and additional CBOs outside of the Network, which FFI has been able to provide dedicated support to.

through establishing appropriate structures - such as supporting the set-up of community groups from scratch (such as was the case with CAOLAS and CROMACH – see Local Case Studies). FFI's Marine Community Support Officer was also able to offer practical, 'agenda-less', support in helping CBOs develop local mandates and ensure better representivity, through offering neutral facilitation of local meetings, workshops and events.

In addition to local 'on-site' support, relationships could be brokered between the Marine Community Support Officer and other non-community bodies as related to establishing wider biodiversity plans – for example with NatureScot, Marine Scotland, NGOs, and academics. Through having a base in Edinburgh, FFI was also able to provide representation on behalf of communities unable to attend meetings with government agencies in the Central Belt, where requested. As the CBOs, which FFI helped to found, matured and secured grant-funding to employ their own staff, FFI continued to provide specific advice in their development of functional operations.

FFI's practical and facilitatory interventions in this space to-date have demonstrably helped CBOs realise their ambitions to deliver positive changes for their marine and coastal environments in Scotland. This kind of support has had the ripple-effect of helping communities deliver meaningful local conservation benefits, and significantly supported the formation of what would become a dynamic and growing network of engaged and vocal community groups – acting within their own localities - whilst also working together to advocate for wider benefits and changes across Scotland's marine environment.



PHOTO: KERRI WHITESIDE (FFI'S THEN 'MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER, SCOTLAND') WITH JAMES MERRYWEATHER AND PAT COTTIS (SOUTH SKYE SEAS INITIAITVE) IN 2015 © ROGER COTTIS



PHOTO: ISLE OF CARNA WITHIN THE LOCH SUNART MPA © CARNA CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

Example of FFI Bespoke Support: The Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS)

The Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS) is a community-led Scottish charitable organisation, with a geographic focus on the Sound of Mull and its surrounding waters. The local movement which led to CAOLAS began in 2014, firstly as a handful of individuals who were eager to respond to the newly designated marine protected areas in their local seas and who requested support from FFI to enable them to bring a core body of local individuals together.

FFI initially provided support in facilitating community workshops and opening local conversations about the MPAs, and then moved into offering organisational support to a smaller grouping of key individuals, eager to lead and form a local community association, which would facilitate the ongoing involvement of the local community in marine decision-making. A small grant from FFI was secured in 2015 to enable the recruitment of a temporary part-time development worker for CAOLAS, which enabled the group to devise a wider strategy around their aspirations for marine conservation, obtain charitable status, and secure a larger grant for outreach work.

Since its inception, CAOLAS has since flourished into a successful local charity, acting as a representative voice on local marine matters and offering critical community leadership roles within many collaborative initiatives such as the Argyll Coast & Islands Hope Spot and government-led marine management initiatives, such as the Argyll Marine Management and Monitoring Initiative (MarPAMM).

In 2021, CAOLAS received funding from the William Grant Foundation to employ a part-time 'Marine Community Officer'. FFI's Marine Community Support Officer provided support with the identification of funds and with the design and recruitment of the role, and provides ongoing support and mentorship to the employee, whose remit is focused on increasing local engagement and participation in CAOLAS' local programme of work. Securing a role such as this was a significant milestone in the development of CAOLAS as it enabled them to not only bring additional capacity to their, to-date voluntary, operations, but also develop their organisational governance and responsibilities.

CAOLAS continues to grow and strengthen as an organisation and has more recently been working on separate, subsidiary, initiatives with the Carna Conservation Initiative and Morven Community Woodlands. Most notably, in 2021, with funding from FFI, and the Highlands and Islands Environment Forum, CAOLAS established a native oyster restoration initiative in Loch Aline, working with Seawilding, and a host of local partners, to introduce native oysters into Loch Aline. CAOLAS is now developing a full research plan and is tentatively exploring management options for Loch Aline. Beyond Loch Aline, CAOLAS is working to investigate, restore, and enhance the biodiversity in their local MPAs, raise awareness around critical marine areas of interest, such as blue carbon and community asset seabed management.



PHOTO: KERRI WHITESIDE (FFI'S 'COMMUNITY SUPPORT SPECIALIST, SCOTLAND'), WITH CROMACH AND SEAWILDING MEMBERS WILL GOUDY, DANNY RENTON AND LUCY WALSH IN 2021 © CAROLINE YOUNGER

Example of FFI Bespoke Support: Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitats (CROMACH)

Particularly inspired by the trail-blazing work of COAST, and more latterly CAOLAS, in 2016 a group of residents based on the Craignish peninsula, Argyll, started to organise themselves into a formal community association which would become the Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitats (CROMACH). With FFI support, CROMACH's initial focus was to make local representation within the ongoing MPA process, with its founding aims centred on promoting the sustainable use of their local waters, carrying out research, raising awareness of, and involving the community in, marine issues and recovering the biodiversity and natural processes in Loch Craignish.

In a similar approach to the support leveraged for CAOLAS, from 2015, FFI worked with residents in the Craignish peninsula to support them in engaging in the decisions being made around marine management – namely, the lack of legal protection for their local Loch Craignish, which is cut off from the boundary of the Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura MPA. During its initial years, CROMACH organised beach cleans, marine information evenings, participated in policy consultations and undertook baseline surveys of Loch Craignish through Seasearch²⁴ dive surveys.

²⁴ <https://www.seasearch.org.uk/>

The successful foundation which CROMACH built then acted as a foundation upon which a highly successful 'sister' charity became established within the area - 'Seawilding'. CROMACH initially secured a small pot of funding from 'Sea Changers' to explore the potential of native oyster reintroduction in Loch Craignish. This then led, in 2020, to Seawilding launching an ambitious native oyster restoration project within Loch Craignish, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The aim of the initiative is to recover near-extinct native oysters. Further to this - funded by NatureScot and others, and working closely with the charity 'Project Seagrass' - Seawilding is now also restoring the loch's seagrass meadows, and building an entirely community-based model for local biodiversity recovery. Through this work Seawilding and CROMACH are working closely with local partners to deliver citizen science activities to local primary schools and wider community groups, while sharing lessons with other communities to enable them to replicate this type of habitat restoration.

In 2022, with funding and technical support from FFI, CROMACH is now taking forward an application for a Loch Craignish Demonstration & Research MPA, to ensure there is a locally-led management framework in place for the loch, which is excluded from the larger 'Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura' Nature Conservation MPA.



PHOTO: FAIR ISLE © TOMMY H HYNDMAN

Example of FFI Bespoke Support: The Fair Isle Demonstration & Research Marine Protected Area

In 2011 the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative (FIMETI), a small community-led body from Fair Isle, developed a proposal for a unique protected site around the island, the Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA. Demonstration & Research MPAs are a marine management option in Scotland for non-state parties to test sustainable marine management approaches, with the potential to be a powerful vehicle for community-led marine protection in Scotland. However, at the time they were a relatively untested form of marine management, with a vast, and as yet untapped, potential in their application and impact.

During 2014 – 2016, FFI closely supported the Fair Isle community in refining their MPA proposal and its aims, and worked with the Fair Isle community and key individuals to facilitate stakeholder meetings. FFI supported FIMETI to establish a co-management governance framework, focused on drawing together a three-tier 'Executive Steering Group' (a collective of key stakeholders that represent all marine agencies and sectors); 'Advisory Group', (a subsection of the Steering Group who provide advice on Demonstration & Research MPA implementation and management), and 'Implementation Level' Project Officer (to coordinate a partnership approach, and facilitate the activities necessary to achieve the objectives outlined in the Designation Order).

On the 9th November 2016, the Fair Isle DR MPA was designated and legally brought into force. See FFI's 'Fair Isle Case Study'²⁵ to understand the process of, and the lessons learned from, Scotland's only DR MPA. Following its designation, FFI has continued to closely support the Fair Isle community in their aspirations to lead the site and secured significant funds (from the Arcadia Fund) to support the MPA, specifically to underpin a dedicated MPA Project Officer role.

During 2017, support from FFI was given to the community to establish a new community organisation - the Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation (FIMRO). FIMETI, having achieved its stated purpose, dissolved and FIMRO formally replaced it as the Fair Isle community DR MPA Steering Committee member. Multiple unforeseen hurdles followed, including a devastating fire on the island which ruined the underpinning Bird Observatory, created delays on the project. However, in 2020, an agreement was developed between FIMRO, NatureScot and FFI which enabled the recruitment of a dedicated Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA Project Officer who would be formally employed by NatureScot, working to FIMRO's agenda, and receiving close support and mentorship from FFI. The Project Officer has built the Fair Isle DR MPA significantly since being in post, leading on the development of a detailed research and monitoring plan for the site, building stakeholder relationships, and securing significant ongoing funds for the site.

FIMRO is now a registered Scottish charity and is building a host of local projects linked to the MPA and the isle's marine environment, such as delivering biosecurity training and ecology information events for the local community. An exciting next phase is now imminent with the MPA project moving from design and development into implementation and delivery. FFI continues to provide support via its role in both the DR MPA Advisory Group and Steering Committee, via the mentoring role the Community Support Specialist provides to the DR MPA Project Officer, and via providing a peer networking space for FIMRO to connect into via the Coastal Communities Network.



PHOTO: KERRI WHITESIDE (FFI'S THEN 'MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT OFFICER, SCOTLAND') WITH FAIR ISLE RESIDENTS STEWART THOMSON AND NICK RIDDIFORD IN 2015 © KERRI WHITESIDE

²⁵ https://www.fauna-flora.org/app/uploads/2021/01/FFI_2020_Fair-Isle-DR-MPA-development-in-Scotland-.pdf



PHOTO: LOCH ERIBOLL EVENT IN DURNESS VILLAGE HALL 2022 © KERRI WHITESIDE

Example of FFI Bespoke Support: Developing locally-led biodiversity protection within Loch Eriboll

In 2020 FFI was invited by the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust and Wildland Limited, to support efforts to identify and establish a community-led vision for managing Loch Eriboll, a sea loch on the North West coast. FFI's approach, was to act as an initial 'enabler' and facilitator of community participation, against a longer-term view of supporting an independent community-led initiative to take forward long term management.

FFI's Marine Community Support Officer (now Community Support Specialist) started the process with an initial (shortened, due to covid-19) scoping trip to the area in March 2020. This was to identify and meet key individuals and, via a snowball approach, to conduct further meetings and inform further planning of the project. It was identified that the linear crofting village of Laid was the only populated settlement around Loch Eriboll and that the Laid Common Grazings and Community Committee were in place, with an active and formal structure. Although there were strong conservation interests within the Grazings Committee (and other local organisations active then, such as Plastic @ Bay), there was no indication of an already evident or emerging shared vision for the loch. There were, however, livelihood dependencies linked to the loch, primarily creel fishing and salmon farming.

The project was paused between March 2020 – April 2021 but from April 2021 onwards, with covid-19 pandemic restrictions easing, FFI then moved into identifying and building a wider set of relationships. During August 2021, FFI's Community Support Specialist met with local residents to listen to their views and more fully understand the context of the area - how it is valued, the leadership potential within the local community, the connections and partnerships active. From these discussions, FFI was able to identify a number of shared themes and issues, such as those regarding wildlife, fisheries and aquaculture management, recreational and research access, cultural history, and community dynamics. The purpose of the discussions was to begin to build up a picture of how locals around the loch already thought about these issues, and how they might seek to organise themselves to manage and sustain the loch's biodiversity, into the future.

Alongside FFI's work in scoping community values and aspirations for Loch Eriboll, a partnership of universities has also been undertaking ecological mapping of the loch, as instructed by Wildland Limited and the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust. During summer 2021, SRUC (Scottish Rural College), University of Glasgow, and University of Hull teamed up with a local creel fisher to undertake benthic

habitat mapping, to enabled an in-depth picture of the loch to be initiated. FFI worked closely with the academic institutes to produce updates, make introductions with local residents, and share live survey results.

During April 2022 a series of community events²⁶ were held around and near to the loch (in Durness, Laid, and Tongue), where local communities were invited to attend marine science survey talks, a facilitated discussion around community visioning, and a ‘premiere’ screening of the local underwater film, ‘Hope for a Highland Sea’²⁷, produced by Wildland Limited. The community workshops amassed a total of 70 participants and, as well as providing an opportunity to share updates and information around the marine surveys, the events also enabled FFI to more broadly understand the appetite from the community for leading conservation efforts locally, some identifiable gaps for taking conservation action, and a better sense of how much ongoing investment needs to be made into the community’s capacity for leadership. With stakeholder mapping/engagement undertaken and initial participation secured around identifying community aspirations and values associated to the loch, FFI is now, in 2022, developing work with local partners to produce a collaboratively designed future plan for community stewardship of the loch’s natural resources.

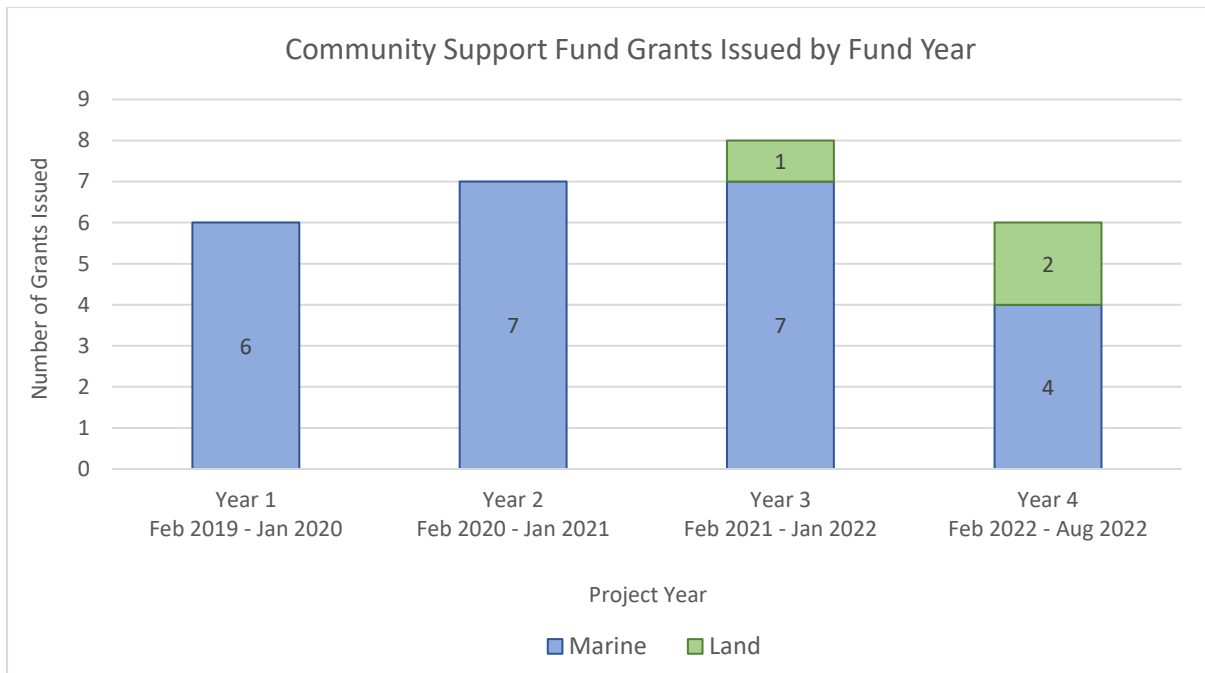
2.2.2. COMMUNITY SUPPORT FUND

Early engagement from FFI’s Marine Community Support Officer (now Community Support Specialist) with emerging community groups demonstrated a need for seed funding for a range of initiatives, and the opportunity that start-up funding could aid further external funding asks. Initial trials of sub-granting from FFI showed the potential for such a mechanism (e.g. CAOLAS in 2015). With additional fundraising efforts, FFI was able to establish a formal community granting mechanism, and from 2019 onwards a dedicated small grants scheme - the Community Support Fund - was made available to support communities. The fund was established to enable CBOs to implement their priority projects and at the same time to develop experience in fundraising and grant acquisition and management. It was initially focused on communities within the network, but latterly it was opened to a wider range of organisations.

As well as providing small grants, FFI also provided parallel support in developing the funding application itself, to nurture community confidence in fundraising. Between 2019 – 2021 the Fund granted £30,000 to 18 different projects; 12 of which were biodiversity focused and six focused upon group development and governance. Although a difficult figure to calculate, it is estimated that these funds have further leveraged around £300,000 for projects as diverse as hosting parliamentary events, to sea lice modelling, to native oyster restoration.

²⁶ [Supporting a local vision for Loch Eriboll - CCN Scotland \(communitiesforseas.scot\)](https://communitiesforseas.scot)

²⁷ [Hope For A Highland Sea \(2022\) \(vimeo.com\)](https://vimeo.com)



In 2021 FFI successfully fundraised to increase the pot of small grant funding to £25,000 per year, and opened this to land-focused, as well as marine, community projects. The uptake of the Community Support Fund since its launch in 2019 (see above graph), and the local benefits it has been able to unlock, such as increased organisational capacity and funds, enhanced biodiversity knowledge, and increased outreach and awareness around marine environments, has proven the success of the model and the need for small grants in this space. Grants have also nurtured a wide range of skills across the groups from habitat and species monitoring, to political advocacy, to outreach and public communications skills. In many cases small grants from FFI have been pivotal to the further development of recipient community groups. For example, a grant of £3,500 was the turning point for the growth of the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS) as it enabled investment into a temporary development officer. An initial grant of £1,500 to one nascent group (the Friends of the Sound of Jura) also provided the foundation for them to receive a larger grant of £15,000 from another donor the following year.



PHOTO: TAYVALLICH RESIDENTS © FRIENDS OF THE SOUND OF JURA

BESPOKE SUPPORT AND MENTORING - WHAT FFI HAS LEARNT?

- By designing the project's 'Theory of Change' around building the capacity of geographical communities, and around their ability to self-organise and influence government to bring about change in their own areas, we could maintain a tight focus on our facilitatory role, even as the project evolved, without defaulting to imposing an external agenda.
- In deploying a flexible, facilitatory 'Marine Community Support Officer' role, we were able to substantially invest our support of CBOs and in the development of their own success. This allowed long-term relationships to be built between FFI staff and key community individuals and CBOs - supporting ongoing collaboration set at each CBOs own self-defined pace.
- As an international NGO entering into the local dynamics of an area, FFI's communication must always start with active listening and no promulgation of an external conservation agenda. Ensuring that FFI acts in a strictly facilitatory (agenda-less) manner - dedicated solely to the marine conservation agenda of partners who actively approach us - has been critical to the overall success of our work in Scotland. At times, however, our responsive and agenda-less support can bring with it its own challenges – particularly where communities have complex divides, around which FFI purposefully takes no position, meaning that trust can sometimes be harder to build in certain relationships.
- If an existing local institution does not exist in any particular area, but there are a few aspirational individuals, the bespoke support that FFI offers will often then begin with supporting these motivated and passionate individuals, whom we will then work closely with to build the foundation for a wider local movement/organisation, where local appetite aligns and permits.
- Ultimately, it is crucial that FFI supports the local institutions themselves in becoming well-organised and well-led with self-defined ambitions for local biodiversity conservation, if they are to be effective and credible, and to enable scaling and sustainability of these institutions.
- Ideally, FFI will quickly work to identify the appointment of a local facilitator (typically with FFI mentoring in the background), when helping a CBO develop its own vision, capacity and structures, so that the process can be taken forward in local hands, should sufficient community interest be established.
- FFI formalising and expanding our provision of small grants to CBOs (originally on an ad-hoc, needs-based, basis) into the 'Community Support Fund' not only helped CBOs to access funds and develop fundraising and reporting skills, but it also facilitated significant access to other, larger, grants for CBOs. The success of this element of our approach also taught us to evolve our project's 'three prongs' over time, so as to centralise small grant-giving as a core line of support.
- Early on, FFI learnt of the complexities associated to the definition of 'community'²⁸ and thus committed to language around 'community groups' and 'community-based organisation', as best as possible.

²⁸ See Elizabeth Dinnie and Anke Fischer's 'The Trouble With Community: How 'Sense of Community' Influences Participation in Formal, Community-Led Organisations and Rural Governance' (2019), Sociologia Ruralis, European Society for Rural Sociology, Vol 0, Number 0, September 2019.

2.3. INFORMATION, SKILLS & EXPERIENCE SHARING

2.3.1. COASTAL COMMUNITIES' LEARNING EXCHANGES

It is difficult to substitute the benefits of direct information and experience exchange. Each coastal area is unique in its social, economic, and environmental characteristics, and each CBO is as equally unique. However, the CBOs we worked with were also highly dispersed, often in highly rural and sometimes inaccessible areas, meaning they did not regularly have opportunities to meet or learn from like-minded groups. In seeking to provide more direct mechanisms for community members to learn from one another, FFI trialled a coastal community learning exchange in 2017. Within conservation, there is a considerable role that peers can play in seeding and diffusing innovation²⁹ – this underpins the basis of FFI's community support work in Scotland, working with COAST as pioneers in this space. In this context, COAST was identified as having the most substantial experience at the start of the project, and we sought specific opportunities to link nascent community groups with COAST's lived experience and technical skills. The first use of this involved a member from the newly formed South Skye Seas initiative spending one week with COAST, in their offices in Lamlash.

The exchange model was based on³⁰ the Scottish Communities Alliance successful Community Learning Exchange³¹ initiative, and informed by previous FFI experience of learning exchanges (for example within the Conservation Leadership Programme). It provided the opportunity for a key representative from one location and CBO to visit, observe, and learn from a peer group. Three exchanges have been delivered thus far, including four different organisations. This has proved to have significant impact in terms of learning about developing organisational set-up (staffing and board roles) and governance procedures, delivering community events, and managing wider relationships. In 2019 CCN joined the Scottish Communities Alliance directly, with the anticipation of benefiting from the formal Community Learning Exchange. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person exchanges were put on hold, however during 2020 and 2021 'virtual conversations' were facilitated between CBOs to continue direct learning and experience sharing.



PHOTO: PAUL CHANDLER (COAST), SARAH RUSSELL (BERICKSHIRE MARINE RESERVE) AND MANUELA DE LOS RIOS (COAST) DURING A CCN COMMUNITY LEARNING EXCHANGE IN 2018 © SARAH RUSSELL

²⁹ <https://conbio.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/conl.12442> When conservation goes viral: The diffusion of innovative biodiversity conservation policies and practices.

³⁰ CCN did not exist at this time, and as such the CBOs FFI was supporting were not part of the Scottish Communities Alliance, or able to participate in the formal Community Learning Exchange.

³¹ <https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/community-learning-exchange>

2.3.2. CASE STUDY PRODUCTION FOR COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES

During the course of the project, FFI has provided in-depth case studies of conservation initiatives led CBOs in order to document and share their experiences.

Lamlash NTZ: Between 2014 to 2016, FFI’s Marine Community Support Officer compiled an extensive Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone Case Study³² in direct collaboration with (and on behalf of) COAST This was primarily for the purpose of capturing the legacy of COAST’s achievements for their own posterity. However, it was also identified as being important as creating a shareable resource which might be useful for other CBOs seeking to better understand how COAST’s grassroots movement achieved this significant outcome - and to perhaps inspire them to undertake similar grassroots efforts.

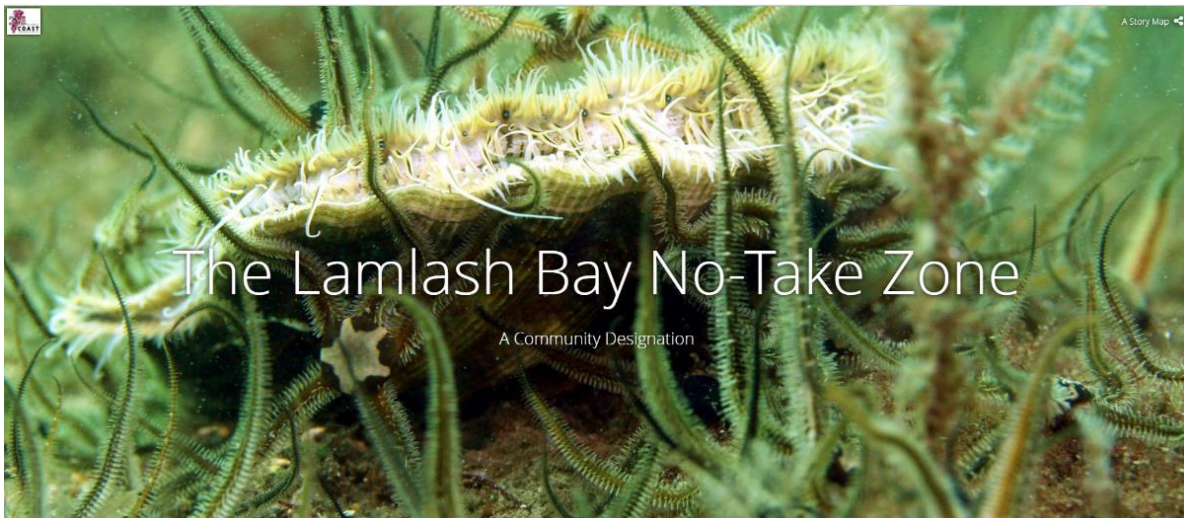


PHOTO: LAMLASH BAY NO-TAKE ZONE STORY MAP

Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA: During 2018 – 2020, FFI’s Marine Community Support Officer conducted thorough information gathering and produced a detailed document entitled ‘A Case Study of Demonstration & Research Marine Protected Area development in Scotland’. Through providing detail on the background and rationale behind the Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA, FIMETI’s key steps towards designation, the challenges the proposal came up against, and the solutions formed along the way, the paper aimed to help others who might be considering developing a Demonstration & Research MPA proposal.

The case study offers the key background on the Fair Isle Demonstration & Research MPA and its history and case for protection, it covers the key steps towards designation, outlines the proposal document and consultation processes, including the necessary negotiation and the development of a collective vision. It then details the current research focus and governance and implementation for the site. The case study proposed a key set of unique challenges and solutions which the Fair Isle case study presents, and produced a ‘check-list’ for others interested in developing a Demonstration & Research MPA. In 2022, the case study was built into the ‘Fair Isle DR MPA Research and Monitoring Plan 2022 – 2025’.

³² Whiteside, K (2017), ‘Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone’ Story Map, accessed via [Story Map Cascade \(arcgis.com\)](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/11111111-1111-1111-1111-111111111111).

2.3.3. ALIGNED POLICY RESPONSES

Though decisively not an active actor in the policy and advocacy field in Scotland, FFI was able, between 2014-2017, to provide additional capacity across the CBOs it was working with to enable them to formulate their own policy responses, in many cases for the first time. In some instances, FFI's role was solely to coordinate and pool responses written by CBOs, to enable them to share knowledge and coordinate positions. In other cases, where a CBO did not have the capacity or technical knowledge to respond directly to specific policy consultations, FFI's Marine Community Support Officer (now Community Support Specialist) produced relevant FFI policy responses which could be shared in advance with CBOs. FFI also produced occasional policy briefings on relevant legislation³³.

2.3.4. COMMUNITY-LED MARINE BIODIVERSITY MONITORING PROJECT

In 2016 FFI and NatureScot (then Scottish Natural Heritage) began to identify a growing desire being expressed from coastal communities to enhance their marine survey and data collection capabilities. During a 2017 co-hosted workshop, both partners scoped the existing skills, knowledge gaps and barriers to participation across the engaged CBOs. A shared project was then established by NatureScot and FFI which sought to directly increase community participation in marine biodiversity surveying in Scotland – focusing primarily on the emerging Coastal Communities Network membership. The ambition behind the project was to improve survey skills, provide more access to suitable equipment, and to support community-led survey planning, fieldwork and data storage and utilisation. The initiative sought to ensure that communities could engage in and lead, where they desire to, the full process of marine surveying. Ultimately, the project sought to ensure that scientifically-sound data and information can be collected by communities and utilised to influence decision-making and management.

Local communities might be interested in collecting data from their adjacent waters for myriad reasons, from helping to inform MPA management methods to creating robust baselines. An increasingly prevalent driver motivating local CBOs in Scotland to engage in community-led biodiversity monitoring has become their ambition to explore, and plan adequately for, marine restoration opportunities in their local waters.

The initiative to-date has engaged 16 of CCN's member CBO's, as well as 14 additional CBOs across Scotland. It has produced Scotland's first Community-led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Handbook³⁴, has explored and piloted, with communities, novel and community-friendly survey equipment and has facilitated peer-to-peer knowledge exchange. Modelled on the Community Support Fund, the project established a Community Group Equipment Fund³⁵ in 2020 to improve access to survey equipment, alongside bespoke survey advice and training, and has to-date granted a total of £33,600 supporting 20 projects.

³³ <https://www.communitiesforseas.scot/wp-content/uploads/Islands-Bill-write-up-for-CCN.pdf>

³⁴ [Community-led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Handbook | NatureScot.](#)

³⁵ [Community Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Equipment Fund | NatureScot](#)



PHOTO: BRYCE STEWART DURING COAST'S ANNUAL NO-TAKE ZONE SURVEYS © COAST

2.3.5. THE ARGYLL COAST & ISLANDS HOPE SPOT

During 2018 and 2019, with close facilitation from FFI, a small cohort of CBOs came together across the Argyll area to share information and knowledge and prepare an application for the UK's first ever Hope Spot to the international ocean conservation charity, Mission Blue. In June 2019, the Argyll Coast & Islands Hope Spot was successfully awarded. The Hope Spot covers c. 791km² – it follows the boundaries of Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura MPA, with some extensions to include other adjacent, or partially overlapping, Marine Protected Areas and Special Areas of Conservation. The Hope Spot calls for more effective management for marine protected areas within its boundaries and for the enforcement of the law to prevent illegal dredging of closed areas. It also aims to ensure the surrounding communities can fully appreciate the significant natural and cultural heritage values of their waters, and can realise opportunities for economic enhancement associated with these under-recognised assets. The area supports a wide range of species, from coastal specialists such as northern feather stars (*Leptometra celtica*) to deep water species such as the Critically Endangered flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius*). It is also renowned for supporting six species of cetaceans, including Risso's dolphins and humpback whales.

Through supporting the application process in 2018 and 2019 itself, to grant writing support in its initial phases of development, to promoting publicity of the award today, FFI works closely with the Hope Spot team to support them in maximising the Hope Spot award. Working closely with FFI to coordinate information and skills, the Hope Spot team successfully secured funds to employ a part-time project officer, to propel outreach and invite discussion with a wider set of communities in the Argyll region around marine conservation priorities. Whilst the Hope Spot doesn't hold statutory power, it displays a strong message of

the desires of, and value in, CBOs coming together to share their knowledge, skills and experiences, for the benefit of marine assets.



PHOTO: LOCH TEACUIS © JOHN AITCHISON

INFORMATION, SKILLS & EXPERIENCE SHARING - WHAT FFI HAS LEARNT?

- Producing the bespoke case studies took a significant amount of the Marine Community Support Officer's time, yet resulted in the production of important shareable resources for CBOs, and has been important in capturing the history of these initiatives, in the absence of other formal documentation. For example, the subsequent up-take by other CBOs of the Demonstration & Research MPA model is evidence of the value of capturing such experiences.
- Whilst it's more difficult to attribute impact to the sharing of and creation of policy responses, this kind of input from FFI helped to bolster a more formal route for community representation on key issues, which was particularly important for many CBOs in the earlier stages, without established relationships or other known routes to ensuring representation.
- We have learnt that both formal and informal ways to share information and experience are equally important – locally, formal information exchange can help with building a CBO's transparency, authenticity, and representivity; whereas informal information exchange, such as events or creating a 'buzz' or culture of exchange on particular areas of discussion, can help engender a stronger sense of common purpose and can help to define the ways in which a group can successfully negotiate and interact with their wider community.
- Direct peer-to-peer learning provided confidence in the value of and need for wider networking – as described below.

- Over time, the project's focus on 'information, skills & experience exchange' became absorbed into the other strands of the wider approach and it became harder to delineate this area of work (as reflected in changes to the original aims included in subsequent funding bids, which placed more emphasis on the Community Support Fund).

2.4. SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO COORDINATE SHARED ACTION

2.4.1. ESTABLISHING A BIENNIAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES' GATHERING

It was identified, from the initiation of the Marine Community Support Project, that it would be vital to design opportunities to bring groups together into a shared space, through a facilitated coastal community gathering (building on the success of COAST's 2010 symposium). Beyond this it was proposed that there could be value in a dedicated space for coastal groups to share their history and aspirations, largely for the first time, and to discuss marine conservation on their own terms. In May 2016 FFI, arranged a weekend venue (Gartmore House in Stirlingshire) to host the disparate community groups which the project was engaging with across Scotland, to share information and experiences with one another directly over a full weekend. 64 individuals, representing seven different community groups (the main constituency represented) attended, alongside a small host of NGOs, government representatives, MSPs and academics. Issues including MPAs, Crown Estate reform and the Community Empowerment Act (Scotland) 2015, were discussed, as well as facilitated sessions to open up conversation around the potential for communities to come together into some form of network.



PHOTO: REBECCA PLANT (FFI'S THEN 'PROJECT OFFICER, MARINE, SCOTLAND') AT 'GARTMORE 2' IN 2018 © FFI

The success of the first event led FFI to repeat the facilitation of the event again in 2018. It aimed to build on the success of the previous workshop, by bringing coastal community groups together again to share experiences and build collaboration. There were fifty-four individuals in attendance, including from eleven of the twelve CBOs that FFI was at that time engaged with, and a similar number of NGOs and government

representatives. A core focus of this second event was discussion around the burgeoning Coastal Communities Network, how the Network could function, and how a participatory design process could be taken forward. The main goal was for groups to identify shared issues and priorities, which they could work on together or support one another in.

The Covid-19 pandemic delayed the next workshop (Gartmore 3) from the planned date of March 2020, but groups were finally able to come together in October 2021. 64 individuals from 14 of 18 CCN member groups attended, alongside FFI staff, 'Friends of CCN', non-CCN community groups and representatives from NatureScot and SEPA. As well as continuing to provide a valuable space for communities to meet and share knowledge, the core focus of the third workshop was the future development of CCN, and priorities for action.

The 2021 workshop aimed to reflect on progress and successes since the initial meeting in 2016, provide a platform for local updates and thematic discussions and facilitate action planning for CCN. Ultimately, the main goal was to identify joint priorities for action and what CCN needs to deliver the desired outcomes. Further workshops are expected to be held biannually, with the fourth event taking place in May 2023.



PHOTO: ATTENDEES OF 'GARTMORE 2' IN 2018 © FFI

2.4.2. ESTABLISHING THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES NETWORK

From the start of the project FFI had considered there might be value in establishing some sort of network for communities (based on experience from other countries), but did not want to assume this would be the right solution for these groups. We needed to nurture and test the burgeoning relationships between individual CBOs, and explore the idea of a network in such a way that it was wholly owned by the groups themselves.

The lessons from the first two years of the Marine Community Support Project, alongside COAST’s insight and guidance, and reinforced further by previous FFI experience in places like Kenya and Tanzania, showed the inherent value of connecting nascent communities to each other, and the potential power of a members-led network. However, FFI actively did not want to be prescriptive to that model, instead facilitating shared working via whichever means suited the community groups best (including direct knowledge exchanges and cross-community workshops, as described above). In 2016, FFI began to facilitate discussions with the CBOs about whether there was appetite to find ways to better connect communities and support them in developing shared positions on key issues, and it was agreed that some formalised network would be an ideal solution. This became the focus of conversations at the first Gartmore meeting, where the groups represented saw the value of some form of structure to enable like-minded communities to connect directly with each other and develop common agendas for shared action.

Without any such infrastructure in place, FFI led a process to develop a suitable network platform, based on the aspirations of, and feedback from, the constituent community groups. Ultimately, this resulted in the development of the Coastal Communities Network (CCN), which currently (in 2022) brings together 21 CBOs. Although CCN seeks to work with a wide set of partners, those who make decisions on behalf of the Network are solely the coastal CBO members themselves – each defined by their own geographical location (communities-of-place).



MAP SHOWING THE LOCATIONS OF THE CURRENT (21) CCN MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

In 2017, FFI recruited a [project officer](#), with the remit of building a network, initially by creating an online hub, coordinating communication, and bringing enhanced organisation to the members' desires to coordinate action on key issues of concern. Directed by findings from the first two community workshops at Gartmore, FFI initially took on this central facilitation of the Network in a purposely light-touch fashion, to allow the space for emerging network functions and development to be directed by the members. The primary focus was to create dedicated convening spaces for discussion and shared resources, for shared learning through a series of emerging issue-based sub-groups, and active campaigning and representation to government.

During 2017, a [CCN website](#)³⁶ was launched, creating both the first shared, public, platform for the CBOs to come together under and the first trial of shared discussion spaces, with a closed members forum. During CCN's infancy, between 2017 – 2021, FFI was able to work to establish some of the governance mechanisms for CCN – for example, setting up subsidiary groups to make representation to government on a large number of issues, and developing a member joining process and a “Community Pledge” (where community member groups are asked to fulfil a set of specific criteria focused on attributes such as representivity, authenticity and governance). FFI invested in providing direct support to and development of the Network, whilst continuing to provide its wider bespoke support to individual communities, to meet their individual aspirations, via the ongoing Marine Community Support Officer (now Community Support Specialist) role.

Gartmore bi-annual gatherings provided a critical forum and opportunity for FFI to consult with member groups of CCN to receive their insights and guidance on shaping the future of the Network. For example, during ‘Gartmore 2’ in 2018, members requested some level of dedicated staffing for the Network. There was flexibility around whether this was a direct employee to the Network, an employee embedded in/seconded from another member organisation (i.e. a hosted coalition model), or a set of local project officers sitting with various network groups. It was generally agreed upon, however, that the Network would require paid staff to operate at a particular level and to drive forward future actions or ideas, and therefore FFI was mandated to search for additional funding for such a role.

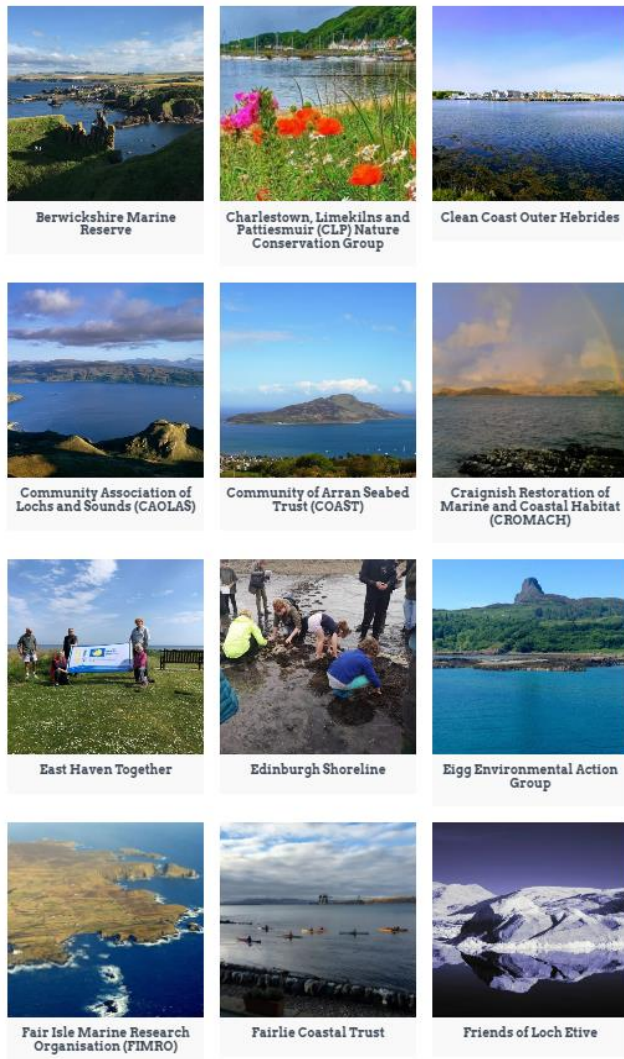
In 2021, FFI worked with members to develop a central ‘[CCN Advisory Group](#)’, to embed more independent direction within the Network. In 2022, this is made up of seven members from across CCN, and the main purpose of the Advisory Group is to provide advice and guidance on the strategic direction of CCN, its priorities, and to provide technical input on local and other matters of relevance to CCN members. The Advisory Group is not a decision-making body, with decisions being taken through consensus by the collective membership of the Network, (with input and guidance from the Advisory Group, where needed).

In 2021 FFI secured the necessary funding to recruit a [dedicated CCN Coordinator](#). This role was secured in 2022 and effectively repositioned FFI coordination to CCN in a more arms-length way (giving more scope for the CCN Advisory Board to direct activities that were previously provided by FFI's project officer). While FFI currently supports the Network by hosting this central coordination role, the model is based upon a long-term goal of increasing Network independence, with the ambition for CCN to develop a separate governance and management structure.

³⁶ www.communitiesforseas.scot

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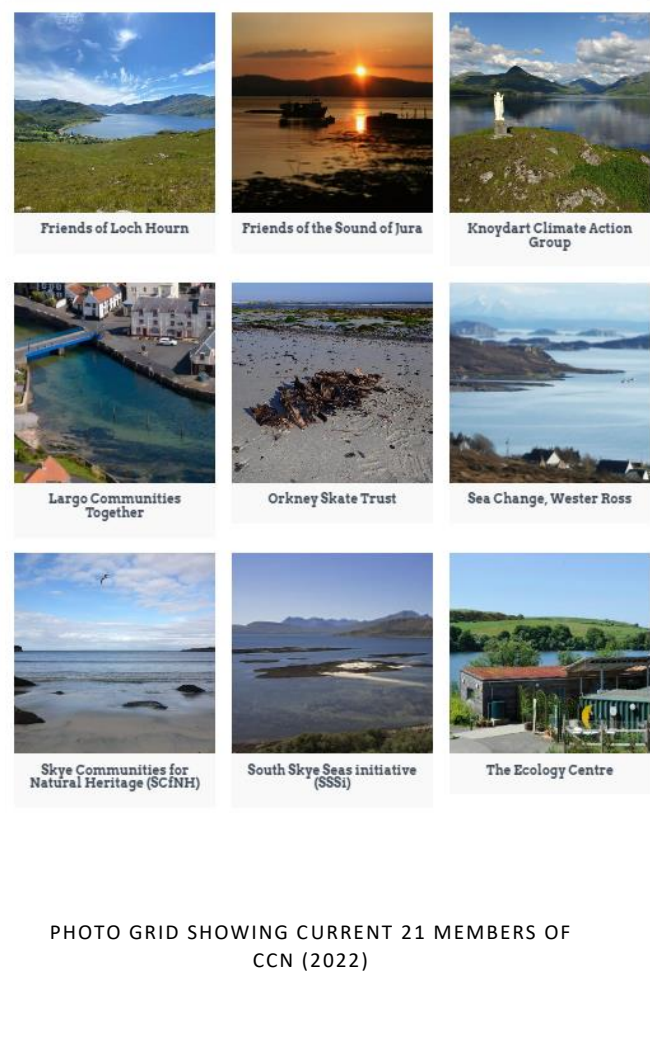


PHOTO GRID SHOWING CURRENT 21 MEMBERS OF CCN (2022)

2.4.3. SHARED POLICY RESPONSES

During the life of the project, FFI has played a necessary coordination role in bringing together relevant and interested CBOs who wish to create a shared position on particular marine policy issues. Before CCN's establishment, this was done on an ad-hoc basis and, in the initial stages, was largely focused around the Scottish Government's designation of inshore Nature Conservation MPAs. Since 2017, after CCN's formal establishment, other important shared policy interests started to emerge, such as those around salmon farming regulation, kelp dredging, and wider marine management. CCN have submitted responses to policy consultations on a wide range of topics including regional marine planning, wild seaweed harvesting, the national planning framework and the National marine plan³⁷. Though decisively not an active actor in the policy and advocacy field in Scotland, FFI was able to provide the necessary capacity needed to

³⁷ Since 2018 CCN has formulated responses to: Working to deliver economic transformation 2021, National Marine Plan review 2021, National planning framework 2021/22, Regional Marine Planning 2019, Joint Fisheries Statement 2022, Red Rocks & Longay MPA 2022, Future of fisheries management 2019, Mobile MPAs 2019, Environmental Principles and Governance in Scotland 2019, Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan 2018, SEPA consultation on the use of biomass or feed to regulate the organic output from marine pen fish farming to the environment 2019, UKTAG Proposed Biological and Environmental Standards for River Basin Planning 2019, Wild seaweed harvesting 2018, Wild Wrasse Harvesting 2020.

coordinate and pool knowledge across CBOs, to enable them to formulate shared policy responses, in many cases for the first time. This has enabled CCN to enter meetings with policy officials to advocate their shared positions.

CCN's sub-groups emerged from 2018 onwards; the first group coalesced when a handful of active CCN members started to actively work together to discuss issues relating to salmon farming. The emergence of these sub-groups³⁸ has been organic and in reaction to specific concerns arising. In 2022, with the CCN Coordinator in place, a shift to 'forums' began, refreshing the 'sub-group' model, bringing in new forums and assessing the effectiveness of existing sub-groups. CCN currently has three forums, based on aquaculture, marine restoration, and marine plastics. The CCN aquaculture forum has established itself as a particularly active and dynamic group, that has harnessed the power of a combined voice to engage with government and industry bodies on shared concerns around open-net salmon farming.

CCN's Aquaculture Forum

Members of the CCN aquaculture forum have held official meetings with government agencies and Ministers and currently sit on the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency's Finfish Advisory Panel (a multi-sectoral technical steering group). They have provided technical advice at Parliamentary Hearings and during independent regulatory reviews. Members independently maintain resources such as a monthly planning application tracker and a community salmon farming website. The forum also actively engages with other stakeholders, including internationally with the Global Salmon Farming Resistance (GSFR) coalition.

CCN's Restoration Forum

The CCN restoration forum was established in 2022 following several new CBOs joining the Network in response to their interest in the restoration of native oysters and seagrass. Monthly calls take place during which members and others come together to discuss their shared opportunities and challenges. The Forum has developed a shared vision for community-led marine restoration in Scotland, which states:

'Our vision is for a Scotland-wide network of community-based groups leading marine habitat restoration projects, which deliver benefits for both nature, climate and people, now and for future generations, including sustainable livelihood opportunities, food security, and community empowerment.'

CCN's Marine Plastics Forum

The CCN Marine Plastics Forum emerged in response to a number of CCN groups and associated members being actively engaged in beach cleaning and other campaign activities related to the issue of marine plastic pollution. The Forum was recently granted a place in the Marine Litter Strategy Steering Group and engaged with the Scottish Government's Circular Economy consultation process.

³⁸ Former sub-groups: i) aquaculture ii) community-led monitoring iii) climate emergency iv) seabed reform v) seaweed harvesting vi) Argyll Coast & Islands Hope Spot vii) native oyster and seagrass restoration.



EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY 'OCEAN LEADERS' FIELD MISSION TO CCN MEMBERS IN 2022 © ALAN MUNRO

SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES TO COORDINATE SHARED ACTION – WHAT FFI HAS LEARNT?

- The importance of organising the biannual community gathering (“Gartmore”) cannot be underestimated. Formal and informal feedback from these events reveals an overwhelmingly positive impact across community group members, with an increased sense of connection to one another, in some cases a real revelation in finding like-minded individuals, an increased feeling of empowerment (as related to taking direct action for conservation), and increased levels of knowledge and understanding of key issues and shared routes forward.
- There is great value in a network operating cohesively, where relevant, but Gartmore sessions have affirmed CCN members aspiration to retain their independent focus at the local level. This has guided FFI in maintaining CCN as a mechanism to enhance the individual agendas of each of its constituent members – which is ultimately the impetus for organisations to join CCN.
- Initially the exchange of experience and information was largely delivered through the Marine Community Support Officer’s role but this shifted, at a pace much quicker than expected, into facilitating much more diverse peer-to-peer exchange amongst a wider number of CBOs. FFI was able to quickly establish strong commonalities between COAST and similar CBOs, who would eventually become CCN members.
- Sub-groups/forums only work if there is a critical mass of interest from the ground, with members themselves driving information exchange. This is currently only evident within CCN’s Aquaculture Forum. If this doesn’t exist, the time necessary to drive these groupings is prohibitive.
- Gartmore discussions revealed that community groups currently see the Network’s main role as enabling the sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences (e.g. survey work), but also offering an important route for petitioning the Government on important issues.
- Over time we have had the scope to trial different cross-group communications tools (including an initial private chat room function which wasn’t used effectively), a Facebook page (which proved more successful in engaging members) and a Twitter account. As well as group emails, we continue to trial new communication platforms, utilising emerging new software (such as ‘Slack’) and but it is evident that emails will continue to act as the preferred method of communication for many. However, over the period of Covid-19 we have seen a significant shift to CBOs readily using video

calls, which has created a new set of opportunities for interim cross-group working, and we recognise the important of regularly reviewing and testing new communications solutions.

- The recruitment of the CCN Coordinator enabled FFI to create some space between itself and CCN, and to finally start having more of its own profile and voice in Scotland - without the risk of dominating community agendas, now with CCN established. It also enabled a reorganisation of roles within the FFI Scotland team, with the evolution of separate Community Support Specialist (previously the Marine Community Support Officer) and Project Manager (previously the Project Officer) roles. This has in turn enabled FFI to develop more external facing engagements, beyond the marine space, and to start to engage on issues in our own right (rather than aligning all engagement alongside CCN).
- FFI has purposefully kept its own operations in Scotland relatively lean, and focused on offering strategic, mentoring, financial and technical input into the CBOs and CCN directly. This reflects the ethos that, to achieve conservation at scale, conservation organisations can often make the highest impact by providing the resources and tools for local communities to define, establish and build their own conservation methods and deliver work directly themselves, on their own terms.



PHOTO: BALLAN WRASSE © COAST

3. BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IMPACT (RESULTS)

The nature of the support that is leveraged through FFI's community support work in Scotland is often subtle and focused on empowering others to identify and take forward their own efforts to bring about positive conservation change. It is thus challenging for FFI to claim our own organisational impact in this space. Although final biodiversity outcomes (in terms of species and habitat recovery) can take decades to become clear, the project has adopted interim impact metrics, not just linked to biodiversity (recovery or threat reduction) but also linked to social and political indicators of change. These include organisational capacity building, governmental influence, improvements in equity and/or representation of CBOs, self-sufficiency (both individual and community-level capacity building – including agency and social cohesion). The FFI Scotland team has mapped these metrics to longer-term conservation outcomes through the

project's Theory of Change. The team has also captured both formal and anecdotal information on perceptions of community members (including feeling more or better supported, feeling better able to reach out to others, and feeling more able to achieve aims) since engaging in the project, through partner surveys. We have, therefore, identified a number of key markers of specific biodiversity conservation success since 2011. FFI doesn't claim full ownership over these successes, but we can evidence our contribution to these impacts via links to specific FFI interventions.

3.1. INCREASING MARINE SPATIAL PROTECTION WITHIN THE FIRTH OF CLYDE VIA THE COMMUNITY OF ARRAN SEABED TRUST (COAST)

COAST's 2.67km² No-Take Zone, secured in 2008, acts as a critical demonstration of natural regeneration and seabed recovery, if left undisturbed from anthropogenic impact. Important habitats and species within the Lamlash Bay NTZ include maerl, seagrass, Atlantic cod, curled octopus and European lobster. FFI's funding of PhD research, which explored impacts on scallop and lobster populations within the No-Take Zone, helped to provide the necessary scientific evidence to underpin COAST's wider case for marine protection locally. Subsequently, FFI's organisational development support during 2012-2014 enabled COAST to progress as a representative local charity.

In 2014 the South Arran MPA was designated, bringing 282 km² under statutory management, ten times the size of the No-Take Zone. Whilst FFI did not have direct involvement in the proposal and designation of the site (beyond supporting PhD research), the strategic support FFI was able to deliver to COAST helped it achieve numerous aims which brought it closer to achieving this larger milestone. Primarily, through a close partnership with FFI, in 2014, COAST secured long-held ambitions to build a wider, national, community conservation movement that would bring positive benefit to inshore waters beyond the waters of Arran and critically gave COAST the scope to continue to focus their own efforts on safeguarding their own local Firth of Clyde.

"FFI has provided a wealth of professional expertise to COAST and helped us make the transition (in 2012) from being entirely run by volunteers to becoming a functioning Charity and Company limited by guarantee with staff." (COAST, 2017)

"It [FFI] has helped us move forward at a critical time of setting up of community support for MPAs. Without FFI input this would not have been achieved for many more years. It has helped balance the stakeholder involvement in Scotland. Something that has lagged decades behind many other countries." (COAST, 2017)

"While we knew there were many individuals and communities around Scotland with similar ambitions to COAST. This had been suppressed by how the Scottish Government managed the seas. Which at that point was 100% commercial fishing focused. FFI was instrumental in the founding of CCN which gave communities a voice, it empowered them to propose a wide range of projects to recover our seas, but just as importantly allowed us a stronger voice to hold Government to account for its decisions, or lack of them." (COAST, 2022)

3.2. BRINGING FAIR ISLE'S WATERS UNDER COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT VIA THE FAIR ISLE DEMONSTRATION & RESEARCH MPA



PHOTO: ROCK-POOLING IN FAIR ISLE AT 'MUCKLE URI GEO' IN 2022 © MARTHA THOMSON

The role that FFI was able to play in providing support to the Fair Isle DR MPA, as a mediator and facilitator, offered light-touch, but strategic and unlocking, support in enabling a small community to deliver their own self-determined conservation goals. In 2016, the Fair Isle community secured the designation of a Scotland's first (and still only) DR MPA, bringing approximately 145 km² (14,500 hectares) under conservation management and allowing new research and testing of locally-led interventions. This had long been their aspiration, but efforts to date, before FFI's support, had not secured local management of any kind. By bringing dedicated technical skills and time to develop the DR MPA proposal and establish key relationships, FFI staff helped to turn this vision into reality. Members of the Fair Isle community have confirmed that this outcome is unlikely to have been achieved without FFI engagement at this critical time.

Key species within this site include Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisaea*), Atlantic puffin (*Fratercula arctica*), Black-legged kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*), Great skua (*Stercorarius skua*), Arctic skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), Orcas (*Orcinus orca*), and soft corals such as *Alcyonium digitatum*. Whilst no specific spatial management is currently in place within the DR MPA boundary, the Steering Group are working towards implementing a shellfish management plan and finfish management plan, as required by the Fair Isle DR MPA Designation Order.

“A partnership. FFI opens doors a small island community could not have done on its own. FFI has...refined the Fair Isle proposal and brought to it technical expertise we lacked, and brought on board stakeholders who were previously unwilling to engage. These elements were barriers the isle community had not previously been able to overcome.” (FIMETI, 2015)

“The role of FFI in breaking down barriers was crucial in this change [securing the Fair Isle DR MPA] - not least because we did not have the resources, time nor finances, to engage in meetings and other direct communications in mainland Scotland. Much of that burden was taken on by FFI.” (FIMETI 2017)

“FFI provided invaluable support and mentorship in a crucial stage of the DR MPA programme development, particularly on how to reengage the community and wider stakeholders with the project after a series of unforeseen events and delays” (DR MPA Project Officer, 2022)

“It is impossible to overstate the importance of FFI support to the Fair Isle drMPA project over the years. The expertise and funding support given by FFI have been critical in each step of the process, but the relationship with FFI has also been a crucial source of support and encouragement to community members in persevering with the project. Their experience of relationship building and working with small community organisations has been instrumental for good working relationships within the Steering Committee, a key feature of the drMPA.” (FIMRO, 2022)

3.3. RESTORING NATIVE OYSTERS AND SEAGRASS AND DEVELOPING LOCALLY-LED MANAGEMENT IN LOCH CRAIGNISH VIA CROMACH

Via initially supporting the formation of CROMACH, FFI has supported the establishment of community-led projects in Loch Craginish, now delivering notable biodiversity conservation gains. Loch Craginish has now seen approx. 300,000 native oysters placed on the seabed (with another 700,000 to follow) and approx. ¼ hectare of seagrass planted by CROMACH’s sister-organisation, Seawilding. Seawilding has been pioneering community-led techniques to native oyster restoration, and more laterally seagrass restoration, since 2020. Native oysters declined 95% in the UK since the mid-19th century, largely as a result of historic over-harvesting, and are now near-extinct in Scottish sea lochs, where they were once abundant.

FFI has been supporting both CROMACH and Seawilding in developing their native oyster and seagrass monitoring skills in a variety of ways including organisational support (to CROMACH during its set-up), peer and networking support (e.g. establishment of the CCN Marine Restoration Forum; facilitating shared learning with the Fair Isle MPA) and financial support to CROMACH and Seawilding (via a Community Support Fund grant in 2021 for Seawilding to develop and more widely disseminate native oyster and biodiversity training modules). Critically, in 2022, with funding and technical support from FFI, CROMACH is now taking forward an application for a Loch Craginish Demonstration & Research MPA, to ensure there is a locally-led management framework in place for the loch and it’s restored biodiversity.

*“FFI have offered tremendous support and encouragement in getting CROMACH up and running.”
(CROMACH, 2017)*

“We now have an active local group with a large membership and an ongoing programme of activities to raise awareness and educate all ages in the local community and visitors to the area. We are establishing monitoring activities and base line data which can be used for measuring changes and to inform policy makers.” (CROMACH, 2017)

“CROMACH and Seawilding would not be here without FFI.” (CROMACH, 2022)

“CCN has amplified the concerned voice of communities. Before, we had very little representation at the marine policy table, but now, under the CCN banner, we get a chance to voice our opinion and to be taken seriously...” (Seawilding, 2022)

“CCN embodies an immense powerhouse of knowledge across Scotland. It has been so helpful to meet like-minded people and to learn from others.” (Seawilding 2022)

“A D&R MPA will be a game-changer for Loch Craignish. It will enable all the stakeholders to work together to improve the health and biodiversity of the Loch. FFI has done much to facilitate this. We are very grateful to them...” (CROMACH, 2022)

3.4. RESTORING NATIVE OYSTERS IN LOCH ALINE VIA CAOLAS



PHOTO: JUVENILE NATIVE OYSTERS AT LOCHALINE PONTOON 2021 © CAOLAS

In 2021 CAOLAS received funding from FFI to grow native oysters suspended in baskets on the Loch Aline pontoons, to restore the local native oyster population and to help regenerate the local marine habitat.

Up to 20,000 native oysters will be grown in suspended cages beneath the floating pontoons until sufficiently mature and then released onto the Loch Aline seabed in areas where they were formerly found. The cages would then be replenished to grow more native oysters and the cycle repeated. During pre-release surveys of the area to identify the best release sites, CAOLAS has also discovered living native oysters, indicating there is viable capacity for the area to host this species again. In summer 2022 CAOLAS released the native oysters which had spent the last 10 months growing into their release site within Loch Aline, at Miodar Bay off the shores of Ardtornish Estate. The hope now is for them now to start forming biogenic reefs and improve the biodiversity of the loch and CAOLAS will be actively monitoring progress, through their community volunteers, as trained by Seawilding.

As well as directly funding the Loch Aline native oyster project (alongside others), FFI also provides ongoing support to CAOLAS in this work via providing mentorship (through FFI's Community Support Specialist, Scotland) to CAOLAS' 'Marine Community Officer' who manages the native oyster project.

"Our organisation would not have been able to set itself up without FFI's initial support and enthusiasm and we would have achieved nothing." (CAOLAS, 2017)

"FFI have been invaluable in helping us get our local marine conservation group off the ground and have supported us every step of the way as we have grown. Without their expertise, facilitation of the Coastal Communities Network (CCN) and community grants, CAOLAS would not have had the positive impact on the protection and conservation of our marine protected areas or the local community involvement it enjoys today." (CAOLAS, 2022)

3.5. ENHANCING PROTECTION TO CETACEANS IN SCOTLAND'S INSHORE WATERS VIA THE COORDINATED ACTION OF THE COASTAL COMMUNITIES NETWORK



PHOTO: HARBOUR PORPOISE © SEALIFE ADVENTURES

Through FFI establishing CCN, the increased organisational capacity and presence of ‘pro-conservation’ coastal CBOs in Scotland has increased, bringing about a much higher rate of participation in both statutory and political forums, where such CBOs were traditionally finding it difficult to garner influence.

A prime example of this has been CCN’s ‘behind-the-scenes’ work regarding the Scottish Government’s allowance of Acoustic Deterrent Devices (ADDs) at salmon farms. The policy work³⁹ (including a legal complaint to the European Commission from active CCN members David and Jean Ainsley) which concerned the failure of Marine Scotland to enforce Habitats Regulation 39(2) under which it is an offence to disturb any porpoise, dolphin, or whale. There is very clear scientific evidence that all ADDs cause disturbance and can cause hearing injury.

This campaign, and associated work⁴⁰, came to fruition in 2020, with the Scottish Parliament passing legislation requiring the reporting and licensing for the use of ADDS (or ‘seal scarers’) by the fish farming industry. This was the first step on the way to these devices being regulated by the Government, for the benefit of cetaceans. No fish farms currently hold licences for ADD use. However, further investigation from CCN members revealed the illegal use of ADDs were still in operation across the inshore area. CCN members therefore set up an ‘ADD Watch’ movement, which saw organised local volunteers drop hydrophones into the water to detect any auditory evidence of active ADDs.

During 2021 CCN then brought its concerns around the continued illegal use of the ‘seal scarers’ to the new Environmental Standards Scotland⁴¹, who began to investigate the case. In August 2022, Environmental Standards Scotland produced a case report (the first report of its kind from the new body), following a detailed referral to Environmental Standards Scotland made in November 2021 by Guy Linley-Adams Solicitor acting for CCN. The referral detailed the Scottish Government’s failure to ensure the fish farming industry complied with the Habitats Regulations when allowing the industry to use ADDs and alleged that Marine Scotland’s investigation and enforcement actions were insufficient.

Since the representation was made to Environmental Standards Scotland, Marine Scotland has introduced more inspections and has moved away from allowing the industry to self-regulating its use of ADDs. Most importantly, the referral to the Environmental Standards Scotland has meant that fish farmers, if they use an ADD anywhere in Scotland, either need to apply and receive a European Protected Species licence under the Habitats Regulations or they need to prove that a licence is not required.⁴²

One of the conditions for granting a licence is that there has to be no satisfactory alternative to using ADDs. However, many fish farms in Scotland and around the world do not use ADDs instead they use either double skinned anti-predator nets or stronger single nets which are adequate to keep seals and salmon separated. Therefore, no competent authority could grant a licence for the use of ADDs as there are satisfactory alternatives already being used. In the summer of 2022 a fish farm company has applied for EPS licences, CCN has written a detailed objection.

³⁹ [Fairlie Coastal: A manifest Breach of EIA legislation - CCN Scotland \(communitiesforseas.scot\)](https://www.comunitiesforseas.scot/)

⁴⁰ [Petition · SAVE DOLPHINS, PORPOISES AND SEALS FROM SCOTTISH SALMON FARMS · Change.org](https://www.change.org/p/save-dolphins-porpoises-and-seals-from-scottish-salmon-farms)

⁴¹ Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) is a public sector body, set up as a non-ministerial office, independent of Scottish Government, and accountable to the Scottish Parliament: www.environmentalstandards.scot/.

⁴² [An end to the unlawful use of Acoustic Deterrent Devices - CCN Scotland \(communitiesforseas.scot\)](https://www.comunitiesforseas.scot/)

“The Coastal Communities Network has proved invaluable. Working with likeminded people motivated to restoring our marine environment has been a huge privilege and has made all the difference in this particular campaign.” Sealife Adventures

“The pleasure of acting for community groups is that you have a client which knows its patch so well. In the case of CCN and the salmon farm work it does, the individuals involved are completely immersed in the detail. It would be completely wrong to assume, as is often the case with Government and regulators, that community groups in some way cannot understand or handle the detail of the law or policy. In my experience, community groups understand and handle the detail of the law or policy far better than Government and regulators, with civil servants in offices far removed from the action”. Guy Linley-Adams Solicitor

4. CONCLUSIONS AND WIDER RELEVANCE

4.1. WHAT IS THE ROLE FOR COMMUNITIES IN SCOTLAND’S MARINE CONSERVATION SECTOR TODAY?



PHOTO: CCN MEMBERS AT ‘GARTMORE 3’ (2021) © FFI

It is clear, to FFI and our partners, that coastal communities now have a stronger voice in the marine conservation sector in Scotland, and as a result are able to drive impacts for nature, and for their own communities, that would not be realised through projects driven by external agencies. A grassroots infrastructure, such as that provided by CCN, did not exist prior to FFI and COAST’s intervention in this space and the establishment of this forum has played a critical part in providing a shared platform for joined up community action. As a result, this has driven on-the-ground change for nature, as described above (section 3).

This approach has also offered validation to nascent CBOs, and built morale across individuals and groups, united in their shared interests. Establishing functional, effective and independent community organisations, working towards their own local and national nature conservation agendas, can be shown to bring about positive change for biodiversity (as evidenced by the implementation of community-led MPAs; the diversity of natural regen and active reintroduction projects led by CBOs; and peer-coordinated legal action bringing about protection for marine wildlife). Due to this, concerted political action has been facilitated and inroads are being made into policy debates around issues covering salmon farming, kelp dredging, destructive and/or illegal fishing, and ‘marine rewilding’.

However, whilst CBOs are increasing their impact and gaining access to resources, national policy action and implementation on critical issues, such as Marine Protected Areas, in contrast, appears to be lagging and uptake of non-state led sites, such as Demonstration & Research MPAs, has been slow⁴³. Communities continue to witness gaps in the ways in which public agencies, particularly Marine Scotland, are regulating industry – with unfulfilled critical policy commitments around fisheries regulation, such as those within Marine Protected Areas and Vessel Monitoring Systems. Community institutions are still under-represented in decision-making forums, whilst equivalent models from elsewhere in the UK (such as England’s Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities) appear to offer more opportunity for more diverse and localised stakeholders to influence marine policy and management⁴⁴. Thus, there is clearly still significant opportunity for the energy, knowledge and vision of local community groups to be applied in this space.

Systemically, though, funding input into community-led conservation initiatives has significantly shifted in Scotland in recent years, with funds such as the Nature Restoration Fund and the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund. The impact that locally-focused CBOs can have with funding input was recognised in 2022, when COAST performed highly in the Environmental Funders Network ranking of UK environmental organisations achieving the most relative to their resources by income⁴⁵. The significant investment and impact that Seawilding has leveraged in more recent years around community-led restoration (of native oysters and seagrass) has also re-exhilarated the community marine conservation space and provided an exciting community-led concept for these approaches⁴⁶.

4.2. TRANSLATABILITY OF FFI’S COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH TO TERRESTRIAL CONTEXTS IN SCOTLAND

Local communities hold essential knowledge of their natural environments and have a vital stake and mandate to drive forward effective locally-led conservation, which can also be aligned to bring about national impact upon conservation decision-making. The work of communities is a valid and necessary counterpoint to more traditional governmental and NGO approaches to conservation and restoration, and has sparked innovation in this space (such as community-driven oyster and seagrass restoration).

FFI’s work with coastal communities has demonstrated the power of bringing geographically dispersed communities together to share their experiences and aspirations, and solve conservation challenges

⁴³ Although, in 2022, it is now picking up pace, see: <https://sites.google.com/make-do.studio/codesign-lochcraignish-drmpa/about>

⁴⁴ Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust, (2018). The Reform of Regional Inshore Fishery Groups, SIFT Position Paper. Accessed via: <https://sift.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Reform-of-RIFGs-SIFT-December-2018.pdf>

⁴⁵ [Environmental Funders Network - What the Green Groups Said 2021 - Environmental Funders Network \(greenfunders.org\)](https://www.greenfunders.org/)

⁴⁶ https://www.fauna-flora.org/app/uploads/2022/02/FFI_2022_Marine_Restoration_in_Scotland.pdf

collectively. We have subsequently been asking ourselves how translatable this approach might be to conserving Scotland's terrestrial environments.

Across Scotland, a once heavily wooded landscape is now denuded, overgrazed, and largely utilised for agriculture and hunting estates. In certain areas, large-scale land-use initiatives are making gains for biodiversity but these are often led by government bodies, NGOs, or are at the discretion of private land owners, with local communities rarely at the heart of conservation decision-making, despite their clear role in bringing about locally-appropriate solutions.

FFI has delivered scoping and consultation work since 2019 and has identified an opportunity and potential value in further expanding an explicitly community-led approach to conservation in Scotland, including increasing community support facilities beyond coastal communities. Through FFI's discussions with inland communities (and coastal communities working on terrestrial projects) in Scotland, we have identified that many face a similar set of obstacles in driving forward change.



PHOTO: RED SQUIRREL IN OAKWOOD © PHILLIP PRICE

These are often, too, the same hurdles that face coastal groups regarding marine conservation, and which direct support from FFI helped them to overcome. These include, for example, access to appropriate specific habitat or species management knowledge or information, difficulties in navigating and influencing local and national planning processes, or a lack of opportunities to align conservation and local development opportunities.

Within all of this, we see leveraging support for CBO development as being critical to ensuring groups are well positioned and have the long-term effectiveness to deliver local conservation goals – be it establishing appropriate structures (such as setting up independent community group), developing local mandates, and ensuring representivity, accessing start-up funding and/or developing wider fundraising skills and strategies. There is a rich and active terrestrial conservation sector active in Scotland, and thus FFI only seeks to add value to this sector, by bringing our explicit investment into community-based organisations and their localised conservation objectives.

4.3. WIDER APPLICABILITY OF FFI'S COMMUNITY SUPPORT APPROACH IN OTHER UK CONTEXTS

FFI's Marine Community Support Project, and in particular FFI's facilitation role in the establishment of the Coastal Communities Network, provides a case study of community-led conservation in Scotland. There is now demonstrable evidence in place to support the case for how bespoke direct support, along with mutual sharing of community learning and experience, empowers community groups to deliver direct nature protection and to influence the decisions that impact their environment. We believe that this model could also be the basis for wider replication across other regions and devolved nations within the UK, and formal experience sharing has already taken place. For example, between 2017 and 2018, FFI shared learning from FFI's work in Scotland within a project called project 'Agents of Change' (led by the marine Conservation Society and funded under the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's 'Marine CoLAB' initiative), which focused on supporting local communities along the Sussex and Norfolk coasts to take leadership in marine conservation and management.

Political contexts and local appetites for community-led conservation will vary across the UK, however, coupled with the lessons learned from other initiatives, shared learning from FFI's work in Scotland and internationally could be a valuable addition to ongoing conservation endeavours within the British Isles. However, as with any of our projects, local understanding of contexts, including all-important political contexts, will be vital from the start. FFI was very aware in entering into support for community-led conservation in Scotland that assumptions would be made about our role and intentions as an international, non-governmental organisation, head-quartered in Cambridge – which, without careful handling, could have undermined the effectiveness of our work and the clear independence of the community groups that we worked with. Set against this backdrop, it was pivotal that FFI designed a project in Scotland without an overt agenda, that focused on supporting communities on the ground to meaningfully follow their own aspirations and participate in marine resource decision-making on their own terms and to their own agendas, and to build from what was already forged on the ground from existing CBOs in Scotland – i.e. COAST. Our role was to add what communities identified as the missing pieces – direct support and additional technical capacity, the mechanisms necessary for a wider set of CBOs to connect to one another, to strengthen their shared voice and thereby to influence wider community mobilisation and policy change.



PHOTO: FFI ARGYLL NATURE TRIP 2022 © KERRI WHITESIDE

4.4. CAN CO-MANAGEMENT APPROACHES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH ADD VALUE TO THE GLOBAL NORTH?

Nature conservation in the UK is much less explicitly aligned towards paradigms of ‘community-based conservation’ and integrated community-led conservation, as compared to many African or Asian countries, for example, where these models have been common-place for decades. Furthermore, exponential industrial development and GDP growth in the Global North has created socio-economic systems which cannot be compared to indigenous cultures elsewhere. In the Global South, there is fervent debate around the role of communities, indigenous people, traditional knowledge and land tenure and/or rights, with traditional conservation often being interpreted as “fortress conservation” by which rural people were excluded from their lands. However, shared management approaches to natural resources, such as ‘co-management’, are widely tested and accepted within various political structures, and FFI has worked in these contexts for decades (see pages 5 and 6).

At least in Scotland, there is a centrality of discussion around land rights and tenure⁴⁷, to enable communities to realise sustainable visions for their landscapes. Aspects of tenure can be secured via formal land purchase or via other formalised arrangements which bring about community involvement in conservation governance, as well as aligned goals such as livelihood security, communication and trust

⁴⁷ “Tenure over natural resources refers to the social relations, institutions, and rules that govern people’s access to and use of land, water, and natural resources.” Courtney, C.A. & Jhaveri, N.J. (2017). *Marine Tenure and Small-scale Fisheries: A Sourcebook on Good Practices and Emerging Themes*. Washington, DC: USAID Tenure and Global Climate Change Program. Accessed via: <https://land-links.org/tool-resource/marine-tenure-and-small-scale-fisheries-a-sourcebook-on-good-practices-and-emerging-themes/>

between different agencies⁴⁸. Due to historical and current patterns of land ownership in Scotland, land rights remain politically contentious and sensitive, and FFI remains committed to a purposefully apolitical agenda. However, we do envisage a future where the opportunities for community conservation leadership can be realised via diverse management options – this would include land ownership, but also not be tied to ownership, per se. We see co-management⁴⁹ as an important approach in this regard – whether between communities and government, or communities and private land owners.

Co-management is a much less widely referred to resource management approach in the UK⁵⁰, despite ‘community engagement’ and ‘stakeholder participation’ being widely upheld as a vital component to successful conservation delivery. It is clear that there is a, largely untapped, wealth of co-management experiences and knowledge bases which the Global North can learn from the Global South. Referring back to Arnstein’s ladder of participation, it is evident that many of the current conservation approaches in the UK context tend to focus on informing and consultation, with regards to local communities, rather than investment into partnership delivery, or the genuine enabling of power shifts which might lead to delegation and/or citizen control.

It’s time to move beyond this, and towards governance and management systems where nuanced, ground-up, methods of community-led conservation and co-management are realised within UK settings - thus releasing the true potential of locally-led biodiversity management.

⁴⁸ Davis, A., & Goldman, M. (2019). Beyond payments for ecosystem services: Considerations of trust, livelihoods and tenure security in community-based conservation projects. *Oryx*, 53(3), 491-496. doi:10.1017/S0030605317000898

⁴⁹ Co-management (i.e. collaborative management) of natural resources is recognised as an inherent inter-relationship between people and natural resources, built upon local knowledge and skills, with local communities creating and constructing themselves around a body of natural resources that they could manage together. See Borrini-Feyerabend, G., *Co-management of Natural Resources: Organising, Negotiating and Learning by Doing*, IUCN, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 2000

⁵⁰ NB: ‘co-production’ is increasingly referred to in Scotland as a solution for bringing local communities and institutions into statutory decision-making, since the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services in 2011.

**TIMELINE OF FFI'S MARINE COMMUNITY SUPPORT WORK IN SCOTLAND
 (SIGNIFICANT MILESTONES)**

2008	Lamlash Bay No-Take Zone designated.
2010	Marine Act (Scotland) enacted and MPA process launched.
2010	COAST host coastal community symposium.
2011	FFI first engages with the University of York and COAST and starts to support Leigh Howarth's PhD, via the direction of Dr Abigail Entwistle (FFI's Senior Conservation Director).
2011	Selection guidelines for developing MPAs published by Marine Scotland.
2011	The Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative (FIMETI) submits its Demonstration and Research MPA proposal.
2012	In May 2012, The Scottish Government also released a Clyde Ecosystem Review, acknowledging the significant change in the ecosystem and stating the need for a different management solution in future.
2012	COAST submits South Arran MPA proposal, along with wider list of MPA selections.
2012	FFI provides ongoing technical, strategic and institutional advice and problem solving to SIFT and COAST via Abigail Entwistle.
2013	List of 30 network MPAs published and MPA consultation process begins.
2014	MPA management consultation process launched by Scottish Government.
2014	Marine Community Support Project launched and Kerri Whiteside is recruited as the Marine Community Support Officer, with Abigail Entwistle as line-manager (and Howard Wood acting as an external mentor between 2014-2017).
2014	30 new MPAs designated, and proposed management measures announced.
2014	Direct support from FFI given to the Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative (FIMETI) in their community efforts to secure a DR MPA.
2014	Fair Isle's DR MPA passes assessment and will be put forward for public consultation.

2015	FFI nominates Howard Wood, co-founder of COAST, for the Goldman Environmental Prize which he successfully secures.
2015	FFI helps to establish new community groups in Argyll - the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS) and Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitat (CROMACH).
2016	Emergency MCOs exclude dredgers from both the South Arran MPA and the Wester Ross MPA.
2016	FFI brings together the 7 CBOs it is currently supporting in Scotland to Gartmore House, Stirlingshire, for a gathering which gives a platform to marine CBOs and initiates conversation around a community network.
2016	Demonstration & Research MPA designated in Fair Isle, after decades of effort from the community.
2017	FFI begins conversations with NatureScot to develop plans for building community capacity and skills around marine biodiversity monitoring.
2017	FFI recruit a second staff member, Rebecca Plant, as the Project Officer, Marine, Scotland, to provide project support to the Marine Community Support Officer/Project Manager and dedicated capacity for the building of a coastal, community-led, conservation network.
2017	A website is launched for the Coastal Communities Network: www.communitiesforseas.scot featuring the current 8 CBOs FFI is working with: COAST, CAOLAS, CROMACH, Sea Change Wester Ross, Berwickshire Marine Reserve, Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation, Orkney Skate Trust and South Skye Seas initiative.
2018	4 additional members join CCN: Friends of the Sound of Jura, Friends of Loch Etive, Save Seil Sound (later disbands), Knoydart Foundation. FFI hosts the second Coastal Communities workshop, with 12 communities now active within the CCN.
2018	NatureScot and FFI launch the Community-led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Initiative, which enables communities to access training, share skills and information, and develop shared protocols for monitoring inshore waters.
2018	FFI bring together Argyll-based CCN members to apply to Dr Sylvia Earle's Mission Blue "Hope Spots" initiative.
2019	CCN's aquaculture forum, consisting of 12 different CCN community groups, is formed and secures representation in government technical working groups.

2019	Mission Blue declares its first ever Hope Spot in the UK on the Argyll Coast, which supports the local community in raising local marine conservation issues, and in building their profile and funds.
2019	FFI launches the Community Support Fund, a small grants fund for community groups focused on biodiversity conservation projects.
2019	FFI is nominated within the Nature of Scotland Award's marine category for the establishment of CCN. (Watch a short video from CCN members at this time.)
2020	NatureScot and FFI launch the Community Monitoring Handbook and the Community Equipment Fund, under their shared Community-led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Project.
2020	CCN now comprises 18 community groups with 6 news groups signing up since 2018: Edinburgh Shoreline, Wardie Bay Beachwatch, Skye Communities for Natural Heritage, Friends of Loch Hourn, Eigg Environmental Action Group, Clean Coast Outer Herbrides. Save Seil Sound evolves to become a 'Friend' of CCN. FFI sets up 7 'sub-groups' within CCN to create a space for members to discuss different issues and plan shared action.
2020	Covid-19 delays the third Gartmore gathering, due to be held March 2020.
2021	Despite the pandemic CCN members continue to connect and strengthen their skills and capacity to connect online, in more diverse ways.
2021	FFI works with CCN members to establish a central Advisory Group – made up of 6 different group representatives from across the membership.
2021	FFI secures funding and begins to plan for the recruitment of a dedicated 'CCN Coordinator'.
2021	The third Gartmore gathering is held at Gartmore House, with 64 individuals from 14 of (the then) 18 CCN member groups attending, alongside FFI staff, 'Friends of CCN', 'non-CCN' community groups and representatives from NatureScot and SEPA.
2021	Alongside delivering the Marine Community Support Project and facilitating CCN, FFI continues to provide technical and institutional advice to SIFT and COAST, via board membership and strategy review input.
2021	FFI expands the remit of their work in Scotland to now offer support to a wider set of community groups focused on both marine and terrestrial conservation, adapting 3-prong approach to bespoke support; small grants; networking.

2022	FFI recruits Alan Munro as the 'CCN Coordinator' - CCN's first solely dedicated officer, a step change for the Network in enabling its future independence from FFI. The small FFI Scotland team accordingly update their roles and responsibilities.
2022	4 new members joined CCN – 'Charlestown, Limekilns and Pattiesmuir (CLP) Nature Conservation Group', 'East Haven Together', 'Largo Communities Together', 'The Ecology Centre', bringing the membership up to 21. Wardie Bay Beachwatch evolves to become a 'Friend' of CCN.
2022	CCN updates the Aquaculture forum and adds a new Restoration Forum and Marine Plastics Forum.
2022	CCN Coordinator begins a process of reviewing the Network's vision and aims, which will be finalised and presented at Gartmore 4, to be held in May 2023.

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