



Climate Change the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 16th March 2021

Session curated by the [Scottish Islands Federation](#) and chaired by **Calum Macdonald**, Development Manager, Point and Sandwick Trust.

Calum Macdonald opened the session by outlining his experience of rural and island communities addressing the climate emergency and safeguarding their futures. [Point and Sandwick Trust](#) in the Western Isles, manages the community-owned Beinn Ghrideag wind farm with all profits – millions of pounds - supporting local projects.

In the run-up to [COP26](#), it is recognised that rural and island Scotland is well placed to be at the global forefront of addressing the climate emergency. The purpose of this Scottish Rural Parliament session was to explore how local communities can be empowered and resourced to take the lead, not just in regard to green energy generation but, equally, in regard to sustainable approaches to land management, food production, transport and economic development. In addition to the recommendations at the end of this document, the session discussions shaped the Scottish Rural Parliament's [response to the Scottish Government's Net Zero Nation Consultation](#). Over 120 people attended the session and to set the context, completed a two-question survey with the responses below:

1. Thinking about all the opportunities that rural and island Scotland has to address climate change, what are the three opportunities that your community would most like to build on?
 - Renewable energy schemes 19%
 - Awareness raising activities in community 13%
 - Recycling/upcycling projects 7%
 - Grow local/reducing food miles 18%
 - Plastic free shops/projects 9%
 - Rewilding/tree planting projects 14%
 - Active transport/sustainable transport 18%
 - Other 1%

NB – it was noted in the comments that a significant omission to the survey options above was the wider agenda of land reform as fundamental to taking forward the activities.

2. Rural and island communities have the right resources/support to take action to tackle climate change:
 - Strongly Agree 2%
 - Agree 12%
 - Neither agree nor disagree 12%
 - Somewhat disagree 44%
 - Disagree 29%
 - Not sure 2%

3. Rural and island communities are fully engaged in planning action to address climate change:

- Strongly Agree 2%
- Agree 26%
- Neither agree nor disagree 11%
- Somewhat disagree 33%
- Disagree 26%
- Not sure 3%

The survey was followed by five short provocations – challenging the audience to be ambitious in their thinking about community led approaches to addressing the climate emergency.

Summary of Presentations

Victoria Mackay, Project Co-ordinator, gave attendees an overview of how [Community Energy Scotland](#) (CES) helps communities develop their renewable energy projects focusing on the [Community Energy Futures Fund](#) which works with cohorts of communities to identify decarbonisation opportunities. Each cohort is supported to develop networks, share knowledge and expertise, and coproduce a high-level Energy Plan, next steps options and possible funding pathways.

Her provocation centred around:

- the impact of the right level of external specialist support and investment in enabling rural and island communities to take forward complex technical projects.
- the benefits of networking across communities, looking at action to address climate change from a regional perspective rather than just through a single-community lens.

Victoria was followed by **Ross Camilli** and **Ross Gillies** from [Raasay Community Renewables](#) (RCR). RCR has raised over £900,000 in funds, £650,000 of which through a Crowdfunder drive selling community shares, in order to commission two community hydro schemes by September 2022. This is a tremendous achievement considering the Isle of Raasay has a population of just 170 people.

The project offers enormous benefits to the community and to the environment. The schemes are predicted to generate, on average, 520,000kWh of electricity each year. They will also generate £660,000 in profits for community projects within the first twenty years. Ross and Ross echoed Victoria in emphasising the crucial role of external experts – Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Local Energy Scotland, the Development Trusts Association of Scotland including Community Shares Scotland and Scottish & Southern Electric.

Citing the multiple hurdles the project had to overcome, RCR's first provocation was expressed as a challenge to the Scottish planning system, urging the new National Planning Framework (NPF4) to create a more enabling and streamlined process for community energy projects. Their second provocation was a challenge to government, especially the UK Government, to make it easier, through sleeving, micro-grid development and other processes, for communities to use the energy they produce locally, rather than being obliged to export it to the national grid.

In discussions it was noted that only circa 5% of Scotland's electricity production is community-owned compared to 50% in countries like Denmark. With the next big push focusing on decarbonising heating and transport in Scotland, more electricity is likely to be required to replace fossil fuels. In turn, this should hopefully open doors for further investment in community-owned generation.

Next, **Jess Pepper**, Founder of the [Climate Café Movement](#) (link is an email if you would like to get in touch with Jess), offered delegates background on the global climate cafe movement, established in 2013. Jess had trained under Al Gore to be a Climate Reality Leader and began touring workplaces, schools, and

communities to raise awareness of climate change. The first Climate Café was held in Highland Perthshire in response to local demand to discuss environmental issues.

Jess described people's approach to climate action as very motivated but benefiting from mutual support to maintain momentum. Her provocation to delegates was to make talking about climate action a day-to-day norm in rural and island communities...as much a norm as talking about the weather (and there are many links between weather and climate change!). Climate Cafés are safe, open spaces for people to come together, share knowledge and generate the collective momentum needed to establish climate action as a community movement.

After Jess, **Reeni Kennedy Boyle**, General Manager of [Fyne Futures](#), described the work of the Bute social enterprise which, since 2004, has pioneered innovative approaches to reducing the island's carbon footprint. Fyne Futures projects include green transport solutions, sustainable food systems, waste recycling, energy production and community engagement on climate action. Reeni outlined the key enablers of Fyne Future's projects, citing community spirit and multi-year funding programmes such as the Climate Challenge Fund as particularly pivotal. With regards to constraints, Reeni choose to shine a light on the barriers experienced by communities trying to set up projects to support a circular economy. Her provocation was to local authorities to make it easier for communities to access material going to landfill. This material, from electronics to furniture, could be recycled and in the process, safeguard the environment and create jobs.

Finally, **Gareth Davies**, Managing Director, Aquatera, gave a brief overview of the [ReFLEX Orkney Project](#). Launched two years ago, it plans to create a micro utility across the island's electricity, heat and transport networks and use software to help balance supply and demand. Transport networks, especially for island communities which have added reliance on ferries and flights for mobility and freight, are the most challenging to transition to low carbon models. Part of the solution is incentivising people to take up low carbon options including offering easy access to active transport, car-sharing, green public transport and second hand (therefore cheaper) electric vehicles for leasing or purchase. Gareth described a near-future scenario where Apps would help plan low carbon journeys, right down to the best solution to travel the last mile or last ten miles, depending how remotely you live. This scenario will be facilitated by the Scottish Government announcement of £500million investment into decarbonising public transport. Ultimately, however shipping is likely to be the biggest decarbonisation hurdle with significant investment required to transition the sector.

In the closing remarks, **Philip Revell**, Convener of [Scottish Communities Climate Action Network](#), made the following points:

- Communities are driving forward the agenda to address the climate emergency and the biodiversity crisis but with the best will in the world, efforts will be constrained unless there is an enabling framework put in place by the Scottish Government that aligns all policy with the paramount priority of tackling climate change. The National Performance Framework does not go far enough to explicitly place environmental sustainability and social wellbeing before economic growth, leading to policy decisions made in favour of immediate, short-term profits over long term returns of a non-financial nature.
- Systemic change is also required at a local level to support a move away from large-scale, blunt approaches to smaller-scale and decentralised initiatives – low carbon transport solutions, circular food & waste economies, energy generation & use - that are tailored to local contexts and motivate people to adapt their behaviour. This kind of systemic change is multi-faceted and includes greater devolution of decision-making to local communities, an enabling planning framework and a strengthened community empowerment agenda.
- COP26 is an opportunity to showcase Scotland at the forefront of addressing the climate emergency. It is also an opportunity for communities to speak with a collective voice to demand both systemic change and the resources they need to support local action. Phil closed by urging delegates to join existing local and national climate action networks and continue the discussion.

Discussion points and recommendations

The main discussion points and recommendations have been captured in the Scottish Rural Parliament's [response to the Scottish Government's Net Zero Nation Consultation](#). In addition to the recommendations in the consultation report, the following priorities were identified through the Youth Led session this session and the Climate Change session of the 2021vSRP:

Youth Led Session of the 2021vSRP:

Delegates of the youth session agreed on the following priorities to address climate change:

- Education: Mandatory education on climate change at all stages of curriculum through primary and secondary education, including regular outdoor lessons to teach children and young people practical skills, like growing food, as well as increase their understanding of local biodiversity.
- Plastics: Single use plastic to be phased out by 2025.
- Transport: Accessible, affordable and available green public transport for rural and island communities by 2025 and an incentivisation scheme for young people to use active transport.
- Biodiversity: Increased woodland space, more peatlands restored and more wildlife corridors to support biodiversity.
- Good Food: local food systems that are designed around small-scale and diverse agriculture and production enterprises.

Climate Change Session of the 2021vSRP:

- Strategic Framework: The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework and economic strategy to move away from a focus on 'economic growth' towards action that safeguards the environment and people's wellbeing.
- Democracy, Planning and Community Empowerment:
 - The Net Zero Nation: Public Engagement Strategy to detail mechanisms for real democratic participation in shaping/ resourcing climate priorities at local level.
 - The Scottish Gov. National Planning Framework (NPF4) to offer a simplified and streamlined process for community-led climate action projects with presumption in favour for such projects.
- Other policy initiatives:
 - UK Government to legislate for affordable mechanisms to enable communities become local energy suppliers.
 - Scottish Government. to:
 - progress land reform agenda
 - progress the Good Food Bill
 - Review requirement for legislation/guidance to lift constraints on community-led approaches to tackling waste.
 - ban single use plastics by 2025

- Areas requiring specific investment:
 - Scottish Government. to:
 - mirror Covid-19 response and flexibly resource communities to take forward local priorities.
 - increase investment in specialist, technical support for communities.
 - deliver programmes to retrofit all homes to meet zero emissions.
 - decarbonise passenger ferry fleets and incentivise use of public and active transport.
 - invest in supporting land-based enterprises to transition.
- Education & networks:
 - Scottish Government to:
 - deliver a consistent and trustworthy comms strategy (as with Covid-19 strategy) to maintain and coordinate engagement.
 - Introduce a climate change curriculum in schools.
 - fund a network of community-led initiatives that can act as hubs for ideas and action.

Links mentioned during session

- SCCAN 1000 Better Stories - <https://www.scottishcommunitiescan.org.uk/1000-better-stories/>
- COP26 Coalition - <https://cop26coalition.org/>
- COP26 Fringe - <https://climatefringe.org/>