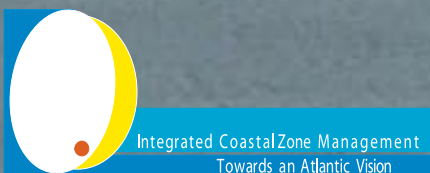


Interreg 3B: Coastatlantic
Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project

COASTAL PLAN FOR THE TWO BROOMS AREA

September 2006



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Planning and Development Service
Highland Council

Foreword

The coast and inshore waters of Highland are two of the region's most important natural assets. The western seaboard here offers some of the best scenery and outdoor recreation opportunities in Europe and its inshore waters are generally clean and naturally productive. These are resources which generate a range of employment and they still have significant development potential. They are resources which also come under pressure from different quarters so they need to be looked after carefully.

Regulation of activities on land and sea emanates from different legislation. However, there is increasing recognition that in the coastal zone effective management of these assets needs to be better integrated and more locally-based. The uses of the coast and inshore waters are, after all, often closely interlinked. Also, where there is a relatively high degree of local dependence on marine resources, the best stewards for inshore waters may well be the local coastal communities themselves. Coastal communities cannot deliver on their own. They need support and guidance from the local authority and from the relevant government departments and agencies which can bring specific resources and expertise to bear. There also needs to be good co-ordination between these different bodies to make the most of their resources and to build synergy.

This more integrated, collaborative approach has been the essential aim of the Atlantic Coast (Wester Ross) Project and it is what makes this plan different from previous ones produced in Highland. Framework plans to guide the development of aquaculture have been prepared in Highland since the late 1980s and they now cover many areas of the West Coast. The positive feedback received on these has encouraged The Highland Council to investigate the potential for a broader-based type of coastal plan – particularly in larger semi-enclosed areas of inshore waters where a range of competing interests are present. This type of plan provides a similar level of guidance to an aquaculture framework plan but across a broader spectrum of activities. The Two Brooms area lends itself to this approach so has been chosen as a testing ground for this new type of coastal plan. There is growing interest nationally in the concept of marine spatial planning and it is already well established in some other countries. However, as yet there is no 'industry standard' approach. Lessons learned in the process of developing and implementing this particular plan can therefore help to inform coastal planning work both here and elsewhere.

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Tourism Committee,
The Highland Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 This plan has been prepared to guide the use and development of the coastal zone in the 'Two Brooms' area – Loch Broom, Little Loch Broom, the Summer Isles and Gruinard Bay. It aims to provide a broad overview for the use of the coastal waters over the next 5-10 years where none has existed before. In this respect it is designed to complement the Wester Ross Local Plan which deals with the terrestrial area. Although advisory, the coastal plan aims, like its terrestrial counterpart, to promote a balanced approach: one which can safeguard the area's core natural assets and sustain or enhance its productivity over the longer term. It can help in the evaluation of development proposals, help to minimise conflicts of interest, and guide investment.

1.2 The policies and recommendations in this plan are guided as far as possible by the ecosystem approach within the limits of the information available. This aims to encourage management which maintains a healthy ecosystem alongside appropriate human use of the marine environment, for the benefit of current and future generations.

1.3 The plan seeks to address the demands of all sectors in a sustainable way and its area policies are relevant to proposals for all types of installation in coastal waters (eg for fish farming or energy generation from wave or tidal power) and the development of local fisheries management measures. One of its key aims has been to produce a local planning framework which can help to integrate aquaculture more effectively with other interests. This is because proposals for the establishment or expansion of aquaculture, when no such a framework is in place, can sometimes be controversial. In this respect the plan serves the same guidance function as Highland Council's sector-specific aquaculture framework plans which have been prepared for other, generally smaller sea loch systems.

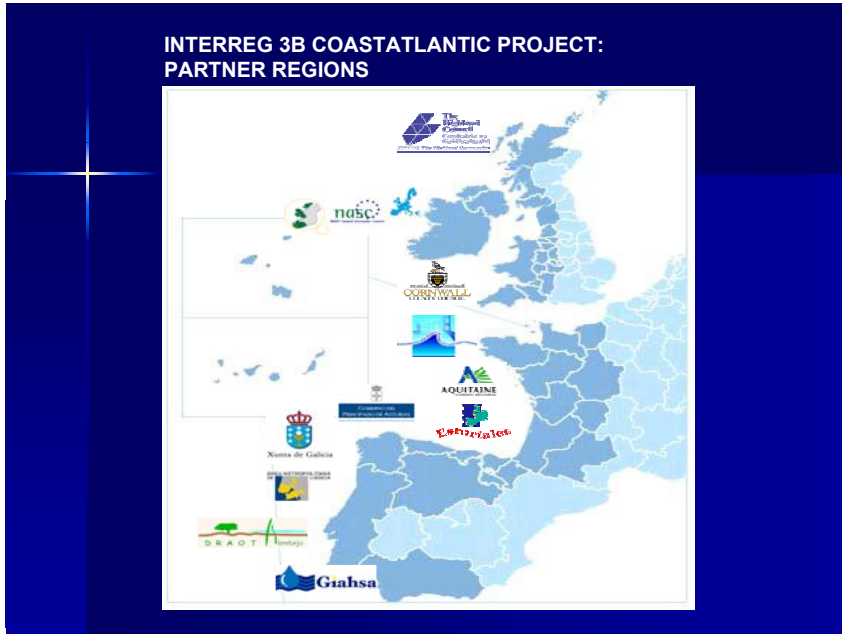
1.4 Although the plan seeks to guide developers, individual proposals will still require detailed, site-specific, appraisal. These may sometimes require formal environmental impact assessment (EIA) and consideration of carrying capacity issues by the regulatory bodies.

1.5 This new planning initiative has been made possible largely through the financial support of the European Regional Development Fund, but also with funding support from the Crown Estate, Ross and Cromarty Enterprise, and Scottish Natural Heritage. In addition, the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency have provided staff time to help guide the project. The plan has been developed as part of Highland Council's contribution to the Interreg 3B Coastatlantic Project. This international initiative has involved 11 regions on the Atlantic seaboard of Europe with the common aim of improving the management of coastal areas.

1.6 Coastatlantic has covered a diverse range of local projects in the partner regions – from the development of coastal footpaths and beach management in western Ireland to the management of natural heritage sites and development pressures on the coast of southern Portugal. The coastal plan produced for this part of Wester Ross has both a practical and a research purpose. On a practical level it fills a key geographic gap in Highland Council's framework plan coverage for aquaculture. In research terms it is an exploratory exercise in the design and implementation of integrated (ie multi-sectoral) coastal zone plans at local level – with the accent on the marine area. Lessons learned through this initiative will help to inform the approach to preparation of future coastal plans in Highland and perhaps beyond.

1.7 The policies and recommendations set out here have been formulated after reviewing the pattern of current use of the project area and identifying the key coastal management issues and development opportunities. This survey work has been published as a series of topic papers. Some of the issues identified have a scientific basis. Others are based on mainly

anecdotal evidence from those directly involved in activities such as fisheries, fish farming, natural history and recreation. All the policies and recommendations in this plan are advisory only and the plan will be reviewed and refined over the coming years. Feedback on its content and effectiveness, as well as suggestions for improvement will therefore be welcomed. Such comments should be sent to the Director of Planning and Development at The Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX.



Coastatlantic Project Aims

- articulate a trans-national vision for ICZM in the Atlantic Arc
- test and deliver integrated approaches to coastal management at the local level
- promote sustainable development of the coastal regions

2. Features and Use of the Project Area

2.1 The project area has a diverse landscape character with topographic features ranging from the steep-sided and fairly sheltered fjordic sea lochs of Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom to the archipelago of the Summer Isles and the exposed coasts and cliffs of Greenstone Point and Rubha Coigach. Most of the project area outwith the Scoraig peninsula is recognised as being nationally important for its landscape and has been designated as a National Scenic Area (NSA). In settlement terms it ranges from the busy service hub of Ullapool to scattered crofting townships and uninhabited headlands and islands.

2.2 In the sea, the largest areas of shallow (<10m) water are in Gruinard Bay, Loch Kanaird, and in Loch an Alltain Dubh. By contrast, there are deep basins (100m+) in Little Loch Broom, Outer Loch Broom, between Horse Island and Tanera Mór, and to the northwest of Cailleach Head and Gruinard Island. The deepest point is more than 200m deep, about half-way between Mellon Udrigle and Priest Island. The area has a biologically rich coastline with a wide range of marine and coastal habitats supporting a diverse flora and fauna. Some of the remoter locations are virtually undisturbed.

Loch Broom

2.3 Loch Broom runs north-west to south-east, with a narrows just inland of the village of Ullapool. The loch is almost 15km in length, with a maximum depth of 87m. Two sills close to the narrows divide the loch into two basins. The coastline is a mixture of steep rocks and shingle beach, turning to mud towards the head of the loch and the estuaries of the Rivers Lael and Broom. Small areas of saltmarsh occur at the head of the lochs which support some rare plants. Shingle beaches also support a range of plants in strict zonation depending on tidal reach.

2.4 Fish-farming and creel-fishing both take place in the loch, and the outer loch sees frequent traffic in and out of Ullapool harbour including the Western Isles ferry, fishing boats and visiting yachts. There are a number of protected anchorages – notably Ullapool harbour itself and the area on the southeast side of the loch at Loggie. The rivers Lael, Broom and Ullapool all have populations of salmon and sea trout.



Ullapool

2.5 This is the most densely inhabited section of the project area. The main centre of population is the village of Ullapool (1700 inhabitants) which provides access to key services including a primary school and a high school, doctor and dentist, library, bank, post office and a variety of shops. Ullapool is an important harbour and fisheries landing port. It is increasingly used by recreational boats including wildlife tour operators and divers wishing to access the many

dive sites in the project area. Besides Ullapool, the north-eastern shore of Loch Broom is inhabited from Rhue at the seaward end to Leckmelm and Inverlael near the head of the loch. The south-eastern shore is populated by scattered communities from the head of the loch to the narrows. Between the narrows and the sea on this side the coast is rugged and almost completely undeveloped. Only a single private dwelling (previously a hotel and accessible only by boat or hill track), stands on the south-east shore of the outer loch, opposite Ullapool.

Outer Loch Broom, Annat Bay and Loch Kanaird

2.6 The area just outside the narrow confines of Loch Broom, ie between Cailleach Head, Achduart and Ardmair, is a much more open stretch of water but still semi-enclosed. It is bounded on the northern side by the dramatic slopes and sea cliffs of Beinn More Coigach and to the south by the broad sweep of Annat Bay and the steep northern face of Beinn Ghobhlach on the Scoraig peninsula. Although exposed to the north-west, Annat Bay is sheltered from south-westerly gales, and it is possible to anchor here. Loch Kanaird, protected by Isle Martin, provides good anchorage.

2.7 Much of the coastline here is rocky, with steep cliffs around the Rhue peninsula, on the northern side of Isle Martin, and along the flanks of Beinn More Coigach and Beinn Ghobhlach. However there are a number of beaches too: at Dun Canna, Ardmair and Annat Bay, all of shingle. The River Kanaird meets the sea at the head of Loch Kanaird. The area is very sparsely populated, with small communities at Ardmair, Achduart and Culnacraig on the north side, and a handful of houses at Achmore on Annat Bay.



Isle Martin from near Culnacraig

2.8 The marine area is creel-fished in the shallower parts and trawled in the deeper areas, with Annat Bay providing an important sheltered area for winter trawling. There are fish farms in Loch Kanaird. A substantial amount of boat traffic passes through the area on the way in and out of Ullapool harbour. Loch Kanaird is popular for sailing and kayaking. The River Kanaird supports populations of salmon and sea trout.

The Summer Isles and Coigach

2.9 The Summer Isles occupy the northern and seaward part of the project area, and include over twenty islands ranging in size from Tanera Mór, the largest at about four square kilometres, to tiny skerries which are only exposed at low tide. There are some important sheltered areas among the islands, made use of by fishermen, fish farms and visiting yachts. However, the greatest part of the area is very exposed, particularly to the north, west and south-west. The area has some strong currents, and numerous rocky reefs make navigation hazardous for the inexperienced.



Houses at Polbain overlooking the Summer Isles

2.10 The coastline is largely rocky, very exposed on the seaward side, with some sea cliffs near Reiff which are popular with rock climbers. Old Dornie, behind Isle Ristol, provides a valuable sheltered harbour, protected from all directions but the north-west. Further to the south-west, Badentarbat Bay is a relatively sheltered shingle beach. The area is very scenic and is accordingly popular with visitors though access to it requires a determined effort. It is well known for its wildlife, and Priest Island is protected under EU legislation for its breeding population of storm petrels. The islands are an important tourist attraction and are visited regularly by wildlife boat trips from Ullapool and other access points.

2.11 Many of the Summer Isles were once inhabited, either permanently or seasonally for the grazing, but today only Tanera Mór still has a permanent community. On the mainland adjacent, Achiltibuie and its neighbouring communities (Polglass, Polbain, Altandhu and Reiff) are home to around 250 permanent residents. The area has a primary school, a library, several small shops, and a post office.

Little Loch Broom

2.12 Little Loch Broom, like its sister loch to the east, is a long, narrow fjordic loch. It is dominated by three impressive hills – An Teallach and Sail Mhor on its south side and Beinn Gobhlach on its north. The narrowest part of the loch is at An Corran, close to the seaward end. The loch is deeper than Loch Broom, with a maximum depth of 110m. There is a sill at the narrows which forms the outer limit of the loch. The inner loch is divided into two basins by a second sill. The coastline is mainly shingle and rocky beaches, becoming muddier towards the head of the loch and the estuary of the Dundonnell River, with a few steep rocky areas.



Little Loch Broom from Scoraig

2.13 The loch is regularly creeled but rarely trawled. A trawling ban is in place through the winter. There are fish farm leases at Ardessie and at Stattic Point at the mouth of the loch, and a Several Order for scallops on the southern side of the loch. There are no shellfish farms at present, although there are a number of unused sites which had previously been identified as possible shellfish cultivation sites. Little Loch Broom is a designated shellfish growing water. The loch does not provide much shelter, and the only protected area for mooring is at Camusnagaul halfway along the south-western shore. The Dundonnell River has populations of both salmon and sea trout.

2.14 There are scattered communities right around Little Loch Broom although the population density is low. The community of Scoraig at the seaward end of the north shore is accessible only by boat or on foot. The other communities of Dundonnell, Badrallach, Camusnagaul, Ardessie, Badcaul, Durnamuck and Badluarach are all accessible by road. The area has a total of 280 inhabitants, served by two primary schools at Badcaul and Scoraig, and two small shops, one of which houses the local post office.

Gruinard Bay

2.15 Gruinard Bay is broad and shallow, open to the north, and surrounded by a low-lying but topographically complex landscape. To the west is the peninsula of Rubha Mor with the exposed cliffs of Greenstone Point at its northern tip. To the south-west is an intricate landscape of rocky hills typical of the Lewisian Gneiss which dominates the area's geology. To the northwest is the low-lying promontory of Stattic Point and the mouth of Little Loch Broom. Gruinard Island occupies the eastern part of the bay. It is uninhabited, and for many years was contaminated with anthrax as a result of Ministry of Defence trials near the end of the Second World War. However it has recently been declared safe. The coastline of the bay is very rocky, with boulder beaches in many areas. Gruinard Bay has the best sandy beaches in the project area, at Mellon Udrigle, Little Gruinard and Mungasdale. Greenstone Point has some fine cliffs.



Inner reaches of Gruinard Bay (Gruinard Island on the right)

2.16 The bay is exposed to winds from many directions but especially from the north, north-east and north-west. It is possible to moor boats at Laide, but it is not sufficiently sheltered to keep boats here through the winter. Creel-fishing takes place in the bay; it is also trawled during the summer, but there is a winter ban on trawling. The Gruinard and Little Gruinard rivers both support populations of salmon and sea trout, and the Little Gruinard is protected under EU legislation for its salmon population.

2.17 The Gruinard Bay area is sparsely settled, with the village of Laide at the south-west corner of the bay being the only community of any size. There are small communities at Opinan, Mellon Udrigle and Achgarve on the western side of the bay, and at Sand and Coast to the south. There are only a few scattered houses on the east side. The area has less than 200 inhabitants. There is no school, with children being taken by bus to the primary school in Aultbea. There is a small shop and a post office in Laide.

Access

2.18 The main road access to the project area is via the A835 from Inverness/Dingwall. The road is in good condition and relatively fast, with the 56-mile journey from Inverness to Ullapool generally taking between 70 and 90 minutes. Inverness has good rail and bus connections with the rest of the country, as well as an airport with flights to other UK cities and European destinations.

2.19 The A832 connects Little Loch Broom and Gruinard Bay with Ullapool to the north and Aultbea and Gairloch to the south. However, the village of Scoraig is not accessible by road, and can only be reached by a four-mile walk from Badrallach or by boat from Badluarach. Coigach is connected to the A835 north of Ullapool by a winding single-track road. This leads to longer travel times and contributes to the area's sense of remoteness but it is an attraction for some. There are several coastal paths which are important local routes and well used by visiting walkers accessing some of the remoter parts of the area.

2.20 Ullapool is the port for the Caledonian MacBrayne ferry to Stornoway on Lewis, and is an important access point to the Western Isles.

3. Key Issues and Opportunities

3.1 The key issues raised through the investigation stage of this project focus mainly on the need to improve fisheries management and the need to integrate aquaculture better with other interests. A relative lack of facilities for marine recreation in the project area has also been identified. Furthermore, the potential development of a subsea electricity cable link with the Western Isles is of concern locally. The cable could cross the project area and make a landfall at a number of potential sites within it and there is uncertainty as to the impacts this might have. However, there are also significant opportunities in the project area. These could include working with local fishermen to put inshore fishing on a more sustainable footing and to increase the value of the local fishery; identifying development and relocation sites for fish farming; and enhancing the attractiveness of the area for certain types of recreation.

3.2 There are concerns locally over the sustainability of current fishing practices. In particular this means the effects of the current levels of effort and fishing methods on the target stocks, and the effects of fishing on non-target species and habitats. However, little research has been carried out at the local level so it is difficult to ascertain the true extent of the problem or to make effective management decisions. Concern has also been raised over the difficulties of enforcing existing fisheries management measures. Efforts to improve people's understanding of the local situation would be very beneficial.

3.3 The issues involving aquaculture centre on the interaction, or potential for interaction between farmed and wild salmon and the impacts of fish farm expansion on the landscape. There are concerns amongst game fishing interests over the potential for exchange of disease and parasites, and the genetic effects of fish farm escapes on wild salmonid populations. This can impact adversely on the income to rural communities from game fishing. Others point to the benthic and water quality impacts of fish farm feeds, medicines and other discharges. However, progress is gradually being made on the issue of interactions with wild fish via a number of national working groups. Benthic and water quality impacts are also closely regulated by SEPA and the science and modelling capability underpinning prediction and control of such effects, with help from the industry, is improving all the time.

3.4 The new plan gives the opportunity to appraise, in a systematic way, the project area's potential for development of aquaculture – both finfish and shellfish – and to identify the more suitable sites for this. The key development opportunities in this field are likely to be finfish farming on sites further offshore, shellfish farming (possibly as an alternative to finfish farming on some sites), and the cultivation of species which have not been commercially farmed before. The plan identifies some sites in the outer part of the project area which might allow finfish farms in the inner lochs to relocate their production, provided they can access the appropriate technology.

3.5 There are no plans at present for marine renewable energy generation within the project area, although there may be potential in the longer term for local-scale wave, tide and offshore wind energy generation. Ongoing studies of the suitability of the Scottish inshore waters for wave, tide and offshore wind energy have all classified the project area as having relatively low potential for the application of these technologies at present. Wave energy generation is likely to be focused to the west of the Western Isles. Tidal energy is being considered for areas such as the Firth of Lorn and the Pentland Firth. Offshore wind energy developments are focusing on areas where developments can be sited relatively far offshore to minimise visual impact, such as the east coast firths. There is, however, a proposal for an undersea cable which would bring power from the proposed wind farms on the Western Isles to the mainland. This could cross the project area to make a landfall at Ardmair or the head of Loch Broom.

3.6 Many of the concerns raised through the project are not unique to this area, and powers to tackle them effectively are not always devolved to the local level. The plan therefore mainly focuses on identifying issues which can be tackled locally.

4. Overview of the Coastal Plan

4.1 The project area supports a diverse range of activities – from commercial fishing and salmon farming to winkle gathering and seaweed collection for fertiliser. The recreational activities pursued here include sailing and canoeing, diving, wildlife watching and sport angling. Many of these activities rely fundamentally on the integrity and productivity of the marine ecosystem, while others rely more strongly on the physical characteristics of the area or are popular because of the quality of the scenery.

4.2 These resources are irreplaceable. The primary goal of the coastal plan is therefore to safeguard this natural capital and to ensure that current and future uses are as sustainable as possible.

4.3 The main ways an integrated plan can do this is by identifying potential conflicts of interest between different activities; by zoning areas for preferred use according to their character, development potential, and sensitivity; and by highlighting broader issues for the attention of the relevant agencies. Area designations can help in gauging sensitivity – for example substantial parts of the project area fall within two National Scenic Areas, indicating the importance which should be attached to landscape management here. However they are not the whole story. Some parts of a National Scenic Area may be suited for certain types of development; some parts may be better left undeveloped. Also some interests (eg marine nature conservation or inshore fishing grounds) may be under-researched or underdeveloped in terms of formal designations. In this sort of context there is no substitute for detailed local appraisal. The area-specific guidance in the plan has therefore been prepared with reference to matrices which were compiled for each policy zone. (see Technical Appendix). These collated information relevant to each of the sectors – specific opportunities/strengths, constraints/weaknesses, development potential, and policy objectives – which forms the basis for the composite area policies and clarifies the process of policy development.

4.4 The plan therefore contains guidance at two levels. Firstly, it provides general guidance for each of the main sectoral interests at the level of the project area as a whole. The interests covered are:

- Aquaculture
- Commercial fishing
- Nature conservation
- Business and Rural Development
- Recreation and Tourism
- Shore access and marine traffic
- Renewable energy
- Landscape
- Cultural and built heritage

4.5 At this level there is also comment on the links with the Wester Ross Local Plan, and other complementary sectoral initiatives. Where relevant guidance on good practice is available (eg landscape design guidance) this is mentioned. The arrangements for monitoring the plan's effectiveness and for follow-up projects are also discussed.

4.6 Secondly, the plan provides area-specific guidance. Ultimately it may be possible to derive this through detailed sieve-mapping (ie systematically combining many layers of spatial data and weighting the perceived opportunities and constraints accordingly) to identify 'hot spots' of opportunity or sensitivity. However, the availability of information for the marine area here is too patchy as yet for this approach to work effectively. Instead, a system of policy zones based on character tracts and natural divisions has been used. This provides a basic framework which can be used with the currently available information and enhanced as new information becomes available.

4.7 It uses two complementary sets of boundaries. The first is a set of coastal/nearshore policy zones which are essentially linear and based on landscape character tracts, aspect, and degree of enclosure. The second is an underlying set of marine/offshore policy zones which

involve broader areas and are based on the major basins and off-shore subdivisions in the area and take into account seabed types. The plan gives policies and recommendations for each zone on the basis of landscape, seabed and biological characteristics, current use, and development potential. These policy zone boundaries are indicative and could be reviewed at a later date if new information or further assessment provides a sound justification for doing so.

4.8 Some uses (or potential uses) of the project area are inherently incompatible whilst others can co-exist quite amicably or even be mutually beneficial. The plan seeks to identify such interactions and makes recommendations accordingly. The plan's guidance should be particularly relevant in the case of new development proposals, where it is in most parties' interest to minimise conflict.

4.9 Human activities in the project area depend on the continued availability of certain resources: clean water, fisheries species, biodiversity, archaeology, landscape. This plan makes policies and recommendations which should ensure that the natural resources are used in a sustainable manner, are not damaged or degraded, and are enhanced where possible.



Fish farm, Tanera Mór

5. General Guidance: Policies, Proposals and Recommendations by Sector

5.1 Aquaculture

5.1.1 Fish farming in the project area began in the late 1970's, with small independent companies operating in sheltered sites in Loch Broom, Loch Kanaird, Little Loch Broom, and the Summer Isles. The independents still have a presence but today multinational companies are more in evidence and there has been a move towards development of new sites in more exposed outer loch locations. However, such a move into more offshore conditions requires an increase in the size and performance of equipment and vessels and this means additional expenses for the operator.

5.1.2 Salmon farming is a significant component of the local economy, and provides employment in areas where the opportunities would otherwise be very limited. In the project area 6.7% of the workforce is employed in fishing and aquaculture compared to 3.7% for Highland as a whole. In addition, the industry supports a significant number of "downstream" jobs in transport, processing, and support services both locally and at locations elsewhere in the Highlands.

5.1.3 However, here as elsewhere on the west coast, proposals for new fish farm sites or expansion of existing ones sometimes encounter significant local opposition. This has been more marked in the project area in recent years as a result of a series of development proposals coming in quick succession. The fish farming industry's view is that some of the concerns raised are many years out of date and the sector has shown economic and environmental responsibility. It points out that management practices, the use of therapeutants, benthic impacts and equipment design have all improved substantially resulting in less of an environmental impact and less risk to wild stocks than there was in the past. It therefore still sees room for the industry to expand and there are new codes of practice in place. Within the finfish sector it seems likely that investment in species diversification will only come from a successful and profitable salmon growing industry.

5.1.4 Prior to the Atlantic Coast project, there was no framework plan to guide aquaculture development in the area and to integrate it with other interests. This new plan therefore has an important role in promoting responsible development. The issues are not just about environmental impact. Competition for space is increasingly a fact of life in inshore waters just as it is on land. As a relatively new industry, aquaculture sometimes has to compete for sheltered sites with other more established uses (eg winter trawling, anchorages) as well as a growing recreational sector. It also has to contend with coastal communities which are keen to protect their amenity. An integrated coastal plan can help to guide aquaculture development towards appropriate, less sensitive sites and tune the scale of development to the surroundings.

5.1.5 A number of national initiatives led by the Scottish Executive are already working to try and resolve some of the issues associated with development of a sustainable and profitable fish farming industry. The Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture provides an overarching view and a national agenda for action. Interim arrangements are in place pending the extension of local authority planning powers to embrace marine aquaculture installations. Draft legislation is expected on this in late 2006. The Executive-led working group on the Location and Relocation of Fish Farms is looking at means of redistributing finfish farm production in some areas to address some of the environmental concerns. The Tripartite Working Group is promoting Area Management Agreements as a means of reconciling fish farming and game fishing interests. At the time of writing there is no Area Management Agreement in place covering the project area, although fish health management is important for both finfish farmers and wild fisheries interests. The Atlantic Coast project seeks to complement these initiatives by providing a local overview which takes account of the full range of interests present in the project area.

5.1.6 There is no active shellfish farming in the project area at present, although a number of consents remain current. Both mussel and scallop farms have operated in the area in the past.

Shellfish farm development has been hindered by the economic implications of the long lead-in time for scallops to reach harvest size and by recent changes to the product testing regime. However, mussel production is technically feasible in the area and prices appear to have firmed, encouraging a new measure of local interest. Nationally there is a 10% increase in the number of shellfish farms, confirming this as a growth industry. Water quality in the project area is good, and Little Loch Broom in particular is designated as a Shellfish Growing Water under EU legislation. Controls on discharges into the loch make this a potentially suitable environment for shellfish growing. Here as elsewhere however, predation by ducks on cultivated mussels can be a problem and this needs to be considered by any potential developer.

Aquaculture Policies

5.1.7 Taking into account the above concerns and requirements, the Coastal Plan for the project area:

1. supports the responsible development of aquaculture on sites and at a scale which is compatible with other interests (a) as a means of harvesting the sea's natural productivity to generate income and employment, and (b) to provide a diversification option for fishermen, crofters, and other local businesses;
2. recommends that any *new* finfish farming sites should be located away from the inner sea loch areas (Little Loch Broom and Loch Broom inland of Rhue), to safeguard the amenity of these areas and to minimise risks to the local wild salmonid populations; new sites should also be located away from the vicinity of Gruinard Bay, to protect the salmon population of the Little Gruinard River which is a designated Special Area for Conservation;
3. encourages measures to relocate existing finfish farms away from inner sea loch areas and the mouths of rivers, where possible, to suitable more seaward locations identified in this plan;
4. encourages the development of small-to-medium scale shellfish farming and ranching, with due regard to the landscape character of the project area and the needs of inshore fishermen and navigation, and with particular regard to conserving the landscape characteristics and qualities of the National Scenic Areas;
5. encourages diversification of finfish aquaculture into species other than salmonids but recognises that there are many unresolved issues associated with this. Potential interactions with wild fish species will have to be taken into account if new species are to be farmed;
6. identifies the types of aquaculture activity and maximum scale of installations which would be acceptable within each policy zone (see footnote at the end of the area policies section for definitions of scale);
7. encourages synchronisation of salmon production cycles within the Two Brooms area to help minimise the incidence of sea lice and fish diseases and improve the survival rate of wild salmonids.

5.2 Commercial Fisheries

5.2.1 The history of fisheries in the project area shows a 'boom and bust' cycle, with first herring, then mackerel, being the main target species. The way both these fisheries are prosecuted has changed and the overall effect for the area has been a collapse of activities that once depended on the fishery. Today the main fishery is a mixed fishery and targets Nephrops (prawns) which are caught both by trawling and creeling.



Fishing boats moored at Ullapool

5.2.2 At the present time, opinions are divided as to the status of stocks and the sustainability of local fisheries. The scarcity of scientific data referring to the project area makes it very difficult to clarify the situation or formulate good policies. Nevertheless, it is clear that there are considerable challenges to be met in the management of inshore fisheries. Some of these have been raised regularly over the course of this project, and are summarised below.

Nephrops Quotas

5.2.3 Nephrops are managed by quota which is set annually, based on stock assessments and catch returns. Recent (2005) changes in the assessment regime for nephrops stock assessments have indicated an increase in biomass which has allowed for an increase in the total allowable catch for nephrops in the area.

5.2.4 Some fishermen routinely land over-quota ('black' fish). This is widely known but generally not acknowledged. The issue is being raised here NOT in order to point fingers, but in order to promote a better understanding of the situation we are working with. There is a strongly-held belief among fishermen that catching more than quota is necessary in order to make a living. This is in part because in poor months it may not be possible to catch the full month's quota. However the excess cannot be retained for use in good months. This is perhaps more of an issue for smaller creel boats who are not operating under the Producer Organisation network which allows more flexibility of effort within the overall total quota. Historically, enforcement of quotas has been poor, which could be for any of a wide variety of reasons but is likely to stem from limited resources. The implementation of a buyers' registration scheme from early 2006 will improve management of landings and there are proposals in development which will lead to licensing the boats which fish specifically for nephrops. Suggestions for improvements to the sustainability of the fishery were received during consultation on the draft plan and this included consideration of locally set fishing quotas.

Overfishing

5.2.5 There is anecdotal evidence of overfishing – the declining size of Nephrops and poor catches in 2004. These observed changes could be due to environmental fluctuations. They could also be due to increased fishing pressure. The local trawl fleet is increasing gradually. There is also an increase in 'stranger' vessels fishing in the project area with trawlers from as far away as the east coast fishing in the project area in recent years. Creel fishermen prefer not to leave an area free of creels in case it is trawled or occupied by another creeler, thus areas are not 'rested'. Also the number of creels operated by each creeler has increased and the number of creel boats operating in the project area has increased due to the current profitability of this sector.

Environmental Impacts

5.2.6 There is anecdotal evidence that trawlers have had negative impacts in the project area. The area was once well-known and popular for sea-angling. Sea angling is reported to have declined as target species became difficult to find around the time that the ban on trawling within three miles of the shore was lifted. Scallop divers and sports divers have observed the damaging effects of trawls and dredges on fragile benthic species and habitats such as maerl beds and sea pens.

5.2.7 With regard to both the changes in local nephrops stocks and the decreasing sea angling catches, it is conceivable that the observed changes may be due to wider environmental fluctuations rather than to fishing pressure. However, there is a lack of detailed information on this. Nevertheless, if the changes are genuinely occurring, then fishing must be ready to adapt to the changing conditions if the local inshore fisheries are to have a chance of a viable future. Changes noticed in the adjacent Torridon area have included an increase in the number of vessels operating and the amount of gear being fished in the area. This is the result of the 'honeypot' effect as fishermen move to an area with perceived advantages. It has reinforced the need to consider a range of management tools to complement a local strategy so that locally agreed management measures can be applied equally to all boats working in the area.

How Might Change Come About?

5.2.8 In the short term, it would be disadvantageous to many fishermen to support a change in management, better enforcement of fisheries legislation, or more detailed research, as any change is likely to reduce their catch and hence their income. In the long term however, it will be advantageous to them to support more detailed research, changes in management and better enforcement because these developments should lead to a more sustainable and viable fishery. It is likely though that they would first bring a period of greater economic hardship.

5.2.9 There is therefore a need for a mechanism to make the long-term approach more attractive. This could be through a well-designed system of incentives to improve the sustainability of fishing practices (see below), coupled with accreditation and effective marketing of sustainably-caught prawns at premium prices. The rapid success of similar developments such as certified organic food and fairly-traded produce suggests that such a strategy would have a good chance of succeeding.

Improving Sustainability

5.2.10 A number of changes could be made to improve the sustainability of local fisheries. These include, but are not limited to:

- restrictions on trawler access to certain areas – the plan mentions some types of areas where trawling should be avoided. This could protect areas of fragile habitat, reduce pressure on creel fishermen to keep creels deployed permanently, and potentially have wider beneficial effects. This approach is being trialled in Loch Torridon, and the outcomes of that study will be of relevance to this project area.
- escape hatches on creels to allow undersized prawns to escape
- rotation of creeling areas to allow recovery periods
- consideration of locally set fishing quotas
- limits on the numbers of creels allowed

At present it is very difficult to implement measures such as these. Loch Torridon is a unique case in which the vast majority of local fishermen were agreed upon the action to be taken.

Inshore Review and HSMO

5.2.11 Current initiatives such as the Highland Shellfish Management Order (if granted) and the recent SEERAD Review of Inshore Fisheries and subsequent Strategic Framework for Inshore Fisheries Action Plan may lead to an increased local involvement in inshore fisheries management. The aim of such initiatives is in part to give fishermen an increased responsibility for the resources on which they depend. These are opportunities for change, and could act as the vehicles for some of the above.

Commercial Fisheries – Policy Advice

5.2.12 On the basis of the above, it is not appropriate at this stage to make detailed policies for fisheries management in the project area. However, it is clear that better information on local stocks would be beneficial. This would both improve current understanding, and inform initiatives such as the HSMO and local fisheries management groups as advocated by SEERAD. The Coastal Plan therefore:

1. recommends targeted research focusing in the first instance on monitoring of the sizes of prawns landed in the area, and of the quantity and species composition of by-catch from trawlers;
2. encourages measures to identify and set aside a part or parts of the project area as 'no-trawl' zone, unless ongoing studies show that trawling has no significant negative impacts on stocks and the character and biodiversity of the seabed;
3. encourages measures to increase the sustainability of creeling through modifying creel design, such as fitting escape hatches for undersized prawns;

4. encourages accreditation for sustainably-fished products (this might be investigated in association with the Marine Stewardship Council). This must be done in conjunction with effective marketing to allow premium prices to be charged, to offset costs of upgrading fishing gear and possibly reducing effort;
5. supports identification of areas where lobster stock enhancement trials could be carried out.

5.3 Nature Conservation

5.3.1 The wide range of marine and coastal habitats in the project area supports a diverse flora and fauna. Several of these habitats are of national or local conservation value. For example, horse mussel beds in the two sea lochs, seagrass (*Zostera*) beds in Gruinard Bay, maerl beds and tidal rapids in the channels between some of the Summer Isles, are all types of habitat which are listed as a priority for conservation under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. There are also very good examples of sea caves around Tanera Beag and Priest Island.

5.3.2 Seabirds breed on remote cliffs and offshore islands. Otters can be found on almost any part of the coast. Seals haul out and breed on some of the remoter skerries. Seals also regularly use the inner lochs, as do many bird species, including black-throated divers, red-throated divers, mergansers, guillemots, herons, and waders. Cetaceans such as minke whale and harbour porpoise are regularly seen, and rare species such as basking shark and even leatherback turtle have been recorded. The seabed supports kelp forests and the sometimes fragile wildlife communities associated with seagrass and maerl. In deeper water, the extensive muddy basins provide a habitat for commercially important species such as the burrowing prawn or Norway lobster (*Nephrops norvegicus*) and more fragile communities of sea pens. Underwater cliffs, caves and wrecks are alive with colourful sea anemones, soft corals and sponges. Saltmarsh and shingle vegetation are also present. Readers should refer to the Nature Conservation topic paper for more details on the range of habitats and species present. The topic paper also explains the area's considerable geological interest.



Starfish on maerl

5.3.3 In the project area, as throughout the west coast, elements of the coastal and marine flora and fauna have been a larder and source of revenue for local people for generations. The village of Ullapool was built to exploit the abundant shoals of herring. Crofters fished on a subsistence basis and used seaweed to fertilise their fields. Migrating salmon were netted in their thousands as they returned to the rivers to spawn. At one time, otters were even trapped for their pelts and seals were culled to reduce their impacts on fish stocks.

5.3.4 In more recent years, pollution from visiting klondyker ships, road building, the growth of tourism, and the development of intensive aquaculture have brought new pressures to bear on parts of the coastal and marine environment and their flora and fauna.

5.3.5 This long history of human exploitation and management, alongside changing environmental conditions, has shaped the marine and coastal environment as we see it today. Despite the remote location, there is little in the project area that can be considered 'untouched' by human activities.

5.3.6 Today, Priest Island is protected under EU legislation as a Special Protection Area, (SPA) for its breeding population of storm petrels, and the Little Gruinard River has also been designated at European level as a Special Area for Conservation (SAC) for salmon. In addition, there are four Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the project area:

- Aultbea – a geological site which takes in part of the coast between Leac Mhór and Mellon Udrigle
- Cailleach Head – also designated for its Torridonian geological features
- An Teallach – a site which touches the southern edge of the project area on the south side of Little Loch Broom – designated for its upland habitats and Quaternary geology
- Rubha Dunan, near Polglass/Achiltibuie – designated for its Torridonian geology and fen habitat

5.3.7 A number of species in the project area are given general protection under EU or national legislation, including otters and all cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises). The Wester Ross Local Plan draws attention to areas considered locally important for conservation. Also the Wester Ross Biodiversity Action Plan recently drew attention to nationally and locally important marine/coastal habitats and species and the threats they face, and made recommendations for actions to conserve them. There are local and national initiatives aimed at progressing the potential benefits of marine reserves which could be relevant in this area, eg the current consideration of candidates for Coastal and Marine National Parks.

Nature Conservation Policies

5.3.8 Maintenance of a functional and productive ecosystem is fundamental to the long-term sustainability of many activities in the project area. The Coastal Plan takes account of this through policies and recommendations relating to aquaculture, fisheries and other activities (see relevant sections). In addition, there are a number of species and habitats in the project area which have been identified as locally, nationally or internationally important, and specific measures should be taken to ensure their protection. The Coastal Plan:

1. supports existing measures to protect sensitive and ecologically important species such as cetaceans, otters and seabirds from disturbance;
2. supports existing measures to protect Little Gruinard SAC and Priest Island SPA, including the monitoring and control of introduced predators such as mink, and careful visitor management;
3. aims to safeguard the coastal Sites of Special Scientific Interest from unsympathetic forms of development;
4. supports the introduction of measures to protect areas with sensitive and ecologically important species/habitats from disturbance or damage, particularly those featuring in local and national Biodiversity Action Plans. These include maerl beds, flame shell reefs, sea grass beds, horse mussel reefs, important kelp forests, and the sea pen *Funiculina quadrangularis*). Causes of disturbance may include, for example, the use of active fishing gears, anchoring, or the establishment of fish cages or renewable energy installations;
5. encourages projects which will identify and map fragile marine habitats, such as maerl beds, biogenic reefs and seagrass beds, and liaise effectively with relevant stakeholder groups to promote their conservation;
6. encourages initiatives to raise awareness of the value of the marine ecosystem, the threats it faces, and the ways in which local people and visitors can help to protect it.
7. encourages adoption of, and adherence to the new cetacean-watching code which is in development;
8. encourages survey and research work to increase understanding of the local marine ecosystem.

5.4 Business and Rural Development

5.4.1 The nature and location of the project area makes it very suitable for well-managed fishing, aquaculture and tourism. The Coastal Plan supports these activities and seeks to improve their long term environmental sustainability and viability. However, the situation is far from static. Thirty years ago aquaculture was a very new activity for the west of Scotland. Today renewable energy is taking off in the region, and this may take various forms in the future, including the location of installations in the sea which may or may not have a surface component. The Atlantic Coast Project supports the establishment and development of environmentally and economically sustainable businesses in the project area.

5.4.2 In the short term it is unlikely that marine or offshore renewable energy generation systems will be proposed for the project area, although technologies for wave, tidal and offshore wind energy generation are all being developed. Recent studies have shown that the project area, although exposed to the west, receives some shelter from the Western Isles and does not provide especially good conditions for wave energy generation. A sloping seabed, relatively deep water and landscape considerations make offshore windfarm developments unlikely here. Tidal flow rates in the area are not sufficiently high to make them attractive for tidal energy generation, at least in the near future. However, these technologies are all still in their infancy, and when further developed they could become much more widely applicable.

5.4.3 Businesses or developments requiring new buildings or other installations must comply with current building regulations, environmental legislation, and should follow recommendations made in the Wester Ross Local Plan. No new developments requiring effluent disposal into Little Loch Broom will be approved, as this is a designated Shellfish Growing Water.

Business and Rural Development Policies

5.4.4 The Coastal Plan:

1. encourages the development of shellfish aquaculture on appropriate sites in the project area;
2. encourages the development of a market for accredited sustainably-caught fish/shellfish;
3. encourages the establishment of local fish buying, processing and marketing facilities within the project area;
4. supports the development and improvement of marine recreational facilities, both for locals and visitors, and to enable the project area to take advantage of the growth of Inverness through provision of facilities for weekend visitors.

5.5 Recreation and Tourism

5.5.1 The project area provides opportunities for a wide range of leisure activities. It has a dramatic and varied coastline, the attractive and lively fishing village of Ullapool, one of Scotland's most scenic groups of small offshore islands, remote communities, sheltered anchorages, abundant wildlife, fine beaches, coastal rock climbing, archaeological sites, good wreck diving and a rich underwater environment.

5.5.2 The area is a popular holiday destination for tourists both from the UK and overseas, many of whom are drawn to the area by the beauty of the surroundings and the opportunities provided by the coast, sea and islands. Sailing and kayaking are increasingly popular with both tourists and locals. Cruise boats give visitors an opportunity to explore the islands and to see seals, porpoises and other wildlife at close quarters. Wrecks, caves, and a diversity of marine species bring divers to the area, and help to sustain local dive charter businesses. Loch Broom, Little Loch Broom and the Summer Isles were well known in the past for sea-angling and with more intensive management of local fish stocks it may be possible to recover some of this trade.

5.5.3 There are some downsides to increasing visitor pressure, such as congestion at existing piers and the currently limited facilities for visiting recreational vessels at the commercial

fishing and ferry port of Ullapool. However, rather than deter visitors, there would seem to be scope for further provision at appropriate locations which could tap into the growing recreational market. Some ports to the north of Ullapool for example, have recently installed pontoon systems although they have less of a local sailing 'scene'.

5.5.4 As on many other parts of the UK coast, seaborne marine litter can be unsightly and if locally significant it can diminish the quality of the coastal recreation experience for visitor and resident alike. All sections of coast are not equally affected by this and regular beach clean-ups can help to minimise the symptoms of the problem (if not the causes). However this is more difficult for sections of coastline which naturally tend to accumulate seaborne debris and which are remote and lacking in road access, eg Kildonan bay on Little Loch Broom. Treating the problem at source requires local vigilance, a degree of voluntary effort, and responsible waste management practices. But it also requires management measures which reach beyond the project area because much of the material originates elsewhere.



Tourist excursion boat, Summer Isles

Recreation & Tourism Policies

5.5.5 The Coastal Plan supports efforts to maintain and increase the attractiveness of the area for both visitors and locals and supports the development of appropriate facilities that will help the tourism industry to continue to develop. Specifically it:

1. supports measures to safeguard important dive sites from disturbance or pollution by active fishing gears, anchoring, or the establishment of offshore installations which could damage their amenity or interest;
2. generally recommends a presumption against the siting of offshore installations in areas which provide important anchorages;
3. supports measures to improve or maintain public access to popular sites such as beaches, coastal footpaths, rock-climbing areas, archaeological sites and viewpoints;
4. supports the development and improvement of marine recreational facilities, improvements to existing access points, harbours, slipways, piers and jetties, both for locals and visitors, and to enable the project area to take advantage of the growth of Inverness;
5. encourages the development of a strategy for information dissemination, interpretation and signage, covering the area's natural heritage, archaeology, and sites of general interest;
6. encourages the development and adoption of codes of conduct for recreational use of the marine environment;
7. supports the development of wildlife tourism and associated accreditation and training;
8. supports measures to safeguard key views of the coast and sea from inappropriate development (eg views from navigational routes, roads, footpaths and viewpoints) and measures to reduce the build-up of marine litter.

5.6 Shore Access and Marine Traffic

5.6.1 With ferry traffic to the Western Isles, inshore and offshore fishing fleets landing their catches, tour boats and recreational boat use, the project area sees a significant volume of marine traffic. The majority of the traffic moves in and out of Ullapool, the largest and most developed harbour in the project area and one of the better sites for sheltered mooring. In addition, there is a smaller harbour at Old Dornie, and a number of public jetties, piers and slipways around the project area. However, many of these points of access to the sea are in a poor state of repair and do not have sufficient funding allocated for their maintenance.



Stone-built jetty

5.6.2 Access to the sea and safe movement around the marine area are crucial to many activities in the project area, from fishing and aquaculture to recreation. Nationally there is an increase in recreational boating and this is reflected in the project area with increased kayaking, sailing and small power boat activity. This increased activity from both local and visiting boat owners puts more demands on existing elderly and largely inadequate infrastructure, such as piers, slips and moorings. Competition for access to sheltered marine areas is increasing and there may be friction between some activities if an increasing number of sites are made inaccessible by the development of fixed installations. Throughout the project area there is a need to safeguard and sympathetically develop facilities with due regard to existing uses. The number and type of recreational craft using the project area should be monitored and appropriate action considered if, due to external factors such as rising costs elsewhere, existing facilities come under increased pressure. The rise in the numbers of personal watercraft should also be monitored.

5.6.3 It has been suggested that pontoons should be installed in Ullapool as they could provide income from reasonable charges if integrated with existing commercial activities. The rationalisation of mooring now being promoted by the newly formed local moorings association in Ullapool could be self-financing and could provide potential commercial spin-off from fuel sales, provisioning, souvenir sales etc. Moorings, however have an ongoing commitment in terms of maintenance and insurance and should only be considered in locations where anchoring should be discouraged (eg where serious damage would be caused to the seabed). The installation of mooring buoys has been suggested at Old Dornie and Badentarbat although cruising yachts appreciate secure, secluded anchorages. The growth of the recreational trailer-sailor sector could bring commercial spin-offs through increased demand for launching facilities.

5.6.4 The project area lies immediately to the east of the main Minches shipping lane which is an important, relatively sheltered coastal route. This route is used by ships in transit from Scandinavia and from the northern oil ports, such as Sullom Voe and Flotta. Larger tankers, over 10,000 gross registered tonnage, are required to transit to the west of the Western

Isles, but there is a considerable volume of merchant shipping using the Minches. Shipping operations in coastal waters are subject to risk, and this was highlighted locally in 2003 by the grounding and subsequent loss of the “Jambo” to the west of Eilean a’ Char in the Summer Isles. At the time of writing, Highland Council is pressing the maritime authorities for additional safety measures to be put in place. This is in recognition of the high degree of dependence that local coastal communities have on marine resources.

5.6.5 Ullapool is well placed as a harbour and shorebase to service any new off-shore developments that may be related to sectors such as renewable energy generation, oil-related exploration and development and off-shore aquaculture development.

5.6.6 Loch Broom has been subject to significant ship-related activity in the past. Fish processing ships or “Klondykers” have taken advantage of the location of Loch Broom and its shelter to allow transshipment and processing of catches. The local authority issued by-laws to affect some measure of control on the potentially detrimental effects of this activity, such as noise and light pollution and noxious emissions. Klondyking has largely been superseded, but fish-processing vessels occasionally visit the area and activities of this type still have to be controlled.

5.6.7 Marine litter and occasional pollution incidents are factors which need to be considered. Seaborne litter in the wider west of Scotland sea area, including the Minches, includes a higher-than-average percentage of material sourced from fishing-related activity. This may reflect the number of fishing boats active in the area but also the lack of adequate shoreside disposal facilities at many of the smaller landing places. Port waste reception facilities are present in the larger harbours and port waste management regulations are already in place. Material sourced from visitors to the coastal area is the second most common source of marine litter, indicating a wider and continuing educational need.

Shore Access and Marine Traffic Policies

5.6.8 The Coastal Plan:

1. encourages the improvement and maintenance of key access points (Old Dornie, Badentarbat, Ardmair, Ullapool, Badluarach, Scoraig and Laide); provided any works are designed to minimise impact on sensitive intertidal habitat;
2. encourages the establishment of a moorings association and the provision of public moorings at a range of appropriate locations;
3. encourages careful deployment of marker buoys (for example in the case of Several Order boundaries) to minimise inconvenience to marine traffic;
4. supports adherence to existing codes of practice which aim to reduce the impact of marine litter and pollution.

5.7 Renewable Energy

5.7.1 Meeting the Government’s targets from offshore renewable energy sources will require additional capacity and this new industry is set to grow significantly. There are no known plans at present for renewable energy generation within the project area, although in the future there may be potential for wave, tide and wind energy generation. Whilst the scope for larger-scale installations may be limited, there may be potential for small-scale renewable energy generation to take place at various locations on or near the coast. At the time of writing, micro-renewable energy production is supported by government policy.

5.7.2 Technological advances in this field are developing rapidly but there is a lack of clear guidance on the effects of this “environmentally friendly” source of power. At present wind power developments require to be located in depths up to 30m at a distance of 5-12 km from the shore. Wave power machines require high energy sites and water over 40m depth and tidal generators need fast flowing tidal streams. Recent studies of the suitability of the Scottish inshore waters for wave, tide and offshore wind energy have all classified the project area as having relatively low potential for the application of these technologies at present.

5.7.3 These are early days for marine renewables, and new projects are likely to be focused on the areas of greatest potential. However, as technologies develop and are tested around the country it may become more realistic to consider their potential in the project area and other similar areas of the west coast. Wave energy generation is likely to be focused to the west of the Western Isles. Tidal energy is being considered for areas such as the Firth of Lorn and the Pentland Firth. Offshore wind energy developments are focusing on areas where developments can be sited relatively far offshore to minimise visual impact, such as the east coast firths. Deepwater installations are being tested in the Beatrice Field to the east of the Caithness coast. A renewable energy strategy for the Highland area has been developed and approved by the Highland Council in consultation with other relevant interests.

5.7.4 A proposal for an undersea cable from the Western Isles to service the proposed new wind farms on the island is being investigated. If these projects go ahead, the cable may come ashore at a number of potential sites within the project area. Alternative routes via the Pentland Firth to connect to the grid at Dounreay or directly to the central belt have been proposed. In any case the direct current transmission cable will require to be laid along the seabed to the landfall. It is possible that further onshore transmission to Beaulieu may be by underground DC link to minimise landscape issues. This means that the undersea cable could come ashore at locations in the project area other than the site initially suggested. At the time of writing, the developer is evaluating possible routing options and the implications of this study for the project area should be considered when it becomes available. Further detailed studies are being undertaken into the effect of renewable power generation within the Highlands and Islands. This work should be published during the life of this project.

Impacts

5.7.5 The visual impacts of any developments would have to be taken into account, as would the disturbance or potential for damage to seabed/coastal habitats during installation, operation and maintenance. Efforts would have to be made to ensure that the area occupied by any such development would not exclude fishing vessels from important fishing grounds or interfere unduly with navigation or wildlife. A full environmental impact assessment of the effects of the interconnector project will need to be undertaken.

Constraints

5.7.6 Offshore developments of this scale would require proper environmental impact assessment and reference to locational guidance. Any interconnection to the grid would create significant landscape issues requiring expensive and intrusive engineering solutions, for example placing an AC supply underground would require a trench 25m wide to be dug at a cost of 10-25 times more than overhead cables.

Renewable Energy Policies

5.7.7 The Coastal Plan:

- supports the development of renewable energy generation schemes which provide tangible local benefits and which, by virtue of their location, scale, type, and design are compatible with other (particularly near-neighbour) interests in the coastal zone;
- encourages the undergrounding of electricity cables emanating from marine-based installations – from their point of landfall to the point of connection with the main national grid;
- encourages more detailed study of the practical potential for local-scale wind, wave and tidal energy schemes in the project area as a follow-up to the finalised Highland Renewable Energy Strategy

Proposals for renewable energy developments in the marine area or on the coast will be assessed against national planning guidance, the provisions of the general strategic policies in the Highland Structure Plan and Highland Renewable Energy Strategy, the Wester Ross Local Plan, relevant good practice guidance, and the schemes' individual merits. Spatial and technological synergy with existing infrastructure and developments will be favoured.

5.8 Landscape



Sail Mhor from Kildonan, Little Loch Broom

Scenic Quality and National Designations

5.8.1 In a UK context, Wester Ross is probably best known for its scenery. Landscape is therefore arguably the project area's most important natural resource. The scenic quality of the project area is reflected in the fact that most of it is covered by two National Scenic Area designations – Assynt-Coigach NSA and Wester Ross NSA. The boundaries of these are shown in the landscape topic map. There are special consultation arrangements in NSAs to help ensure that development is compatible. Policy tests include checks that proposed developments in, or adjacent to the NSA should not detract from the quality or character of the landscape. They aim to ensure that the scale, siting and design of developments are appropriate and that design and landscaping are of a high standard.

5.8.2 The importance of landscape in this part of Wester Ross is also reflected in the number of visitors it receives and the number of people who have chosen to live in relatively remote locations here. It may not have peaks as well-known as those of Torridon but it can make a fair claim to epitomise much of what is best about west highland coastal scenery: rugged and unspoilt coastlines interspersed with more intimate crofting landscapes; wild and lonely headlands; “sentinel” peaks presiding over the entrance to fjordic sea lochs; and wide, sweeping views over water to both near and distant islands. The last-mentioned of these represents perhaps the area's most important landscape asset – the views over the Summer Isles. However, the distinctive setting and compact, attractive townscape of Ullapool is also widely appreciated. The Wester Ross Local Plan identifies a number of areas where the views over water are particularly important.

5.8.3 The scenic qualities of the project area are the main basis of its appeal for a broad spectrum of visitors. They may transit the area by car, bus, or ferry but they often also explore parts of the area on foot, by bicycle, or in yachts, motor boats, and kayaks. If anything, the new access legislation is likely to increase this trend. Safeguarding the quality and diversity of landscape experience in the project area is therefore important from both an economic and a conservation point of view.

Forces of Change in the Landscape

5.8.4 The underlying landform is virtually a constant in terms of a human lifespan. However, landscape character and scenic quality, particularly at local level, are more open to influence and can be subject to a range of pressures. These may be immediately obvious or they may build up over a period of time. Factors which tend to increase the human impact on the coastal landscape include:

- population pressures – house building, fencing
- increasing car ownership and expectations of mobility – roads, tracks, car parking facilities, signage
- requirements for facilities for marine traffic – harbour development and storage facilities, jetties, slips
- the development and expansion of aquaculture – finfish and shellfish farms, feed barges and pipe systems, shorebases, and pontoons
- forestry and agricultural land management activities
- energy requirements – eg renewable energy installations, subsea cabling or pipelines and their points of landfall
- the need for building materials – quarries and borrow pits
- managed and unmanaged waste disposal – land fill and litter

Careful location and good design can help to make these impacts acceptable. But in some of the more sensitive areas there is a case for making a presumption against development

Influence of Land Management

5.8.5 Evidence of early human land use activity has been absorbed into the more obvious outlines of present day fields and crofts. These have been created from cleared stones creating a link between the physical environment and settlement patterns. Crofting settlements with scattered housing occupy sheltered inlets where soils may be better on some of the poorer quality land near the coast. These townships are based on small, mainly tenanted holdings that have access to communally managed grazings, overseen by elected grazings committees and legislated by specific crofting laws. Settlement patterns are affected by the proximity of the mountains to the coast which influences field patterns, tree lines, woodland and communication lines.

5.8.6 Larger farms and estate policy woodlands tend to occupy the more fertile straths. Woodlands have been established in the glens and inland areas for shelter and timber production, with a more recent trend towards establishing native species and reducing the extent of exotic conifers. Since the 1980s crofting townships are able to get involved in woodland management through changes in the Crofting Acts.

5.8.7 Uncertainty about the future of agriculture and an ageing population has led to a decline in active traditional land management. This leads to a potential change in relationship between land management and the land or sea as the past dependency on these resources changes.

Landscape Character Assessment

5.8.8 The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) for Ross and Cromarty, which was published by SNH in 1998, gives detail on the forces of change within the various character areas. It classifies the landscapes in the area by type, and examines the generic characteristics, sensitivities, and pressures on each one. It also provides guidelines for sympathetic development without being place-specific (eg for road building, land management, and peat extraction).

5.8.9 The LCA defines the main landscape character types present in the project area as:

- *Enclosed bay and offshore islands* – all of the marine part of the project area outwith the two sea lochs
- *Fjord* – Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom

- *Rugged mountain massif* – Beinn More Coigach, most of the peninsula between Loch Broom and Little Loch Broom, the slopes of An Teallach and Sail Mhor on the south side of upper Little Loch Broom
- *Rocky moorland* – eg around Polbain, Ardmail, Cailleach Head, Gruinard House and Mellon Udrigle
- *Smooth moorland* – around Rubha Coigach, Greenstone Point, and Badentarbat Bay, Kildonan
- *Undulating moorland* – around Achiltibuie and Polglass, the south side of lower Little Loch Broom
- *Scattered crofting* – Reiff, Altandhu, Rhue, Scoraig, Achgarve, Opinan
- *Linear crofting* – Achiltibuie, Loggie-Letters, Badluarach/Durnamuck and Laide

5.8.10 Landscape evaluation is however an inherently subjective topic and this is typified in the continuing debate and uncertainty over boundaries for the two NSAs in the vicinity of the Scoraig peninsula (at present the peninsula falls between the two). The Draft Management Strategy for the Wester Ross NSA, published in 2002, addresses this boundary question, but has not yet been matched by detailed survey work on the Assynt-Coigach NSA, so has only been able to make provisional comment on it. Also the concept of ‘wild land’, though widely accepted for management purposes in other countries, remains somewhat controversial in the Highlands and Islands where communities have been sensitised by the history of clearances and out-migration. The importance of conserving such areas is increasingly being recognised under the provisions of the National Planning Policy Guideline for the Coast.

5.8.11 Since 1974 The National Trust for Scotland has a ‘Conservation Agreement’ with the Dundonnell Estate, which is one of the larger estates in the area, covering some 40,000 acres. Conservation agreements impose burdens on the landlord to consult with the NTS for certain types of management changes that would impact on the landscape, amenity etc.

5.8.12 Effective landscape management is about seeing ‘the big picture’ and having a view to both the past and future. But it is also about attention to the details which collectively make up that picture. As society’s needs change and as technology develops, this requires elements of both vigilance and creativity.

Landscape Policies

5.8.13 The plan seeks to safeguard the area’s core scenic assets and to promote development which is of a scale and type which respects its essential landscape character. To this end, the plan takes landscape character zones as the basic framework for its area-specific policies for the coastal/inshore area. In the project area as a whole, it aims to:

1. safeguard the integrity of the designated National Scenic Areas;
2. safeguard views over open water – particularly from those areas specially identified in this respect in the Wester Ross Local Plan;
3. safeguard or enhance the visual amenity of areas which are popular for recreational use or which have special recreational potential;
4. increase awareness and understanding of the landscape resource and the forces of change which can act upon it;
5. encourage responsible development and measures to enhance the coastal landscape – particularly the landscape setting of settlements.

Proposals for new coastal development should take account of the generic landscape guidance contained in the Ross and Cromarty Landscape Character Assessment (1998) and relevant sector-specific guidance. Details of these can be obtained from Scottish Natural Heritage.

5.9 Cultural and Built Heritage



Monastery ruins, Annat Bay

5.9.1 The project area has a rich and diverse cultural and built heritage. Coastal archaeological sites in the project area range from caves and rock shelters used as long ago as 8000 years BC, through defensive sites such as brochs and duns, field systems, chapel sites, farmsteads, clearance villages, fishing stations and fish traps, to Ullapool itself which is a fine example of a planned fishing village, parts of which have Conservation Area status. The marine area has a number of wrecks, most of which are relatively recent fishing or cargo vessels, but artefacts dating from the Armada have been recovered in the area.

5.9.2 Several sites are recognised as being nationally important and have been afforded statutory protection through their recognition as scheduled ancient monuments under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. These include Dun Canna, at Loch Kanaird, Dun an Ruigh and Dun Lagairh, on Loch Broom and a hut circle on the beach at Mellon Udrigle. Many of the areas archaeological sites have been classified in the Sites and Monuments Record which advises in terms of protection or professional recording on a case by case basis. There are a number of listed buildings and structures as well as a Non-Statutory Register of Monuments detailing sites within the area. Listed buildings and structures include Udrigle House, Ullapool's former parish church and a bridge over the River Broom at Auchindrean. The better-preserved, upstanding archaeological remains tend to attract more public interest. However, it should be borne in mind that sites with buried, or less upstanding archaeological deposits and remains can sometimes be of as much archaeological significance.

Cultural and Built Heritage Policies

5.9.3 The Coastal Plan:

1. supports measures to safeguard key maritime and coastal archaeological sites;
2. encourages efforts to safeguard the landscape setting of important coastal sites, particularly those identified as supporting the qualities of isolated coastlines;
3. encourages efforts to improve knowledge of the cultural and built heritage in the project area, with particular emphasis on maritime sites;
4. supports the development of access agreements, interpretation and signage for more visually interesting and accessible sites.

5.10 Interface with the Wester Ross Local Plan

5.10.1 The Highland Council has recently completed a Local Plan for Wester Ross which sets out policies for the regulation of terrestrial developments. Whilst it does not cover activities or developments in the marine area, it does cover the coast, and efforts have been made to ensure that the Coastal Plan and the Local Plan complement each other. The Wester Ross Local plan takes account of a number of other plans and strategies covering the Wester Ross area which may be material considerations in evaluating development proposals. These other strategies, which may contain new or updated information and deal with wider issues, are also taken into account in the Coastal Plan.

5.10.2 The following elements in the Wester Ross Local Plan are of particular relevance:

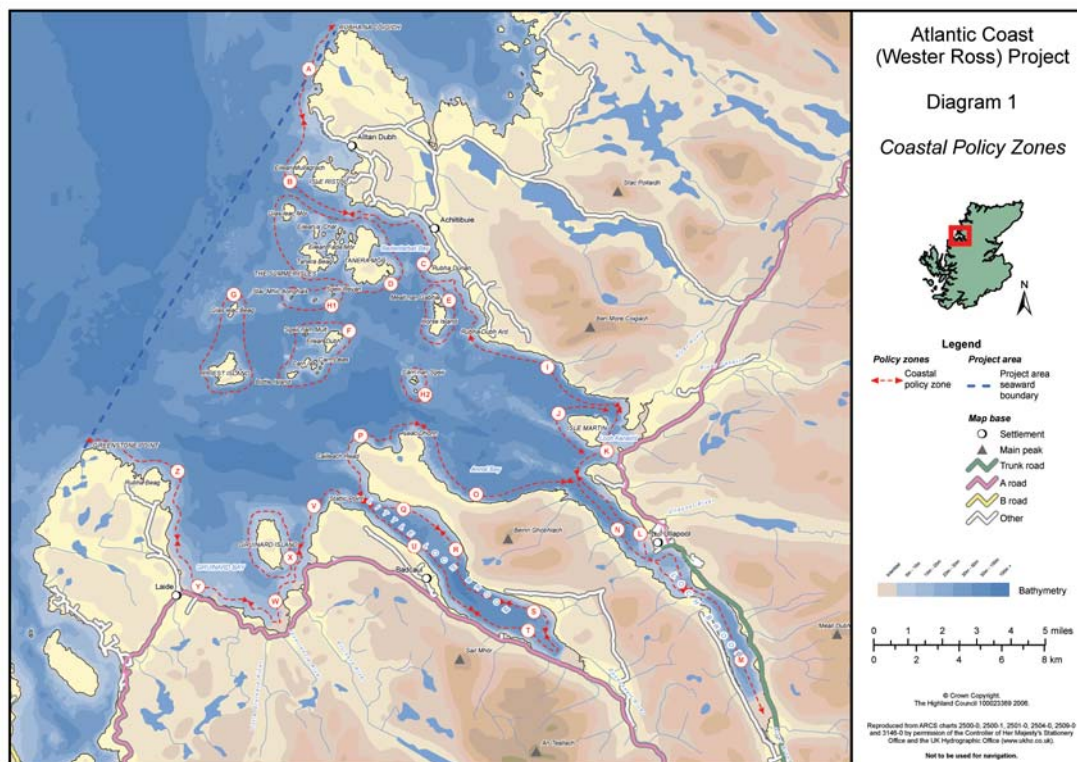
1. it divides Wester Ross into internationally important Areas (SACs, SPAs, etc), nationally important areas (Scheduled ancient monuments, NSAs, SSSIs, etc), locally/regionally important areas (isolated coastlines, local conservation areas, areas where the seaward views from settlements are important), and unclassified areas, and sets out policies for their protection
2. any developments less than 5m above sea level must be approved by SEPA
3. it includes terrestrial policies which acknowledge and support the EU's designation of part of Little Loch Broom as a shellfish-growing water
4. it seeks to safeguard views over open water between the road and the coast, isolated coastlines and sites of local nature conservation interest

The area-specific guidance which follows integrates elements of the Wester Ross Local Plan as appropriate.

6. Area-specific Guidance

6.1 Structure of the Area-specific Guidance

6.1.1 To provide area-specific guidance in this plan a distinction has been made between the coastal/nearshore areas and the waters further out. The guidance for the **coastal/nearshore areas** has been based primarily on landscape character tracts and visual envelopes (sections of coast which are within relatively close sight of one another). These represent areas of common identity (see DIAGRAM 1 and larger scale fold-out map at rear of document).

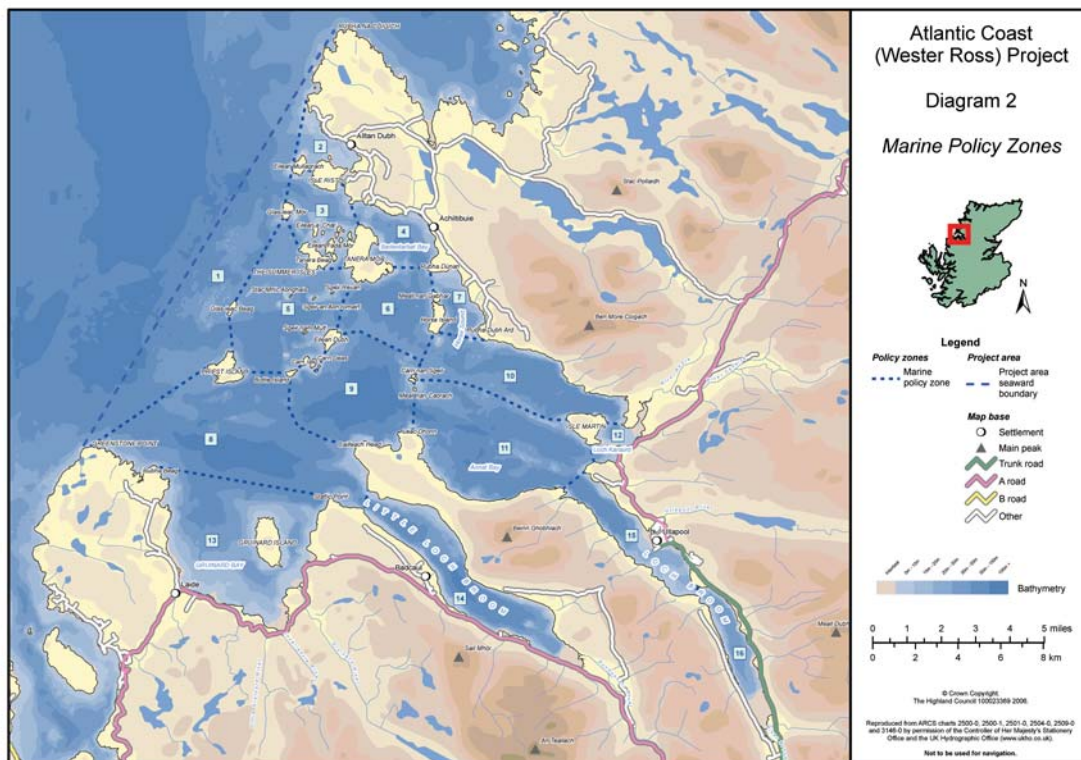


6.1.2 This approach has been taken because where the sea comes close to the land, the landscape and its features is the main frame of reference. The most dramatic of these features – the abrupt headlands and major coastal cliffs which are important landmarks in the project area – are highlighted on the policy map at the rear of the document. The form and orientation of the coast also determines its level of exposure and this has a strong bearing on the development potential of both the land and the sea near the coast. The area is exposed to the west and any strong winds from the north through west to south can produce dangerous seas which build up quickly in heavy weather. The sea lochs, particularly in the upper reaches, are subject to squalls and downdraughts from the surrounding mountains in windy weather. The existing pattern of settlement and land use is also an important influence on the type and scale of new development which is likely to be acceptable.

6.1.3 Key policy topics in the coastal/nearshore area, in addition to landscape and nature conservation, are aquaculture, harbours and jetties, recreation, the built environment, and waste disposal. The last of these may relate to discharges from the land to the sea or the potential for the sea to carry pollution to the land (eg in the form of sea-borne litter).

6.1.4 Further offshore, the frame of reference provided by the land, and the shelter it may afford from the wind, diminishes in importance. Water depths and seabed character become relatively more important. Depending on the size and nature of developments, the pattern of use here may have relatively little effect on the land which is at a distance. However, there may be an element of competition between different users of the marine area for space or for access to resources within the sea or on the seabed. Some of these activities, most notably fishing, will have an impact on the marine ecosystem. For long-term sustainability they need to be managed so that the resilience and natural productivity of the ecosystem is not compromised.

6.1.5 The area-specific planning guidance for the **offshore/marine areas** is therefore structured around the main hydrographic subdivisions and seabed character type (see DIAGRAM 2 and larger scale fold-out map at rear of document).



6.1.6 At this stage, this guidance is fairly rough and ready. However, as better-quality information becomes available on the extent of activities in the marine area, and the capacity of the habitats and species there to cope with these activities, it should be possible to refine this guidance. Key policy considerations in the offshore marine area are fisheries management and the requirements for marine nature conservation. Navigational needs, and the scope for development of marine-based renewable energy sources are also considerations in the areas further away from the land.

6.1.7 There is obviously a degree of overlap between these two sets of policy zones and this is made clear in the larger, fold-out map which accompanies this document. It would be unrealistic to define a hard-and-fast boundary between what qualifies as “nearshore” and what qualifies as “offshore”. Also, some activities and issues straddle both these types of policy zone. For marine areas, users of the plan are therefore advised to refer to both sets of policy zones and they should allow for the fact that some overlap is necessary. For terrestrial areas the coastal/nearshore policies should suffice. Overarching both these sets of area-specific guidance are the general policies and recommendations set out above – the overall strategy and the recommendations for each sector which relate to the project area as a whole.

6.2 Coastal/Nearshore Area Policies

6.2.1 The project area can be split into five main areas:

- the Coigach coast and the Summer Isles
- Loch Broom
- the north side and western tip of the Scoraig peninsula (Cailleach Head and Annat Bay)
- Little Loch Broom
- Gruinard Bay to Greenstone Point

These divisions have been further subdivided for planning policy purposes to give a total of 26 coastal policy zones (here labelled A-Z). These subdivisions, as mentioned above, are

based on landscape character tracts, visual containment, and aspect. They can be used to identify what types and scales of development in the nearshore area or on the coast would be compatible with the character of the area and also what remedial measures might be taken to reinforce or enhance this character and scenic quality.

6.2.2 Each of the five main areas is introduced with a general description. Each of its subsidiary policy zones is then presented in a standard format. This sets out firstly a brief description of the area, its existing pattern of use, then a brief discussion of the policy considerations. This is followed by the suggested policy for the area. Further details of the factors taken into account in developing the area policies can be found in the matrices in the Technical Appendix. Scale definitions are given on page 64.

The Coigach Coast and the Summer Isles

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CONSIDERATIONS

6.2.3 Western Coigach is “a place apart”. The only road in from the Ullapool area is single-track and it winds between the Coigach mountains before the landscape abruptly opens out and levels out around Loch Osgaig. This lengthy approach culminating in a sudden change to a land of more moderate relief, wider horizons, and often clearer skies, gives western Coigach a distinct identity. It has a feel of the Northern or Western Isles yet it is physically of the mainland. At the same time however, an integral part of its landscape character is the proximity of the Summer Isles and the vantage points which it affords over this scenic archipelago. This distinctive character and visual ‘reward’ for the traveller at the road end has helped to ensure that western Coigach, despite its remoteness, remains one of the project area’s most vibrant communities.

6.2.4 The coast of eastern Coigach, by comparison, is somewhat more enclosed and notable for its dramatic contrasts – the steep mountain slopes of Ben More Coigach and the northern cliffs of Isle Martin and Meall Garbh contrast with the intimacy and shelter of Loch Kanaird and Ardmair Bay close by.

6.2.5 The islands of outer Loch Broom can be divided into three broad categories:

- near-shore islands and island groups:
 - Tanera Mór and the central Summer Isles
 - Isle Ristol and Eilean Mullagrach
 - Horse Island and Meall nan Gobhar
- distant island groups and outliers:
 - Priest Island
 - Glas-leac Beag
 - Glas-leac Mór
 - the Eilean Dubh group
- skerries:
 - Càrn nan Sgeir and Meall nan Caorach
 - Stac Mhic Aonghais/ Sgurr an Aon Iomairt/ Sgeir Revan

6.2.6 The near-shore islands and island groups offer better shelter and more development potential. However, they are also often overlooked at relatively close quarters and are visually sensitive because they are key components of the views from the settlements on the adjacent mainland. The relative ease of accessibility of the near-shore islands, particularly Tanera Mór and the cluster of smaller islands beside it, makes them popular for informal recreation – short boat trips, canoeing, and picnicking.

6.2.7 The most important role of the outliers is arguably as havens for wildlife and as "adventure destinations". They need policies to safeguard these functions.

6.2.8 The main significance of the skerries is that they represent navigational hazards though they have a local landscape value in their own right.

6.2.9 Zones [A] through to [J] all fall within the Assynt Coigach National Scenic Area. Isle Martin and the Rubha Meallan Bhuidhe headland nearby (both part of zone [K]) fall within this NSA. The Ardmair side of Loch Kanaird (also in zone [K]) falls outside it.



Stac Mhic Aonghais

[A] RUBHA COIGACH TO REIFF

General Description

This rugged and exposed headland has generally low relief and the coastline is characterised by low cliffs which are backed by moorland.

Existing Use

Some creeling takes place along this stretch of coast. The cliffs are popular with rock climbers as a training area or poor-weather alternative when conditions on the higher hills are unsuitable. There is a pleasant west-facing small bay at Camas Eilean Ghlais which is one of the few sections of this coast offering a degree of shelter. This is an attraction for short walks from Reiff and should be safeguarded for its amenity.

Policy Considerations

The area is too exposed for aquaculture and onshore development would tend to conflict with wilderness recreation function. It would be best left undeveloped as an area for walking, rock climbing, wildlife watching, trout fishing in the hill lochs and creel fishing in the inshore waters.

Policy:

Safeguard as an outdoor recreation area.

Seek provision of some car parking space for visitors at the road end.

Precautionary presumption against installations in the nearshore area.

[B] REIFF TO ALTANDHU AND ISLE RISTOL

(Reiff Bay to Rubh a' Mhadaidh-Ruaidh, including Eilean Mullagrach)

General Description

The clachans of Reiff and Altandhu are the most remote communities accessible by road in the project area. Reiff is particularly exposed to the west and south-west and marks the end of the public road. Altandhu gets some shelter from south-west winds due to the close proximity of Isle Ristol and Eilean Mullagrach. Isle Ristol and Eilean Mullagrach are important in views from Altandhu and to an extent from Reiff also. Isle Ristol is just accessible by foot at the lowest tides and it has an attractive small sand beach on its north side.

Existing Use

The small anchorage at Old Dornie, although well-sheltered from most directions, is shallow and still has a degree of exposure. However Old Dornie provides a safe haven for inshore fishing boats and recreational craft in most conditions. It has two tidal jetties, one with a slip alongside. It is the most important anchorage in the project area next to Ullapool for the local fishing fleet but is quite confined and relatively shallow. The inner, most sheltered anchorage which cannot be entered at low tide tends to get crowded and the bay at the eastern end of Loch an Alltain Duibh tends to accumulate sea-borne litter.

Despite their remoteness there has been a significant amount of house building on individual plots at Reiff and Blairbuie because of land availability and sea views. However, the houses are quite tightly spaced at Reiff so parking for the casual visitor is not altogether easy. This creates a degree of conflict with recreational interests (visiting walkers and rock climbers who

wish to access the coastline to the north). The first section of footpath out of the clachan to the north is also not very satisfactory, being squeezed between a fence line and the eastern shore of Loch Reiff.

Policy Considerations

The sheltered parts of Loch an Alltain Dubh are generally too shallow for aquaculture. Deeper waters are to be found close inshore off the south and east sides of Isle Ristol and the north-east side of Eilean Mullagrach but there is scant shelter at these locations. Probably only small-scale finfish or shellfish farming installations could be located here because of this and the amenity of the area would be compromised by anything larger. Maintaining free access to the anchorage at Old Dornie from the south and west is important.

Isle Ristol would be best left undeveloped for informal recreation. Aquaculture development is largely constrained here by exposure, and the need to safeguard access to the local anchorage. There are also considerations in relation to the Assynt Coigach NSA and the important viewpoint above Altandhu.

Old Dornie harbour – needs some shelter and toilet facilities; possibly also some amenity tree planting on the landward side of the road (eg to screen the storage area used by fishing boats). There are some good examples of rig-and-furrow nearby which should be safeguarded.

Policy:

Aquaculture development would be acceptable in principle on the west and south-west side of Isle Ristol and the east side of Eilean Mullagrach. However installations sited in these nearshore areas would have to be small-scale only, well separated and low in profile to avoid impacting adversely on the scenic quality of this area.

Precautionary presumption against such development in the other parts of this Policy zone to safeguard (a) access to the important local anchorage at Old Dornie, and (b) the visual amenity of the communities at Altandhu and Reiff.

Encourage fishermen using mobile gear to recognise the presence of sensitive maerl bed habitat off the south end of Eilean Mullagrach and the south-west tip of Isle Ristol.

On the terrestrial side of the coast, support improvements to public access and car parking at the Reiff road-end to promote good relations between local residents and visiting walkers and climbers.

Encourage the improvement and maintenance of facilities at the key access point of Old Dornie.

New development must allow for existing access to the coast to be maintained.

[C] BADENTARBAT BAY AND HORSE SOUND

(Rubh a' Mhadaidh-ruaidh to Rubha Dubh Ard)

General Description

This section of coast is characterised mainly by open south-west-facing bays backed by a low rocky or shingly shoreline and gentle onshore gradients. The spacious setting, frequent clear skies and distant views of the Summer Isles, An Teallach and the peaks of the Fisherfield Forest are key to its landscape character and appeal. This zone embraces the visual envelope of the extensive, settled coastal strip which includes the communities of Polbain, Achiltibuie, Badenscallie and Acheninver. Most houses are set back from the shore by 300-500m on a gently sloping hillside which affords them elevated and extensive views of the main Summer Isles group, Horse Island, and the more distant islands beyond.

Low-lying, somewhat barren headlands with ruined crofts separate Badentarbat Bay from Horse Sound and Horse Sound from Achduart and Culnacraig. The headland of Rubha Dunan however provides open space, a quiet retreat, and a close vantage point over the Summer Isles for the inhabitants of Achiltibuie, Polglass, and Badenscallie.

Existing Use

Badentarbat Bay has an attractive shingle beach which is often used as a launching point for sea kayakers visiting the Summer Isles. The pier at Badentarbat is used by vessels servicing the finfish farm at Tanera Mór, recreational boats, and scuba divers from time to time. Use of the pier area by the fish farm intensified in recent years but declined more recently due to the supply of feed by sea and harvesting operations taking place by 'well-boat'. The pier is a public facility which has multiple usage and is in need of significant, ongoing maintenance.

There is a good small, pink-sand beach at Acheninver which is out of sight of the public roads for most of their length.

Policy Considerations

The extent to which the inshore area is overlooked by houses, and the quality of the seaward views in this area, makes the coastline visually sensitive and limits its development potential. Surface installations in the waters close to the mainland shore or halfway out to the islands would be too obtrusive. The only places where surface installations could be installed without being very obtrusive – and at that they would have to be small scale – would be immediately west of Badentarbat Pier and possibly also on the northwest side of Rubha Dunan.

There is a degree of conflict between the use of Badentarbat pier as a service base for the fish farm at Tanera Mór and its use for recreation. Recreational use should not be discouraged here and storage of fish farm materials adjacent to the pier and along the access road should be carefully controlled.

The main potential is likely to be for enhancement of recreational provision, eg accommodation or shelter/changing facilities near Badentarbat Pier. Building should be closely controlled between the public road and the sea to maintain amenity and seaward views. The views over open water in this area are identified as being of local/regional importance in the Wester Ross Local Plan and impacts on them will be an important planning consideration.

There is very limited woodland cover here – mostly non-native conifers planted for shelter in the immediate vicinity of some houses. There is scope for more planting for shelter for livestock and buildings on the uphill side of the village provided that the in-bye grazing needs of the crofters can be met.

Policy:

General presumption against siting of surface installations in the nearshore area to safeguard residential amenity and seaward views.

Presumption in favour of carefully-sited and well-designed developments which can support and enhance recreational provision and interpretation/information provision around the key access point at Badentarbat Pier.

Close control of roadside storage of materials and equipment at the pier to reduce visual impact and improve local amenity.

[D] MAIN SUMMER ISLES GROUP

(Tanera Mór, Tanera Beag, Eilean Fada Mór, Eilean a' Chàr, Glas-leac Mór)

General Description

The main Summer Isles group is one of the Highland region's key scenic assets and provides an impressive visual backdrop for the houses at Polbain and Dornie. The islands as a whole are probably best appreciated from the elevated viewpoints around here or from the high points on the islands themselves.

Existing Use

Tanera Mór is the only inhabited island in the Summer Isles group. It is also the largest, with the most pronounced relief, reaching a height of 124m. It has a good natural anchorage which has been heavily developed for finfish farming. This has tended to "industrialise" the bay. There are scattered houses, some quite large, around the bay. Tanera Mór's proximity to the mainland at Badentarbat Bay makes it a useful "stepping stone" for canoeists and other boat enthusiasts who wish to explore the central Summer Isles group.

Whilst the anchorage area of Tanera Mór is quite developed, the remainder of this island group is essentially undeveloped other than a finfish farm on the east side of Eilean Fada Mór.

Policy Considerations

The area is fairly compact and much of it can be viewed from the mainland adjacent making it possible to monitor fishing activity. It would therefore seem suitable for a potential lobster stock enhancement initiative area as the waters around many of the islands in this area have rocky, boulder slopes descending to sandy/cobbled sea bed where lobsters are currently found and fished, subject to further detailed investigation. Thought would need to be given to the costs involved in sourcing juveniles for seeding and the legal basis for preventing fishing in any given area. This should be possible under the Highland Regulating Order, if approved.

Continued aquaculture activity is acceptable in principle at the existing sites but reducing its impact at Tanera Mór (eg by rationalising the level of development in the anchorage) could encourage more yachts to visit and these could bring tourist trade.

The undeveloped area offers good creeling ground, an attractive area for canoeing and diving, and sanctuaries for wildlife. The scale of individual islands can be diminished by siting large installations on or close to them and the attractive network of waterways between the islands should remain open for creel fishermen and recreational boats. This, and the exposure factor, militates against further aquaculture development, particularly around the smaller islands, though there may be some potential on the east side of Glas-leac Mór.

Potential for outdoor activities and field study.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of continued use of The Anchorage at Tanera Mór for aquaculture but encourage a reduction in the overall scale of the fish farm presence at this site and encourage the use of low-impact designs for the fish farm installations to make the area more attractive for visiting recreational boats. The scale could be reduced by relocating some of the fish farm production to the south-east end of Tanera Mór or the south-east side of Horse Island if sufficiently robust equipment is available for these more exposed sites.

Presumption against further development in the western part of the island group.

Encourage recognition of the presence of sensitive maerl bed habitat

Investigate potential for establishing a lobster stock enhancement area here on a trial basis (see Policy Map).

[E] HORSE ISLAND (and Meall nan Gabhar)

General Description

Horse Island is one of the more substantial islands in the project area and an important element in the seaward views from the townships of Badenscallie and Polglass. Horse Island and its intimate neighbour Meall nan Gabhar are linked at low water and together effectively represent a land mass 2kms long. Both islands are rugged and uninhabited. The main island reaches a height of nearly 60m.

Existing Use

At the time of writing an application for a large new shellfish farm off the south-east side of Horse Island has recently been approved by the Crown Estate. A small area is also leased for shellfish farming at the north eastern corner of Horse Island but this has been inactive for a long period.

Policy Considerations

The eastern side of Horse Island provides reasonable shelter from westerly and north-westerly winds and there is scope for aquaculture on a moderate scale here provided it is visually discreet and takes advantage of the hill backdrop to reduce its visual impact.

Potential as a finfish farm relocation site – but probably more likely to be acceptable to local residents for this purpose if development were to be off the (more distant to them) south-east side of Horse Island rather than the east or north-east.

The nearest jetty/pier/slip which could service development at Horse Island is Badentarbat pier. At the time of writing this pier is already in use by the fish farm operator on Tanera Mór; this would tend to preclude its use by another fish farm operator because of the need to minimise risks of transfer of fish diseases

Policy:

Presumption in favour of use as a finfish farm site to allow relocation of finfish production away from the vicinity of game fishing rivers or other sensitive areas.

Aquaculture development here should be small-to-medium in scale and visually discreet.

Outwith the small existing shellfish lease at the north-east end of Horse Island, development should be directed towards the southern end of the island to minimise impacts on the visual amenity of the communities on the mainland adjacent.

Encourage fishermen using mobile gear to recognise the presence of sensitive maerl bed habitat

[F] THE EILEAN DUBH ISLAND GROUP

(Eilean Dubh, Carn Iar, Carn Deas, Sgeirean Glasa, Bottle Island, Sgeir nam Mult)

General Description

This island group as a whole is of significant landscape importance for passing boat traffic and as a distant set of features in views from the mainland. However the group is too far from the mainland to be as visually sensitive as some of the nearshore islands. Although only moderate in area, Eilean Dubh is the second highest of the Summer Isles at 87m. It offers shelter from west and north-west winds on its south-eastern side which in itself is relatively undifferentiated and of lesser scenic value than other parts of the island group.

Existing Use

The area is used by tourist vessels and for creel fishing and dredging in the waters to the north-west of the islands.

At least one finfish farming company has shown tentative interest in developing an experimental site at this location. This would be a challenging site to service and would require a very robust installation designed for offshore use. Development here on any significant scale would probably require improvements to be made to one of the local jetties on the mainland.

Policy Considerations

Less visually sensitive than the nearshore islands so may have some potential for aquaculture development. However, the landscape value of the islands, apart from the south east side of Eilean Dubh, is such that large scale surface installations on the sea nearby (eg aquaculture or renewable energy) or any significant scale of terrestrial development would probably be unacceptable.

The smaller islands of the group – Bottle Island, Carn Iar, Carn Deas and the associated skerries – are smaller and lower and therefore offer less shelter. Together they form a more intricate coastline, and collectively are more scenically sensitive.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of marine development involving surface installations off the south-east side of Eilean Dubh which are of a scale and design compatible with the scenic value of these islands.

Presumption against development on or around the western and northern sides of Eilean Dubh, and on or around the lower-lying islands in the south-western part of the group to safeguard their landscape character.

[G] THE LONE OUTLIERS (Priest Island and Glas-leac Beag)

General Description

Priest Island and Glas-leac Beag are the most remote and exposed of the Summer Isles. Their main interest is their wildlife and Priest Island is internationally recognised as a Special Protection Area for its important breeding population of storm petrels. However Priest Island is one of the larger islands in the project area and has a rugged and indented coastline, so is important in landscape terms also. Boats may find some shelter from west and south-westerly winds in the bay on its eastern side (Acairseid Eilean a' Chléirich) but there is no man-made landing place.

Glas-leac Beag is arguably the loneliest Summer Isle. Just 700m long and 200m wide and battered by the full force of wind and wave from across the Minch, it is little more than a large skerry.

Existing Use

To the land-based observer both of these islands have an aura of inaccessibility – an attractive visual counterpoint to the more accessible inshore islands. Whilst fishing boats and the Western Isles ferry pass Priest Island most days on their way to or from the open sea, accessing these islands represents a challenge for inshore recreational craft. The islands are however visited by locals and trip boats in the summer months. This is a popular destination for experienced sea kayakers.

Policy Considerations

The presence of freshwater lochans and a small bay which is sheltered from westerly winds make Priest Island viable as an overnight camping spot for experienced kayakers seeking a wilderness camping experience.

Priest Island is internationally recognised as a Special Protection Area for its important breeding population of storm petrels, which are susceptible to disturbance during the nesting period. Best left undeveloped as a wildlife haven and wilderness recreation resource

Policy:

Presumption against development on or around Priest Island to safeguard its wildlife and wilderness recreation resource. Maintain free access to the bay on the island's eastern side because of the shelter it affords for smaller boats.

Ensure that those accessing and using the island do so responsibly with due consideration for the special bird interests here.

Any marine installation located in the vicinity of Glas-leac Beag should be suitably robust to cope with the exposure but it should also be low in profile and of a scale and form which is sympathetic to the island's landscape character and compatible with the SPA and Natura designation.

[H] THE SKERRY GROUPS

[H1] STAC MHIC AONGHAIS, SGEIR AN AON IOMAIRT, SGEIR REVAN

General Description

Low and very exposed rocky skerries, close to the main ferry route, which are scenically significant for passing boat traffic but which also represent a navigation hazard.

Existing Use

This area has been noted as important for wildlife watching and for fishing, with scallop ground indicated to the west of the skerries.

Policy Considerations

Because of their proximity to the main shipping route into Ullapool they represent a significant navigational hazard in conditions of poor visibility.

Policy:

Presumption against location of surface installations in the vicinity of the skerries to safeguard their scenic value for passing boat traffic.

General Description

These are skerries of lesser scenic value than the main islands in the wider context of the project area. Although less distinguished seen from the north, Carn nan Sgeir has a rugged and scenic south side. The south-east end of Meall nan Caorach marks the outer limit of the Ullapool Harbour area.

Existing Use

Because of their proximity to the main shipping route into Ullapool they represent a significant navigational hazard in conditions of poor visibility. It is also an important area for commercial fishing – scallops, velvets, etc. There is also good scenic diving

Policy Considerations

It is important that no installations should be located in the sea at or near the surface to the north or south of these skerries to maintain the width of the navigational channels either side. Although less distinguished seen from the north, Carn nan Sgeir has a rugged and scenic south side. The south east end of Meall nan Caorach marks the outer limit of the Ullapool Harbour area.

Policy:

Presumption against location of surface installations to the north or south of this skerry group to safeguard the main navigational channels to and from Ullapool.

Suitably robust surface installations which are sympathetic in design to the wider landscape setting could be located to the west of the skerries or to the east provided they are within the green sector of the Rubha Cadail navigational light and compatible with the operation of the Ullapool Harbour area.

[I] RUBHA DUBH ARD TO DÙN CANNA – The southern flanks of Ben More Coigach

General Description

The slopes of Ben More Coigach drop steeply down to the sea here and are a key coastal feature of the project area, well-seen from the Stornoway-Ullapool ferry or from Ardmair or Annat Bay. The rugged scenery of this stretch of coast can also readily be appreciated close-up because a coastal footpath (The Postie's Path) runs along most of its length. This path, which is steep and challenging in places, is mostly used by backpackers travelling to and from Acheninver and Achiltibuie.

Existing Use

The steep cliffs at the eastern end of this area continue underwater, offering scuba divers some impressive wall dives. Ben More Coigach is popular with visiting hill walkers because of its multi-faceted character and its fine, varied views. Most climb it from Culnacraig to make the most of the coastal views over Loch Broom and the Summer Isles.

Policy Considerations

This stretch of coastline is scenically very sensitive. It is also exposed to west and southwest winds and the water is deep close to the shore in its eastern part. These factors militate against aquaculture development in the nearshore area on both amenity and technical grounds and the nearshore marine area of this zone and the terrestrial area east of Culnacraig would be best left undeveloped – for use and appreciation as a scenic and outdoor recreation asset (hillwalking, diving, recreational boating and canoeing).

The Wester Ross Local Plan allows for some terrestrial development around Culnacraig and Achduart but says that the views from the end of the public road at Culnacraig should be maintained.

Policy:

Terrestrial development which is consistent with the aims of the Wester Ross Local Plan should be acceptable in and around the Culnacraig Settlement Development Area.

East of Culnacraig and in the nearshore marine area of this Policy zone generally, there will be a presumption against development to safeguard the scenic quality and recreational value of this area.

Support maintenance and improvement of the Postie's Path where necessary to safeguard and enhance its contribution to local recreational provision and the economy of the Achiltibuie area.

[J] THE NORTH AND WEST COASTS OF ISLE MARTIN

General Description

The northern and south-western sides of Isle Martin are rugged and uninhabited with steep cliffs. There is a shingle beach at Camas a' Bhuailidh. These shores are exposed to the prevailing west winds, particularly the south-western shore. The northern shore gives onto deep water close in and some steep underwater cliffs. Like the coast below Ben More Coigach, this area offers scuba divers impressive wall dives which are relatively accessible.

Existing Use

Isle Martin is in community ownership and is managed for its historical and wildlife interest by the Isle Martin Trust. The Trust is working to improve access to the island and the facilities for visitors on it.

Policy Considerations

There is little obvious development potential in the nearshore area due to its exposure to prevailing westerly winds. However the nearshore area just south of the western tip of the island is relatively inconspicuous and might accommodate an installation which is suitably robust. The island is however being managed primarily as a (natural and cultural) heritage resource for the local community so it would be important that any development on its west coast should be compatible with this.

Policy:

Aquaculture development is unlikely here due to the area's exposure. However, if suitably robust equipment were available, a small-to-medium scale aquaculture installation might be acceptable at the south-west side of the island provided it is kept away from the immediate vicinity of Camas a' Bhualaidh.

The siting of marine installations off the north side of the island would not be favoured due to the likely impact on the landscape character of the area (Isle Martin's rugged north coast is an integral part of the view from the important coastal footpath on the shore opposite) and the likely impact on recreational diving interests.

Support development of Isle Martin as a (natural and cultural) heritage resource for the local community.

[K] LOCH KANAIRD AND ARDMAIR (Dùn Canna to Rubha Cadail, including the SE side of Isle Martin east of Camas a' Bhuailidh)

General Description

This area is scenically attractive and diverse within a small compass. Rugged hill slopes and cliffs at Meall Garbh and Dùn Canna frame the seaward views from shingle beaches and across Loch Kanaird to the gentle eastern slopes of Isle Martin. The low headland of Rubha Meallain Bhuidhe and the broad inter-tidal area and river flats at the mouth of Strath Canaird provide a scenic contrast to the heights of Ben More Coigach to the north. Isle Martin provides Loch Kanaird with local shelter from westerly winds while the coastline immediately to the north at Camas Mòr and to the south-west of Ardmair Point is more exposed.

Existing Use

The main coastal activities in this area involve tourism and fish farming. There is a caravan park, chalets, and moorings at Ardmair Point and the seasonal ferry to Isle Martin runs from here. The fish farm shorebase is just to the east.

Fish farming is conducted at two sites within Loch Kanaird. The fish farm installations close to Isle Martin are low in profile and generally integrate well in the landscape. The fish farm installations closer to the mouth of the River Canaird, particularly the site at Rubha Meallain Bhuidhe, have been more controversial because of the potential for adverse interactions with the wild salmonid population here (eg sea lice, escapes, or fish disease). The leases for both the Loch Kanaird fish farm sites were recently renewed (the RMB site on appeal) but these sites are obvious candidates for relocation should alternative sites become available.

The bay has been identified as a possible landing point for the Western Isles electricity connector.

The bay at Cùl a' Bhogha has a very attractive, steep shingle beach and fine open outlook to Ben More Coigach, Isle Martin and the outer Summer Isles. However the main road runs very close by which tends to diminish its amenity as a picnicking spot. It is sheltered from south-westerlies by the steep headland of Meall Garbh where there are shore fishing marks and cliff outcrops used by climbers.

Policy Considerations

The proximity of the main road to the shore at Ardmair leaves little space for quality development close to the sea. This physical constriction – caused by the steep hill terrain close to the coast – and the development pressure which arises from the attractiveness of the area for recreation and aquaculture, means this is an area under pressure. Signs indicating private access are much in evidence around here and ownership rights are strongly defended. There is clearly a certain level of conflict here between public and private interests. This makes it less friendly to the casual visitor than it could be and less friendly than it deserves given its obvious scenic attractions. It needs a co-ordinated approach to access management and design guidance for onshore development. Ideally it needs the road to bypass this area further up the hillside but this is unlikely to happen on cost grounds.

Shellfish farming as an alternative to finfish farming at the west side of Loch Kanaird. Relocation of finfish production away from the mouth of the River Kanaird to sites further out towards the Summer Isles may be possible using more robust and self-contained installations.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of aquaculture on the west side of Loch Kanaird but finfish production elsewhere in Loch Kanaird should be relocated if possible to safeguard and help rebuild the wild salmonid stocks of the nearby River Kanaird.

Presumption against development of aquaculture in the area south and west of Ardmair Point (Aird na Eighe) and at Camas Mòr to safeguard landscape quality and recreational amenity.

Encourage co-ordinated approach to access management and road signage in the Ard mair area. Encourage the improvement and maintenance of facilities at this key access point.

Within Ardmair itself, the Wester Ross Local Plan states that development should focus along the south east boundary to reflect the break in landform and should avoid the open central area, except possibly for new access (which should allow for sharing).

Loch Broom

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CONSIDERATIONS

6.2.10 Loch Broom has the most sheltered inshore waters of the project area by virtue of its narrowness, steep bounding hill slopes, and its north-west/south-east orientation. It is the most populated and (in its inner reaches) the most fertile part of the project area and sustains a substantial woodland presence on its eastern side (mostly conifer forest on the upper hill slopes and native woodland lower down).

6.2.11 For coastal management purposes, the most useful subdivision of the area is at the narrows at Carry Point/ Dun Eagaibh. Above here is the sheltered inner basin, which is roaded and settled on both sides but which sees little marine traffic. It is narrow enough and homogeneous enough to be considered as one Policy zone. On the seaward side of the narrows the loch is slightly broader and more heavily trafficked on account of its proximity to the harbour at Ullapool. Two Policy zones are proposed here – for the east and west sides of the loch – on account of their contrasting character. The eastern side is settled for most of its length with the fishing and ferry port of Ullapool at its centre and has a mixed land use pattern. The western side is rugged and almost completely undeveloped but for the isolated dwelling at Altnaharrie which is only connected to the road network by a rough track which runs over the hill from Dundonnell.

6.2.12 Key coastal management priorities in Loch Broom are to ensure freedom of navigation to and from the port, to identify opportunities for economic use of the marine area which are compatible with the range of other interests there, and to safeguard the landscape character (particularly the Conservation Area setting of Ullapool) and general amenity of the loch. Fragile species such as flame shell reefs, horse mussel beds and sea pens have all been reported from the loch.

POLICY ZONES, AREA POLICIES

[L] EAST SIDE OF LOCH BROOM: FROM RHUE TO ULLAPOOL AND THE UPPER NARROWS (Rubha Cadail to Corry Point)

General Description

This section of coast is the most densely populated in the project area with the striking townscape of Ullapool (a planned village) at its centre and many houses on individual plots overlooking the loch.

The shoreline is generally low, rocky or shingly and the water depths are moderate other than at Rhue and Ullapool Point. Rhue is popular with locals and visitors because of its lighthouse and beach. The coast is backed for much of its length by crofting land on slopes whose gradient allows building on elevated sites with good views across the loch to the rugged hills of the Scoraig peninsula. The amenity of this area makes it sensitive to any new developments in the inshore area adjacent.

The village of Ullapool is the principal settlement in the project area, an important regional service centre, and is one of the most popular tourist destinations on the west coast during

the season. It mainly occupies a broad, low-lying promontory and incorporates a pier and harbour area on its sheltered south-eastern side.

Existing Use

The harbour provides berthing for the roll-on-roll-off ferry which serves Stornoway in the Western Isles, locally-based and visiting fishing vessels, and moorings for recreational craft. There is also a substantial, centrally-situated campsite.

Marine traffic to and from Ullapool harbour is the main use of sea space in this section of Loch Broom. Creel fishing also takes place either side of the main navigational channel. Freedom for manoeuvre of marine traffic to, from, and within the harbour area is a key consideration and this, coupled with the amenity factor mentioned above, militates against aquaculture development.

The broad strip of land between the main road and the sea north-west of Ullapool is often characterised by the narrow, linear field divisions of traditional crofting settlements. However the boundaries of many of these traditional field divisions, as elsewhere in the project area, are becoming less well defined as the proportion of the local population involved in livestock rearing continues to decrease.

Policy Considerations

The main road north from Ullapool is set well back from the coast and its route involves a steep climb up and over Cnoc na Mòine. As more houses are built to the north-west of the town (through Morefield and out towards Rhue) there is a growing rationale for the development of a coastal footpath or cycleway which can link Ullapool and Rhue.

The coastline and nearshore area is overviewed at close quarters for most of its length by houses so tends to be visually sensitive.

Although the wider harbour area is large (extending up and down Loch Broom), the mooring area close to the pier is quite confined, and there is limited provision for recreational boats. Launching for small boats from trailers is difficult. Safeguarding and development of the harbour function is the most important commercial consideration in this area. As the population grows in this area and as the growth of Inverness generates more day-visitors to Ullapool and its surrounding area, recreational provision is likely to become increasingly important. Because of the shelter which inner Loch Broom provides and the opportunities which the wider marine area served by Ullapool offers, marine-based recreation is likely to be a significant component of this. Diversification and development of the harbour facilities to accommodate this trend could generate new economic opportunities.

Policy:

Safeguard navigational approaches to Ullapool harbour.

Support development of a coastal footpath between Ullapool and Rhue and facilities for recreational boat users.

Presumption against aquaculture development to avoid conflicts with the navigational interest and to safeguard amenity.

Encourage the improvement and maintenance of facilities at the key access points in Ullapool and particularly at Am Pollan.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions which can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[M] THE UPPER BASIN OF LOCH BROOM

(from the narrows at Corry Point/Dun Eagaibh to the head of the loch)

General Description

The upper loch is a sheltered basin with fairly deep water (30-50m) over most of its area. The coast here is more intimate and enclosed than the section of the loch seaward of the narrows, and it has more woodland cover and good pasture. It is overviewed by houses on both sides for most of its length, particularly from the western side where most of the houses at Letters, Ardindrean and Loggie are in an elevated position.

Existing Use

Many of the houses around the upper loch are holiday homes and this area is valued for its verdant setting and the tranquillity of the western side of the loch, whilst still enjoying ready access to Ullapool's services. These amenity factors tend to militate against the development of aquaculture (or other types of surface installation) on any substantial scale. However there is a long-established finfish farm at Corry which is in one of the less conspicuous positions here and low in profile.

Policy Considerations

Proximity to the River Broom suggests that existing finfish farming in the upper loch should be carefully controlled with appropriately robust containment measures or (ideally) should be relocated to better-flushed sites in the outer parts of the project area. There may be potential for small-scale shellfish farming along the stretches of coast which have sufficient water depth close to the shore and which are not closely overviewed by dwellings. Shellfish farming in the intertidal area at the head of the loch may be precluded on water quality grounds by the intensity of stock farming in the strath upstream. There may be potential for development of facilities for water-based recreation and yacht anchorage on the east side of this, the most sheltered part of the loch.

Policy:

Use of this area for aquaculture purposes is acceptable in principle but the location, scale and type of aquaculture activity should respect other interests.

Encourage relocation of the existing finfish farm to a better-flushed outer-loch site (subject to site availability) to help safeguard and regenerate wild salmonid stocks in the River Broom.

Presumption in favour of small-scale shellfish farming on appropriate sites which is compatible with residential amenity and the interests of other loch users.

Favour in principle the development of new yacht moorings and a water-based recreation facility on the east side of the loch to take some pressure off Ullapool harbour and to expand and diversify the area's tourism and recreation provision.

Any terrestrial development at the coast should allow for existing or potential foot access along the coast.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions which can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[N] WEST SIDE OF LOCH BROOM: FROM BEINN GHOBHLACH TO THE NARROWS (Rubha Camas a' Mhaorach to Dun Lagaidh)

General Description

This section of coast is largely uninhabited and undeveloped apart from the immediate vicinity of Altnaharrie which is at a traditional ferry point across Loch Broom. The coast is however closely over-viewed from the Ullapool side of the loch and it provides an attractive vista for properties there. Rugged hill slopes descend steeply to a mainly rocky shore from Beinn Ghobhlach, Beinn nam Ban and Creag an Tairbh, giving onto deep water north-west of Altnaharrie and shallow water to the east.

Existing Use

Like the opposite side of the loch, this section of Loch Broom falls within the Ullapool harbour area and maintaining clear navigation in and out of the harbour is of particular importance. The bay at Camas A' Chonnaidh is significant in local amenity terms.

Policy Considerations

There is physical scope for some small-scale shellfish farming but to avoid impinging on the harbour area and navigational channel this would need to be restricted to areas close inshore north-west of Altnaharrie and south-east of the Allt na Caillich.

If aquaculture development is acceptable anywhere here it would be on the south-west side, seaward of Ullapool, and could only be small-scale eg a few shellfish longlines. Landscape considerations may militate even against this.

Policy:

Main priority should be given to safeguarding the functionality of the Ullapool harbour area and freedom of navigation to, from and within it. There is also a need to safeguard the landscape character of this side of the loch, which provides a scenic backdrop to Ullapool, and the recreational opportunities which parts of this coast afford.

Some small-scale, discreetly-located aquaculture development may be acceptable in this zone provided it is compatible with other interests. For equipment in the sub-tidal area this would only mean close inshore in the section north-west of Altnaharrie and south-east of the Allt na Caillich.

Shellfish farming in the inter-tidal are, using trestles may be feasible at Camas A' Chonnaidh but any such development should be strictly limited in scale and sited to avoid conflict with local amenity.

Water quality in the vicinity of Ullapool may be another limiting factor in relation to aquaculture development.

The North Side and Western Tip of the Scoraig Peninsula: Cailleach Head and Annat Bay

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CONSIDERATIONS

6.2.13 The western extremities and north side of the Scoraig peninsula represent some of the least accessible mainland parts of the project area. This slender peninsula is sculpted on both sides by wide sweeping bays and terminates abruptly at the cliffs of Cailleach Head. The spine of the peninsula follows almost a straight line between this headland and the heights of

Beinn Ghoblach. This separates the largely uninhabited Annat Bay from the main settlement and gentler slopes of Scoraig. This sense of separation and isolation is an important part of Annat Bay's appeal to Scoraig residents and others and the relatively well-preserved remains of earlier settlement around the bay add to its atmosphere. The headlands of Carn Dearg and Cailleach Head are rugged outliers which are rarely visited. Their main value lies in their wilderness quality and the views they afford of the coastal mountains in this area, the Summer Isles, and to the Western Isles beyond.

6.2.14 This is an exposed and largely uninhabited coast with only localised shelter. The main focus of the coastal plan here should be to safeguard its landscape integrity, sense of remoteness and archaeological interest.

POLICY ZONES, AREA POLICIES

[O] ANNAT BAY (Lone Dhann to Rubha Camas a' Mhaorach)

General Description

Annat Bay is unusual in more ways than one. It is notable for its sweep and fine open outlook across to Beinn More Coigach. There are few places on the Highland coast with a similar combination of characteristics: the north-facing aspect, large curving bay, open vista across a large expanse of sea to distant hills, yet the feeling of semi-enclosure. It also has a certain majesty which stems from the sweep of the bay and the way it is presided over by the rugged Beinn Ghoblach.

Existing Use

Another dimension is apparent in the many remains of earlier settlement in the western half of the bay. The tight group of ruins just west of Achmore (the remains of a monastery) is particularly striking. This coincides with a gentle, shingly shoreline in this more sheltered half of the bay and pleasant green sward which makes for an attractive picnicking spot. Yet there is also very much a living presence here – with active small holdings at Achmore which are currently used for horse rearing and horticulture. Other buildings are used seasonally by eco-tourism operators. There is also a recognised anchorage at the small inlet of Feith an Fheòir at the western end of the bay and local residents travel to and from Achmore by boat when weather conditions permit.

Policy Considerations

The main value of Annat Bay lies in the scenic outlook and tranquility it affords to residents of and visitors to the Achmore area, its archaeological interest and the sheltered fishing opportunities it affords. The recreational diving interest at both its eastern and western ends is significant and it is relatively accessible (by boat) from Ullapool. It is difficult to see how aquaculture development (at least involving surface installations of any significant size) could be reconciled with these factors. A recent application for a fish farm in this area proved controversial and the applicant appealed against the Highland Council's recommendation of refusal. At the time of writing a recommendation by the SEIRU (Scottish Executive Inquiry Reporters Unit) for approval subject to (unspecified) conditions awaits discussion by relevant parties.

Any surface installation of significant size in the nearshore waters here would tend to detract from the seaward views whose character is fundamentally open and uncluttered. If surface installations might be acceptable anywhere in the bay on landscape grounds it might be towards the eastern end, close in to the shore. However landscape is not the only constraint. Local fishermen regard Annat Bay as an important winter fishing ground because it is relatively sheltered from south and west winds and it is valued for creeling and scallop diving. Furthermore, there is considerable water depth very close to shore at the eastern end of the bay (60m+) and there are good wall dives here valued by recreational scuba divers. Given this multi-faceted interest, the character of the bay is worth conserving and should be left undeveloped in terms of fish or shellfish farming.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of a limited degree of settlement consolidation at Achmore and measures to safeguard and enhance the archaeological interest of the area.

Presumption against development of surface installations in the marine area of Annat Bay to safeguard its scenic outlook, recreational amenity, cultural heritage, and locally important fishing grounds.

[P] CAILLEACH HEAD (end of path at western end of Scoraig to Leac Dhonn)

General Description

Cailleach Head forms the main extremity of the peninsula and is characterised by convex slopes and cliffs. This rugged moorland headland is very exposed to winds from the north-west quadrant. It also marks the outer limit of the Ullapool Harbour area. The topography around Carn Dearg is of a similar height but more rugged. Between these two headlands the small bay at Camas an Duthain has a shingle beach and is sheltered from all quadrants except the north-west.

Existing Use

Although rarely visited on foot other than by Scoraig residents, there are fine, panoramic views from this headland. It is significant mainly as a local landmark for mariners, as creeling ground, and as a wilderness hinterland for the residents of Scoraig. There are also recreational dive sites at Sròn a' Chairn Deirg. Local people prefer to see the whole zone left undeveloped as a local 'wild land' resource.

Policy Considerations

Although technically the area between Cailleach Head and Carn Dearg might be used as a relocation site for finfish farm production, local opinion strongly favours retaining this area as a wilderness resource.

There have been suggestions from the Scoraig community that the nearshore waters either side of Cailleach Head should be a marine nature reserve.

Policy:

General presumption against development on the coast or in the nearshore waters to safeguard this area as a local wild land recreation resource for the Scoraig community.

Little Loch Broom

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CONSIDERATIONS

6.2.15 Little Loch Broom belies the diminutive in its name in that it is both broader and deeper than Loch Broom and its surrounding landscape is generally more spacious. The strong linearity and smooth, gentle curves of the Little Loch Broom coastline however make subdivision for Policy purposes somewhat more difficult. In visual terms these characteristics also make it more difficult to accommodate offshore installations into the landscape unobtrusively because there are fewer nooks and crannies in the coastline. Such installations tend to look more exposed here unless they are viewed mainly from a distance and have a steep, high hill backdrop.

6.2.16 As with Loch Broom, views across the loch are an important aspect of local amenity. This makes the inshore area immediately in front of the coastal settlements of Scoraig, Badrallach, Camusnagaul and Badcaul visually sensitive. Where the loch is relatively narrow, the area which could be regarded as “immediately in front” of settlements extends across the full width of the loch. Also the smoothness of the contours and lower height of the hills on the north side of the loch would tend to make any large structure on or close to the coast here look more prominent. A mitigating factor however is that many of the houses on the south side between Badcaul and Badluarach are set well back from the coast and the slope below them tends to be convex, limiting the visibility of the near coastline.

6.2.17 The scope for accommodating larger-scale structures in Little Loch Broom unobtrusively is very limited. The main exception is the site of the existing finfish lease between Ardessie and Badbea. Installations towards the middle of the loch should be avoided. Smaller-scale structures, if well-spaced and aligned carefully with the coastline, and if they avoid being overlooked by houses at close quarters, are a different matter. In all instances brightly-coloured surface gear (other than for navigation marking purposes) should be avoided.

6.2.18 The middle reaches of Little Loch Broom are designated as an EU shellfish water area and the settlements around the loch lie in close proximity. The regulations require that in these areas private foul water drainage must be to land. The loch is trawled or dredged annually, usually just after the seasonal closure is lifted. The growth rate of sea trout in Little Loch Broom has been reported as being as much as 50% higher than other lochs in the area.

6.2.19 The traditional field boundaries which give the crofting landscape its visual structure are an important element of the local landscape character (eg at Badrallach, Scoraig, and Durnamuck). Where feasible, these would be worth reinforcing, for example where drystone dykes have fallen into disrepair or where the remains of traditional stone dwellings have potential for renovation.

6.2.20 Woodland cover is very limited in its extent and the distribution of plantation woodlands tends to lack coherence in the landscape. Isolated shelterbelts provide some shelter for individual houses but they are not linked sufficiently to enhance the setting of any of the townships on Little Loch Broom as a whole and some of the conifer planting has been prone to windthrow. Windthrow in this area is due to climatic factors, such as wind speed and soil conditions allied to the incorrect use of species not well suited for providing shelter in this type of location. An integrated, whole-township approach to woodland development, with support from the estate owners and guidance from the Forestry Commission, could reap significant benefits in terms of amenity and shelter. The Clyde Cruising Club pilot notes that ‘the loch can be dangerous in windy weather on account of severe downdraughts’.

6.2.21 The high roadside viewpoint at Druim nam Fuath above Durnamuck is one of the best in Highland and a popular stopping point for tourists as a result. It gives good views over Little Loch Broom and the Summer Isles and north to the hills of Coigach and Assynt. It also marks a point of transition between the more enclosed landscape of the inner sea loch and the more open landscape of the western seaboard.

6.2.22 Most of zone [T], around Camusnagaul, falls within the boundary of the Wester Ross National Scenic Area.

POLICY ZONES, AREA POLICIES

[Q] SCORAIG (Corran Sgoraig to Rireavach)

General Description

The pioneer settlement of Scoraig occupies the gentle, south-facing slopes along this section of the loch. It has created a special identity for itself where the lack of roads and vehicles makes for tranquility and a strong measure of self-reliance and where the adventurous or unconventional design of many of the buildings reflect an independent spirit.

Existing Use

The area attracts a small but significant number of tourists in season whose custom helps to sustain elements of this remote community. Although based on and around the remains of an older deserted village, the township of Scoraig has a 21st century feel in its blend of old and new. This is not readily discernible from the distance at which most people view it (ie across the loch) but rather needs to be experienced close-up. It seems rustic and close to nature because of the relative absence of cars and the accent on small holdings, yet it is defiantly modern in its vigorous adoption of domestic-scale wind turbines to generate electricity and in some of its building styles. The area around the jetty sees the most activity on account of the private boat link with Badluarach but in the main this section of coastline is valued most in its undeveloped state as foreground to the views across the loch.

Policy Considerations

The essence of Scoraig's character is development with an accent on individuality, self-reliance, and the general aim of low ecological impact. Some expansion of the settlement and its associated woodlands is still possible, particularly towards the eastern end, and as it matures there may be more demand for community facilities which can help it to be self-sustaining.

Policy:

Development here should respect the views from the opposite side of Little Loch Broom (which is in close proximity) and allow for existing and potential foot access along the coast.

The plan supports development of small-scale installations on the coast or in the nearshore marine zone at Scoraig which are for the benefit of the local community and which are compatible with other interests.

The plan also supports development of woodland schemes which can enhance the landscape setting of the village and encourages the improvement and maintenance of facilities at the key access point of Scoraig jetty.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions that can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[R] CREAG A' CHADHA AND THE LOWER SLOPES OF BEINN GHOBHLACH

(Rireavach to the western end of the improved pasture at Badrallach)

General Description

Rocky hill slopes descend steeply from Beinn Gobhlach to the shore of the loch along this uninhabited stretch of coastline. The shoreline is rocky and near the headland of Creag a' Chadha gives onto deep water close in. Otters are frequently seen in this area.

Existing Use

This is the main undeveloped and uninhabited section of coast in Little Loch Broom and is skirted above by the footpath access route to Scoraig from Badrallach. This route is fairly well maintained and an attractive coastal path in its own right but it is steep in places and the length of approach to Scoraig this way effectively discourages casual visitors. There is unlikely to be much pressure to upgrade this route now that there is ample parking space for Scoraig residents' cars near the jetty at Badluarach.

Policy Considerations

Scenic value – the rugged character of this section of coast provides a contrast with the other, more settled parts of Little Loch Broom. Best left largely, if not completely, undeveloped to safeguard the landscape character of Little Loch Broom and to retain Scoraig's sense of separation and sanctuary.

Policy:

The visual contrast between this undeveloped stretch of coastline, which is an integral part of the landscape setting of Beinn Gobhlach, and the settled coastline opposite, is an important part of the landscape character of Little Loch Broom.

This contrast should generally be safeguarded but shellfish farming on a small scale, if pursued unobtrusively in the areas between about 1 and 2 kms either side of the headland of Creag a' Chadha, would be acceptable.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions that can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[S] BADRALLACH - KILDONAN BAY

(West end of improved pasture at Badrallach to Sron Creag na Ceapaich)

General Description

The remote crofting community of Badrallach, like Scoraig, benefits from a south-facing position and relative freedom from traffic. However unlike Scoraig, it is joined to the road network.

Existing Use

There is some improved pasture, a campsite, and summer cottages which attract a small number of visitors. There are the remains of a deserted village at Kildonan as well as a pleasant shingle beach at the southern end of the bay. However, marine litter tends to accumulate in the inner part of the bay because of the prevailing westerly winds. The setting of the bay as a whole, the ruins of the deserted village above it, and the headland of Sron Creag na Ceapaich, are all important in landscape terms.

Policy Considerations

There is potential for enhancement of small-scale tourist facilities – a campsite and holiday accommodation – to supplement crofting incomes and to help justify maintenance/improvement of the access road.

Interpretation could be provided and improvements made to the access path for the ruined village of Kildonan to attract more visitors to the area.

The gentle hill slopes and shallow water depths in the bay militate against aquaculture development close to the shore. Further out it would tend to be visually intrusive.

Policy:

Support expansion of Badrallach in line with the Wester Ross Local Plan to maintain the viability of this remote settlement.

The Local Plan supports redevelopment of derelict croft buildings here but requires development at the camping and caravan site to be consistent with the existing leisure and tourism use. Development south of the road at the western end should be set down the slope to allow for views across the loch from the road.

Presumption against development in the nearshore marine area on landscape/amenity grounds.

Support annual beach litter clean-ups at Kildonan bay to maintain or enhance amenity.

[T] CAMUSNAGAU AND THE HEAD OF LITTLE LOCH BROOM

(Leac a' Bhaid bheithe to Sròn Creag na Ceapach)

General Description and Existing Use

The gentle gradient at the head of Little Loch Broom is marked by a broad inter-tidal area and salt marsh which contrasts with the steep bounding hill slopes to north and south.

There is also rich green pasture immediately adjacent in Strath Beag. Camusnagaul and Ardessie occupy one of the few areas of gentle slopes on the south side of the inner loch and Camas nan Gall provides a sheltered anchorage. Seaward views from Camusnagaul across and down the loch are an important aspect of its amenity. There are two areas leased for finfish farming to the west of Ardessie which are well-sited in visual terms and encroach little on these views.

Policy Considerations

Finfish farming in such close proximity to the mouth of the Dundonnell River – a small river system which traditionally has sustained sport fishing lettings – is not ideal. As the bulk of fish farm production in the project area moves to better flushed, less sensitive sites in the outer loch areas, there may be scope for shellfish farming here as an alternative.

Potential for development of finfish farming has been more or less fully exploited given the amenity, navigational, and carrying capacity constraints in this area. However there may be scope for conversion of the finfish farm sites to shellfish production to reduce the potential for adverse interactions with wild salmonid stocks. A small scale shellfish farming unit might also be located east of Sròn Creag na Ceapach.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of continued use for aquaculture in the area between Leac a' Bhaid bheithe and Ardessie but preference for small to medium-scale shellfish farming and preference for relocation of finfish production further away from the Dundonnell River (subject to site availability) to safeguard its wild salmonid stocks and game fishing potential.

There is limited potential for small-scale shellfish farming with longlines between Sròn Creag na Ceapach and the north side of the head of the loch. However care should be taken not to crowd the mouth of the Dundonnell River or to impinge on the setting of Kildonan Bay or the headland which marks its southerly bounding point.

This area is identified in the Wester Ross Local Plan as having locally/regionally important views over open water. The likely impact of terrestrial development proposals on these will therefore be considered carefully. Camusnagaul has been identified as a Settlement Development Area where views from the eastern end over Little Loch Broom should be protected. Separation from Ardessie to the west should be retained.

Farming of oysters using trestles in the intertidal area is acceptable in principle but it should only be on a moderate scale to retain the landscape character and wildlife interest in this area. However, shellfish farming in the intertidal area at the head of the loch may be precluded on water quality grounds by the intensity of stock farming in the strath upstream.

[U] BADLUARACH TO BADBEA (Leac an Ime to Leac a' Bhaid bheithe)

General Description

As in other parts of the project areas the human landscape is in transition as land use patterns change; but this is perhaps particularly obvious around Badluarach. Many of the features of what was once a traditional crofting landscape are in decay – the drystone dykes marking the old field divisions are largely derelict and there are many remains of old croft dwellings and shielings. Durnamuck and Badcaul enjoy a relatively sheltered position with good views up to the head of the loch which makes the nearshore area here visually sensitive. Northwest of Druim Dunn the terrain is more exposed, though on the steep lower slopes there is a significant woodland presence. This woodland presence, combined with the convex slope profile, tends to screen the near inshore area northwest of Durnamuck from the view of houses on the south side.

Existing Use

The area around Durnamuck and Badcaul is the main concentration of population in the Little Loch Broom area and the availability of buildable land between here and Badluarach has resulted in a significant amount of housebuilding and renovation on individual plots. The importance of passing tourist trade to the Dundonnell area is reflected in the recent redevelopment of the campsite at Badcaul.

Many new fences are in evidence and a significant amount of house building is going on but the abundance of fencing appears somewhat incoherent and likewise the plantation woodlands here, whilst providing a limited amount of shelter, are stark and fragmented and do not seem to be conceived with any overall design in mind.

Policy Considerations

A township scheme for establishment of new woodland, particularly on the hill slopes above the public road, could help to increase the level of shelter and enhance the setting of this developing community through consolidation of settlement structure and woodland; with conversion or rebuilding of ruined crofts

Either side of the jetty at Badluarach the gradient of the shoreline is very gentle and covered with shingle/ large cobbles. Badluarach jetty could offer the best public access for boats on the south side of Little Loch Broom with improvement of the slip at Badluarach to allow boat launching over a wider range of tide states.

There may be scope for some small-scale shellfish farming outwith the immediate environs of the jetty towards the east where there is reasonable water depth close to shore. West of the slip, towards Leac an Ime, it is likely to be too shallow.

Policy:

Sensitive development between the road and the sea at Durnamuck, Badcaul and Badbea and presumption against the location of new aquaculture installations in the loch along this stretch of coast to safeguard amenity.

Northwest of Durnamuck and at the western end of the Policy zone there may be some opportunity for small-scale shellfish farming subject to adequate water depth near the shore.

The vicinity of the jetty at Badluarach (on the marine side) should be kept clear to allow free navigation for boat traffic between here and Scoraig and for visiting boats. Encourage the improvement and maintenance of facilities at the key access point of Badluarach jetty. Consideration should be given to extending the slip here to allow its use over a wider spectrum of tidal conditions.

Support an integrated, whole-township approach to woodland development.

In the Badluarach Settlement Development Area, the Wester Ross Local Plan identifies the area between the road and the sea as having views over open water of local/regional importance. It supports redevelopment of derelict croft buildings and states that any development at the coast should allow for existing or potential foot access along the coast.

The Local Plan requires separation between Badcaul and Durnamuck to be retained and in these areas and Badluarach it states that proposals should allow for shared access arrangements to potential future developments.

Gruinard Bay to Greenstone Point

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CONSIDERATIONS

6.2.23 The broad semi-circle of Gruinard Bay and the coastline immediately adjacent are generally characterised by open landscape and seascape, rocky and shingly shores with some good sand beaches, and exposure to the north. Low hills surround most of the bay but an area of very rugged and varied topography to the southeast forms a dramatic backdrop for the beaches in the innermost part. Above Little Gruinard, looking eastwards, this provides one of Scotland's most iconic coastal views. Gruinard Island provides a visual focus offshore which brings variety and scale to the wider bay – best seen from the high ground to its east. These features are well seen from the twisting, undulating main road (the A832) which skirts the bay and provides a popular car touring route.

6.2.24 Water depths in the nearshore area are relatively shallow and seabed gradients gentle, particularly in the south of the bay. The main exceptions to this are at the headland between Greenstone Point and Rubha Beag, the southernmost tip of Gruinard Island, and Stattic Point, where in each case the 20m depth contour comes within 200m of the coast (high water mark).

6.2.25 The relative shelter of the inner bay and inlets such as at Mellon Udrigle have attracted a significant amount of new house building in the scattered communities here. However, the structure and texture of the traditional crofting landscape is gradually disappearing as fewer people now work the land and more modern house styles replace the old. The outer fringes of the bay are rugged and exposed – the low-lying though somewhat undistinguished headland of Greenstone Point to the west and the steeper, more shapely headland of Stattic Point to the east. Both of these points are rarely visited by walkers though they give good distant views of the Summer Isles and Coigach hills.

6.2.26 Most of this area (zones [W], [X], [Y], and [Z]) falls within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area. Only a small part of zone [V], at its southern end, falls within the NSA. Fragile species such as flame shell reefs, horse mussel beds and sea pens have been reported from zones [V] and [W].

[V] HEADLAND BETWEEN GRUINARD BAY AND LITTLE LOCH BROOM

(Rubha na Moine to Leac an Ime)

General Description

This headland which marks the divide between Gruinard Bay and Little Loch Broom forms the end of a ridge with a strong north-west/south-east axis (Druim nam Fuath) – like the Scoraig peninsula on the opposite side of Little Loch Broom. However here the termination of the ridge is somewhat less dramatic - the moorland slopes tumble to the sea more gradually and the cliffs are not so high. Nonetheless Stattic Point lives up to its name – it forms a shapely promontory which provides an attractive foreground in views north-west to the outermost Summer Isles from this lonely stretch of coast.

Existing Use

This headland area also has good views across Gruinard Bay but it is little visited because of the proximity of more attractive sheltered areas in the inner part of the bay. The headland is, however, an important part of the local crofting township's common grazings and is also regarded locally as a recreational resource. Generally this is an exposed section of coast – exposed primarily to the northwest with only limited shelter in the eastern lee of Stattic Point and towards Mungasdale where the presence of Gruinard Island just offshore reduces the west wind's fetch.

Policy Considerations

There are limited opportunities for aquaculture using robust installations in the lee of Stattic Point and between Sròn na Fàire Móire and Rubha na Mòine and this proposition is being tested at present in the former area. However the risks associated with exposure remain and any significant escape of farmed salmonids could threaten the wild stocks of the Natura-designated Little Gruinard River and its companion the Gruinard. A finfish farm was recently established on an experimental basis half-way between Stattic Point and Leac an Ime. However this site is exposed to the north and north-west and was originally leased for aquaculture use against the advice of the Highland Regional Council. Its activation after many years of dormancy was not popular with the Scoraig community and in December 2005 the operator suspended fish farming activities here. However, if the site proves technically viable in the longer term, similarly exposed sites elsewhere in the project area, which impinge less on the amenity of local communities, may be considered as alternatives for fish farm development here or in the inner lochs. This staged relocation of fish farm production away from the inner loch sites should, in the longer term, benefit the wild salmonid populations of rivers like the Dundonnell and the Broom.

Exposure to north and north-westerly winds, rugged terrain, and lack of road access tends to militate against both aquaculture development and onshore development. Shellfish farming would be preferred over finfish farming for this reason.

Policy:

Safeguard the landscape setting of Stattic Point and the quality of open seaward views from this stretch of coast.

Where aquaculture may be viable – in the lee of Stattic Point and between Sròn na Fàire Móire and Rubha na Mòine – favour small-to-medium scale shellfish farming with low-profile gear over finfish and encourage relocation of the existing finfish production (subject to site availability) to restore the visual amenity of Scoraig residents and to minimise risks to native salmonid stocks.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions that can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[W] INNER REACHES OF GRUINARD BAY (Southeast)

(Second Coast (the point) – Gruinard – Rubha na Mòine)

General Description

One of the finest stretches of coastal scenery in Wester Ross. The pink sand beaches of the innermost part of Gruinard Bay nestle against a rugged backdrop of rocky hills with ranges of distinctive, successively higher hills (eg Beinn Ghobhlach, An Teallach, and Ben More Coigach) beyond. The scene is both rugged and intimate. Rocky headlands divide the inner bay into four distinct sand beaches at high tide. The backdrop to the inner bay is also “clothed” to an extent by an attractive area of mixed woodland (Scots pine, larch, and broadleaves). Shingle shores and the miniature river gorge near Gruinard House add variety.

Unlike some other parts of the coast around the wider area of Gruinard Bay, development in this part has been low-key and the few houses here are generally well-sited and well-designed.

Existing Use

Important game fishing rivers enter the sea here – the Gruinard and Little Gruinard (which is Natura-designated for its salmon stocks), both of which drain large mountainous catchments with many hill lochs. The Inverianvie River is also important for game fishing.

Mungasdale beach is less intimate and less visited than the beaches at Gruinard but it is also composed of pink sand and west-facing.

Policy Considerations

Careful management of this area for its scenic and recreational value and its wildlife interest is the key priority. There may be scope for a few more houses at Mungasdale, Gruinard House, and Second Coast. However, quality design would be important to safeguard the scenic quality here and new building should generally be avoided in the innermost part of the bay. The outlook from here should also be safeguarded.

The proximity of the main road detracts slightly from the ambience of the beaches but in practical terms there is nowhere else for the road to go in this rugged landscape and it allows many people to enjoy this fine stretch of coastal landscape whilst touring. Although car parking facilities are adequate in the innermost part of the bay, the number of visitors here during the summer season suggest that a discreet level of toilet provision may also be merited.

Finfish farming should be avoided in this Policy zone because of the proximity to the game fishing rivers and the Little Gruinard River Special Area for Conservation.

Policy:

There should be a sensitive approach to further terrestrial development in this area, in line with the Wester Ross Local Plan, to safeguard the landscape character and scenic quality of this zone .

The Local Plan identifies important views over open water between Achgarve and Little Gruinard. General presumption against development of aquaculture installations on landscape grounds and to protect local wild salmonid stocks.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions which can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[X] GRUINARD ISLAND

General Description

Large, uninhabited island with a fairly bland profile. However the west side is rugged with many small cliff-backed inlets. The east and south sides are more gentle. The coastline is exposed to the north and west with virtually no sheltered bays or inlets. Shelter is probably best on the south-east side but the water depths here are shallow, as they are at the northern end. As a point of visual focus offshore, within the broad sweep of Gruinard Bay, the island as an overall entity undoubtedly adds to the bay's scenic appeal, particularly when viewed from the high ground to the east.

Existing Use

Up close however, it is less distinguished, though it has a significant recent history. Biological warfare experiments at the end of the Second World War made this a "forbidden" island and precluded development or habitation on it for many years. It is now safe for people to visit, but some of the aura remains. The island's exposure and lack of a good landfall has also tended to discourage development.

Policy Considerations

Gruinard Island could be left to slumber as an uninhabited island with a dark recent history, and could be used only for sheep grazing. However, a more interesting prospect might be an imaginative new development which could make the most of the island's setting and transcend its past. Such a development could for example involve a few upmarket but low-impact holiday houses like those which have been built into a hillside on the west coast of Harris. Or it could involve development of a small observatory or similar research facility to take advantage of the island's open setting and absence of nearby street lighting. Either of these options would of course necessitate a substantial investment in infrastructure.

Although the remains of old castles, forts and monuments are a feature of many hilltops in Scotland, modern-day constructions on or around hilltops tend not to be favoured in this country unless they meet a strategic requirement for a communications or defence capability. A scientific/educational facility for peaceful purposes, well-designed and of an appropriate scale for the surroundings, could however to some extent compensate for what was once arguably the misuse of science here and rehabilitate the island's image. It could also help to boost the local economy.

Policy:

Presumption in favour of small-medium scale shellfish farming on the east side of the island where this would be compatible with other interests. Proposals for development of shellfish farming here or elsewhere around the island will need to demonstrate that the gear is suitably robust to cope with the level of exposure involved and designed not to impact adversely on the landscape character of the National Scenic Area or on navigation around the southern promontory of Sròn a' Mhail. General presumption against finfish farming to protect the important wild salmonid populations in the rivers nearby, including the Little Gruinard River SAC.

Terrestrial planning applications for high-quality development which can exploit the special character of this island site with sensitivity and deliver tangible public benefits, preferably in the field of research/education, would be considered sympathetically in line with the provisions of the Wester Ross Local Plan.

Increase awareness amongst marine users of the presence of sensitive marine habitats in this area, and the actions which can be taken to prevent or minimise damage to them.

[Y] SOUTHWEST GRUINARD BAY, LAIDE

(Sròn a' Chùirn Deirg to the point at Second Coast)

General Description

Open, sparsely-settled, north and east-facing coast characterised by low, rocky shoreline and shallow waters, with road nearby. The main areas of settlement around Gruinard Bay are on this section of coast, centred on Laide.

There are big, open views across the sea here – to the hills of Assynt, Coigach, and Fisherfield – which are fundamental to the identity of this area. The importance of maintaining the integrity of these views, coupled with the exposure to the north and east, the relatively shallow water depth inshore and the need to safeguard important local wild salmonid populations, suggests a presumption against aquaculture development.

Existing Use

The settlement of Laide has seen significant growth in recent decades but lacks structure because the crofting way of life on this fairly poor ground has been superceded and taken over by sporadic development. There are few houses in vernacular style here and the development of new woodlands has lacked the coherence which would otherwise soften the impact of new building. The woodlands largely comprise non-native conifers and they do not provide much structure in the landscape. Laide jetty is an important access point to the sea and is showing signs of age. The local community wish to see it upgraded.

Policy Considerations

The more isolated areas of First Coast and Second Coast are starting to see more interest for housebuilding or renovation. The elevation of Second Coast gives good views to the east and north. Access to the shore is good – the public roads run close by this section of coast. Plantation woodlands here have developed sporadically and contribute relatively little to local amenity. The focus should be on improving the townscape coherence of the settled area around Laide and Sand and on enhancing access to the sea for recreational craft (eg for trips to the Summer Isles). Whilst this area is on a popular car touring route, many people just pass through. It is an area which would benefit economically if it could hold visitors for longer.

Policy:

Safeguard seaward views from this settled area of coast and safeguard the local wild salmonid stocks by close control of development between the road and the sea and a precautionary presumption against aquaculture.

Encourage developments which can improve the townscape coherence of the Laide-Sand area. Also encourage an integrated approach to the management and development of local woodlands which can enhance the setting of Laide and Sand and provide more amenity benefits for the local community.

Encourage the improvement and maintenance of facilities at the key access point of Laide jetty.

The Wester Ross Local Plan states that the separation between Laide and Sand and between First and Second Coast should be retained; also the views over the bay from the main road at Sand and to the north of Laide should be protected.

Proposals should allow for shared access arrangements to potential future development. The Local Plan encourages development within the areas identified for this purpose at First and Second Coast.

[Z] OPINAN AND MELLON UDRIGLE (Greenstone Point – Sròn a' Chùirn Deirg)

General Description

This is a rocky coast of moderate relief with many small inlets orientated in a north-east/south-west axis. It is backed by moorland and low hills.

The coast between Greenstone Point and Leac an Fhaobhair is very exposed to the north-west, north, and north-east. From Mellon Udrigle southwards it is exposed primarily to the north-east.

Existing Use

There is a good sandy beach in a small cove at Mellon Udrigle but it is northeast-facing so does not receive as much direct sunshine as the beaches elsewhere in Gruinard Bay. The traditional crofting landscape is semi-derelict around Opinan, which marks the outermost fringe of habitation in this area, but there are newer houses here also. The crofting elements of the landscape are healthier around Mellon Udrigle which has some more fertile land.

Policy Considerations

Like Reiff at the northern extremity of the project area, this is an area of remote, end-of-the-line settlements on land which is generally of limited agricultural value – peaty and poorly drained. Houses are fairly scattered, many with small plantations of conifers round about to provide shelter. There is a relatively high proportion of holiday homes here which are only inhabited seasonally or at weekends.

In the terrestrial part of this zone the main potential is likely to be housing, holiday accommodation and footpath development. The township landscape is rather fragmented at Opinan and needs more visual cohesion. As in certain other parts of the project area, a co-ordinated approach to the development and management of woodland here could help. The existing areas of woodland – planted essentially for shelter – lack coherence and are dominated by non-native conifers. There is potential for development of a circular coastal footpath route between Mellon Udrigle and Rubha Beag.

The key virtues of this area are the amenity of inlets such as Mellon Udrigle and Leac Mhór and the views from the hills close to the coast at Rubha Beag and Meall nam Meallan across to the Summer Isles and Coigach. Mellon Udrigle is one of the best sand beaches in the project area.

In the marine part of the zone there may be limited scope for small-scale shellfish farming at Rubha Beag and Poll an Eòin Mór but exposure to the north-east and limited water depth may militate against this. Larger-scale developments are unlikely to be favoured on amenity grounds.

Policy:

Safeguard the amenity of the main inlets – Mellon Udrigle/Camas a' Charaig and Leac Mhór. Allow for the possibility of small-scale shellfish farm development at Rubha Beag and Poll an Eòin Mór but finfish aquaculture should be avoided to safeguard the important wild salmonid stocks of the rivers which flow into Gruinard Bay.

Support the development and maintenance of a footpath route linking Mellon Udrigle with Rubha Beag as a facility for local residents and visitors.

The Wester Ross Local Plan states that development will be supported within the SDA identified at Mellon Udrigle but views over the beach should be protected and separation from Opinan should be retained.

The area around the beach is identified as an important view over open water.

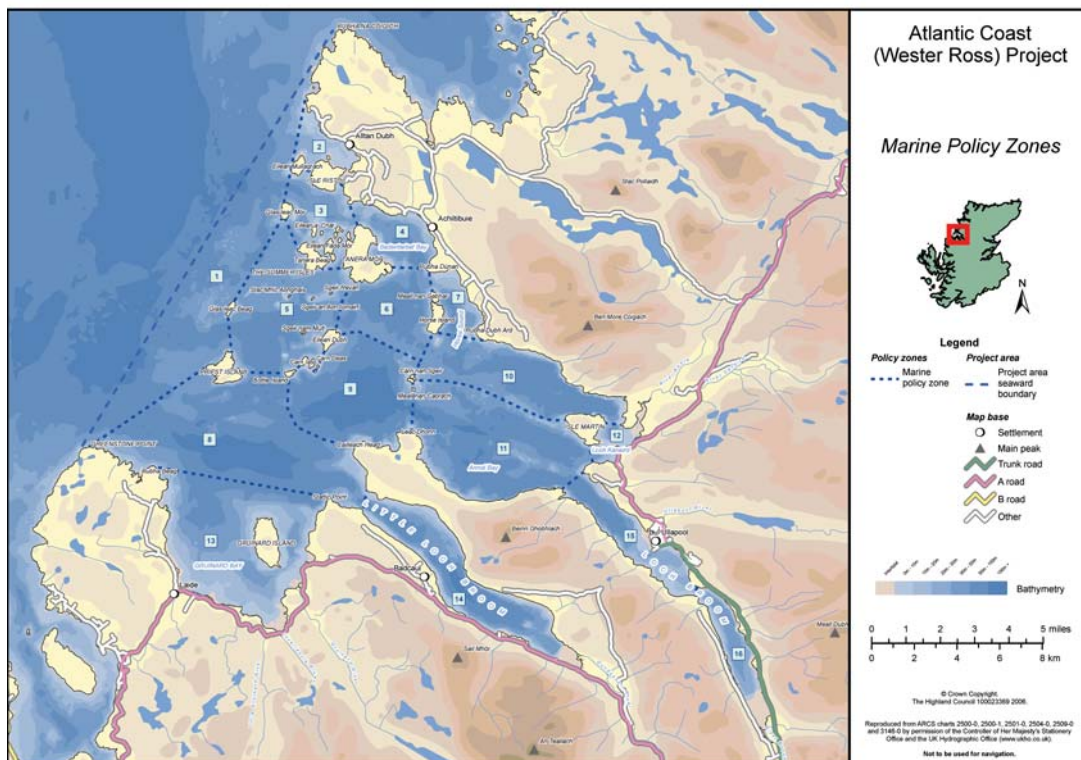
NB: The terms “small” and “medium” scale in relation to aquaculture (as for other types of operation) are essentially relative. However as a guide for the purpose of this plan, a finfish farm of up to about 2000 square metres cage area would be regarded as “small” and one of up to 4000 square metres would be regarded as “medium”.

A “small” shellfish farm using the longline system would employ lines of up to 200m length to a maximum of four lines. A “medium” shellfish farm would employ up to eight lines of 200m length each, up to five lines 300m each, or up to four lines 400m each. All other things being equal, the longer lengths of lines are harder to accommodate successfully in the landscape.

A “small” shellfish farm using rafts would employ up to four rafts each 10 square metres, and a “medium” one would have up to four rafts each 20 square metres.

6.3 Marine/Offshore Policies

6.3.1 To provide policy guidance in the areas further from shore, 16 marine/offshore policy zones have been identified, which are based on the main hydrographic subdivisions in the project area and seabed type. Headlands, bay closing lines and islands have also been used to provide the indicative boundaries for these zones because they are key points of visual reference for users of the marine area. The appraisal and policy prescription for each of these zones is presented in a somewhat different way from that of the coastal/nearshore policy zones. A more succinct box format has been used because less information is available for these areas. A detailed assessment of strengths, weaknesses, and development potential in these zones would be premature ahead of the release of definitive seabed habitat survey data and management advice. This information is being developed by SNH and others and will be assimilated, if possible, into the next edition of the coastal plan.



MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 1: SEAWARD ZONE

The most exposed part of the project area, including the seaward parts of Greenstone Point and Rubha Còigeach as well as the exposed sides of the outermost Summer Isles.

Current activities

- Prawn trawling, mainly in the outer part of the zone
- Creeling in muddy and rocky bottom areas
- Commercial scallop diving; possibly some recreational diving
- Boat traffic passes through, including the Western Isles ferry, fishing boats landing to Ullapool, cruise boats, visiting yachts and motor vessels
- Some sea angling

Opportunities and Constraints

This outer area is very exposed in the arc from the south-west to the north, with a long fetch to the north-west. The exposure, combined with the depth (in excess of 50m over most of the zone) is likely to preclude any small-to-medium scale developments.

The zone is remote and not readily overlooked from land. However, all but the mid section of this zone is contained within either the Wester Ross or Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Areas. Permanent developments in this zone would need to be sensitive to this.

Cetaceans are regularly seen in this area and may present the opportunity for a small-scale increase in wildlife-watching boats.

Area policy

Presumption in favour of continued shellfish creeling activity in this area.

Presumption in favour of a reduction in benthic trawling and clam dredging activities in order to reduce pressure on stocks and non-target species

Exposure and depth here militate against the siting of any fixed installations which would be of a scale in keeping with the NSA designation and the need to maintain navigational access.

Support the use of this area for accredited cetacean-watching businesses, in keeping with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code of Conduct.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 2: REIFF AND LOCHAN ALLTAN DUBH

This shallow bay is surrounded on the north and east by the mainland, and to the south by Isle Ristol and Eilean Mullagrach.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Diving – commercial and recreational
- Fishing boats and visiting yachts on passage to Old Dornie harbour
- Recreational traffic to Isle Ristol
- Some sea angling

Opportunities and Constraints

This area is exposed to the west which may preclude certain developments.

The entire zone can be seen from the coastal road between Reiff and Altandubh and is therefore sensitive to surface installations. In policy terms its sensitivity is increased by the location within the Assynt Coigach NSA.

The shallow, sandy seabed in this area may support opportunities for scallop ranching, with no exposed surface equipment.

High-water access from Lochan Alltan Dubh to Old Dornie must be maintained and further precludes surface developments close to the northern entrance to Old Dornie.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of the continued use of this area for creeling and scallop diving activities.

Support for possible seabed scallop ranching in this area, compatible with other interests.

Presumption against any development involving surface equipment which will impact on the views over open water from the residential properties and the open road.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 3: NORTHERN SUMMER ISLES AND OLD DORNIE

This zone includes the channel between Isle Ristol and the Summer Isles, the outer part of which is very exposed to the west and south-west. More shelter is offered by the channels and inlets among the Summer Isles which in places are protected from the south-west by Tanera Beag.

Current activities

- Crab, lobster and prawn creeling; scallop dredging
- Fish-farming
- Diving – recreational and commercial
- Sailing and anchoring
- Sea kayaking
- Tour boats from Ullapool and Achiltibuie
- Boat traffic passes through, including fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts
- Sea angling

Opportunities and Constraints

The area has abundant wildlife including seabirds, cetaceans, otters and seals, as well as important habitats such as maerl beds and kelp forests. Any future development in this area would need to be sensitive to this biodiversity. The area is very scenic and is within the Assynt, Coigach NSA. Any surface installations in this area would need to be discreetly located and well designed to be in keeping with the scenic nature of the area.

The zone is popular with visiting yachtsmen. There are several anchorages in the area. Access to these recognised anchorages and commercial moorings and slipways (eg the natural harbour at Old Dornie) needs to be preserved.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out. Presumption in favour of commercial scallop diving where appropriate within the area as an alternative to scallop dredging.

Presumption against any future developments that would impinge upon navigational access to recognised moorings and anchorages, or would restrict navigation between the Islands.

Support for improved interpretation, recognition and publication of dive sites in the area and improved access for small boats.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 4: BADENTARBAT BAY

This bay has the mainland to the north and east, and the island of Tanera Mór to the west. It is open to the south and to the north-west. The bay is overlooked by the villages of Achiltibuie and Polbain, as well as the houses on Tanera Mór and the mainland coast road. The area is very scenic.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Scallop dredging
- Recreational diving
- Fish-farming
- Sailing and anchoring
- Sea-kayaking
- Tour-boats from Ullapool and Achiltibuie
- Boat traffic passes through, including fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts
- Sea angling

Opportunities and Constraints

The scenic nature of the area may preclude any large-scale developments within Badentarbat Bay.

The presence of the fish farm at Tanera Mór may preclude any further development within close proximity to this area.

Navigational access to the pier and anchorage at Badentarbat Bay needs to be maintained.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out.

Presumption in favour of commercial scallop diving where appropriate within the area, as an alternative to scallop dredging.

Presumption against any future developments that would impinge upon navigational access to recognised moorings and anchorages.

Support for small-scale shellfish farming initiatives compatible with other interests.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 5: SOUTHERN SUMMER ISLES AND THE STACKS

The zone between Tanera Beag and Priest Island is very exposed, with shelter only in the lee of Priest Island and Glas-leac Beag. The area is divided in two by a line of three stacks, with a basin at 50-100m depth to the south of the stacks. The area is very remote, and is not readily overlooked from the mainland. The Western Isles ferry passes through the zone. Cetaceans are regularly seen in this area, and Priest Island is important for seabirds and is designated as a Special Protected Area for its bird interest.

Current activities

- Trawling
- Mixed creeling
- Scallop dredging
- Diving
- Sailing
- Sea-kayaking
- Boat traffic passes through, including the Western Isles ferry, fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts

Opportunities and Constraints

Regular presence of cetaceans and seals in this area may preclude any static development. Proximity to regular ferry route militates against any development which may impinge upon this and other navigational access to the loch.

Depth of water and the relatively high exposure militates against small-to-medium scale developments in this area.

The scenic nature of the area as isolated coast militates against any large developments in this area.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of creel fishing as currently carried out here.

Presumption against scallop dredging in the shallower areas of this zone in favour of scallop diving.

Presumption in favour of maintaining clear access through this area for ferries and other large vessels.

Support the use of this area for accredited cetacean-watching businesses, in keeping with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code of Conduct.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 6: TANERA/EILEAN DUBH/HORSE ISLAND BASIN

This zone is a basin 50-100m in depth. It is exposed to the south and west and also fairly exposed to the north. The area is overlooked from the mainland villages of Achiltibuie and Polglass. Cetaceans are sometimes reported in this area.

Current activities

- Trawling
- Some creeling in shallower areas
- Diving
- Sailing
- Sea-kayaking
- Boat traffic passes through, including fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts

Opportunities and Constraints

The area is very scenic and is within the Assynt-Coigach NSA. Any surface installations in this area would need to be discreetly located and well designed in order to be in keeping with the scenic nature of the area.

Regular presence of cetaceans and seals in this area may preclude any static development.

Depth of water and the relatively high exposure militates against small-to-medium scale developments in this area.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of prawn creeling in the deeper areas of this zone and continued lobster/crab creeling on the harder ground.

Exposure and depth militate against any permanent fixed development of a scale which would be in keeping with the NSA designation and with maintaining navigational access.

Support the use of this area for accredited cetacean-watching businesses, in keeping with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code of Conduct.

Presumption against developments which would impinge upon navigational access to recognised moorings and anchorages.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 7: HORSE SOUND

Horse Sound is bounded by the mainland to the north and east, and by Horse Island to the south-west. It is open to the south. It is mostly relatively shallow (less than 50m deep in most parts). Shellfish have been grown here in the past and approval has recently been granted for a large shellfish farm off the south-east side of Horse Island.

Current activities

- Creeling

Opportunities and Constraints

This zone is contained within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area and is overlooked by the villages of Polglass and Badenscallie, and from the coast road along the length of its mainland shore. There is a small beach and youth hostel at Acheninver. Care must be taken to ensure that any permanent developments in this area are of a scale in keeping with the surroundings.

There is sheltered anchorage for large vessels to the east of Horse Island. Access to this area should be maintained.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of continuation of existing creeling activities in this area, compatible with other interests.

Presumption against any development which may have an adverse impact on the amenity of the view over open water.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 8: NORTH GRUINARD/PRIEST ISLAND BASIN

A basin over 100m deep runs through the area between Gruinard Bay and Priest Island. This area is very exposed to the west, and receives little shelter from other directions. It is partially overlooked by the settlements of Opinan and Mellon Udrigle. Cetaceans are sometimes seen in this area, and Priest Island is designated as a Special Protection Area for its bird interest.

Current activities

- Trawling; some creeling in the shallower parts and in areas less accessible to mobile fishing gear
- There is a finfish farm lease at Stattic Point which was operated on a trial basis from 2004-2006
- Boat traffic passes through, including fishing boats, visiting yachts, and the Western Isles ferry (depending on the weather)
- Submarine exercise area

Opportunities and Constraints

Proximity to the regular ferry route militates against any development which may impinge upon this and other navigational access to Loch Broom. This section of sea is exposed to prevailing westerly winds. It is overlooked from some sections of road and some settlements but with the exception of the south-eastern and south-western ends of the zone, this is generally only from a distance. It is therefore visually sensitive only to larger surface installations apart from the extremities of the zone mentioned above and in the vicinity of Priest Island and Bottle Island. It is however partly within the Wester Ross NSA.

The area is important for creel and mobile gear fishing, particularly at the eastern end towards the mouth of Little Loch Broom. Here the bottom is more of a mud and sandy substrate. There is a seasonal closure to mobile gear under the Inshore Fishing Act.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of creel fishing as currently carried out in this area.

Presumption against any marine developments which would hinder navigation through the area.

Presumption against new aquaculture developments in this area or expansion of existing leases due to exposure and navigational issues. Presumption in favour of relocation of the fish farm operation at Stattic Point if the opportunity arises.

Support the use of this area for accredited cetacean watching businesses, in keeping with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code of Conduct

Support research to find out more about local migration routes of salmon leaving and returning to the Little Gruinard River SAC.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 9: EILEAN DUBH /CAILLEACH HEAD BASIN

This basin is bounded to the south-east by Cailleach Head and to the north-west by Bottle Island and Eilean Dubh. It is exposed in particular to the south-west, and reaches over 100m in depth. The area is remote and not overlooked by any settlements or roads.

Current activities

- Trawling and occasional scallop dredging
- Some creeling, mainly around Bottle Island, Cailleach Head, Carn nan Sgeir
- Boat traffic passes through, including the Western Isles ferry, fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts
- Submarine exercise area

Opportunities and Constraints

The area is important for creel and mobile gear fishing, particularly at the eastern end towards the mouth of Little Loch Broom where the bottom is more of a mud and sandy substrate. Most of this section of sea is exposed to prevailing south-westerly winds. Depth of water and the relatively high exposure tend to militate against small-to-medium scale developments in this area.

Views into this area from the Scoraig peninsula are valued by the Scoraig residents. The scenic nature of the headland as isolated coast militates against any large developments in this area.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of continuation of existing creel fishing as currently carried out in this area, compatible with other interests.

Proximity to regular ferry route militates against any development which may impinge on this and other navigational access to Loch Broom.

Presumption against any development which may impact severely on the amenity of the view over open water.

The south-east side of Eilean Dubh may have potential as a site which could accommodate finfish production relocated from Stattic Point or the inner sea loch sites. It should be reserved for this purpose subject to the provisos in the policy for coastal/nearshore zone 'F'. However, a finfish farm at this site would require suitably robust gear.

Support use of this area for accredited cetacean watching businesses, in keeping with the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code of Conduct.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 10: OUTER LOCH BROOM – NORTH

The northern part of outer Loch Broom is a basin at 30-50m depth. It is bounded to the north by the mainland and the steep slopes of Beinn Mór Coigach; to the south by a rise in the seabed running between Carn nan Sgeir and Isle Martin. It is exposed to the west and south-west. The area is partially overlooked from Achduart and Culnacraig and also from the coastal footpath which runs from Culnacraig to Strathcanaird.

Current activities

- Trawling
- Creeling – mainly close to the shoreline
- Diving – particularly the wall dives beneath the southern flanks of Ben Mór Coigach and on the north side of Isle Martin (recognised as two of the best dives of this type in Scotland)
- Tour-boats from Ullapool circumnavigate Isle Martin when returning from the Summer Isles. This channel also provides access to the moorings in Loch Kanaird and the existing fish farm

Opportunities and Constraints

This zone is contained within the Assynt–Coigach National Scenic Area and is overlooked from the areas mentioned above. The eastern end, which is close to Isle Martin and Ben Mór Coigach, is sensitive on account of its landscape and recreational interest. Care must be taken to ensure that any permanent developments in this area are of a scale in keeping with the surroundings.

Deep mud habitats here are home to some animals which are found in relatively few locations in Britain's inshore waters.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of continuation of existing creeling activities in this area, compatible with other interests. Presumption against any increase in mobile fishing gear in this area.

Presumption against any development which may impact severely on the amenity of the view over open water.

Presumption against any developments which would impact on the two noted wall dives in this area.

Presumption against any activities which would restrict navigational access to Loch Kanaird through the deep water channel between Isle Martin and the Coigach mainland.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 11: OUTER LOCH BROOM – SOUTH

This zone is bordered to the south by Annat Bay, the Scoraig peninsula, and the steep slopes of Beinn Gobhlach. Its northern boundary is the rise in the seabed which forms a ridge between Isle Martin and Càrn nan Sgeir. It is exposed to the east and west and also to the north, but it is sheltered from the south and south-west. There is a recognised anchorage at the western end of Annat Bay. The wreck of the 'Fairweather' lies just off the shore in the western part of the zone. The area is overlooked by the small settlement of Achmore and by houses at the western end of Rhue.

Current activities

- Trawling, especially in winter
- Creeling, close to the shore
- Diving – particularly on the wreck of the 'Fairweather' (one of the most popular dives in Highland) and the wall beneath the north flank of Beinn Gobhlach
- Sailing and anchoring
- Tour-boats from Ullapool
- Boat traffic passes through, including the Wester Isles ferry, fishing boats, tour boats and visiting yachts

Opportunities and Constraints

This zone is partly contained within the Assynt–Coigach National Scenic Area. Views across this zone from land are particularly valued by residents of the Scoraig peninsula [see *coastal/nearshore policy zone 'O'*]. The zone is used by harbour and ferry traffic, in addition to the tourist boats from Ullapool which circumnavigate Isle Martin when returning from the Summer Isles.

The area is used for commercial and recreational diving.

Area Policy

A suitably robust finfish farm installation may be acceptable on the east side of Càrn nan Sgeir subject to the provisos outlined in the coastal/nearshore policy for H2. Presumption against any development which would impact severely on the amenity of the view over open water.

Presumption against any marine developments which would hinder navigation through the area close to existing moorings, facilities and anchorage.

Presumption against any increase in mobile fishing gear in this area.

Presumption against any developments which would impact upon noted dive sites and wrecks in this area.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 12: LOCH KANAIRD

This shallow, semi-enclosed water body is bounded to the south and east by the mainland and to the north-west by Isle Martin. It is almost divided in two by a spit of land which becomes exposed along most of its length at low tide.

The loch is overlooked by the community of Ardmail and the main north road. It is an area of very dramatic landscapes, backed by the steep outline of Beinn Mór Coigach.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Fish-farming – there is a long-established salmon farming operation in Loch Kanaird with cages close to Isle Martin and the mainland
- Diving
- Sailing and anchoring
- Sea-kayaking
- Tour-boats from Ullapool
- Boat traffic passes through, including fishing boats, fish-farm boats, and the boat to Isle Martin

Opportunities and Constraints

There is a shallow river mouth here, which is associated with an important game fishery. The inner part of Loch Kanaird is a recognised anchorage. Access to this and the commercial moorings and slipways needs to be preserved. Many small recreational boats use this zone and it is popular with visiting yachtsmen. The ferry access to Isle Martin also crosses the area.

The area is scenic and lies within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area. Any development in this area would need to be well designed to be in keeping with the scenic nature of the area.

Area Policy

See coastal/nearshore policy zone 'K' for policy on aquaculture development here.

Presumption against any marine developments which would hinder navigation through the area close to existing moorings, facilities and anchorage.

Presumption in favour of maintaining access through this area for the Isle Martin ferry.

Presumption in favour of developments which would improve and maintain access points to the sea for small recreational craft.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 13: GRUINARD BAY

This broad, relatively shallow bay is surrounded on three sides by the mainland, and opens only to the north. However, the low-lying land does not provide much shelter. The bay has a road and scattered communities all around it, and most of the bay is visible from most points on the land.

Eelgrass, which is encompassed within the Seagrass Beds Habitat Action Plan, has been found in the southeastern part of the bay.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Seasonal trawling and dredging
- Some recreational boating

Opportunities and Constraints

Almost the entire zone can be seen from the coastal road between Opinan and Mungasdale and it is therefore sensitive to surface installations. It lies wholly within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area.

The bay lies immediately to seaward of the Little Gruinard River Special Area for Conservation. Little is known about the migration routes of salmon in the immediate nearshore area and this is an important buffer zone for the river.

The jetty at Laide is well used by recreational boating interests and there are proposals to develop this facility.

The area is subject to a winter closure under the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out and a reduction in benthic trawling to reduce pressure on stocks and non-target species.

Presumption in favour of developments which will improve and maintain access points to the sea for small recreational craft.

Presumption against any marine developments that would hinder navigation through the area close to Laide jetty.

Presumption against any new or expanded finfish aquaculture developments in this area due to the proximity of the little Gruinard River SAC [see coastal/nearshore policies for zone 'V' regarding relocation of finfish production and for zones 'V' to 'Z' regarding shellfish farming].

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 14: LITTLE LOCH BROOM

Little Loch Broom runs north-west to south-east and has two basins separated by a sill. There is a Several Order for scallops adjacent to the southern shore. The whole loch is overlooked by roads and communities along the southern shore making it a relatively easy loch in which to monitor marine activity. On the north shore, Scoraig at the western end and Badrallach near the eastern end also overlook the loch. Maerl has been recorded in the loch, and porpoises are regularly seen.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Seasonal trawling and dredging
- Fish-farming
- Scallop ranching
- Boat traffic passing through the loch includes fishing boats, fish-farm boats, boats ferrying passengers and supplies between Badluarach and Scoraig, a dive charter boat which operates out of Camusnagaul, and visiting yachts

Opportunities and Constraints

There is a long-established salmon farm at Ardessie and the upper loch is a designated shellfish harvesting area. The mouth of the loch is close to the Little Gruinard River Special Area for Conservation. Although little is known about the migration routes of salmon in the immediate nearshore area this is an important route for salmonids migrating to the Dundonnell River. Deep mud habitats in Little Loch Broom are home to some animals which are found in relatively few locations in Britain's inshore waters. The area is subject to a winter closure under the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act. There is regular boat traffic between Badluarach and Scoraig which is inaccessible by road. It is important that free navigational access is maintained here.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out.

Preference for relocation of finfish production (subject to site availability) away from the inner loch to more open water – to safeguard wild salmonid stocks in the Dundonnell River – with possible substitution by shellfish farming or scallop ranching. [For more detail on aquaculture see the coastal/nearshore policies for zones 'Q' to 'U']

Support for possible seabed scallop ranching in this area, compatible with other interests.

Presumption in favour of developments which will improve and maintain access points to the sea for small recreational craft.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 15:

INNER LOCH BROOM: RHUE TO ULLAPOOL AND THE NARROWS

Loch Broom runs north-west to south-east and contains the port of Ullapool. This section of the loch is relatively densely populated along the northeast shore but the southwestern shore is largely uninhabited. Porpoises are sometimes seen in the loch.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Boat traffic passes through to reach Ullapool harbour, including the Western Isles ferry, fishing boats, cruise ships and visiting yachts

Opportunities and Constraints

Ullapool is an important sheltered harbour area and in the klondyking days Loch Broom has accommodated significant numbers of vessels. Proximity to harbour traffic and the regular ferry route militates against any development of fixed installations which would impinge upon this and other navigational access to the loch.

The area is popular with visiting yachtsmen and other recreational boat users on account of Ullapool's services and its attractive setting. However space for these users within the inner harbour area is fairly limited because of the pressure from commercial traffic.

The entire zone can be seen from Ullapool and the main north coastal road and is therefore sensitive in relation to the siting of surface installations.

Deep mud habitats in Loch Broom are home to some animals which are found in relatively few locations in Britain's inshore waters.

Water quality associated with outfalls acts as a constraint on shellfish farming close to the built-up area.

Area Policy

Presumption against any marine developments which would hinder navigation through the area close to existing moorings, facilities and anchorage.

Presumption in favour of developments which would improve and maintain access points to the sea for small recreational craft, including formation of a Mooring Association.

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out.

MARINE/OFFSHORE ZONE 16:

INNER LOCH BROOM – THE NARROWS TO THE HEAD OF THE LOCH

Above the narrows, Loch Broom is sheltered from most directions. There is a good anchorage just inland of the narrows. Flame shells and horse mussels are found in this part of the loch.

Current activities

- Creeling
- Fish-farming

Opportunities and Constraints

The inner loch is overlooked by settlements along virtually all of its length.

Access to the anchorage opportunities, commercial moorings and slipways in this area needs to be preserved.

There is a long-established finfish farm in the inner loch which is serviced from the eastern shore.

Deep mud habitats in Loch Broom are home to some animals which are found in relatively few locations in Britain's inshore waters.

Two game fishing rivers – the Lael and the Broom – flow into the head of the loch.

Area Policy

Presumption in favour of static gear fishing as currently carried out.

Encourage relocation of finfish production (subject to site availability) away from the upper loch to better flushed, more open water.

[For further details on aquaculture see coastal/nearshore policies for zone 'M']

Support in principle for developments which would maintain and improve access points to the sea for small recreational craft.

Presumption against any developments which would adversely affect important Biodiversity Action Plan species such as horse mussels.

7. Monitoring and Follow-up

7.1 The Atlantic Coast project has not just been about preparing a coastal plan. It has been and will continue to be about learning from the process of preparing the plan, implementing the plan on a trial basis, and evaluating its influence. This process of project development, monitoring and review will extend beyond the timescale of the formal Interreg 3B Coastatlantic initiative. All the partner agencies on the steering group for the Atlantic Coast project have agreed to use the plan and to contribute to its review and refinement. A monitoring report will be produced by the Council within 3-5 years. This will take account of new developments, information from the Steering Group and the Community Liaison Group, and assess the effectiveness of the plan and its policy zones in guiding emerging plans and projects. This report will help to show how effective the plan has been and will highlight any need for subsequent modifications. It will also take account of any comments received on the series of topic papers and reports on development opportunities which accompany this plan. In the intervening period some sections of the plan could be updated as additional data becomes available.

7.2 Key indicators of the effectiveness of the plan will include:

- the level and quality of feedback on the plan (and subsequent revised editions) from local stakeholders and communities
- the extent to which the plan is referred to, and the ways in which it is used by agencies operating in the field
- the number and proportion of successful applications for development consent or grant aid in the aspects of coastal zone use which the plan seeks to influence

7.3 A key aim of the Atlantic Coast project has been to develop a transferable model for an integrated coastal plan which could be applied in other parts of Highland or beyond. The monitoring and review process will therefore also consider the level of interest which the plan has attracted outwith the project area and any links which develop with other coastal planning initiatives elsewhere in the country.

7.4 During the period of the Interreg 3B funding, the project officer supported local initiatives and prepared reports in relation to the following development opportunities which were identified in the topic papers:

- lobster stock enhancement
- establishment of a local fish processing facility
- seaweed mariculture
- shellfish farming
- voluntary marine nature reserve or network of such sites
- potential for a marine visitor centre
- best practice in coastal interpretation
- improvements to shore access, facilities and moorings
- development of code of practice for wildlife watching
- local implications of Highland Council's emerging renewables policy

These reports can be accessed via the Highland Council website.

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