



The Use of Coastal Land and the Seabed - the recording and outputs from the 2021vSRP Session on 11th March 2021

Session curated by the [Scottish Islands Federation](#) and chaired by **Emma Cooper**, Head of Land Rights and Responsibilities at the [Scottish Land Commission](#).

As Head of Land Rights and Responsibilities at the Scottish Land Commission, Emma gave the attendees an overview into the role her organisation plays in putting into practice the Scottish Government's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement which informs people as to what the expectations of landowners are regarding responsible land management.

The Scottish Land Commission has also issued a range of protocols which provides practical details for landowners and communities as to what a responsible land ownership in practice entails. Last year, they published recommendations on Regional Land Use Partnerships and how they might work. These partnerships are designed to bring people together, engage with communities and landowners to agree priorities for action in that area, and that these partnerships should be able to direct public funding to achieve those actions. The Scottish Government is now piloting these partnerships in five areas across Scotland. and that there we have a pilot of those projects in 2021.

Summary of Presentations

First to present was **Fred Taylor, Manager and Development Officer, Isle of Harris Marina**. He described how Harris Development Ltd, led by volunteer members of the community, has raised £1.3million from a variety of government and third-party agencies to:

- Provide and operate a chain of pontoons for the community that could deliver direct socio-economic gain to the wider Harris community.
- Be a catalyst for local marine and outdoor businesses to grow or encourage new start-ups.
- Provide young people with access to water-based sports and leisure activities and give them the confidence to consider making a career in this area.

He detailed some of the unforeseen positive outcomes that have occurred; the project has encouraged social inclusion, brought local boat owners together and the marina has become a social hub, with different generations mixing and sharing experiences and skills. The marina has also provided a focus outside of the home for older members of the community who now volunteer and help run the facility. Fred described the marina as a catalyst for other projects and spoke about two

projects being development: a sea school in Tarbet and a maritime focussed Heritage Centre in Scalpay.

Fred spoke briefly about the difficulties the group encountered when trying to get the project off the ground, having to navigate things like marine licences, local planning, and Crown Estate leases. He explained that the initial rent proposed by the Crown Estate would have taken a significant portion of their annual income. He acknowledged that the Crown Estate Scotland Act 2019 had provision for Crown Estate managers to sell or lease assets for less than market value and encouraged community groups to make use of this clause.

Fred ended his presentation on the discussions around devolving the management of the foreshore and seabed to local groups or local authorities. He expressed his desire for that to be extended to local communities being given the foreshore and seabed.

Next up was **Morven Gibson, General Manager of South West Mull & Iona Development Agency**, who told attendees about a community owned seaweed farm that SWMID had developed and secured funding for and which will begin seeding in October 2021. Among the exciting opportunities this will bring to the community are jobs, income generated that can then be re-invested locally and the opportunity to develop new alternative to plastics.

One of the main reasons SWMID are keen to get involved in this newly emerging industry is so that they can shape the model which will keep the wealth within the community.

Morven detailed the nominal community consultation expected of organisations applying for marine licences - this can be a small notice in the local newspaper with minimal information which could easily be missed. SWMID, as a community organisation, made a point of consulting with the local people. This consultation led to a review and relocation of the proposed site to protect the local fishermen's livelihoods. Morven felt strongly that decisions made at this level do not exclude local people and lead to empowerment.

She ended her presentation with a statistic following Scottish Government research into public attitude to land reform. That 71% of people canvassed supported widening the owning of rural and urban land to include more public and community and third sector ownership. Morven believes that coastal land and the seabed can provide a range of potentially transformational opportunities for local communities and that it should be the norm to access and utilise these resources at community level.

Then **Rachel Shucksmith, Marine Spatial Planning Manager, NAFC Marine Centre** gave attendees an overview of Regional Marine Plans (RMP). Although relatively new, there are going to be 11 RMPs developed that will sit below the National Marine Plan and Shetland and Clyde are the first regions to try and develop this. The aim of developing more localised marine plans is to create greater community engagement, provide additional data and consideration to challenges that may be more localised than a National Marine Plan can address. Rachel said there was scope within the **Act** for Marine Planning Partnerships (MPP) can be developed in different ways in different areas. In Shetland, the MPP is the Shetland Island Council and the NEFC Marine Centre with a wider advisory group that is made up of local community groups, fishermen and representatives from recreational and environmental groups.

She gave some examples of how the Shetland MPP has engaged with local fishing industries and the local community and has resulted in a greater knowledge and understanding of how the area is used by different people and organisations. A clearer picture of where the fishing takes place means that any new developments need to take this into consideration. The local fishermen, now more aware of the different sensitive habitats locally, are helping to conserve these. In doing so, they can work towards a Marine Stewardship Accreditation which also has economic benefits for them.

The RMP is also informed through data, such as whale and dolphin sightings, that has been gathered by local communities. This localised information is economically unfeasible for the government to collect but empowered communities

Finally, **Lisa MacLean, CEO of Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn (Galson Estate Trust - GET)** spoke.

The Galson Estate has been in community ownership since 2007, and its vision is for a thriving and well-connected community with excellent local services, harnessing natural assets to sustain a unique cultural and social environment.

Having been unaware of who had the leases for the GET area seabed, the Trust was keen to become involved in the management of these leases. Galson Estate Trust, together with the Comhairle, have embarked on a Crown Estate Local Asset Management Pilot in which local communities manage the seabed assets. Galson Estate will oversee the Renewable Energy leases along the GET area and the Comhairle will manage the non-renewable projects in the GET and all the leases in the remaining Hebridean Marine Region. The pilot is enhanced by a community impact assessment so that affected communities to able to make their views on a known.

From her perspective as a community landowner, Lisa offered some important points when discussing sustainable use and management of the seabed and some of the reasons GET decided to collaborate with the local authority to gain more control over how the local seabed was being managed. Lisa encouraged the attendees to embrace these opportunities and be prepared for some of the challenges that they bring.

In summing up, Lisa suggested that strong, resilient, sustainable communities are achievable if communities are given the opportunities to achieve this and management of local resources, including the seabed, are a key part of this.

Closing Remarks

The presenters were asked for their final thoughts which were all along similar lines:

- All stakeholders should understand and respect that communities are going to be the most committed to local projects and should therefore be at the heart of any coastal land or seabed project.
- With regards to asset management - more powers should be devolved to communities as this will produce better results.
- Attendees were encouraged to consider what resources they may have, be prepared for steep learning curves and be ambitious because there could be enormous benefits to community led management/ownership.

Session Output and Future Directions

The summary recommendations is available as separate document.

Other documents and initiatives mentioned during session:

- *Scottish Land Commission* - <https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/>
- *Isle of Harris Marina* - <https://www.isleofharrismarina.co.uk/about>
- *South-West Mull and Iona Development* - <https://swmid.co.uk/projects/aird-fada-seaweed-farm/>
- *Galson Estate Trust* - <https://www.galsontrust.com/>

- *Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan* - https://www.nafc.uhi.ac.uk/t4-media/one-web/nafc/research/document/marine-spatial-planning/sirmp/SIRMP_2021_Amended_Version.pdf
- *Crown Estate Scotland* - <https://www.crownestatescotland.com/>
- *Community Energy Scotland* - <https://www.communityenergyscotland.org.uk>