

# Coastal Communities Network

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



Welcome to the Coastal Communities Network (CCN) annual report for 2025! As the CCN Coordinator, I am pleased to share with you some of the remarkable achievements of our network, and to look ahead to the next year.

Since the network launched in 2017, CCN has continued to grow from strength to strength, and evolve into a dynamic network of 35 groups as of the end of 2025. CCN's mission to connect and strengthen community-led efforts for the benefit of people, nature and climate has never been more important. Our the health of our seas and coasts is in really dire straits, but CCN and its membership has inspired a wave of positive change along Scotland's coasts, from new marine habitat restoration projects to community-led marine protected areas.

This report draws on a survey sent to the CCN membership at the end of each year. You will see an overview of some of our members and their key achievements from the past year, as well as our priorities for the year ahead. 2025 was a really pivotal year for CCN, as we became an independent charity, and Scotland's first independent member-led network of community groups dedicated to the protection and improvement of Scotland's seas.

Thank you for being part of CCN's journey, and I look forward to the continued success and development of the network over 2026.

**Sarah Doherty**  
Coastal Communities Network Coordinator

## Who we are

The Coastal Communities Network (or CCN) emerged in 2017 with support from Fauna & Flora, recognising the need for a platform to provide peer-to-peer support and guidance to community organisations dedicated to safeguarding Scotland's coastal and marine environments. CCN has since grown from its eight founding members into a diverse network of 35 groups at the end of 2025.

CCN's mission is to connect and strengthen community-led efforts to protect, restore, and sustainably use coastal & marine resources for the benefit of nature, people, and climate. Since its inception, CCN has been a driving force behind remarkable achievements for Scotland's coastal areas.

CCN welcome all Scottish community-led groups that share a passion for preserving marine and coastal biodiversity. Our current membership is varied, ranging from more informal volunteer-run groups to larger, charitable organisations with dedicated funding and staff. Embracing this diversity, we celebrate the unique strengths and perspectives each community group brings to the table. Nevertheless, what unites everyone in CCN is a shared sense of accountability to their community and commitment to marine and coastal protection and restoration.

### DEVELOPMENT OF CCN IN 2025

2025 marked a really pivotal time in CCN's development. In May of 2025, we officially became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). This is as a result of years of discussions and consultations with CCN's membership about the future of the network and building CCN's capacity and ability to run as an independent charity.

We formally launched with an inaugural Board of five Trustees. As per our constitution, the majority of our Board of Trustees will always be from within the CCN membership, keeping with our being a member-led network. Our Trustees are Wendy Murray from East Haven Together as Chairperson, Áine Purcell-Milton from COAST, John Aitchison from Friends of the Sound of Jura, as well as Rebecca Plant and Alan Munro. We are confident that this is a strong and highly skilled Board who can oversee CCN's governance and strategic direction.

Over 2026, we plan to continue the development of CCN as an independent charity. Over the beginning of the year, we plan to set up policies and processes so that CCN can be a fully independent organisation, holding its own staff and funds, by September.

From our inception, CCN has been supported and funded by Fauna & Flora. We are immensely grateful to them for their support in helping CCN to establish as a network, and now as a charity.

## Our members

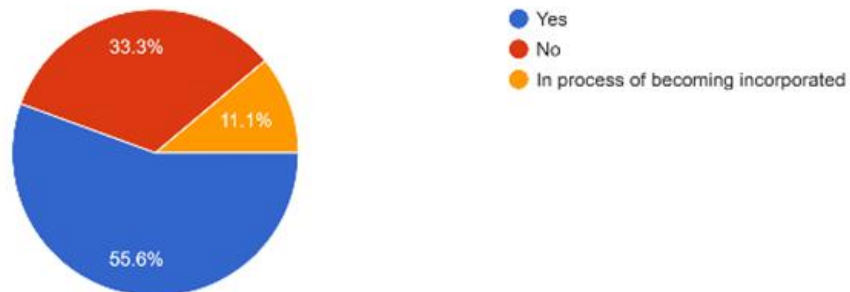
CCN has 35 members as of December 2025, based all around the coastal and island areas of Scotland. Each CCN member is rooted in a community of place, and together they encompass a broad constituency of members and supporters.

The number of active members in each group, that is individuals who play an active role in the running of the group, varies widely. Their organisational structures and governance also differ, with some groups being registered as charities with a Board of Trustees, some operate as branches of wider community initiatives, whilst others are affiliations of volunteers operating non-hierarchically. Nevertheless, all CCN members must adhere to certain broad principles, which include political neutrality, collective and transparent decision-making, having an evidenced following of local members, and a stated aim on marine conservation.

In terms of the governance of the groups, a slight majority (56%) of those who responded to this year's survey are registered charities, with others in the process of becoming incorporated. Within the groups, decisions are typically made by smaller committees or Trustees, consultation events with the wider community, and by discussion and voting. The majority of members have a written constitution.

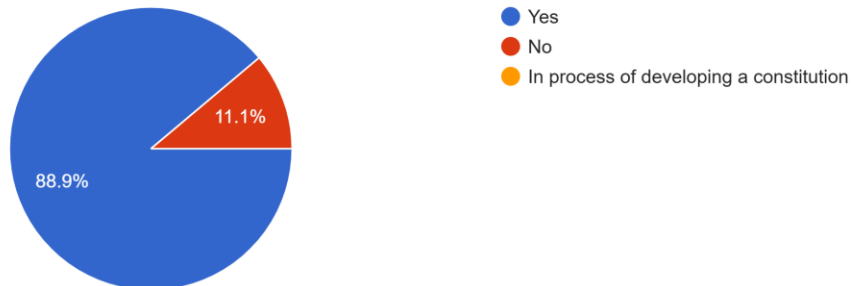
Are you an incorporated organisation (ie. a registered charity)?

9 responses



Do you have a constitution?

9 responses



The levels of active membership also vary dramatically between the groups, with some having small numbers of trustees or highly engaged core members, others having large numbers of volunteers, in some cases over 50 active volunteers.

The above figures illustrate the diverse nature of CCN's membership. These differences underscore the need for flexibility and inclusivity of CCN's approach towards community empowerment. As we continue to evolve and grow, a challenge will be to balance this growing diversity of groups with the need for a cohesive network that is able to speak with one voice on different issues.

## WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

CCN welcomed five new members in 2025 – Carna Coast and Communities, Common Ground North, Cove & Kilcreggan Clearwater Group, Scottish Salmon Think Tank, and Tarbert Action on Coastal Litter. This is significant growth of the membership, and brings us to 35 members as of the end of 2025. These new members have brought a wealth of new perspectives, expertise, and passion to our network, and we are really delighted to have them on board.

We also gained a new 'Friend of CCN' this year – the Scottish Seabird Centre. We are always grateful to our wider network of friends and supporters who are on hand to offer expertise, guidance and solidarity to CCN.

## Our governance

### CCN COUNCIL

The CCN Council at the beginning of 2024 and served as the decision-making entity for the network and the main discussion body for the development of CCN's governance. In early 2026, the Council decided to disband, now that a Board of Trustees is in place.

## CCN TRUSTEES

As mentioned above, CCN launched as a registered charity in the summer of 2025 with an inaugural Board of Trustees. The Trustees have oversight of the governance and overall strategic direction of the network.

## WIDER MEMBER INPUT

As CCN is a member-led network, it is important that members have the opportunity to input to and influence CCN's strategic direction and governance where they wish. In 2025, we trialed All-Network Meetings as a way for members to meet, share news and updates, discuss shared topics, and input to wider CCN decisions and governance. As CCN continues to develop as an independent organisation we will continue to ask members for feedback and input as to how our communication and decision-making structures are working, to ensure that all members have a say in wider CCN matters.

# Events and activities throughout 2025

Last year was a busy one for CCN, with lots of activity happening across our forums as well as the network as a whole. Here are some examples:

## CCN MINI GATHERING

In October, CCN members and representatives came together in Lochaline, on the Morvern peninsula. The purpose of this weekend was to explore how arts, culture and heritage relate to marine conservation, and how community groups can use them to engage new audiences and foster deeper connections with the marine environment. During the weekend, CCN members came together to share skills, knowledge, and ideas on this theme.

## ONLINE SESSIONS

Project Seagrass ran a talk on seagrass mapping at the beginning of the year, which provided an introduction to seagrass and the importance of its conservation and restoration, and various tools and methods that can be used to map and monitor it.

Sussex Underwater and the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project also spoke to CCN about their work along the Sussex coast. This began when local divers began to notice the damage done to the seabed and marine habitats by destructive fishing practices. The local community and small-scale fishers campaigned together for years until, in 2021, a byelaw was introduced prohibiting trawling in large areas close to the coast. Now the passive restoration of the area is being supported and studied by the Sussex Kelp Recovery Project, a collaboration between NGOs, universities, local authorities and community groups.

OpenSeas also ran a workshop for CCN members in November to help better understand and engage with policy and legislative processes. This was intended to build towards the Scottish Government's upcoming consultation on inshore Marine Protected Areas and Priority Marine Features.

NatureScot also gave a workshop on their Community Led Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Project and explored wider issues and information in citizen science data.

## ADVOCACY

Looking ahead to the 2026 Scottish elections, CCN members co-developed our priorities for this election. You can read them [on our website](#).

In February we wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy on the need for better routes and possibilities for communities to lead on the management of their local marine areas. Subsequently, some CCN members met with the Cabinet Secretary to discuss why they would like better community-led governance opportunities, and to ask what the Scottish Government is doing to support local marine management efforts.

In March and June, we collaborated with Fauna & Flora and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to co-host a roundtable based around furthering community-led marine management. This brought together community groups, NGOs, funders and policy experts to understand these barriers to community-led governance of marine areas and to identify how they can be overcome. There are lots of really great examples of community-led marine management, such as the No-Take Zone in Lamlash Bay, the voluntary marine reserve off St. Abbs, and the community-led Demonstration & Research MPA on Fair Isle. However there are also many barriers to communities taking a leading role in the governance of their local marine areas, such as a lack of sustained funding, access to guidance and sufficient knowledge sharing, and bureaucratic and legislative challenges. We will continue this work over 2026 with the ultimate vision of securing routes for communities to lead in the management of their local seas for the benefit of people and nature.

We also engaged with the development of the Coastal and Marine Restoration Plan and submitted a short response on our priorities and thoughts on the draft plan. Marine Directorate representatives also attended a CCN restoration forum meeting to present on the plan and answer member questions.

In October, we launched the Scottish Seagrass Collaborative, alongside Fauna & Flora and Project Seagrass. 55 participants attended the launch meeting with more signing up to be part of the collaborative. Our first set of two meetings in January 2026 also went well, focusing on monitoring of seagrass beds.

Of course, we also facilitated CCN forums to meet and discuss shared issues and interests within aquaculture, marine restoration, marine litter and inshore reform, and

continued support to engage new and existing members in all CCN activities to connect with one another on their shared interests.

## Member snapshots

Our members have a lot to celebrate this year! Here are the current and future priorities of a few of our members, as well as just some of their achievements from 2025.

### EAST HAVEN TOGETHER

#### *Current priorities*

- Managing the built environment (we have to manage our own roads, street lights, refuse, paint street furniture)
- Visitor Management (public toilets, water rescue equipment, beach management, active travel, heritage signs, Look after our public toilets and hang paintings in them)
- Wildlife and management of habitats (work with Scottish Wildlife, Butterfly Conservation, Tayside Biodiversity Partnership. Plant Kidney Vetch corridors along the coast for the Small Blue).
- Work with school children with additional needs to enable them to be outdoors and learning.
- Managing the natural environment (community gardens, coastal dunes etc) Marine Environment (citizen science projects, marine litter, coastal erosion)
- Maintain a sustainable community (Defibrillator, Village Emergency Telephone Scheme, Emergency Services Drivers in our ATV along the coast, Part of the Angus Resilience Forum so we have installed flood gates and purchased pumps and other equipment for flooding events. Also have to be resilient for power outages so we have generators, cookers, heaters etc.)

#### *Achievements*

- We have completed a Local Place Plan, achieving national standards of engagement, which was a huge undertaking. We did this without any external support from consultants etc.
- We achieved a Community-Led Beach Award from Keep Scotland Beautiful (have to achieve against 25 different criteria). We also achieved a Beautiful Scotland, Gold Award, Best Coastal Village in Category and the Jim Murdie Sustainability Award.
- We held two heritage story walks, one Wildlife and Biodiversity walk, and delivered 7 in-person presentations about coasts and several on-line presentations. We worked with three primary schools, 1 secondary school and 2 Universities.
- We removed over 3 tonnes of marine litter, held a Coastal Grasses workshop and a Marine Plastics Art Workshop. We also held an art exhibition over 2 months in Carnoustie to raise awareness about marine litter.

*Future priorities:* Redesigning village square to make it safer for all users. Explore options regarding septic tanks which are at risk of being undermined in the future if the coast erodes further.

## COVE & KILCREGGAN CLEARWATER GROUP

*Current priorities:* Research and funding.

*Achievements:* Burn testing and group involvement within the community.

*Future priorities:* Awareness and research

## FRIENDS OF THE SOUND OF JURA

*Current priorities:* Hosting the Argyll Hope Spot (education in schools and outreach through art), campaigning against the harm done by salmon farming (with CCN), inshore marine management

*Achievements:* Argyll Hope Spot has taught 43 artists to sketch underwater and supported exhibitions of their work for public outreach/education. One former Hope Spot artist (Christina Riley) has published a book (Looking Down at Stars) on marine life and conservation, citing the HS. Another (Jane Smith) has published a book called Communities, which also mentions the Hope Spot. On salmon farming, FoSoJ Chair, John Aitchison, gave evidence to the Scottish Parliamentary review of progress since the 2018 inquiry into salmon farming in Scotland. We have engaged on many other fronts during the year.

*Future priorities:* Same as above, though increasing active community support building through public engagement, such as public talks.

## CRAIGNISH RESTORATION OF MARINE AND COASTAL HABITATS (CROMACH)

*Current priorities:* Community engagement to identify future projects, and progressing the current Demonstration & Research Marine Protected Area proposal.

*Achievements:* Held several successful events in the Craignish Village Hall, and raised funds for a Community Engagement Officer.

## ORKNEY SKATE TRUST

*Current priorities:* Science around Scottish sharks and skates.

*Achievements:* Two Important Shark and Ray Areas were approved in Orkney for flapper skate. Have a scientific paper in review around Baited Remote Underwater Vehicles (BRUVs). Have also had over 80,000 views on social media, which contributes towards awareness raising.

## FAIR ISLE MARINE RESEARCH ORGANISATION (FIMRO)

### *Current priorities:*

- Continue and develop community-led marine monitoring and citizen science activities in Fair Isle, contributing to data collection for the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research MPA.
- Continue to build on baseline data on the species and habitats of Fair Isle with a particular focus on expanding seabird prey and sandeel research from 2026.
- Review and synthesise Fair Isle DR MPA research and project progress over the last 5-year period (2020-2025) to outline current knowledge base and the growth/change in our understanding of the Fair Isle marine environment, and identify any significant research gaps and considers potential management measures and areas for community contribution.

### *Achievements:*

- Ongoing capacity building with support from Fauna & Flora. Key outcomes include support accessing funds, obtaining liability insurance, taking on an additional FIMRO trustee
- Accessing funds to deliver a successful pilot trial of a seasonal Education Officer
- Working with a NatureScot/Edinburgh Napier MSc student to further acoustic monitoring of cetaceans in Fair Isle
- Accessing funds to support the delivery of the first Fair Isle specific sandeel survey
- Accessing funds to support the recruitment of an independent consultant for the delivery of the following project: 'A Summary and Analysis of Research Outputs (2020 – 2025) and Implications for Future Directions' due for completion in March 2025

## LITTLE LOCH BROOM MARINE LIFE

*Current priorities:* Survey work to monitor changes occurring in Little Loch Broom.

### *Achievements:*

- Liaising with students tutors who collected relevant data in Little Loch Broom, and using ROVs for survey work here and with other groups.
- Giving presentations to local groups of the present marine life in Little Loch Broom and to highlight possible losses.
- Locating horse mussel sites around the loch.
- Liaising with SSEN re cable through loch - mitigating potential damage to PMF.
- Little Loch Broom Marine Life was invited to look for Nessie in using ROVs in Loch Ness, meeting with key monster hunters and promoting the importance of looking after our marine life.
- Helping Scoraig with survey work and looking at the possibility of further protection measures in Anat Bay.

## COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION OF LOCHS AND SOUNDS (CAOLAS)

*Current priorities:* Continuation of our Lochaline Oyster Restoration Project and others.

*Achievements:* Expanding our network within our Marine Protected Area.

*Future priorities:*

- Increasing the number of spat establishing a location for EnvLoggers
- Getting our boat up and running, training on the ROV and using the drone and sonogram, sediment traps etc, and generally recording more data on our loch around the oysters.
- Interacting and responding to a fish farm sunken boat disaster and responding to the Glensander mine spillage concerns into our waterways that feed into our loch and taking samples.
- Setting up several community showings of Ocean film and increasing our involvement with the communities, and setting up another Coastal Testimonies exhibition.

## COMMUNITY OF ARRAN SEABED TRUST (COAST)

*Current priorities:* Model marine recovery by empowering communities, inspiring action, influencing policy makers, conducting research, supporting the Arran marine economy.

*Achievements:*

- COAST was co-author of two published papers on AIS & vessel tracking Revive Our Ocean was launched with COAST being the community partner for Scotland.
- COAST hosted 13 internships in 2025 and became a placement partner for the Scottish Association of Marine Science MSci Applied Marine Science programme.
- COAST were highlighted in BBC new article about well managed MPAs before the UN Oceans Conference.
- They were also featured in the new David Attenborough *Oceans* film and attended the global premier of the movie, also organising an Arran premier of the movie for 520 people.
- Alongside CCN we developed manifesto asks for political parties
- COAST also celebrated it's 30th Birthday with a community event for over 850 people.
- COAST completed its first year of the *Communities and the Sea* project, and ran a new education activity called Snorkel Safaris.
- CCN became constituted and COAST joined the Trustee board
- COAST was also invited to meet the King of Britain.
- COAST also moved its offices and developed a community hub on Arran.

## Key challenges

Groups mentioned that it was difficult to keep on top of the various meetings and events ran by CCN, and that a lack of capacity was a barrier to engaging with CCN. In particular, it is difficult for many to balance engaging with CCN with personal responsibilities and other activities of member groups. This has been an ongoing challenge for groups for several years, which we are continuously trying to address.

For some groups, funding and fundraising is also an issue, as are the practicalities of running an organisation, like financial management, trustee recruitment and training, and staff recruitment.

For others, aspects of data management and analysis are a challenge. Within CCN we have run, and are planning some further, workshops and talks on citizen science data to help members navigate this complex area.

It was also mentioned that the policy and political landscape can be complex, and difficult to understand where communities can exert influence.

## Priorities for the future

A core priority for CCN over 2026 is to increase cohesion and communications within the network, which is particularly important as we change to our new governance structures. Collaboration, both within the network and with external organisations, is also a central priority.

A huge priority for CCN is in engaging with policy and decision-making processes to represent and advocate for the views of CCN members. Related to this is expressing CCN's views more widely through the media and other opportunities. Another priority for CCN is to inform members about policy issues as they emerge, and communicating what policies mean for coastal communities and our seas.

A priority for CCN should be to increase impact of the coastal community groups with a view to improving government policy protecting and conserving the marine environment. We have huge strength that comes with being part of a network, which can be leveraged to shift the political narrative in favour of greater protection.

Overall, CCN's priority is to remain committed to preserving and improving the condition of our seas and coasts for the benefit of nature, climate, and communities.

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