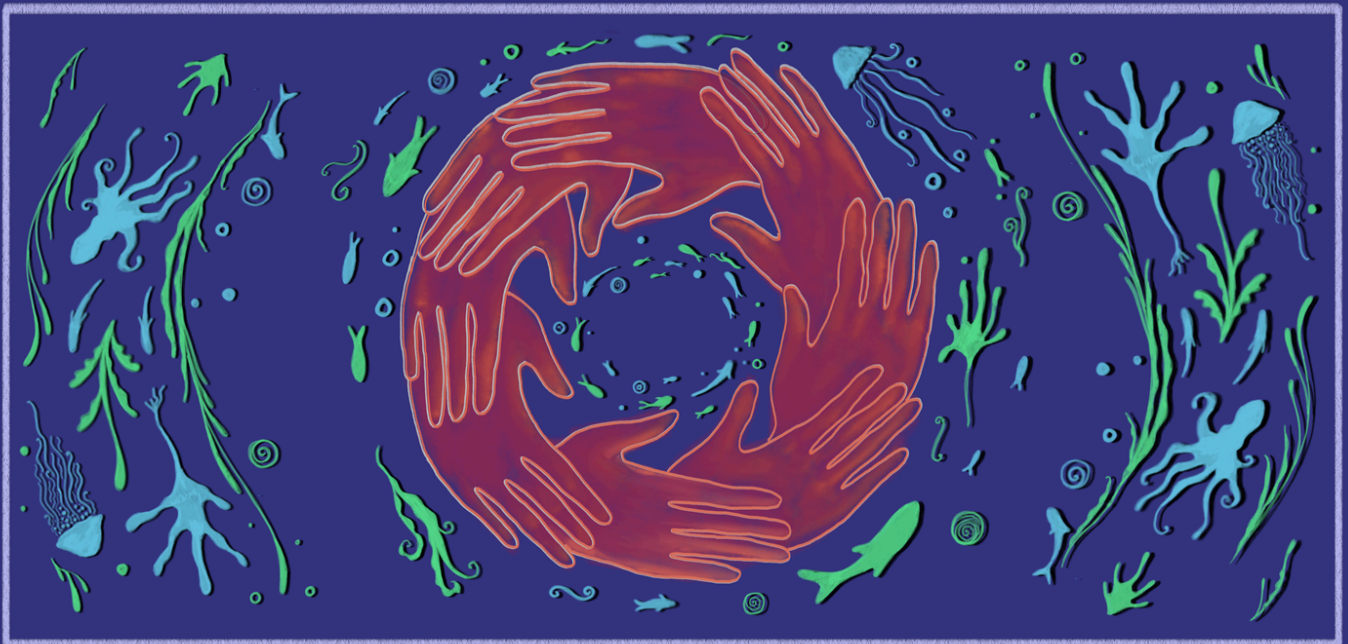


# INCREASING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN MARINE MANAGEMENT IN SCOTLAND

## POLICY BRIEFING



### SUMMARY

**Scotland's coastal and island communities are essential partners in safeguarding our marine environment. Strengthening community leadership leads to better ecological outcomes, fairer decision-making, and more resilient coastal economies.**

Community-led marine initiatives in Scotland have already demonstrated strong, place-based stewardship.

A participatory approach aligns with Scotland's marine and coastal policy ambitions.

Enhancing community leadership requires clearer governance pathways, resourcing, and increased marine leadership opportunities locally.

## BACKGROUND

This paper is the outcome of roundtable discussions convened by [Fauna & Flora](#), [Coastal Communities Network](#) and [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#) in 2025, bringing together representatives from some Scottish community-led groups, NGOs, networks and funders within the marine sector. For more information contact [info@communitiesforseas.scot](mailto:info@communitiesforseas.scot) and [rebecca.plant@fauna-flora.org](mailto:rebecca.plant@fauna-flora.org).

There is a growing recognition of the value of bottom-up approaches to marine management in Scotland, such as the creation of the UK's first No Take Zone in Lamlash Bay in 2008 or Scotland's first Demonstration & Research MPA in Fair Isle. These have demonstrated the potential for biodiversity recovery through community leadership.

Marine conservation methods are typically characterised as being top-down, an approach which has limitations when addressing community needs and encouraging long-term, sustainable stewardship. Globally, models of locally-led management of marine and coastal areas have demonstrated the social, environmental, and economic benefits of giving coastal communities the tools, resources and mandate to manage these areas.

## HOW LOCAL COMMUNITIES CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SUSTAINABLE MARINE MANAGEMENT



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### TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE & PRACTICES

In many areas, traditional fishing practices combined with modern scientific approaches help to maintain healthy fish stocks and marine ecosystems [1].



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### BALANCING COMMUNITY BENEFIT WITH BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION

Through collaborative efforts, marine protection can ensure that local communities benefit from sustainable fisheries and other marine uses while also protecting biodiversity.



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### BOOSTING LOCAL ECONOMIES & CREATING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Increased local management and stewardship can lead to an increase and variety of sustainable, local jobs in the marine environment.



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### SUSTAINED EFFORTS & RESULTS

Leadership of place-based communities in restoration and conservation efforts can allow for a longer-term view of these initiatives. *With sustained resources, monitoring and finance, local actors can lead in the long-term.*



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### INCREASED COMMUNITY STEWARDSHIP & AGENCY

Mechanisms that allow for communities to directly input to the management of their marine area can create processes to identify and address local concerns and needs. For example, fishers involved in the Lyme Bay Consultative Committee, which input to the management of the Lyme Bay Reserve in England, saw both economic and wellbeing benefits from directly inputting to local marine management [2].


[1] <https://iucn.org/resources/grey-literature/solutions-focus-community-led-successes-marine-conservation>

[2] [https://www.lymebayreserve.co.uk/download-centre/files/2021-Rees-Sian-et-al-Socio-economic-impact-of-Lyme-Bay-MPA-on-commercial-fishermen\\_Fisheries-Research.pdf](https://www.lymebayreserve.co.uk/download-centre/files/2021-Rees-Sian-et-al-Socio-economic-impact-of-Lyme-Bay-MPA-on-commercial-fishermen_Fisheries-Research.pdf)

The sixth session of the Scottish Government outlined a commitment to supporting communities to lead on marine management [3], though a pathway and mechanisms for doing so are not fully defined. Principles of community participation and leadership in marine governance are well established in Scottish legislation and policy:

 **The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aimed to give communities greater influence over decisions and local assets.**

 **Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MACAA) requires a Statement of Public Participation (SPP) for marine plans.**

 **The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 provides powers to develop a National Marine Plan (NMP) and Regional Marine Plans (RMPs), with Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) intended as spaces for communities to shape how local seas are managed.**

However, too often community participation in marine decision-making is optional or under-resourced and mechanisms to allow for meaningful participation are underused, leading to perceptions of community engagement being a 'tick-box exercise'.

## BARRIERS

There are several key barriers to community leadership in marine management:

**POLICY / MECHANISMS / SYSTEMS :** Management structures are complicated, routes to community participation are limited, challenges of enforcement of marine protection measures, limited forums for community voices to influence local management, a complex policy landscape.

**SUPPORT / CAPACITY / RESOURCES :** Low community capacity and dependence on volunteer efforts, lack of specific funding and long-term finance, levels of ocean literacy across the country, limited support and information clearly available.

**COLLABORATION / GOVERNANCE / CONFLICT :** Negative perceptions on communities as legitimate stakeholders, conflict between stakeholder groups/sectors, poor communication between communities and statutory bodies, lack of collaborative forums.

**EVIDENCE BASE & DATA :** Mixed views on available economic evidence for marine management, poor data availability and site monitoring capacity, few routes to embed local knowledge in data or policy.

[3] [https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-29-06-2023?meeting=15402&iob=131410#orscontributions\\_M16190E445P781C2509676](https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/search-what-was-said-in-parliament/meeting-of-parliament-29-06-2023?meeting=15402&iob=131410#orscontributions_M16190E445P781C2509676)

# RECOMMENDATIONS

We see these recommendations as critical steps to increasing community leadership in marine management, for the benefit of people and nature:

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## 01. COLLABORATIVE DESIGN OF MPAs ON A LOCAL SCALE

Enabling communities to collaboratively design local marine protection measures can be a vehicle to protect and restore biodiversity while incorporating the needs of various stakeholders [4]. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to marine management, and both nature and local socio-economic contexts must be accounted for. Effective approaches combine local participation, stakeholder dialogue, and scientific data to achieve conservation goals while reducing negative social and economic impacts of management measures.

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## 02. ESTABLISHMENT OF MARINE RANGER ROLES ON A LOCAL LEVEL TO PLAY A ROLE IN MONITORING & GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED MARINE AREAS

Monitoring and enforcement of existing management measures remain key challenges for effective marine protection. Local marine ranger roles, under the remit of local authorities and public bodies, could strengthen governance and public engagement. Rangers have long-established roles in safeguarding the natural environment on land, which could be replicated at sea. International examples, such as Gökova Bay in Turkey, show fishers supported to act as rangers in cooperation with government, improving outcomes for small-scale fisheries and securing local acceptance of management measures [5].

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## 03. A COMMITMENT TO INCREASING ENFORCEMENT MEASURES FROM GOVERNMENT & ALL RELEVANT AUTHORITIES.

For management measures of MPAs to be effective, they must be adequately enforced. A recent case of illegal scallop dredging in the protected Loch Alsh [6] shows the current downfalls of monitoring and enforcement of MPAs. The overall objective of enforcement should be to secure compliance, rather than to punish offenses. As part of this, Marine Directorate should review whether current enforcement measures and penalties act as a sufficient deterrent, and encourage appropriate use of the range of sanctions available.

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## 04. PILOT A SERIES OF COMMUNITY-LED MARINE MANAGEMENT PROJECTS

There is appetite amongst coastal communities for increased marine leadership opportunities on a local level. The Crown Estate Scotland and Orkney Islands Council Local Governance Pilot Scheme could be formalised, better resourced, and developed in different areas and contexts. Several mechanisms for locally managed marine areas have been implemented internationally [7], which could be trialled in Scotland. These pilot schemes should provide adequate funding and resource to the local body or community, and sufficiently flexible to allow for differing contexts across Scotland.

[4] <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X25001101#sec0010>

[5] <https://medpan.org/en/resource-center/mpa-success-story-gokova-example-co-management-small-scale-fishers-restore-marine>

[6] <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c98drdz8m8jo>

[7] <https://iucn.org/resources/grey-literature/solutions-focus-community-led-successes-marine-conservation>