

Conservation news

Protecting Scotland's seas through Scottish coastal communities

Since June 2014 Fauna & Flora International (FFI), in partnership with the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), has been providing support to various communities along Scotland's coast. FFI has been working with the community on the remote Fair Isle, which lies between the Orkney Islands and Shetland, and supporting the long-established Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative (FIMETI). FIMETI represents the interests of the c. 60 people living on the island and has been campaigning for stricter protection of their local sea for 2 decades. Fair Isle has submitted a proposal for a Demonstration and Research marine protected area and awaits a decision from Marine Scotland, the government department responsible for the management of Scotland's seas, later this year. The proposal seeks to explore whether locally led management measures could be put in place, and aims to investigate declines in various seabird populations on Fair Isle and to determine whether seabird populations are negatively affected by the impact of human activities and/or by broader environmental fluctuations such as the effects of climate change. The proposed marine protected area would also endeavour to demonstrate the many socio-economic benefits that marine protected area designation could bring to the Fair Isle community, such as job creation, increased tourism and an enhanced knowledge of the local marine environment.

FFI has also been working with people living along the shores of Loch Sunart and the Sound of Mull. The area is part of two new, separate but overlapping marine protected areas designated for both common skate (Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura marine protected area) and seabed life such as northern feather-stars (Loch Sunart marine protected area). Community members living here have acted on their interest in local issues to form a community group that is now in its early stages of mobilization. The group would like to see their local waters thriving within their environmental limits, and understand that local voices being inherently part of the government process is key to this. Coastal communities around Scotland can play a distinct and valuable role in the sustainable management of inshore waters. Too often this role is overlooked and marginalized from mainstream discussions between government and other leading representatives but the seas are a common, shared resource and members of the public have a rightful place within the decision-making processes connected to this resource.

One such role coastal communities can play is sharing their local knowledge of certain areas of the sea. The benefit of this kind of contribution has been shown along the north-west coast in the Wester Ross area, another region the project has

been engaging with. The area has been designated as a nature conservation marine protected area for various features, including maerl, a hard slow-growing red algae, which can form beds that provide shelter for juvenile fish and other species. Maerl beds are very delicate, however, and are highly sensitive to bottom-towed fishing gear, the impacts of which the marine protected area is intended to mitigate. Local knowledge recently indicated a greater presence of maerl, and a survey using an underwater camera was carried out to locate the unmapped maerl. The search, initiated by members of the local community and supported by a partnership between FFI, Scottish Wildlife Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage was a success and new locations of maerl have now been mapped. With management of this marine protected area currently out to public consultation the data from this survey can be put forward to strengthen the case for larger areas of protection.

Through this project coastal communities have increased opportunity to share their local knowledge of certain areas of the sea and to use this to influence government processes directly. Communities are supported through the initiative to mobilize into coordinated and more strategically-thinking action groups that work alongside one another and with partners. This year will be focused initially on the current consultation on marine protected area management approaches, together with the ongoing support to Fair Isle. Later in the year we aim to organize a symposium on Scottish coastal community empowerment, which will help to maintain momentum and provide a further focus to establish a network of coastal communities around Scotland.

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Identifying and managing priority ecosystem services in Peru

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) works with a number of strategic partners in the extractive industry. These include, amongst others, Rio Tinto, Anglo American, BP, eni and Repsol. Together we are integrating ecosystem approaches into strategic management of biodiversity and ecosystem services across their operations. Repsol, an oil and gas company, and FFI are working together to identify priority ecosystem services at Repsol's Sagari Project. Priority ecosystem services are defined by Performance Standard 6 (the guidelines produced by the International Finance Corporation) as those that a project's activities are likely to affect, and could therefore have effects on local communities, and that a project directly depends on (e.g. water). Sagari is a gas pipeline project in the western Peruvian Amazon, located along the lower Urubamba River