

2024 Coastal Communities Network Gathering

Full Report



Friday 4th – Sunday 6th October 2024

FSC Millport, Isle of Cumbrae, North Ayrshire

Fauna & Flora would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in and contributed to the 2024 gathering. The success of these gatherings is based on the work of Fauna and Flora colleagues and the wider CCN network, members of which contributed to this gathering in many ways, from inputting to the programme to running workshops to sharing ideas for future priorities for CCN.

If you would like to engage with the Coastal Communities Network, please contact Sarah Doherty, Coastal Communities Network Coordinator: sarah.doherty@fauna-flora.org.

Report prepared by Sarah Doherty, Coastal Communities Network Coordinator, Fauna & Flora

Background

The inaugural gathering that sparked the formation of CCN was held at Gartmore House in May 2016. It was a resounding success, and members agreed to continue this valuable forum on a regular basis as an opportunity to connect and share knowledge and experiences. Since then Fauna & Flora has provided funding and organizing support for the CCN gathering as part of their marine community support work in Scotland.

For the first time, this Gathering was held at a different location to Gartmore House, at the Field Studies Council Centre in Millport on the Isle of Cumbrae. As at previous gatherings, this programme provided ample networking opportunities, allowing old and new members to meet and share updates and ideas.

The focus of this gathering was on skillshares and peer to peer learning, allowing members and groups associated with CCN to share knowledge and methods relevant to community-led marine protection.

Session summaries

On Saturday morning, we held three concurrent sessions which each ran three times. This was followed by three evening sessions, which ran concurrently twice.

1. Using drones to monitor coastal litter

Janet from Clean Coast Outer Hebrides showed us how she uses drones to monitor coastal litter in the Outer Hebrides, particularly in difficult to reach areas. Each session was notably different, but questions and discussion points included what to do with the data gathered, how to connect drone footage with ground collection data, the legal requirements for flying drones, and the potential to use this in other areas, such as mapping seagrass.

2. Rocky shore survey and species ID

Here participants practiced rocky shore surveying using quadrats, as is detailed in the NatureScot Community-led monitoring handbook. This session aimed to build familiarity with data collection and help participants to better understand their own local shores and habitats.



3. Community-led marine protection

This workshop aimed to hear participant's views on the potential for community-led marine protection and understand CCN members goals for this (if any). It also shared the results of Mariana Polania's MPhil research into community-led protection. Participants discussed the pathways to community leadership in marine protection and the barriers and needs in achieving this. A full report of this workshop is available.

4. Myth or Match? Biodiversity Credit Finance and Community-led Nature Conservation in Scotland

Peg Shaw from Fauna and Flora and Tambudzai Matenga from the Cambridge University Conservation Leadership MPhil cohort led this workshop focused on biodiversity credits and how community groups can navigate them for their own local benefit. This was found to be a complex topic, with participants learning about the potential risks and opportunities associated with biodiversity credits.



5. What makes for a successful community-led organisation

Ceris Jones from Fauna and Flora ran this interactive workshop which examined what success looks like to various community-led organisations and introduced Fauna and Flora's Small Organisations Checklist. Participants found that the organizational checklist was beneficial and learned that there is no singular definition of success and that this varies from group to group.

6. Re-Storying Ourselves, Remembering Community; engaging communities through natural and cultural heritage

This relaxed and interactive session was led by Nadine Malcom and Brogan Rees from Future Heritage. It explored how heritage, storytelling and folklore can bring people together and connect oftentimes fractured communities. This drew on Nadine and Brogan's experiences in building connections within their own community, and discussions during this session touched on the roles of community councils and local authorities, the power of storytelling and culture in engaging individuals, and the impact of land ownership.

Show and tell



The Show and Tell was an opportunity for groups who had received grants from Fauna and Flora's Community Support Fund to share their experiences of receiving this funding and how it helped them to achieve their goals. One key benefit of this that was noted was that the fund was more flexible than other funders around deadlines and the reporting process, so it beneficial for groups new to submitting grant applications. Four groups shared their experiences with the Community Support Fund:

COAST received a grant for Arran Waters Day, a community celebration of Arran's marine environment aimed at raising awareness of local marine biodiversity and promoting sustainable practices. This engaged over 600 people, engaged participants in citizen science, and boosted local tourism.

Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation (FIMRO) received two grants from the fund. The first was used to develop the FIMRO website and information portal, and the second was to create outreach and engagement resources. This has allowed wider sharing of project work with the community and visitors to the island, made it easier to collect citizen science information, and raised the profile of FIMRO and the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research MPA.

Edinburgh Shoreline Project also received two grants, supporting the Forthline Project and the Show Us Your Mussels project. The former was an art related engagement project, encouraging people to learn about their local coast, and the latter is a citizen science project focusing on the decline of Blue Mussels in the Firth of Forth. The Community Support Fund helped Edinburgh Shoreline Project to design citizen science guides, hire venues for workshops, fund volunteer travel around the Forth, and attend training sessions in advocacy and data collection and analysis.

CLP Nature Action received a grant in 2023 to focus on volunteer and organizational capacity development. This aims to grow the organisation's capacity and help to develop volunteers as leaders, supporting the wide range of work that CLP Nature Action are involved in.

NatureScot update

Katie Gillham, Head of Marine Ecosystems at NatureScot, attended the conference and gave an update of NatureScot's current work and future priorities. She gave us an overview of NatureScot's structure and the various strands of marine-related work, showed us the SiteLink website, which many members had not heard of previously, and highlighted the many pieces of policy and legislation that will be published or consulted on over the next year. She also highlighted some funding opportunities linked to NatureScot, such as the Neighbourhood Ecosystem Fund and Scottish Marine Environment

Enhancement Fund and encouraged community-based organisations to track the hours and resources they are putting into their voluntary work and highlight these in funding applications.

We were delighted to also have Ariane Burgess, Green MSP for the Highlands and Islands, also attend the gathering. Ariane has long been a supporter of community leadership in conservation, and as advocated for this in Parliament. She gave a short reflection on the day. In this she emphasised the importance of community leadership in marine protection and governance, and highlighted the opportunities we should take to enhance community voices in this area.

Member led sessions

We also had two member-led sessions which ran concurrently.



The first was delivered by Carna Conservation Initiative and covered the Hope Week, a residential week for school children on the island aimed at addressing the growing issue of eco and climate anxiety. Each day of the Hope Week had a theme, such as snorkeling and rainforests, and helped to inspire young people to find hope connect to the coast and land. The Hope Week was in partnership with other organisations, such as CAOLAS and Argyll Hope Spot.

The second was on aquaculture and was led by Friends of the Sound of Jura and Wildfish. This covered various issues with the current aquaculture industry and potential alternatives we can promote. We heard about the issues that open net salmon farming can have on marine biodiversity and local communities, how Wildfish have opposed these farms in the past, and how we can promote more sustainable alternatives in our communities.

Horizon scanning

At the end of the gathering, we held a plenary discussion and horizon scanning session to look forward to the next year and beyond and identify our priorities as a network. Several priorities and ideas came from this discussion:

Workshops, training, and resources

There were suggestions for more training sessions and skillshares, particularly using skills and knowledge that already exist within the network. Some suggestions included

- Local place plans and how these can be used in the marine environment. CCN could hold a workshop on this to inform how best to extend Local Place Plans to the marine environment.
- More support in data collection and understanding what data collection is important.
- We could also establish better ways of sharing skills and resources across the network through online libraries.

Political and policy

There was also discussion around upcoming political priorities. The Scottish Parliament elections in May 2026 were identified as an upcoming opportunity to influence political agendas. Priorities and ideas here included:

- Identifying our political priorities for the next 18 months, building relationships with MSPs and engaging in collective political action.
- Building cross-party relationships, and with opposition party members.
- Political visits by MSPs, which could create good photo-ops.
- Creating guidance for how community groups can engage politically.
- Continue to influence the Scottish Government, push for solutions and raise community voices on this level.
- Engage more with political lobbying and add more capacity here.
- There is also potential for a collective campaign led by CCN, with different roles for various groups to take part in

Engagement

There was considerable discussion around engaging young people in our community groups and marine conservation work. We can explore different ways to work with young people and link young people to local community groups and also look at how to bring young people together in an event like the Gathering. To do this, we could explore the scope within the network for a CCN youth wing or collaborate with Young Sea Changers Scotland. We could also explore and communicate the jobs needed to sustain community groups working in marine conservation to better inform young people of jobs and employability in this sector.

On a broader level, we could look at establishing better partnerships with other organisations. To better engage with others, we could link marine conservation to economic development and better use storytelling.

Network form and functioning

There were several ideas and suggestions around how subgroups and forums work in the network. These include:

- To create different interest group, for example around the arts or snorkeling, who can then meet up and host workshops.
- Look at how to easily curate forum information so it is easily to collate and refer back to.
- Review the subgroups, and look at whether they are working and needed, if there are different topics we should be covering.

Future of CCN

Also highlighted were some thoughts around the future of CCN as it moves towards an independent identity. There was a need for greater clarity on the future of CCN, and what support from Fauna & Flora could be during and after this process. There was also considerable appetite to get the independence process sorted so that the network can focus on its other priorities. There was also mention of having an AGM to discuss priorities for the year ahead.

Events

It was reiterated how important the Gathering is for CCN, and that members also want to have more opportunities to meet with each other. Also requested were more updates on what happens with member's ideas from workshops like this through regular updates, and flagging whether there are any barriers to implementing ideas. Members also highlighted how important it is to make these events fun and enjoyable!

Next steps and action points:

Actions for Fauna & Flora / CCN:

- Look into and organize workshops in the areas identified. These include
 - o Data collection and understanding what data is important
 - o Local Place Planning
 - o Engaging young people in communities, possibly working with Young Sea Changers Scotland
- Scope out organizing more frequent in-person events
- Develop an online library or better ways to share resources with CCN member input

Actions for CCN membership:

- Build on existing decision-making to work towards CCN independence
- Contribute any useful resources of CCN online library
- Review subgroups and forums
- Explore how better to engage young people

