

# POLICY BRIEF

## Community-led Marine Protection in Scotland

### Summary

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As part of the MPhil in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge, this placement examined collective leadership challenges in marine protection in Scotland.

- The project sought to extract lessons from global community-led marine protection efforts through literature reviews and interviews with Fauna and Flora's country teams and partners, with the goal of adapting these lessons to Scotland's context.
- Objectives included identifying successful community-led strategies and challenges in Scottish marine conservation and proposing practical recommendations for policy engagement and community empowerment in marine protection.
- Key finding: community empowerment played a crucial role as project driver, but it is insufficient on its own to sustain marine protection efforts. Most successful outcomes in the case studies and best practices identified in the literature were achieved through co-governance and co-management strategies that integrated both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

### Context

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As awareness of the fragility and importance of marine ecosystems has grown, so has the focus on leadership in marine conservation. Effective leadership is now recognised as key to successful natural resource management<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Leaders in this field are critical for advancing visionary strategies, fostering collaboration, resolving conflicts, and mobilising resources<sup>4</sup>. Collective leadership in marine protection can also enhance social capital by building trust and consensus among diverse stakeholders<sup>5</sup>.

Marine conservation efforts in Scotland have traditionally been characterised by top-down approaches, with government-led initiatives playing a dominant role. The Scottish Government has shown a strong commitment to marine protection through the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and other conservation

measures<sup>6</sup>. However, top-down management alone has its limitations, particularly when it comes to addressing local community needs and encouraging sustainable, long-term stewardship.

The growing recognition of the value of bottom-up approaches is reshaping the marine conservation landscape in Scotland. Community-led efforts, such as the creation of the first no-take zone in Lamlash Bay in 2008, have demonstrated the potential for biodiversity recovery and sustainable fisheries. These initiatives show that bottom-up strategies can deepen the connection between communities and their marine environments, making conservation more inclusive and sustainable. Nevertheless, these efforts often face significant bureaucratic and legislative challenges, as community-driven conservation is not yet widely supported in Scotland.



## Placement description

A professional placement was undertaken as part of the MPhil in Conservation Leadership, at the University of Cambridge. It focused on examining collective leadership challenges in marine resource management, employing five Fauna & Flora projects as case studies. By conducting a systematic literature review and carrying out semi-structured interviews with three FF country teams and two

Scottish community groups, this project aims to extract successful principles, methodologies, governance frameworks, and insights from global community-led marine protection efforts. These findings will be adapted to the Scottish setting with the intention of informing policy engagement and fostering the development of mechanisms that support community-led marine protection.

## Research question

What are the key lessons learned from community-led marine conservation strategies, as evidenced in academic literature and Fauna & Flora's global case studies, and how can these lessons inform collective leadership and management practices in Scotland's marine protection efforts?

## Objectives

Explore key lessons learned of community-led marine conservation strategies documented in academic literature and in three case studies within Fauna & Flora's global portfolio.

Determine elements that can be directly applied to address the specific challenges and opportunities in Scottish marine conservation.

Develop practical recommendations to enhance and support community-led marine conservation efforts in Scotland.

## Methodology



Data for this study was collected through case studies and a review of relevant literature. Interviews were conducted with key participants involved in five projects—three from Fauna & Flora's global portfolio (International Case Studies – ICSs) and two from Scotland (Scottish Case Studies – SCSs). The ICSs were located in Honduras, Tanzania and Turkey.

These cases were chosen to provide insights into leadership and community engagement in marine conservation.

The interviews, conducted either virtually or in person, focused on topics like project governance, community involvement, and outcomes.

Interview transcripts were analysed for recurring themes. Additionally, snippets were categorised into “perceived success” categories (opportunities/challenges, success/failure), to discern key enablers, barriers, and lessons from the project.

Data patterns from the International Case Studies (ICSs) were compared to those from the Scottish Case Studies (SCSs) and then cross-checked with the literature findings.



## Key Findings

Five broad themes were identified from the data: Community engagement (Stakeholder engagement through inclusion in decision-making, training, and education), Conservation outcomes (Social and ecological impacts of the project), Governance framework (Governance structures and strategies that support or hinder the project), Management approaches (Management approaches of the protected area), and Project implementation (Project initiation, actors, funding mechanisms and recommendations for other community-led projects).

In these cases, community empowerment played a crucial role as the initial driver. However, while community empowerment is essential, it is often insufficient on its own to sustain marine protection efforts. Most successful outcomes in the International Case Studies (ICSs) and best practices identified in the literature were achieved through co-governance and co-management strategies that integrated both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

## Co-governance

**Shared decision-making** is fundamental to co-governance, as seen in projects in Tanzania and Honduras, where communities are involved in early planning and budgeting, reflecting a commitment to shared power.

**Participatory governance** is supported by formal and informal collaboration mechanisms, such as committees and local patrollers, as well as capacity-building initiatives and conflict management strategies.

**Challenges in Scotland** include limited legislative decentralisation and resource constraints, though growing participatory efforts like Regional Marine Plans and community-led projects **offer opportunities** for policy reforms and improved co-governance.

## Co-management

Co-management strategies rely on **formal collaboration** mechanisms like committees and shared databases for coordinated monitoring and enforcement, as seen in projects in Honduras, Tanzania, and Turkey.

**Building trust and relationships** through informal practices, such as shared responsibilities and community engagement, strengthens collaboration and supports formal mechanisms.

**Capacity-building and conflict management** are essential for sustaining co-management, but resource limitations in Scotland, such as funding and enforcement assets, present challenges that could be addressed through joint efforts between local groups and state enforcers.



## Policy recommendations



### 1. Power Decentralisation in Marine Resource Management:

Shift towards co-management frameworks that balance top-down and bottom-up approaches. Decentralising decision-making to local communities will foster greater ownership and adaptability in marine conservation efforts. Legislative reforms and long-term capacity-building initiatives are needed to support community-led governance.

### 2. Creation of Multi-Stakeholder Committees:

Establish inclusive committees that involve diverse stakeholders—government, communities, NGOs, and resource users—in shared decision-making. These committees will promote collaborative governance, ensure equitable representation, and provide formal channels for conflict resolution and capacity-building.

### 3. Enhancing Long-Term Funding Mechanisms:

Develop dedicated and sustainable funding streams to support community-led marine conservation projects. Blended finance approaches, combining public, private, and philanthropic resources, will ensure the financial sustainability of marine protection efforts and long-term monitoring and enforcement.

## For further information contact

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## References

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