

2026 Coastal Communities Network Gathering

Full Report



Friday 24th – Sunday 26th April 2026

Ardentinny Outdoor Centre, Dunoon

The Coastal Communities Network (CCN) would like to express their heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated in and contributed to the 2026 gathering. The success of these gatherings is based on the work and enthusiasm of the CCN membership, our wider networks, and the support of Fauna & Flora. Members contributed to this gathering in many ways, from inputting to the programme, to running workshops and talks, 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.

This gathering was held in Ardentinn Outdoor Centre. This focused on sharing news and updates from member groups, learning new skills, and identifying CCN's strategic priorities for the years ahead. We also held our first annual general meeting (AGM) and celebrated our progress in becoming a registered charity. As at previous gatherings, this programme provided ample networking opportunities, allowing old and new members to meet and share news and ideas.

Member updates and talks

On Saturday morning, we heard short updates from six CCN members, as well as a longer update and showcase of marine surveying equipment from COAST.



From CLP Nature Action, we heard about their community beach cleans and data collection, collaboration with Fife Community Payback team, nurdle pollution, school and community garden, surface water catchment engagement project to reduce flooding in village, amongst many other projects!

From Friends of Largo Bay, we heard about their beach cleans and litter surveys, sea water temperature monitoring, biodiversity monitoring, and public engagement work.

From Tarbert Action on Coastal Litter (TACL), we heard about their beach cleaning, collaborations with academics to explore alternative methodologies for beach litter monitoring to increase the representation of heavily-littered coastlines, and their beach litter art project – the group even brought one of their octopus sculptures along!

From MaCCOLL, we heard about their biodiversity mapping and development of a new marine survey tool to aid this. Their Galathea tool can be used to transform raw seabed footage into structured, usable conservation data to support long-term monitoring of marine ecosystems in Loch Linnhe.

From Clean Coast Outer Hebrides, we heard about their beach cleans and single use plastic campaigns, as well as the difficulties in cleaning inaccessible beaches.

From Caolas, we heard about their Lochaline Native Oyster Restoration Project. Around 9000 oysters have now been released in the loch, and the group are conducting follow up assessments and monitoring to measure oyster growth and suitability for these oysters to reproduce.

From the Argyll Hope Spot, we heard about their arts-based marine education and outreach in schools, such as making marine-themed mosaics with local primary schools, building confidence and sea safety knowledge with schoolchildren, sharing Gaelic words for marine habitats and species, and linking marine learning with school curriculums.

We then heard a longer talk from COAST on their Communities and the Seas project. This project is intended to gather community voices and aspirations for their local marine areas, build an understanding of the seabed around the north of Arran through community marine habitat surveys, and collate what is known about Arran's rich marine heritage. We also heard about the various tools and methodologies they use to survey the marine environment, before taking a short walk down to the bay to see their ROV in action!



On Saturday evening, we heard from the Fair Isle Marine Research Organisation (FIMRO) about their research and findings from 10 years of the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research MPA! Here they highlighted the process of having the MPA designated, how they engaged the island residents, and all the amazing research they conducted in the past 10 years.

Workshops

Throughout the weekend we also held four workshops, of which members attended two each.

Using Green Map tools to develop your Local Place Plan

Across Scotland communities are being encouraged to create Local Place Plans (LPP). The goal of a LPP is to create a community vision of place that illustrates how the community want to use land and building assets. In the case of coastal communities, this also means shore lines. LPPs are part of a suite of measures that are designed to support local community empowerment in Scotland.

Using the experience of Dunoon Community Development Trust, who have developed a LPP for their coastal community, we explored What a Local Place Plan is, the policy objectives, how to engage your local community in the development of a Local Place Plan, and how Green Map tools can be utilised to support this work.

Building your support network: a workshop to identify who to go to when

Running and developing a community organization can be really challenging sometimes, and it can be difficult to identify where to go for help, and how to navigate this busy space. Beginning with some quiet time to contemplate and jot down support needs or support offers, participants then posted these on market place boards organised by theme. Then the real action of the Market Place began. Participants mingled about reviewing support offers and support needs in search of other groups and participants they could connect with in the Market Place, later in the gathering, or to follow up with afterwards.

The CCN Market Place workshop seemed to strike a chord for participants. A buzz developed once the Market Place was 'open' to mingle and connect, with many participants meeting each other for the first time around support needs and offers. It's common for community groups to be focused on their needs – but not so common for groups to focus on their expertise. This workshop sought to spark this thinking by prompting groups to take some time to think about all their experiential learnings, skills, and knowledge they've developed through persistent, inventive and targeted work, and how they can support each other by sharing these strengths. In this way, the Market Place was an exercise in peer-peer learning.



Engaging young people in local marine conservation

Community-led marine conservation is strongest when diverse voices shape its direction and implementation. This includes young people who are often deeply connected to local places, but who frequently experience barriers to participation. This workshop with YSCS explored how youth engagement could strengthen place-based conservation and build long-term stewardship of our marine and coastal environments.

We explored power dynamics, safeguarding, inclusion across socioeconomic and cultural contexts, and practical ways for embedding youth participation within community-led initiatives. Some identified barriers to youth engagement are a lack of awareness of opportunities, a lack of

confidence, a lack of other young people being involved, language and jargon, practical issues, and competing priorities.

However, meaningful participation can look like removing practical barriers, such as timing and financial barriers, setting clear expectations, fostering a welcoming environment, supporting young people to take part, and listening to young people's feedback.

Making citizen science data count

Communities across Scotland collect vital data on biodiversity baselines, invasive species, habitat distributions, and marine litter. However recording this data can often be complex, and knowing where it goes and what it is used for can be challenging. In this session we will map the main tools to collect citizen science data, and discuss how we as a collective can ensure that the data we collect is used to benefit our environments. A key takeaway from this workshop is that Scotland does not lack willing communities or interest in citizen science, but the marine litter and biodiversity landscapes are complex and underfunded, and there is a lack of transparency of existing data, data gaps, and the uses of data. Streamlining or coordination of datasets and tools are needed to reduce complexity and confusion, while ensuring that citizen science data meaningfully impacts planning, policy, and decision-making.

CCN Strategy workshop

We also held a strategy workshop, facilitated by Ceris from Fauna & Flora, to look ahead to CCN's priorities over the next few years. This brought members and supporters together to look at the current contexts we are working in, from economic, environmental, social and political perspectives, and discuss CCN's priorities for the next few years.

To gauge levels of engagement within CCN, members were asked to note where they felt they were currently involved, and where they would like to be involved within the network. In some areas, such as governance or external representation, few members felt like they were involved. Other areas, such as sharing information, learning, and taking part in joint initiatives, had high involvement from members. Some ways to increase member engagement were identified, such as providing more information on topical forums, clarity on processes of decision-making and external representation, and increased facilitation from CCN of joint initiatives.

CCN's strategy 2026-2030 will be finalized soon, but some of the main topics that came up in discussion were

- *sharing resources and skills* within the network, possibly through developing a skills database or sharing of resources,
- for CCN to *become a stronger and better recognized voice* in terms of protecting and restoring the marine environment, with the weight of community voices behind it,
- *influencing policy* relating to the marine environment, particularly around upcoming policy developments and enforcement of protected areas, and building political relationships to aid this,
- taking more *regional focuses and connecting geographically-linked members*, to meet the needs of different areas and connect groups around specific local contexts,

- *sharing and collating data and evidence*, to become a reliable source of information and knowledge and use strong scientific evidence to push for change.



Reflections and next steps

The CCN Gathering is always a really important time for the network to come together, re-connect, and reflect. It is also a great opportunity to look forward and identify priorities and next steps, both for the network and for individual groups who attended.

Next steps that arose from this gathering are:

- CCN Coordinator / F&F: Write up the outcomes of the strategy session, and continue to facilitate strategy development
- CCN Coordinator: share survey on strategic priorities for further input into the CCN strategy
- CCN members: Continue to participate in the development of CCN's next strategy
- CCN Coordinator: Develop a members' handbook to outline opportunities for members to get involved in the network
- CCN Coordinator and members: Further discussions that were started around citizen science data collation
- CCN Coordinator and members: initiate and facilitate further discussions around inshore MPA management measures