

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
20th MAY 2009

Agenda Item	16
Report No	PED 46/09

Draft Aquaculture Framework Plan for Loch Nevis
Report by Director of Planning & Development

SUMMARY

A new framework plan has been prepared to guide the development of aquaculture in Loch Nevis. This is intended to replace the original (1988) Loch Nevis plan and is one of three new aquaculture plans for Highland which are currently in preparation. Coastal plans are becoming more widespread in Scotland and more diverse as marine management moves up the political agenda, as more organisations get involved, and as new methodologies are tested. Progress on the Highland Aquaculture Framework Plans (AFPs) and the scope for their future development should be viewed in this context. Members are invited to approve the distribution of this new draft plan for Loch Nevis for public consultation over an 8-week period. The aim is to finalise the plan later in the year.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A new aquaculture framework plan (AFP) has been prepared for Loch Nevis. Copies of this draft document, along with the report required for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) purposes, are available on the bulletin. Printed copies of the two documents have also been lodged in the Members' Lounge. The plan is one of three which are currently being prepared to replace plans originally produced in 1988. The other two are for the Loch Torridon area and for the coast between Enard Bay and Loch Dughail in northwest Sutherland. Work on drafting these should be completed later this year.

2. The Nevis plan in context - progress with coastal plans

- 2.1 There are currently 11 coastal plans in Highland (*see Diagram 1*). Six of these are the newer-generation AFPs prepared since 2000, four are first-generation AFPs from the late 1980's, and one is the integrated (multi-sectoral) plan which was produced for the Two Brooms area in 2006. Of the four first-generation AFPs, two, as mentioned above, are currently being revised. This leaves only the plans for the Loch Linnhe area and Loch Ewe to be updated. The scope of these last two plans remains to be decided. However, a relevant consideration in the case of the Loch Linnhe area (which includes Loch Leven and Loch Eil) is that a new, integrated plan is currently being prepared for the adjacent Sound of Mull area as part of the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative (SSMEI). The draft plan for the Sound of Mull is likely to be published within the next few months.

- 2.2 Updating of Highland's early fish farming framework plans is necessary to take account of the changes in the industry since its first major wave of expansion in the 1980's. Some of the early seabed leases have lapsed or been relinquished whilst on other sites leases have been renewed and installations have been expanded. Expansion has reached the point on some sites where the limits of acceptable growth require careful consideration. Also, with sustainable development the watchword, the interaction between aquaculture and other interests continues to require careful management.
- 2.3 The model of aquaculture framework plans which the former Highland Regional Council pioneered and which the Highland Council has subsequently developed, is well-established. They continue to provide local-level guidance in a compact form which aims to integrate aquaculture harmoniously with other uses of the coastal zone. They identify place-specific development opportunities and constraints and address issues of appropriate scale which would be difficult to deal with at a more strategic level. Their aim is not to expand aquaculture at any cost but to identify development opportunities and constraints and to get a best fit "on the ground" between aquaculture and other interests.
- 2.4 The wider context in which these plans are being developed is changing however. There is growing interest in integrated, multi-sector approaches to coastal planning, here and elsewhere. The Council's initiative in producing a multi-sector plan for the Two Brooms area in 2006 (on a partnership basis and with European funding support) was the first of its kind and attracted interest both nationally and internationally. Our neighbouring authority, Argyll & Bute Council, has become active in the field of coastal planning in recent years and has recently produced an integrated plan for Loch Fyne. The SSMEI project, which has produced (or is producing) marine spatial plans for Shetland, the Firth of Clyde, and the Sound of Mull, is a complementary initiative which has provided new knowledge for the Scottish Government and the other agencies involved.
- 2.5 Three other new policy developments - the advent of the new government division Marine Scotland, the Marine Bills for Scotland and the UK, and growing interest in harnessing marine-based energy sources – are likely to stimulate a new wave of marine and coastal planning at the national and regional scale. This may well feed through into new strategic-level guidance which deals more rigorously than before with aquaculture, inshore fishing, marine-based renewable energy, marine nature conservation, and the need to safeguard and rebuild the wild salmonid fish populations of key river catchments. The Council should be alert to these changes and be prepared to adapt or contribute accordingly.

3. Key features of the area and the draft Loch Nevis Plan

- 3.1 Loch Nevis is perhaps best known for its fjord-like character and scenery (it represents a substantial part of the Knoydart National Scenic Area), its remoteness (accessible only by boat or rough tracks), and the enterprising spirit of its community. It is increasingly popular as a destination for outdoor-

mindful tourists and walkers. The loch (see *Diagram 2*) also provides opportunities for sheltered inshore fishing and for finfish and shellfish aquaculture. For a sea loch of its size, Loch Nevis is unusual in that it is largely unroaded and the upper reaches of the loch are in a core area of wild land. The wild and unspoilt character of this area – an important asset in UK terms - could easily be eroded by the cumulative impact of inappropriately located fish farms, or by the over-expansion of existing ones.

3.2 The middle and lower reaches of the loch are somewhat less sensitive in landscape terms. They have better water circulation and on the south/west side, between Tarbet and the mouth of the loch, there is good shelter from prevailing winds. However, the obvious opportunities for aquaculture development here have already largely been taken up. There appears to be some scope for new development of this type between Airor and Doune (though this is more exposed), at Sandaig Bay (inter-tidal area) and in Braomisaig Bay. The layout of the existing aquaculture activity in Ardentigh Bay is somewhat cramped and the plan recommends addressing this by relocating some of the production to other sites in the middle reaches of the loch. The plan recommends that the current scale of aquaculture activity in the approaches to Tarbet Bay should not be exceeded. The plan also recommends that the current scale of finfish farming at Earnsaig and Stoul should not be exceeded unless it involves relocation of production from Ardentigh Bay.

3.3 Further to the above, the draft strategy for Loch Nevis:

- supports continued finfish and shellfish farming activity in the areas currently used for this purpose provided that operators give due regard to the environmental sensitivity of the area and other users;
- identifies Inverie Bay, the narrows, the innermost basin of the loch, the small inlet of Tarbet Bay, and the mouth of the loch as areas where aquaculture development should be avoided to safeguard other interests.

The plan also encourages the use of existing shellfish leases which are currently inactive or undeveloped and supports progress towards an Area Management Agreement.

3.4 More detailed area guidance is given for the 7 policy zones which have been identified in the plan area (see *Diagram 2 – policy map – attached*).

4. Next steps

4.1 Members are invited to approve this draft plan for public consultation with or without amendment. Thereafter a report on the consultation will be prepared with proposals for any necessary amendment. This will be brought back to the PED committee for its further consideration and ultimately its endorsement as supplementary planning guidance.

5. Fit with the Programme for the Highland Council

5.1 Preparation of this draft plan helps to implement the Council's published aim of producing three new aquaculture framework plans by 2011.

6. Resource implications

6.1 There are no significant resource implications attached to this paper. The draft plan will be advertised in the local press and on the Highland Council website.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is recommended to approve the publication of the draft Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan for public consultation over an 8-week period.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning & Development

Date: 6 May 2009

Author: Colin Wishart (tel: 01463-702272)

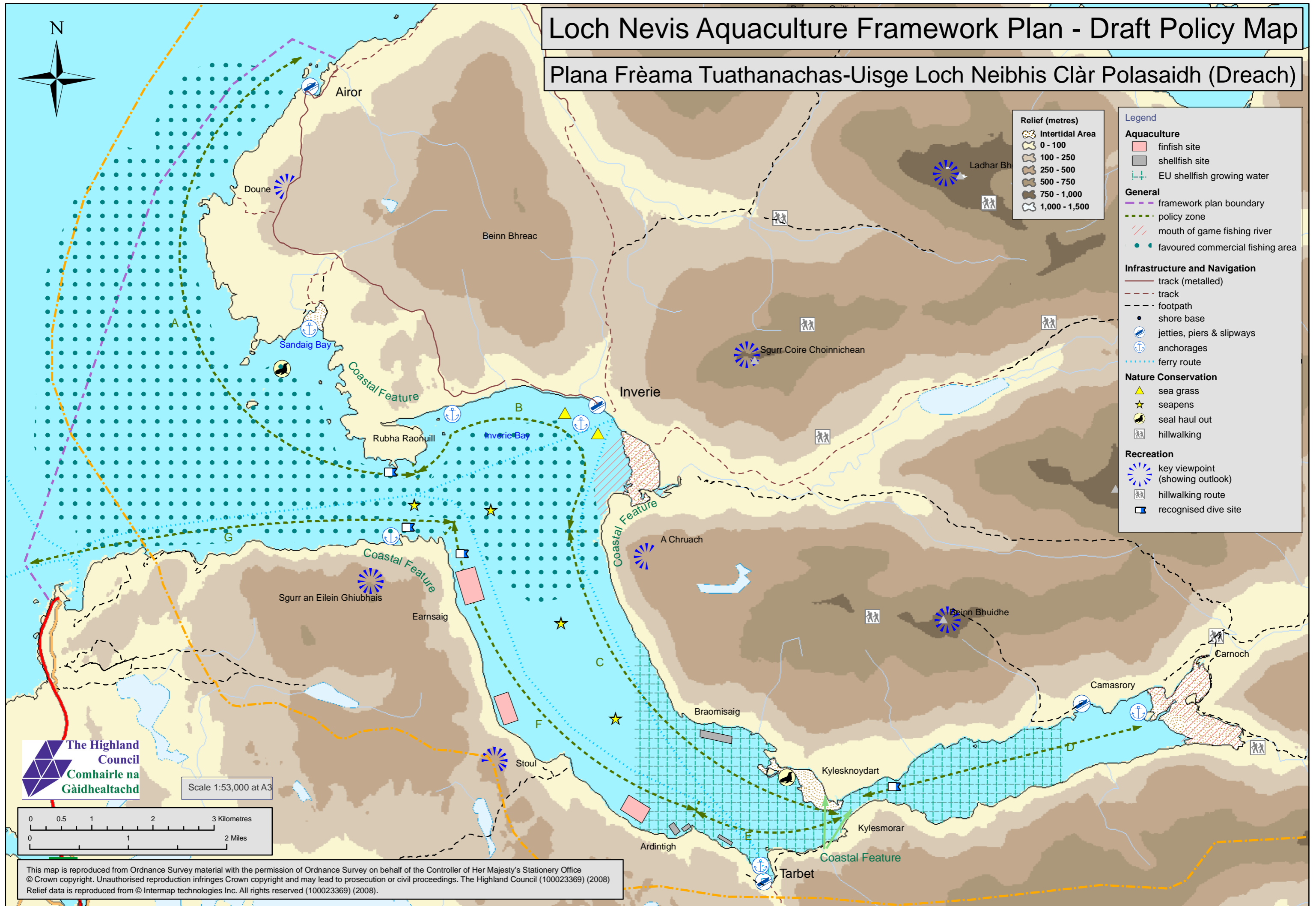
Ref: R.11.17.5

Background Papers

Diagrams: 1. Coastal plan coverage in Highland
2. Draft Loch Nevis AFP – policy map

Loch Nevis Aquaculture Framework Plan - Draft Policy Map

Plana Frèama Tuathanachas-Uisge Loch Neibhis Clàr Polasaidh (Dreach)



Relief (metres)

- 0 - 100
- 100 - 250
- 250 - 500
- 500 - 750
- 750 - 1,000
- 1,000 - 1,500

Legend

Aquaculture

- finfish site
- shellfish site
- EU shellfish growing water

General

- framework plan boundary
- policy zone
- mouth of game fishing river
- favoured commercial fishing area

Infrastructure and Navigation

- track (metalled)
- track
- footpath
- shore base
- jetties, piers & slipways
- anchorages
- ferry route

Nature Conservation

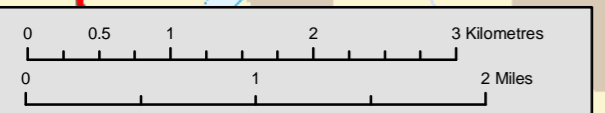
- sea grass
- seapens
- seal haul out
- hillwalking

Recreation

- key viewpoint (showing outlook)
- hillwalking route
- recognised dive site

The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Scale 1:53,000 at A3



This map is reproduced from Ordnance Survey material with the permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office © Crown copyright. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. The Highland Council (100023369) (2008). Relief data is reproduced from © Intermap technologies Inc. All rights reserved (100023369) (2008).