



Coastal Futures Conference 2024

An inclusive future for our seas

Conference Report

24th & 25th January, 2024 | The Royal Institution, London & online

Executive Summary



The 31st Coastal Futures Conference was held at the historically significant Royal Institution, London, who's overarching purpose is to bring the public and scientists together to share their interest and passion for science. Equitable access to science is a core belief of the Royal Institute, which provided the perfect setting for this year's Coastal Futures theme: the need for inclusivity in coastal and marine management.

The two-day conference, opened by a keynote speech from Sally-Ann Hart MP, contained a wealth of presentations from leading organisations across government, industry, consultants, academia, NGOs, and the voluntary sector, focusing on the following six key themes:

1. Community aspirations
2. Capitalising on Values
3. Delivering a sustainable blue economy
4. Evidence assessment into action
5. Restoration prioritisation
6. Mobilising equitable management

The range and diversity of presentations provided delegates with the latest updates on government actions for managing our coasts and seas, including marine spatial prioritisation, restoration, community engagement and collaboration. From across the UK, over 400 delegates attended in person with 246 online.

The overarching theme of inclusivity was present throughout the conference, with many delegates and presenters sharing their personal and professional experiences and encouraging reflection on their own workspaces, communities, and even the conference itself. Inclusivity was promoted by Yvette Curtis (Surfers Against Sewage) in her keynote speech, by asking who is not in the room, and set the tone for a thought-provoking conference.





Session 1

Community Aspirations

How are coastal and marine practitioners responding to the inclusivity agenda?

Introduction and Keynotes

Chaired by **Sarah Young** (WWF), speakers navigated the future for coastal communities facing the extremes of social and economic inequality, environmental stewardship and how to support a 'just transition' through the management of our coasts and seas.

In her opening keynote, **Sally-Ann Hart MP** emphasised the power of communities in shaping national policy and the importance of networks, such as the Coastal Communities APPG, that ensure community interests are accounted for. It was highlighted that, under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, which drives sustainable development through place-based regeneration, the challenges facing coastal towns have been identified and are now a priority for the Levelling-Up Minister.

The following talk by **Yvette Curtis** (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, Surfers Against Sewage) made a strong challenge to the audience over whether we were facing head-on the challenges of inclusion and diversity – in ocean science, in conservation, and through Coastal Futures conferences.

Jen Ashworth (Head of Domestic Marine Conservation Defra) set out Defra's key commitments and actions. She emphasised the primary target of halting biodiversity loss for healthy and diverse seas whilst delivering net zero. This would require collective action across UK government teams and international partners. Current actions included managing and evaluating the first three Highly Protected Marine Areas, ensuring designated MPAs are in favourable condition by 2042, data sharing, scoping the first set of Offshore Wind Environmental Standards, solidifying the Marine Spatial Prioritisation programme and widening opportunities to engage with consultations. Jen explained that the natural capital approach was "like a jigsaw" with many components for wider sea management, sustainable development and restoration.

Session speakers

Samantha Richardson (National Coastal Tourism Academy) opened the session with an inspiring talk on the One Coast Coalition's Pledge for the Coast. With strong evidence of the social and health benefits of coasts, the Coalition was working towards greater coastal access for all through this year's campaign "A Coast for All". Samantha encouraged delegates to sign the pledge and get involved.

Nicky Rimington (National Resources for Wales) focussed on the complex range of interests related to integrated coastal management in Wales. By highlighting the unique legislative approach in Wales, driven by the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015, Nicky explained NRW's seven wellbeing goals and five ways of working, which enable a more integrated way of working on coastal issues. Engaging with a range of sectors and interests was highlighted as important, particularly making information accessible to enable meaningful conversations.

We then heard from **Joe Perry** (Highland Council) about how nature-based solutions can help threatened coastal communities. Community engagement was central to Joe's talk, which focused on Golspie; a Scottish fishing town with a cultural history linked to the Highland Clearances. Golspie is threatened by coastal flooding and erosion and plans for improving coastal defences are being considered alongside the town's historical and social context. The inclusion of community voices in discussions over Golspie's future was highlighted as invaluable.

The importance of capturing the views of communities directly impacted by future projects or climate impacts was also passionately voiced by **Mandelai Wolfe** (Lyme Bay Fisherman's CIC). Guided by the tagline 'for fishermen, by fishermen', the CIC provides fishermen with the skills and confidence to engage with regulators. Mandelai's talk showed the importance of meeting marginalised groups "where they are" and supporting them to advocate for themselves.

Staying on the South Coast, **Elaine Hayes** (Chief Executive of Plymouth Sound National Marine Park) discussed the strong relationship between people, planet, and place that exists within Plymouth's marine identity. The importance of the marine and coastal environment to local communities was highlighted, and how helping people engage with the marine environment increases marine citizenship, further supporting sustainable management of our seas.

The final talk came from **Jetske Germing** (Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum), representing the Wales Coast and Seas Partnership (CaSP Cymru). With a focus on ocean literacy and capacity building, Jetske explained how CaSP Cymru is working to reconnect people with the coasts and seas. However, effective engagement requires investment, and securing funding can be challenging when traditional KPIs and outputs do not necessarily align with the work required.

Panel Debate

How are coastal and marine practitioners responding to the inclusivity agenda?

- We must face the challenges of inclusion and diversity head-on – in ocean science, in conservation, in management, in all our lives.
- Engaging with a range of sectors and interests is highly valuable, but it is essential that the information presented for discussion is accessible.
- Incorporating the voices of communities directly impacted by future projects or climate impacts will be crucial for ensuring decisions about our shared future are effective.
- Helping people engage with the marine environment increases marine citizenship, which in turn helps increase sustainable management of the marine environment.
- Increasing engagement activities, building rapport with communities, supporting advocacy, and securing funding can engage a wider range of people in marine management discussions.

Summary

Conference delegates were given passionate accounts of enhanced community engagement and evidence of its importance for both communities and marine conservation. The panel debate highlighted that marine environmental management does not take place in a social vacuum and the better we understand context and people, the better our management will be. The appetite for inclusivity is clear and can be achieved through increasing engagement activities, building rapport with different community groups, providing advocacy support to those unable to advocate for themselves, and securing investment and funding. By including a more diverse range of people in steering groups, and other engagement activities, the power to make decisions is shared more equally between stakeholders, communities and individuals.



Session 2

Capitalising on Values

How will knowledge of 'values' make a difference to our prospects?

Introduction

In this session, chaired by **Hugo Tagholm** (Oceana UK), the speakers were asked to consider how to bring the latest progress in evidence development tools for natural and social capital into mainstream decision-making, and whether they can support inclusivity and longer-term investment.

Session speakers

Graham Underwood (UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership) explained why the concept of blue carbon must be defined before it is used to evidence the value of different habitats. Blue carbon can be defined in different ways, depending on its use, which creates several challenges. The importance of balancing evidence standardisation with end uses for the assessments was emphasised.

Mike Nelson (Environment Agency) spoke on the application of the natural capital approach to the land-sea interface. Through considering monitoring, evidence gathering and application, the Marine Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (mNCEA) programme aims to build our understanding of the true value of natural assets.

In her talk on valuing the King Charles III England Coast Path, **Ellen McHarg** (Cefas) presented findings from a pilot economic study into the recreational value of walking on the North Norfolk coastal path. Ellen highlighted the potential for applying the values identified in the pilot study to other sites using the benefit transfer approach, which provides a cost-effective solution that can be applied at both local and national scales.

Elizabeth Beall (Finance Earth) explored the current status of marine natural capital markets and the opportunities for unlocking investment. High-integrity markets are measurable using both financial and non-financial metrics, and allow for a fair price to be paid to benefit communities. The development of roadmaps that provide clear, defined actions is essential.

Leonie Robinson (MMO) explored whether decision-making for a thriving marine environment is happening, and, if not, why not? By mapping the landscape of decisions, information can be collected on how decisions are made, who is involved, and the extent to which socio-economic values are considered. Further, through this process, evidence gaps can be identified.

Erika Hughes (University of Portsmouth) presented work being conducted within the SMMR Diverse Values project. Erika highlighted how theatre, photography, film making, and digital storytelling can engage local communities and result in co-produced knowledge of marine issues that are of most interest to the participants.

Panel Debate

How will knowledge of 'values' make a difference to our prospects?

- Values can be defined and measured in different ways, often informed by the question being addressed.
- Defining a common understanding of values is central to having informed and integrated conversations with stakeholders.
- Adopting a range of stakeholder engagement techniques, including non-traditional methods such as theatre, film making, and storytelling can provide valuable insights into how the environment is valued.

Summary

This session explored the different ways in which 'value' is considered in decision-making and explored the challenges of ensuring values are sufficiently evidence-based to enable their inclusion in decision-making. Through using a variety of creative methods to help local communities share their knowledge and insight into how they value the environment, a more informed set of values can be incorporated into decision-making. Mapping decisions can provide a better understanding of the extent to which different values are considered in decision-making and identify evidence gaps. Session speakers further discussed the importance of both quantitative and qualitative approaches for understanding the range of social values at the coast, and the need for a range of value indicators. However, stakeholder engagement is fundamental for identifying common ground within social values and broadens the range of people engaged in decision-making.



Session 3

Delivering a Sustainable Blue Economy



What approaches are going to be crucial in balancing the need for social and economic benefit alongside environmental recovery?

Introduction

This session, chaired by **Dickon Howell** (Howell Marine Consulting and OCF Co-Director) focused on strategies for delivering a sustainable blue economy and ensuring that economic activities are environmentally sustainable and socially equitable.

Session speakers

Michelle Moore (The Crown Estate) outlined the Whole of Seabed Programme, highlighting its approach to mapping seabed demand and identifying co-location opportunities. The programme will align demand priorities with spatial planning, while considering MPA and habitat conditions and environmental benefits. Next steps involve integrating ecosystem services into mapping and addressing knowledge gaps, regional supply chains, livelihood impacts, and sector coordination.

Benj Sykes (Orsted) showcased commitment to sustainability in offshore wind development, aiming to reduce emission intensity by 2025, achieve net-positive impacts from 2030, and establish a net zero value chain by 2040. Their ecosystem restoration projects (e.g., Wilder Humber and artificial nesting structures) and their €100m Blue Bond, exemplify their dedication to environmental stewardship. Benj emphasised that further industry-wide collaboration is needed to prioritise sea space and address environmental challenges proactively.

Geraint Evans (UK Major Ports Group) discussed leveraging the rapid evolution of the port sector to drive positive change in coastal communities. Initiating projects, addressing community plans, and implementing effective solutions are crucial actions. Key priorities include supporting floating offshore wind in the Celtic Sea, facilitating a societal and economic transition from steel to port-focused activities, collaboration with communities, and securing investments to drive progression.

Alyx Elliot (Oceana UK) introduced the Ocean Alliance Against Offshore Drilling, highlighting the risks associated with new oil and gas drilling and emphasising the need for renewable energy. Alyx highlighted that, in 2023, 40% of oil and gas licences extended into MPAs, and that operations are producing continuous small oil spills that release toxins and micro-plastics into the food chain.

Annabel Stockwin (DEFRA) explained how Fisheries Management Plans provide a tool for proactive, plan-led fisheries management that ensures policies maintain sustainable stock levels. The 2024 Action Plan preparation included the hosting of evidence and engagement workshops, piloting management schemes, and undertaking climate change-related efforts for responsive and adaptive plans.

Louise O'Hara Murray (Scottish Government) presented how Scotland's National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) has a focus on blue economy, aiming for ecosystem health, improved livelihoods, economic prosperity, and social inclusion. Next actions in developing the NMP2 involve trialing a natural capital approach, particularly with island communities, and co-designing the NMP2 with stakeholders through outreach programmes.

Panel Debate

What approaches are going to be crucial in balancing the need for social and economic benefit alongside environmental recovery?

- A strategic planning approach that considers natural capital and blue economy approaches will be valuable for selecting sites or projects that have the least negative impact and maximum benefit.
- Active stakeholder and public engagement throughout all phases, including planning, monitoring, and evaluation to ensure collaborative ownership.
- Produce climate change adaptation strategies.
- It will be essential to prioritise evidence needs and, subsequently, fill evidence gaps where required.
- Explore opportunities to unlock private and public investment to support responsible development and growth of the blue economy.

Summary

This session focused on delivering a sustainable blue economy, providing examples of activity ranging from industry-led initiatives through to national-scale government actions. Discussions highlighted the need for a holistic approach to managing the marine environment, ensuring that management decisions consider the multiple demands on the marine space (including opportunities for co-location), the wider implications of management decisions on society, particularly with regard to ecosystem services, and the need for strategic stakeholder engagement, as demonstrated by the Scottish Government's NMP2 process. The presentations highlighted the range of activity being led by the private sector, particularly with regard to creating a coordinated and collaborative approach to informing planning decisions, securing investment, and addressing environmental challenges.

Keynotes

Srabani Sen (Full Colour) outlined three C's to encourage the audience to reflect on actions to support equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Clarity on their organisations' understanding of what EDI means to the organisation itself; Commitment to take actions; and Courage to challenge any fear one may have when advocating EDI.

The first day closed with a talk from **Monty Halls** who emphasised the importance of continuing environmental conservation work, drawing on personal experiences and the generational responsibility to protect natural environments. He highlighted the transformative impact of nature on young people, the role of community initiatives in addressing global problems, and introduced Leaderbox Blue, a project designed to facilitate local marine conservation efforts worldwide.





Session 4

Evidence Assessment into Action

In response to the latest evidence and assessments, how will we drive action?

Introduction and Keynotes

Day 2 began with a keynote address by **Helen Wakeham** (Environment Agency) who highlighted the need to take a catchment-to-coast approach and work collaboratively to transform water management. Dr **Gemma Harper** (JNCC) then set the scene for the fourth session where she called for collaborative, innovative, and inclusive approaches to mitigate marine issues and foster long-term ecological recovery and resilience, to move from monitoring ecological collapse to enabling ecological recovery.

The session was chaired by **Dave Stone** (JNCC), beginning with a UK perspective on the recently launched OSPAR Quality Status Report for the NE Atlantic. Speakers addressed the pollution challenges we face and the role of the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) and other approaches to protect and recover the state of our seas.

Session speakers

Dominic Pattinson (OSPAR) presented the Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023, which distilled over 120 assessments to measure the health of the North-East Atlantic. Using the DAPSIR approach [1], the report analysed cumulative pressures and their interactive impacts, providing valuable insights using Sankey diagrams, that can inform decision-making.

Christina Herbon (JNCC) highlighted a crucial shift in mindset towards viewing the oceans as one interconnected global system rather than separate entities. In response to the QSR benthic ecology evidence showing wide-ranging impacts across ecosystems, it was emphasised that the transition to a low carbon future must ensure appropriate management across the ocean for high biodiversity and healthy environments.

Bob Earll described the reporting of annual change on a regional scale within England and how it was building social capital. Recognising the importance of early warnings, citizen scientists' contributions were highlighted, emphasising the need to leverage this information effectively, particularly for developing actionable strategies. The South-West Marine Ecosystems (SWME) approach serves as an exemplary model of regional reporting that aligns with the UKMS and promotes action and inclusivity through communication and outreach initiatives.

1 - The DAPSIR framework describes the relationships (and flows) of the causes and consequences of changes in the quality status of the North-East Atlantic from environmental, social and economic perspectives. DAPSIR: Drivers, Activities, Pressures, State, Impact and Response.

Kayleigh Thomas (JNCC/Cefas) highlighted that marine litter remains unsatisfactory for 'Good Environmental Status', emphasising the need for action and innovation for addressing the challenge. For example, AUV and camera methods are effective in detecting litter, but trawls were better at identifying plastic, emphasising the need for improved methods. Advances in mapping lost fishing gear have identified hotspots and found overlap with marine structures, reefs, and renewable energy sites, posing threats to various species and requiring immediate attention.

Matt Frost (UK National Decade Committee/Plymouth Marine Laboratory) introduced the UK National Ocean Decade Committee, which focuses on bringing regional and global assessments together to capture diverse pressures. Matt explained how, in alignment with the UN's Ocean Decade goal of inspiring and uniting people, the committee has adopted a "whole of society" approach, encouraging participation from various sectors and backgrounds through a voluntary, inclusive, multi-stakeholder group. Acting as a central hub for UK global engagement, the committee oversees four large UK-wide projects and 16 decade-long projects, with potential for further expansion.

Caroline Carr (Clean Humber) highlighted the increase in sewage overspills and contamination reports around the Humber. Conflicting data analysis suggested excellent local water quality, prompting the need for transparency and coordination efforts among local authorities. Actions included updating monitoring systems and addressing land pressures. An innovative approach is needed to coordinate data from multiple sources to improve public communication, ensuring accurate representation of water quality status.

Panel Debate

In response to the latest evidence and assessments, how will we drive action?

- We must go low carbon whilst keeping high biodiversity and healthy environments
- Using available evidence and collaboratively addressing issues to secure political commitment for enhanced actions.
- Embracing a 'whole of society' approach involving all sectors, engagement with communities, and considering inter-generational sustainability.
- Enhancing capacity to move away from short-term economic gains towards long-term actions.
- "No organisation can do this alone", we need to work together collaboratively to make a difference
- Need to work catchment to coast – people and environment together in a systems approach to enable improvement.
- Hope is a leadership skill that needs to be embraced as it incentivises action.

Summary

This session focused on turning evidence into action and presenters covered a range of scales and actions that need to be considered, from the UK perspective on the recently launched OSPAR Quality Status Report for the NE Atlantic to the pollution challenges faced in the Humber estuary. The role of the UK Marine Strategy in protecting and recovering the state of our seas was highlighted, as well as other UK programmes, such as the MNCEA. Delegates were reminded that our ocean is a single, interconnected global system, demonstrated by the global challenge of managing marine litter, and that effective management must take place at a range of scales and across the ocean. The need for uniting and inspiring coastal communities and engaging them in meaningful ways was also emphasised, highlighting the value of local action and the importance of a 'whole of society approach'.





Session 5

Restoration Prioritisation

Are we evolving the right solutions to deliver marine restoration and a nature-positive approach to decision-making?

Introduction

Chaired by **Roger Proudfoot** (Environment Agency), speakers highlighted recent efforts to realise restoration ambitions, including new mapping tools and techniques to help prioritise recovery.

Session speakers

Charlotte Johnson (Natural England) presented the Marine Restoration Potential (MAREPO) project, published in 2023, which mapped the restoration potential for England's threatened and declining habitats, including maerl, kelp, oyster beds, and horse mussel beds. The project explored whether restoration would succeed for these habitats, with assessments detailing where restoration was considered to work and not work.

Lily Pauls (Natural Resources Wales) discussed building resilience of Welsh marine ecosystems through the launch of a new three-year programme called the Nature Networks, which consists of eight projects covering, for example, non-native species, saltmarsh restoration and noise pollution. This £45m Welsh Government funded programme sets out to bring MPAs into favourable condition and increase biodiversity and resilience by addressing the pressures facing habitats in Wales.

Annika Clements (DAERA) shared the priorities for the Northern Ireland government, particularly with regard to habitat restoration supported by local communities. For example, the establishment of three oyster restoration nurseries and a seagrass conservation scheme, through EcoMoorings with the Ulster Wildlife Trust. The co-development of a blue carbon action plan is a key ambition for DAERA, which aims to explore and identify the potential for blue carbon habitats across Northern Ireland.

Tara Hooper (Natural England) discussed Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) developed through Defra's Marine Natural Capital Ecosystem Assessment (MNCEA) programme. The Sussex kelp restoration project was identified as a good example of a LNRS that used a natural capital evidence base and involved academia in monitoring kelp recovery. It was emphasised that there needs to be a way of linking individual projects together in a strategic approach to recovery, potentially using LNRS, and that the MNCEA is exploring how this might work through developing a standard approach and leading a community of practice.

Will Melhuish (Exo Engineering) explored how to achieve biodiversity net gain through coastal infrastructure. Coastal 'squeeze' is happening along coasts due to seawall development, which reduces intertidal habitat space. ExoEngineering are developing Hybrid Nature-Based Solutions (HNBS) to help promote nature along seawalls, including artificial rock pools, textures, and structures. Such innovation is likely to help achieve biodiversity net gain legislation, which currently requires 10% net increase in biodiversity.

Eve Leegwater (Environment Agency) discussed the success of the ReMeMaRe project, which aims to restore meadows, marshes and reefs across England. The project has 35 members from across government and NGOs. The project has published handbooks for restoration, principles of restoration and delivered conferences. Eve highlighted the many challenges that restoration ambitions face, such as regulation and licensing, and the initiatives on the horizon, such as the endangered landscape project and the development of a 5-year plan that will provide governance, advice and support.

Panel Debate

Are we evolving the right solutions to deliver marine restoration and a nature-positive approach to decision-making?

- Defra and NGOs are keen for restoration work to happen, but, while recognising more data could help with uncertainties, consider that the desire for a perfect dataset should not hold back progress.
- Multi-year programmes are beneficial, but bigger issues require legislative changes to further help restoration efforts.
- Scaling up and timeframes are important.
- Strong political leadership is needed, without which nothing happens.
- Measuring success is important and, although this is difficult, we must try.
- Decision making is improving, but legislative mechanisms are often lacking. There is a need to get things moving more quickly.
- Solutions proposed can often be headed in right direction but new oil and gas licenses are a contradiction.

Summary

This session delved into the strategic importance and methodologies for marine restoration in the UK, emphasizing its role in counteracting biodiversity loss and enhancing societal well-being. Key challenges include predicting habitat suitability, data scarcity, financial constraints, and regulatory hurdles. Advocates called for innovative conservation strategies, robust funding, and cross-sector collaboration to make marine restoration a cornerstone of sustainable development and societal resilience.





Session 6 Mobilising Equitable Management

How do we mobilise engagement in strategic marine resource management and choose between priorities?

Introduction

In this session, chaired by Prof. **Clare Fitzsimmons** (Newcastle University), speakers offered perspectives on progress in marine spatial prioritisation and how to ensure that blue economy opportunities involve coastal communities, whilst protecting and restoring the quality of our coasts and seas.

Session speakers

Rachel Brown (MMO) explored the next generation of marine planning in England. She explained the legislation behind marine planning in England and gave a progress update on the next iteration of the East Marine Plan, which was recommended for replacement in 2023. The next steps were highlighted, notably the need for a spatial energy plan, a marine prioritisation programme, and the need to consider other emerging sectors. Rachel noted that there is a movement towards prioritised spatial planning, which has started with the East Marine Plan.

Daniel Morris (Orkney Island Council) discussed unlocking the potential of regional marine plans (RMPs) from an Orkney Islands perspective. As laid out in Scotland's National Marine Plan, Scotland is divided into 11 different marine planning regions, which are delegated to regional marine planning partnerships to develop. It is led by Orkney Island's Council in Orkney where this approach is tailored to the specific issues and needs of the region. However, despite advancements in RMPs, none have yet been adopted and greater support from central government is needed.

Chloe Wenman (Marine Conservation Society) discussed the priorities for strengthening marine planning in Wales. She recognised the increased focus on energy security and investment in offshore renewables and called for more spatially prescriptive marine planning to transition to a low carbon and high nature future. Clarity is needed on what activity can happen where. Chloe also emphasised the importance of ocean equity and access to benefits and resources.

Sarah Coulthard (Newcastle University) spoke about the importance of trust and legitimacy for co-management to work. Providing several examples, Sarah showed how we need trust to mobilise proper engagement. Her research has demonstrated how trust is two-way and can be lost quickly. We have seen a lack of trust between fishers and government, and there currently exists a wider public mistrust in science and politics.

Simone de Winter (CEFAS) examined cumulative effects of offshore wind farms in a marine spatial world. Cumulative Effects Assessment (CEA) can be carried out at different scales, encompassing multiple activities and pressures. Simone explained that OSPAR/DAPSIR was revised by adding a spatial component and considering all receptors, in particular food and ecosystem services. Limitations included the absence of receptor data, no data on the exact location of wind turbines, and the difficulty with assessing interactivity between pressures.

Jennifer Godwin (Seabed User and Developer Group) set out key principles for Marine Spatial Prioritisation. Marine industries have an interest in a well-managed marine environment and work collaboratively. As a group of informed and considered stakeholders, SUDG hope their contribution will inform government decisions, but consider there is a need for change in the way we manage our seas. It was further emphasised that transparency is critical when making prioritisation decisions.

Panel Debate

How do we mobilise engagement in strategic marine resource management and choose between priorities?

- ‘Who’ you want to engage with must be identified early, to target relevant stakeholder engagement, and that language is clear and accessible. There isn’t “one size fits all” for engagement
- Valuing local knowledge and actively working with communities is critical to choosing priorities - different views and values should be incorporated into decision-making.
- A lot of engagement is ‘extractive’ so there needs to be more focus on creating feedback loops to inform those who engage but are then impacted by decisions. This will build an understanding of the outcomes from their engagement and build trust amongst coastal communities.
- Those making decisions need to connect more with those delivering change in coastal areas.
- Clearer priorities from government may make decisions easier and enable more focussed actions.
- The role of IFCAs was described as “implementing difficult, effective management that balances conservation with keeping sustainable fisheries open”, however what happens within IFCAs could be better communicated to the broader fishing community.
- It was confirmed the new Marine Plans will include restoration and recovery strategies.
- Lobbying MPs is something all individuals can do to encourage their local representatives to be more vocal about the marine environment - being a ‘collective’ will have more influence.

Summary

This session invited speakers to offer their perspectives on marine spatial prioritisation and community engagement with blue economy development. Two key themes to emerge from the presentations were the need for collaborative working and the need for transparency and trust in the decision-making process. Regional marine planning provides an opportunity to engage with local communities and focus on challenges relevant to that region, but sufficient support from the central government is required to effectively engage with stakeholders and identify key challenges. Cumulative Effects Assessments provide an approach for capturing the multiple activities and pressures within a marine region, but gaps in data and understanding of pressure interactions have limited its application. The next era of marine plans should present opportunities to increase engagement with coastal communities to ensure equality and inclusion.



Invited speaker

Katrina Ryan (Mindfully Wired Communications) advocated communication that emphasised building, maintaining, and evolving collaborative structures for managing coastal resources and fisheries. She spoke of the importance of trust, inclusivity, and mutual respect in co-management projects, drawing from her experience with the GAP2 project, which integrated communication with scientific research and policy engagement across Europe. Katrina concluded that effective communication should be integral and mindful throughout the lifespan of projects, not just for surface-level PR, but to foster participation and ensure long-term success.

OCF Bob Earll Award

The final activity of the conference was the first Bob Earll Award to recognise an individual for their outstanding contribution to ocean and coastal management. For 2024 the award was presented to **Peter Barham**.

Peter had worked in environmental sustainability throughout his career. He pioneered connections between industry, government and the NGO community. Originally working for the National Rivers Authority, he moved to Associated British Ports and was a founding member of the Seabed User and Developer Group. He facilitated industry input to legislation and policy such as the Marine Act, stakeholder engagement into Marine Conservation Zones, advice on Highly Protected Marine Areas, and more recently Marine Net Gain. Peter was particularly acknowledged for supporting many individuals in the coastal and marine sector, encouraging their growth and commitment to careers in the field.





Coastal Futures Conference 2025

London and Online
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