

LOCH TORRIDON

LOCH

TOIRBHEARTAN



AQUACULTURE FRAMEWORK PLAN
PLANA UISGE-ÀITEACHAIS

MAY 2011

CEITEAN 2011

FOREWORD

SAN TOISEACH

Aquaculture is one of the key economic sectors on the Highland west coast and it is increasing in importance as a means of seafood production. The Highland-wide Local Development Plan therefore recognises it as a key contributor to the aim of achieving sustainable communities. Finfish farms and shellfish farms now operate in all the major sea lochs and there is still scope for expansion of the industry. However, there are also other interests around the coast and the natural heritage value of the Highland west coast is high, so aquaculture operations have to be located and managed with care.

Aquaculture framework plans were introduced by the former Highland Regional Council in the late 1980's as a key part of its development and control strategy for aquaculture. Their purpose is to guide aquaculture development to appropriate locations and to help minimise conflicts of interest. This updated plan for Loch Torridon replaces the version prepared in September 1988 and is one of a second generation of plans which began to be introduced in 2000. The guidance here is intended to supplement that which is provided for the terrestrial area in the Wester Ross Local Plan and the evolving Highland Wide Local Development Plan. It will be used to inform the Council's evaluation of planning applications for finfish and shellfish farms and the Scottish Government's review of development consents which were granted by the Crown Estate.

One of the most important changes to take place since the original Loch Torridon Framework Plan was produced has been the introduction of the EU's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations. Since March 1999, these have embraced aquaculture developments to a much greater extent than before and they now apply to most proposals for new or expanded finfish farms. EIA brings more rigour to the assessment of individual applications and the onus is on the developer to produce an Environmental Assessment which meets the regulatory bodies' information requirements. At the time of writing, shellfish farming developments are exempt but large-scale shellfish installations may come within the scope of the legislation within the lifetime of the plan.

Another important change in the regulatory context has been the extension of planning control in April 2007 to embrace marine aquaculture developments (both finfish and shellfish). This effectively transferred the Crown Estate's planning role to the local authorities. Under the Planning etc (Scotland) Act 2006 and the Town and Country Planning (Marine Fish Farming) (Scotland) Order 2007, all new aquaculture developments and modifications require planning permission. However, existing Crown Estate consents are being reviewed and converted into planning consents under a separate process by the Scottish Government.

A third key development, which will have relevance in the future, has been the introduction of the Marine (Scotland) Act in 2010. This provides a framework which will help balance competing demands on Scotland's seas, and includes statutory marine planning and marine conservation as key elements. At the time of writing, a national policy statement is in preparation and boundaries for a new set of marine

regions are being considered. Plans will be prepared for the marine regions in due course. These documents will provide a strategic policy framework at a higher level, within which local coastal plans, such as this one for Loch Torridon, can be further developed.

As the drive towards sustainable use of inshore waters gathers momentum, aquaculture framework plans should be seen as one component of an increasingly comprehensive and integrated coastal planning system. This system will ultimately also embrace area access agreements for inshore fishing and seabed harvesting, management plans for marine nature reserves, the coastal policy elements of Local Plans and coastal zone management (CZM) strategies at sub-regional level and above.

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Contents

Clàr-innse

Introduction	1
Planning Policy Context	2
National Guidance	2
Regional/Local Guidance.....	4
Objectives of the Framework Plan	5
Main Features of the Area	6
Topographic Setting	6
Settlements and access	6
Hydrography.....	7
Scale of Aquaculture Development and Potential	7
Historic and Present Development.....	7
Future Prospects for Aquaculture Development.....	8
Planning and Development Considerations	11
Economic Development	11
Navigation	12
Water Quality.....	12
Predator Control and Interactions with Other Species.....	15
Industry Codes of Practice	17
Infrastructure	17
Inshore Fishing.....	18
Landscape and Visual Amenity	19
Nature Conservation	21
Recreation	22
Archaeology	23
Game Fisheries	24
Strategy and Introduction to the Area Policies	26
Draft Policy Map.....	28
Area Policies.....	29
Appendix 1: Consented aquaculture sites	43
Appendix 2: Jetties and slipways	44
Appendix 3: List of Consultees.....	45
Appendix 4: Relevant policies in the Highland Structure Plan	46
Appendix 5: Bibliography.....	47

Introduction

Ro-ràdh

1. Loch Torridon is one of the largest sea lochs on the west coast of Scotland and one of the finest in terms of its landscape setting. Situated in an area of outstanding scenic qualities, the loch, its small villages and the surrounding mountainous terrain are popular with walkers, wildlife enthusiasts, photographers and tourists from around the world.

2. The sea loch itself can broadly be divided into three connected basins; the outer, middle and upper lochs, marked on the OS map as Loch Torridon, Loch Shildaig and Upper Loch Torridon respectively. Loch Shildaig and Upper Loch Torridon are located within the Wester-Ross National Scenic Area (NSA). This designation was applied in 1980 and is the largest of the 40 NSA's in Scotland.

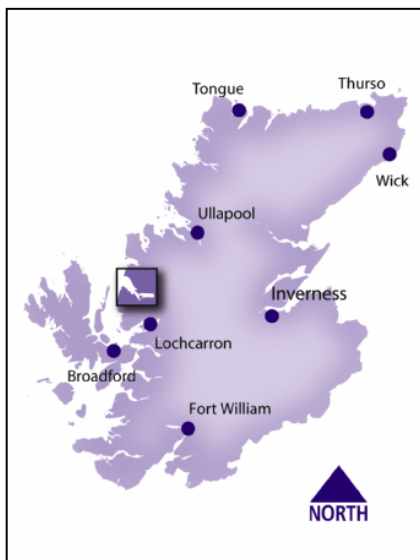


Figure 1: Location of Framework Plan Area

3. Finfish and shellfish farming have been present at various locations in the loch since the 1980s. At the time of writing, there are four extant consents for finfish farms and four extant consents for shellfish. All of these were approved by the Crown Estate, some of the earlier ones in the era before the Crown Estate entered into public consultation. At the time of writing, the main finfish farming site is at Camas an Lèim in Upper Loch Torridon. This received planning permission for an expansion in 2008 when the operator concerned offered to relinquish a more confined site in Loch Diabaig.

4. This framework plan updates the original plan for Loch Torridon which was published in 1988. The new plan covers a slightly larger area than previously and now includes the small bays of Ob na h-Uamha and Ob Chuaig on the Applecross coast just south of the mouth of Loch Torridon. The plan therefore encompasses the entire coast from Rubha Chuaig to the southern tip of Red Point.

Planning Policy Context Co-theacsa Poileasaidh Dealbhachaidh

National Guidance

5. The policy guidance relevant to aquaculture at national level currently has three main strands:

- i. “A Fresh Start: The renewed Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture” (SFSA) – this is a broad-based strategy which sets out a vision and objectives for the industry. It is not place-specific and focuses instead on general principles for growing the industry and maintaining its competitiveness;
- ii. locational guidelines for the siting of marine fish farms and supporting general advice on marine fish farming and the environment;
- iii. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP): this sets out how coastal planning should develop and provides guidance on the factors to be taken into account when considering proposals for new fish farms or modifications to existing operations.

6. The SFSA document and the SPP identify sustainability (economic, environmental and social) as the overarching guiding principle for aquaculture development in Scotland. They also advise local authorities to develop local planning guidance for aquaculture in appropriate

areas in consultation with the relevant interests and they encourage community engagement.



Photo 1: Loch Shieldaig

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR SCOTTISH AQUACULTURE

7. The original framework was published in 2003. The revised document published in 2009, ‘*Scottish Aquaculture – a Fresh Start*’ ties in closely with the Scottish Governments’ five strategic objectives, whilst addressing the key challenges facing the aquaculture industry:

- healthier fish and shellfish;
- improved systems for licensing aquaculture developments;
- improved containment;
- better marketing and improved image;
- improved access to finance

LOCATIONAL GUIDELINES

8. The Locational Guidelines, introduced in 1999 and updated in 2003 indicate, essentially on a whole-sea-loch basis, where the expansion of fin fish farming would be more (or less) likely to be acceptable in terms of water quality and benthic impact. This pattern of opportunity and constraint, which is regularly updated, reflects the level of

existing fish farm development and the natural flushing characteristics of the different sea lochs. The guidelines categorise sea lochs into three categories:

- Category 1: where the development of new or the expansion of existing marine fish farms will only be acceptable in exceptional circumstances;
- Category 2: where new development or expansion of existing sites would not result in the area being re-categorised as category 1;
- Category 3: where there appear to be better prospects of satisfying nutrient loading and benthic impact requirements, although the detailed circumstances will always need to be examined carefully.

9. At the time of writing, Loch Torridon is classified as Category 3. The categories are based on the environmental sensitivity of the sea lochs as determined by predictive modelling carried out by Marine Scotland, based at the Marine Laboratory, Aberdeen. The classification of the sea loch may change during the lifetime of the plan and maps depicting the current classifications can be found on the Marine Laboratory web site:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/science/Publications/publicationslatest/locationalfishfarms>.

PLANNING ETC (SCOTLAND) ACT 2006 AND THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (MARINE FISH FARMING) (SCOTLAND) ORDER 2007

10. In April 2007, all new aquaculture developments and alterations to existing sites were brought within the scope of the Town & Country Planning system. This means that in most cases sites will have permanent planning permission once they have been through the planning process.

11. Transitional arrangements between the Crown Estate, which deals with seabed leases, and the Scottish Government's marine aquaculture farm review programme, will now take until March 2013. This means that where Crown Estate consents (or works licences in Shetland and Orkney) have expired since 1st April 2007, or will expire before 31st March 2013; the site(s) can continue to operate with consented equipment up to 31st March 2013. This is unless a decision on planning permission has been made by Scottish ministers before then, i.e. the consent has been reviewed or audited.

SCOTTISH PLANNING POLICY

12. A single, consolidated Scottish Planning Policy document (SPP) was published in February 2010. It replaced a number of previous National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) notes, including those on coastal and aquaculture planning.

13. The new SPP includes new guidance on coastal planning, which includes the need for local planning authorities to identify:

- (a) coastal areas suitable for development;
- (b) areas subject to significant constraints;
- (c) areas which are considered unsuitable for development such as the isolated coast

14. Apart from the section around Diabaig, most of the coastline on the north side of Loch Shieldaig and outer Loch Torridon (i.e. from Rubha a Ghuibhais out to Red Point) is classed as 'Isolated'. The rest of the coast around Loch Torridon is an intimate mix of opportunity and constraint and therefore would most closely approximate to 'areas subject to significant constraints'. These constraints relate primarily to the high scenic value of the area around Loch Shieldaig, upper Loch Torridon, and Loch Diabaig, the amenity of coastal settlements and houses, navigation, wild fish stocks and nature conservation.

15. The new SPP also replaces SPP 22 ("Planning for Fish Farming"), which was published in April 2007. It set out guidance on the factors which planning authorities should take into account when preparing development plans and assessing development proposals for fish farming. It also provided guidance on the type of information fish farmers should supply when seeking to alter existing sites or establish

new ones. The new SPP covers similar issues, albeit in less detail. In addition, the Water Framework Directive and the West Highland Area Management Plan produced by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) provide additional guidance for improving the water environment.

Regional/Local Guidance

HIGHLAND COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

16. The Highland Structure Plan (2001), together with the Local Plans for constituent parts of Highland, form the Council's Development Plan. This focuses mainly on terrestrial developments but it contains some policies which refer to the marine environment in general and to aquaculture specifically. These policies have been taken into account in the preparation of this Framework Plan and will continue to inform the consideration of applications for development consent. In addition, a new Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP) is being prepared which will supersede the Highland Structure Plan.

17. Relevant strategic policies in the current Highland Structure Plan are G1 (conformity with strategy), G2 (design for sustainability), G3 (impact assessments), G6 (conservation and promotion of the Highland heritage), FA5 (Aquaculture Framework Plans), FA6 (Fish Farming Developments), L4 (Landscape Character). Further

details of these policies are contained in Appendix 4.

18. Through the public consultation exercises undertaken for the 2006 Wester Ross Local Plan, the coast was highlighted as a main issue to be considered. The plan states that it needs to balance the effect of fish farm developments against the quality of the environment and recognise the relationship of development between the coast and the land. Much of the area between the road around the loch and the loch shore are designated for the views over open water. Any development proposal outwith the defined settlement development area should conform to the Highland Structure Plan policies outlined above. This will include not only marine aquaculture developments but also any shore-based infrastructure associated with the proposal.

19. The vision of the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP) focuses on enabling sustainable Highland communities and supporting a competitive, sustainable and adaptable Highland economy by encouraging economic development (e.g. via key sectors such as aquaculture) whilst safeguarding our environment. It also focuses on helping deliver a healthier Highlands, providing better opportunities for all and a fairer Highlands. To help deliver this vision the HWLDP provides a positive planning framework to support sustainable development of finfish and shellfish farming.

HIGHLAND COASTAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

20. The Highland Coastal Development Strategy provides guidance for sustainable development and use of Highland's coastal zone at the regional scale. Focussing on the coast and nearshore waters, it complements the statutory, terrestrial elements of the evolving HWLDP. It also provides classification maps (based on the NPPG 13 methodology) for the whole of the Highland coast. These show the location of 'Developed', 'Undeveloped' and 'Isolated' coast.

Objectives of the Framework Plan Mion-amasan a' Phlana Frèama

21. The objectives of the framework plan are to:

- promote the operation and development of aquaculture within the plan area which is environmentally sustainable and in harmony with other interests;
- raise awareness of Loch Torridon's role and potential as a multi-faceted resource and guide prospective aquaculture developers as to the various interests which they should take into account here;
- safeguard the high natural heritage interest of the area, its special scenic qualities and its key wildlife habitats and

species, including native wild fish stocks;

- safeguard the key tourism and recreation assets of the loch;
- identify infrastructure investment priorities to support the development of aquaculture and to maximise the general economic and recreational value of the inshore area;
- provide guidance on issues which should be considered within any Environmental Impact Assessment, if required in support of an aquaculture application.

Main features of the area

Prìomh feartan na sgìre

Topographic Setting

22. The three main sections of Loch Torridon each have distinct topographic settings. Upper Loch Torridon is set amongst an array of peaks which are formed from some of the oldest rocks in the world. The two highest, Liathach and Ben Alligin, are both over 900m and are two of the most distinctive peaks in Scotland. Together with the compact but very rugged area of rocky hills between Alligin Shuas and Diabaig, they form a steep and dramatic mountain backdrop on the loch's more exposed northern side.

23. The southern side of the upper loch also has a high hill backdrop but it is somewhat less

dramatic and less continuous. However, along the coast, the south side of the upper loch has an assortment of small bays, inlets, and headlands. These, combined with extensive areas of native pine woodland, make it more sheltered and intimate.

24. This intimacy is also a feature of Loch Shieldaig which has two wooded islands, some large areas of shallow, sandy bottom, and is sheltered from both east and westerly winds by the peninsulas at Shieldaig and Ardheslaig. The aforementioned rugged hill area between Alligin Shuas and Diabaig again forms a dramatic northern backdrop.

25. Outer Loch Torridon, by contrast, opens to the northwest and generally has a lower hill backdrop on both sides. The coast on the south side still has a number of small inlets which provide some shelter and intimacy for a string of small, remote hamlets. However, on the north side, northwest of Diabaig, the coastline is exposed to the prevailing winds, much less differentiated and uninhabited. This character continues north-westwards for about 10 kms until it reaches the attractive, south-facing beach at Red Point.

Settlements and access

26. The Torridon area has a scatter of small communities that were estimated to have a combined population of 410 in 2009. The main villages are Shieldaig, Torridon, and Inveralligin. Tourism is an important source of income in this area and there are many second

homes. Although it is a popular area for visitors, Torridon's links to the main road network are currently restricted to single-track roads between the head of the loch and Kinlochewe and between Shieldaig and Kishorn. Further single-track hill roads serve the outlying settlement of Diabaig and hamlets such as Kenmore and Fearnmore.

Hydrography

27. The Loch Torridon system is fjordic in character, 22 kms long overall and has three main basins. The deepest section is the outer loch which reaches a depth of 145 metres. Loch Shieldaig and the upper loch have maximum depths of 119 and 88 metres respectively.

28. The outer loch can be described as an enclosed bay with strong currents rapidly flushing the basin. However, a deep sill does exist near the mouth at a depth of 64 metres. Another deep sill, at 79 metres, lies between the outer loch and Loch Shieldaig.

29. A much shallower sill, at 20 metres depth, separates Loch Shieldaig from the upper loch. The mouth of the upper loch is narrow with a maximum width of 340 metres. This gives the upper loch fjord-type hydrodynamics where the water mass can become stratified with dense saline waters lying below less dense fresher/warmer water. This can reduce the flushing capacity of the loch where surface waters are regularly flushed with the daily tides and the lower water masses are only flushed where

mixing can occur with the upper water layer. As a whole the loch takes approximately 9 days to flush. However each basin has its own flushing characteristics with some of the deeper waters having exchange rates significantly slower than this.

Scale of Aquaculture Development and Potential

Sgèile an Leasachaidh Cultar-uisge

Historic and Present Development

30. The current finfish sites in Loch Torridon were all granted their original development consent for salmon farming by the Crown Estate during the 1980s. They pre-dated the first Aquaculture Framework Plan for Loch Torridon, which was published in 1988 and in most cases were established without public consultation. More recent finfish developments have sought to rationalise salmon production by concentrating it on the better-performing existing sites. To this end, Marine Harvest relinquished its lease in Loch Diabaig in return for expansion of its site and installation at Camas an Lèim in 2006/8. All the existing Crown Estate aquaculture consents are likely to come up for review by the Scottish Government during the lifetime of this new plan.

31. Use of the loch for shellfish aquaculture has also changed. Many of the sites noted in the 1988 plan have since been relinquished. Some new sites have since been approved, for

mussel or scallop farming with longlines or rafts and for oyster farming in the intertidal area, but the scale of operations remains fairly small.



Photo 2: Upper Loch Torridon from viewpoint on Diabaig road.

Future Prospects for Aquaculture Development

32. Aquaculture has a significant and generally stable presence in Loch Torridon. The prospects for further expansion are restricted however by the limited availability of new sites which are technically viable, by environmental constraints and by other interests in and around the loch.

33. Having grown to its current level, the scope for further major expansion without impacting on the environment and other interests now seems fairly limited, at least in the upper loch and in Loch Shieldaig. Prospects for expansion may be somewhat better in the less sensitive outer loch but here exposure is more of a consideration and more robust

types of installation would be required.

34. All of the loch from Diabaig and the bay at Kenmore eastwards is located within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area. The upper loch is also a Marine Consultation Area on account of its nature conservation interest. The following are extracts from the Scottish Executive's '*Locational Guidelines for the Authorisation of Marine Fish Farms in Scottish Waters*':

"National Scenic Areas (NSA) identify areas where Scotland's scenery is of exceptional attractiveness and where the need to safeguard the existing character and scenic qualities of the landscape assume a high priority. NSA's are a component of the key resource for tourism and thus form the basis for many local economies. Development within these areas should not compromise the objectives of the designation or the overall integrity of the area."

"Marine Consultation Areas, although not statutorily designated, are of particular distinction in respect of the quality and sensitivity of their marine environment and where the scientific information available substantiates their nature conservation importance. Other sites identify where species and habitats have been recorded which are known to be sensitive to aquaculture and which are listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The

precise distribution of these features is not certain. Development close to mapped sites may also be sensitive.”

35. While some further expansion of shellfish farming in Loch Torridon is possible there are limited opportunities for additional finfish farms within the system. The current sites are relatively closely spaced and additional farms nearby would have an unacceptable visual impact. Most other locations within the loch have constraints such as depth, exposure, amenity value which appear to preclude further finfish farming activity. At the time of writing all Loch Torridon sites are operated in accordance with the Loch Torridon Area Management Agreement.



Photo 3 Salmon farm in Loch Torridon

36. In recent years most salmon farm companies in Scotland have embarked on restructuring/consolidation programmes to sustain their competitiveness. This has generally involved concentration of production on their best-performing sites (sometimes with expansion of these sites, e.g. at Camas an Lèim) whilst sites which have performed less satisfactorily

have been relinquished (e.g. Diabaig), scaled down, or put to alternative use (e.g. shellfish farming). Such consolidation proposals in Loch Torridon have been and will be judged on their individual merits.

37. Both finfish and shellfish development will have to take into account the need for reasonable separation and they should be compatible with the area's natural heritage and tourism interests.

Surface installations for aquaculture development need to be low in profile and of suitable colouration to fit in with their surroundings. Sites which are overlooked at close quarters from recognized tourist routes or roadside viewpoints are particularly sensitive in this respect. Close liaison between the operators, the local planning authority and Scottish Natural Heritage, along with the use of professional landscape design expertise, can help to make the most of the opportunities which exist.

38. The fish farming industry continues to undertake research projects related to the diversification into new species. For example, there has been interest in the potential for cultivation of cod and other gadoids in recent years. Different species may have different environmental requirements in relation to exposure and hydrography.

39. Whilst it may be possible to on-grow cod in reasonably exposed sites, including those currently used for salmon, halibut require much more sheltered,

inner loch sites and a much greater cage surface area is required in order to cultivate the same biomass in a halibut farm compared to a salmon farm.

40. In the future, given improving technology, it may become possible to moor fish farm cages in more exposed sites than are currently viable. It is essential however that navigational access is maintained, that there is sufficient separation distance between adjacent sites and that any future developments for salmonids are located away from the entrance to important game fishing rivers given the potential for escapes and the subsequent effects on wild fisheries. It is also important to note that the equipment required to service the larger and more exposed sites may have an increased visual and noise impact on their surroundings. In the past, equipment installed in exposed locations has been prone to damage by storms which can result in debris washing up on shorelines or an underwater hazard to vessels, swimmers and divers. For this reason, development proposals in locations which have the potential to be too harsh for the specified equipment will be strongly discouraged.

41. With regard to shellfish developments, there are a limited number of sites within the plan area which may be suitable for the longline or raft culture of mussels. These locations are identified in the area policies and policy map. The use of subsurface longlines would result in reduced surface gear and therefore less visual impact.

42. Applications for new finfish farm sites or significant alterations to existing ones are likely to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Applicants are advised to request a screening and scoping opinion from the planning authority at the outset. This preliminary process, which includes consultation with statutory bodies, will determine whether or not an EIA is required and what information should be provided with the application.



Photo 4 Mussel lines at Ob Gorm Mor

43. It may be possible that in the future it will be economically viable to farm other marine species within Highland sea lochs. The Highland Council has been involved as funding partner in a number of projects aimed at determining the feasibility of farming new species and the techniques which would be required for their culture. Finfish species include haddock and lumpsuckers as well as the mollusc abalone and the green sea urchin *Psammechinus miliaris*. There are markets in Europe and eastern Asia for the mature roe of this species and it has the potential to be cultivated in trays or lantern nets suspended on sub-surface longlines.

44. Interest is also increasing in the potential for polyculture. This might involve growing a species such as mussels, or certain marine algae, on the same site as finfish. The main argument for this type of aquaculture is that one species may have the potential to utilise some of the waste nutrients produced by the other, leading to less dissolved organic matter entering the water column. This is an issue which merits further investigation and the Council has contributed in recent years towards research into finfish/seaweed polyculture. The future introduction of polyculture techniques on a commercial scale would require changes in legislation to allow certain combinations of species to be grown on a single site. Care will be needed in relation to the possible introduction of non-native species.

Planning and Development Considerations

Beachdachaidhean Dealbhaidh is Leasachaidh

45. When considering the various issues relating to individual aquaculture applications, planning authorities take into consideration a wide range of factors, both socioeconomic and environmental. Whilst some of these issues e.g. biomass and sea lice mediation by SEPA/MSS, may be regulated by other organisations, there may still be potential impacts

which need to be considered by the planning authorities under other legislation or guidance e.g. the Biodiversity Duty.

Economic Development

46. Angus McHattie's study of Loch Torridon in 1999 estimated that nearly 25% of the local population were directly employed in the management and exploitation of the loch's natural resources. At that time, the numbers employed full-time in aquaculture and fishing were estimated to be very similar. The figure of 48 FTE jobs in aquaculture then is however likely to be substantially lower now, though the multiplier rates which generate employment indirectly may still apply.

47. Over the last three decades finfish production techniques have advanced significantly. Throughout Scotland annual site productivity per person for salmon increased from 28 tonnes to 136 tonnes per staff member over the 16-year period 1992-2008. The fish farms have become increasingly automated and whilst this means proportionately fewer jobs and a more mobile workforce, it is essential if operators are to remain competitive in the future. Shellfish aquaculture thus far has operated in a much more traditional fashion and owners and staff are much more likely to be residents of the communities around the shores of the loch.

48. At the time of writing salmon farming is still considered to have good growth prospects nationally

and there was capital investment of £8m in the sector across Highland in 2009. The Scottish Government currently estimates that for each pound paid to employees in the fish farming sector a further £4-5 is generated in the local economy. Aquaculture generates employment opportunities both on-farm and downstream in processing and marketing. It also helps to generate income for other local businesses which provide support services.

49. Development plans and policies therefore need to nurture sustainable aquaculture to maximise these benefits. The sustainable use of natural resources which maximises productivity whilst protecting the environment will help to provide a stable, healthy local economy for future generations. In addition to this, the industry can operate in harmony with other activities and interests.

50. The Scottish Executive Marine Renewables SEA identifies Outer Loch Torridon as a potential development area for tidal energy. Although tidal energy is at an early stage of development, it is another sector which needs consideration when assessing further aquaculture development within the loch.

Navigation

51. The mouth of Loch Torridon opens onto the northern section of the Inner Sound between the Isle of Rona and the mainland. This is a navigable channel allowing large vessels, such as coastal tankers and freighters,

sheltered passage on the east side of Skye via Kyle Rhea and Loch Alsh. In addition, naval forces regularly exercise in the Inner Sound and within Loch Torridon.

52. There have been issues where feed pipes were blocking the entrance to an anchorage point in the loch. It is important that any future development within the plan area does not impinge on commercial traffic or present a navigational hazard to smaller coastal vessels. Any installations must be adequately lit with appropriate navigation lights so that they remain visible at night. Under Section 34 of the Coast Protection Act 1949 there is a requirement for all works within Scottish tidal waters to obtain consent from the Scottish Government to ensure that the proposal will not interfere with or obstruct navigation. This requirement is in addition to planning consent.

53. A compromise is often necessary between the requirement to use subtle colouring of surface equipment to mitigate against visual intrusion and the requirement to make installations sufficiently visible so as not to be a hazard to navigation. The Northern Lighthouse Board advises developers and regulators of the requirements to minimise risks to navigation.

Water Quality

54. All aquaculture activities rely on good water quality to support the growth of the species concerned. The Water

Framework Directive seeks to secure good or high ecological status for all water bodies. This is achieved through the implementation of the Scotland River Basin Management Plan including the West Highland Area Management Plan which covers Loch Torridon. Each planning application will need to demonstrate that it will not adversely affect the ecological status of Loch Torridon.

55. Aquaculture itself can sometimes have an adverse effect on surrounding waters. In the case of shellfish farming the inputs into the water column are usually minimal since no additional feed is required to grow shellfish. However, where very large scale shellfish farms are proposed, there may be both benthic and water column impacts which need to be considered. As farmed shellfish are net consumers of nutrients from the water column at high stocking densities, this may lead to less nutrients being available for other marine life in the vicinity.

56. Finfish farming, on the other hand, requires the regular input of feed. Veterinary medicines and anti-foulant chemicals may also on occasion be used at cage installations. These result in discharges to the environment along with the faeces of the fish being farmed. This level of discharge needs to be kept within reasonable limits. It is the responsibility of SEPA and MSS to determine, through computer modelling, the maximum biomass of fish which may be stocked at a finfish site, the types of medicines which are

permissible, and in what quantities they may be used.

57. One of the main reasons why medicines might be used on a salmon farm is the control of sea lice. These are naturally occurring planktonic animals which are ubiquitous in the marine environment around the coast of Scotland. Large concentrations of caged salmonids are sometimes associated with larger than normal quantities of sea lice. They have therefore been implicated as one of the factors in the decline of wild salmon and sea trout on the west coast. The risk of adverse impacts varies from site to site but it appears that wild salmon are most at risk in long fjordic systems where they have to pass several fish farms during their migration to sea (see bibliography in appendix 5). As planning authorities have a biodiversity duty to consider these impacts, they will consult with SEPA and MSS with regard to planning applications.

58. Game fishing interests also recognise the importance of using the appropriate medicine to control lice. There are however concerns that the use of medicines to control sea lice has the potential to adversely impact non-target organisms e.g. bioaccumulation in shellfish (see bibliography in appendix 5). These potential impacts are taken into consideration when sea lice medicines are licensed for use on fish farms. Lice medicines may be administered either by bath treatments or in medicated feed. Bath treatments are carried out by surrounding the cage net with a tarpaulin and

adding the medicine to the enclosed water or increasingly, treatment is done by well-boat. In-feed treatments are made up by the feed supply companies under veterinary supervision. For sea lice treatments to be effective, a sufficient quantity of medicine must be permitted to allow all the fish on the site to be treated at the same time.

59. Anti-foulant chemicals based on copper compounds may be used to treat cage nets and zinc used on walkways to slow the growth of unwanted marine organisms. Although the actions of these chemicals on shellfish are not fully understood there are fears that they may retard the growth of shellfish or other benthic organisms and lead to higher mortalities (see appendix 5). The Council strongly supports alternative methods such as regular swim-through net changes which reduce the need for chemical antifouling on cage nets, or mechanical net cleaning.

60. Live shellfish put on the market must by law meet strict criteria in terms of hygiene. Shellfish production areas are classified for this purpose according to the presence in water and shellfish samples of certain types of bacteria. Harvesting classifications are species and area-specific and may be seasonal. In Highland harvesting areas are normally classified as category 'A' or 'B'. Shellfish landed from areas classed as category 'A' can go direct to market for human consumption provided they meet the specified end-product standards. There is no legal

requirement for any processing other than washing. When the classification is 'B', mussels must be either depurated, heat treated, or re-laid in an area having an 'A' classification in order to meet the category 'A' requirements and the end-product standards. These classifications are subject to ongoing monitoring carried out by the Food Standards Agency (Scotland) (FSAS) and they are published annually. The end-product standards are listed on the agency's web site (www.food.gov.uk).

61. Upper Loch Torridon is afforded additional protection from deteriorating water quality by virtue of being designated as 'Shellfish Growing Waters' under the European Community Shellfish Waters Directive (79/923/EEC). These waters are protected to ensure the quality and productivity of shellfish and must meet the minimum environmental quality standards laid out in the Directive. Water quality monitoring under the Shellfish Waters Directive is carried out by SEPA and further information can be found on its web site (www.sepa.gov.uk).

62. In the siting of shellfish farms in particular, it is important that developments are not close to any significant effluent discharges, including the discharge from septic tanks. For any application involving the siting of a marine fish farm, the Council consults Scottish Water and SEPA for their expert advice in this regard.

63. Shellfish production can sometimes be affected by the presence in the water column of

certain harmful but naturally occurring algae. When these algae occur in high concentrations they can cause the accumulation of toxic compounds within filter-feeding bivalves. This can lead to fisheries and aquaculture operations being temporarily suspended on public health grounds. Closures of this nature, to avoid any risk of Paralytic, Amnesic, or Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning, are not uncommon in Scottish waters during the summer months. Monitoring for toxins in shellfish and for the specific algae causing them is the responsibility of the Food Standards Agency, which sub-contracts this work to an accredited laboratory. If a temporary closure is necessary, FSAS contacts the Highland Council Environmental Health Officer for the area. The officer must then inform the grower or harvester and put up notices to inform the general public not to gather shellfish from the area.

64. Finfish production may also be adversely effected by algal blooms. Some species of algae, if present in sufficiently large numbers, can damage the gills of farmed fish. This may result in mortality in the worst cases. Fish are also susceptible to blooms of zooplankton, such as juvenile jellyfish.

Predator Control and Interactions with Other Species

FINFISH

65. There is the potential for finfish farmers to sustain stock

losses as a result of several naturally occurring predatory species. These include birds, such as herons and cormorants, and mammals, in particular seals and on occasions American mink. These losses can occur as a result of the direct action of the predator catching and removing fish from the cages.

66. Alternatively losses occur as a result of unsuccessful attacks causing wounds which lead to infections and may ultimately result in fish death. Such attacks cause considerable stress to the fish during and following incursion. However, the most significant impact of predators, in particular seals, is damage to the cage nets which can lead to large-scale fish escapes.

67. The impacts of predators on farmed fish can be minimised and mitigated in several ways. Top nets can prevent birds from gaining access to the fish in the cages. Seals may be deterred by the use of Acoustic Deterrent Devices (ADDs) i.e. seal scarers. These devices emit a high-pitched noise underwater which affects seals to the extent that they should be deterred from attacking.



Photo 5: Barge delivery in Outer Loch

68. Most modern devices have various settings allowing the sound signal to be continuous, intermittent, or activated

automatically in the event of a seal attack. SNH's preferred mode of operation is the use of intermittent devices. However, regardless of the settings used there remains the potential for seals to become accustomed to the noise, reducing the efficacy of the ADD. In addition, there are concerns that ADDs may adversely impact on non-target species such as porpoises and the various types of dolphin which may be seen on Scotland's west coast. All cetaceans are protected species under European legislation and as such any activity, such as the use of seal scarers which may cause them harm or lead to them being displaced from their natural range, should only be carried out under the provisions of a disturbance licence. As all planning authorities have a Biodiversity Duty, they too have to take such issues into consideration when determining applications.

69. Good fish husbandry and tensioned nets are the first line of defence as the main ways of reducing the impact of seals on farmed salmon stocks. In addition, outer predator nets can be used, although they can entangle wildlife. These prevent losses by not allowing seals any slack net to push against to access the fish in the cages. The industry is developing new technology to counter seal attacks. These include seal blinds (false bottoms for cages) and additional tensioning rings at the base of cages.

70. On occasions, particular seals may be so persistent in their attacks on marine fish

farms that the operator may find it necessary to destroy the seal concerned. In such cases, fish farmers must apply to the Scottish Government for a seal licence, as set out in the Marine (Scotland) Act, 2010.

71. Whilst it is accepted that industry losses may result from seal attacks, in many cases seals were present in the sea loch prior to fish farms being introduced and increasingly provide opportunities for eco-tourism. Given the Council's Biodiversity Duty and the protected status of marine mammals, the preferred option is for non-destructive methods of predator control to be used whenever possible.

SHELLFISH

72. Shellfish farms do not normally suffer from attacks from mammals but mussel farms in particular may be susceptible to losses from predatory birds such as eider ducks. These diving ducks can strip large quantities of mussels from the dropper ropes suspended below longlines or rafts. Again predator deterrents may be required to reduce losses to the farmer. These may take the form of anti-predator nets placed around rafts or groups of longlines although this can prove expensive and may on occasion result in entrapment of diving birds. Alternative methods involve the use of scarecrows or gas cannon to scare off the birds. These methods may however also have adverse landscape and noise impacts. One of the most effective ways of controlling eider duck impacts is to ensure a regular human presence on the site. Whilst recognising the

adverse economic impact which sea birds such as eider ducks may have on shellfish farms, the Council favours non-destructive and low-impact methods of predator control.

73. Starfish may also be active predators on shellfish farms, feeding on mussels dislodged from longlines and settling on the seabed. Losses can be minimised by ensuring that the dropper ropes cannot make contact with the seabed. Lines should therefore be located in sufficient depth of water and have sufficient buoyancy to keep the shellfish farm afloat.

Industry Codes of Practice

74. Many of the adverse impacts which can result from aquaculture can be avoided or reduced by operating sites in line with recognised standards of best practice. As an action point for the Strategic Framework for Scottish Aquaculture, a “Code of Good Practice for Scottish Fin Fish Aquaculture” has been developed by the industry in consultation with key regulators. A similar document “The ASSG Code of Good Practice” has been prepared by the Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers in relation to shellfish farming.

75. These industry codes cover topics such as maintenance of site integrity, predator and disease control and staff training requirements. They also reiterate many of the statutory requirements which aquaculture operators are obliged to meet.

76. The Council is fully supportive of the industry codes of practice and it recommends that all aquaculture operators carry out their production and site management in accordance with the relevant code. The Council believes that such good practice should be more than just voluntary, so is of the view that permission to operate a fish or shellfish farm should be dependent on full compliance with the relevant code.

Infrastructure

77. There is a range of both public and private jetties and slipways in the plan area, details of which can be found in Appendix 2. The public facilities are at Shildaig, Diabaig, Inveralligin and Fasag. The finfish farm installations are however serviced from private jetties and slipways in the loch or from further afield.

78. The main road which serves the Loch Torridon area is the A896. Along the south side of the upper loch this road is twin-track but away from the loch it reverts to single-track through Glen Shildaig and Glen Torridon. An unclassified single track road runs from Torridon Village along the north side of the upper loch to Diabaig. This road is narrow with passing places and can be described as unsuitable for heavy goods vehicles. The northern shore of the outer loch is not accessible by road. Only a cross-country footpath runs between Diabaig and Red Point Farm at the northern mouth of the loch.

79. The south side of Loch Shildaig and outer Loch Torridon are served by another single-track road with passing places. This is part of the Wester Ross Coastal Route, so despite its low specification and somewhat tortuous route in places, it can be relatively busy at peak times during the summer tourist season. Proposals for development which would be likely to significantly increase the use of the minor roads to Diabaig or Applecross would have to be carefully considered.

Inshore Fishing

80. At the time of Angus McHattie's study of Loch Torridon in 1999, there were approximately 21 boats in the local fleet giving almost 50 FTE jobs. The vast majority of these were small creel boats. Whilst the number of boats may have reduced slightly since then, the newer boats are likely to have maintained the overall fishing capacity of this fleet. The highest value landings are prawns (*Nephrops*) from the creel fishermen although crabs (both edible and velvet), scallops and periwinkles are also important catches in the area.

81. There was some conflict in the past between local static gear fishing and the larger mobile trawl fishing interests in the loch. Local fishermen reported gear losses by trawlers towing through their equipment. It was claimed that the more selective methods of capture used by creels are more sustainable as the smaller immature prawns are not caught. As a result of sustained local

efforts, the loch is now closed to mobile fishing gear under an inshore fishery order.

82. The *Nephrops* fishery has been the subject of significant efforts to establish a sustainable management regime. About half of the boats fishing within the loch conform to the voluntary code of conduct established by the Torridon *Nephrops* Management Group. The voluntary management measures include the use of escape panels, limits on total amount of gear and time at sea. It is hoped that these measures will improve the long term sustainability of the fishery. The success of the various measures led to the group being rewarded the Marine Stewardship Council's Sustainability Label. However, at the time of writing, this label has recently been removed due to ongoing problems linked to the level of fishing effort within the closed area.

83. Aquaculture interacts with the fishery in a number of ways. There is a degree of competition between the two sectors for space and there is the potential for aquaculture to impact on the habitat which supports *Nephrops* and other target species. On the other hand, both industries have a mutual interest in marine safety and in safeguarding the marketing image of seafood of local provenance. There may also be opportunities to rationalise the facilities for shore access and minimise the environmental footprint of shore-based developments by sharing infrastructure.

Landscape and Visual Amenity

84. Safeguarding the landscape character and scenic qualities of Loch Torridon is a key issue when evaluating aquaculture development in this nationally designated area. The area around the upper loch is classified as Rugged Mountain Massif so its main character is defined by these high, steep slopes and their interrelationship with the loch. An intimate pattern of small bays and headlands, backed by stands of native woodland close to the coast, is also an important characteristic of upper Loch Torridon and Loch Shieldaig. This complements the larger-scale mountain setting. Recent work by SNH, which tabulates the special qualities of the NSAs, provides further detail on the landscape character of the area (see appendix 5 for further details).

85. Towards the outer loch the character changes to crochan to the north and rocky moorland to the south although very often views of these areas also encompass the rugged mountains behind. The implication of these designations in terms of aquaculture developments means that particular care needs to be taken in siting fish and shellfish farms and in keeping them within a reasonable scale. This is required to ensure that particular landscape characteristics of the area are not adversely impacted by any new developments or modification to existing ones.

86. Aquaculture buoys and rafts are located at intervals within the sheltered waters along the coastline. Their close proximity to the land attracts attention and may appear to extend the fringed nature of the coast even further. The cumulative effect of these elements has a significant impact, especially when travelling along the coast. Their location in areas which would otherwise contain no structures also affects the sense of remoteness at the coast. Associated buildings and access tracks, where necessary, can have greater impact than the rafts themselves.

87. For these reasons, it is important that all aquaculture developments within the loch take appropriate steps to minimise the visual impact of their operations. Cages should be sited as close as possible to the shores of the loch and orientated with the line of the coast as far as possible. Operators should take advantage of natural screening and the landscape contours. Surface equipment, including cage top nets and walkways, should be low in profile and of a muted colour scheme in keeping with the surroundings. Any equipment not immediately required on the site should be removed quickly for storage within the confines of a shore base. These considerations also need to be taken with regard to the use of ancillary equipment such as storage rafts and feed barges.

AUTOMATED FEEDING SYSTEMS, TOP NETS, AND UNDERSEA LIGHTING

88. Modern marine fish farms increasingly rely on automated feeding systems and bulk storage of feed. They may take the form of self-contained offshore installations which use purpose-built feed barges and which are replenished from boats, or they may be installations which are umbilically linked to feed silos on the shore.

89. Automated feeding systems have a number of advantages for the operator and the environment. The ability to store larger quantities of feed on site can make it economically viable to transport feed by sea reducing heavy lorry movements on rural roads. A reduction in the amount of manual handling and feeding required on site can lead to improved workforce health although ultimately automation may mean that less personnel are required. There is also the potential, through the use of underwater cameras and feedback loop technology, to reduce the quantity of uneaten food pellets reaching the seabed. This in turn reduces discharges from the site and conserves resources.

90. On the other hand, large feed storage barges may have a bigger visual impact than the cages themselves because the former usually have a higher profile and may look like buildings on the water. Complex arrays of feed pipes on the water surface can add to this impact. Feed pipes and walkways which create umbilical links to the

shore restrict navigation options around the fish farm and by creating what are in effect artificial “peninsulas”, they change the character of the coastline at a local level.

91. In some areas, particularly where the wild, undeveloped character of the coast is an important part of its appeal, or close to houses, roadside viewpoints or tourist/recreational routes, the use of high-capacity feed barges may not be appropriate. In any case, the profile and colouration of these pieces of equipment should always be carefully considered. In addition, the use of high top nets above large circular cages is not appropriate at all sites due to the increased visual impact of the larger structures. When new types of equipment are developed, operators should fully consider the landscape and visual impact implications. If necessary, operators should discuss these options with the local planning authority prior to purchase of the equipment or its inclusion in a planning application for a specific site.

92. Generators on fish farms have the potential to cause a noise nuisance if there are residential properties overlooking the site. They should be muffled accordingly. The use of underwater lighting, to slow the speed at which fish mature sexually, may also be practiced by some operators. In the event that underwater lighting is required, it should be used with great sensitivity.

93. The above considerations also apply to the installation of

floatation gear for shellfish longlines, which should be in dark matt colours. Further useful information on the siting and design of aquaculture installations is contained in the SNH publication "Marine Aquaculture and the Landscape". At the time of writing, this guidance was being revised and due for publication in 2011.

Nature Conservation

94. Safeguarding the nature conservation interest of the loch and the surrounding area is important for biodiversity and general sustainability. It is particularly important where there is a legal requirement to safeguard nationally and internationally protected species and habitats.

95. Upper Loch Torridon has long been designated as a Marine Consultation Area (MCA). Although this is not a statutory designation, it reflects the fact that the loch supports important marine biological communities. In particular it has a variety of foreshore and benthic habitats which are in good condition. A useful summary of the marine biodiversity of the loch is contained in the booklet '*Loch Torridon: a Guide to Underwater Life*', SNH (2004).

96. Of particular note is the Ob Mheallaidh tidal lagoon on the south side of the upper loch, with its associated tidal rapids. This lagoon and tidal rapid are considered to be among the finest examples of their type in

northwest Scotland. The narrows between Upper Loch Torridon and Loch Shieldaig also contain good examples of tide-swept animal and plant communities. Also the loch system contains deep muddy basins in which sea pens, firework anemones and foraminifers are all found in abundance.

97 Loch Torridon supports a number of habitats and species relevant to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan:

- Maerl Beds (the 2000 survey revealed an extensive maerl bed at the very head of upper Loch Torridon, which is a highly unusual circumstance in which to find maerl).
- Mud Habitats in Deep Water (note also that 'sea pen and burrowing megafauna' habitats are also listed by OSPAR on the 'List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats')
- Saline Lagoons
- Seagrass Beds
- Sublittoral Sands and Gravels
- Tidal Rapids (both subtidal and intertidal)
- *Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackaii* – a type of furoid seaweed (or wrack) which occurs in extensive beds on the shores of the upper loch, particularly in the sheltered obs.
- *Funiculina quadrangularis*: the tall sea pen. Notably, the

deep water brittlestar *Asteronyx loveni* (a species found in association with *F. quadrangularis*) is known to occur in Loch Diabaig. This is the shallowest known record for this species.

98. The loch also supports a number of habitats recognised as being of local importance because they support either national or local priority species. These include kelp forest, sub-tidal brittle star beds, other species of sea pens and Flame Shell reefs. Further detail on protected species and habitats work can be found in appendix 5.



Photo 6: Loch Diabaig

EUROPEAN PROTECTED SPECIES

99. There are numerous records of whale and dolphin species within Loch Torridon and the Inner Sound. These include Harbour Porpoise, Minke Whale, Killer Whale, and several species of dolphin. Otters can also be found.

SEALS

100. Five-yearly counts of harbour seals (*Phoca vitulina*) are conducted by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), during the annual moult in August. These counts suggest that small haul-outs for harbour

seals are present at the head of Upper Loch Torridon and at the narrows between Loch Shildaig and the upper loch. The counts for the Torridon sub-region have been varied, with 18 seals recorded during the annual moult in 1988, 3 seals in 1996 and 36 seals in 2000. A count of breeding harbour seals by SMRU in 2000 indicated a small breeding colony of 31-50 adults within the upper loch. Due to funding issues, the 2005 count was not done for Loch Torridon.

Recreation

101. The Torridon area is best known for its mountains, particularly Liathach and Beinn Alligin, two of Scotland's best-known Munros, which attract walkers and climbers all year round. Beinn Damh on the south side of the loch is also popular. The upper loch and Loch Shildaig are therefore often viewed in their entirety from above. However there are also both short and long lower-level coastal walks which provide an alternative when the weather is less favourable for the high tops. These include the routes between Diabaig and Alligin Shuas, the peninsula between Loch Shildaig and the upper loch, the track between Balgy and Annat on the south shore of the upper loch and the long-distance route between Diabaig and Red Point.

102. In addition, kayaking, sailing and diving takes place on and in the loch. Divers are attracted to the drift dive through the narrows at the entrance to the upper loch, to the steep, stepped slopes

underwater on the west side of Shieldaig Island and to the walls on the NE side of Aird and near Diabaig.

103. An underwater guide highlighting interesting and important dive sites within the loch was published by SNH in 2004. Dive sites contained in this guide are shown on the accompanying map.

104. There are several charted anchorages in the area and these are also acknowledged in the Clyde Cruising Club's "Sailing Directions and Anchorages guide (Ardnamurchan to Cape Wrath)". The anchorages are located at:

Outer Loch Torridon:-

- Loch Diabaig
- Loch Beag
- Kenmore
- Red Bay (Chamas Ruaidh, Fearnbeg)
- Camas an Eilean
- Arinacrinachd Bay

Loch Shieldaig:

- Shieldaig
- Camus Doire Aonar
- Ob na h-Acairseid (Ardheslaig)

Upper Loch Torridon:

- Ob a'Bhraighe (Alligin Shuas)
- Inveralligin
- the head of the loch
- Sron an Dubh-aird (east side)
- Rubha na Feola (both sides)

- Camas an Lèim

105. The locations are marked on the main plan accompanying this document. Fish farming interests sometimes seek to place their installations in areas which have traditionally been regarded as natural anchorages. This can mean competition for space where the shelter is limited. However, on the benefit side, some fish farm owners provide use of their slipways for a range of community and other commercial uses.

Archaeology

106. Both Historic Scotland and the Highland Council's own Archaeological Service were consulted during the production of this plan. There are few monuments or buildings with statutory protection in this area, although these, along with other sites of archaeological interest, are commonly found close to the shore. There is a single Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) which is a 19th century open-air church site at Am Ploc, near Torridon village.

107. There are many recorded sites within the wider area, most of which lie above the MHWS. The sites generally relate to former settlement and associated features including the scattered evidence for the earliest occupation of this part of Scotland. A few sites may extend into the foreshore such as fishing stations, piers, storehouses etc. In addition to this, there is potential for unrecorded wreck sites to be present. It would therefore be prudent for prospective fish farm

developers to undertake an examination of the seabed prior to developing or expanding a site, to determine whether or not local reports of surviving wrecks are accurate. If operators identify any archaeological sites or remains during routine inspection or operations they should report them immediately to the Council's Archaeological Unit. The Unit can then advise on appropriate action.

Game Fisheries

108 The Rivers Torridon, Balgy and Shieldaig have historically supported salmon and sea trout populations which have been exploited by game fisheries for many decades. These fisheries have traditionally provided some employment and benefit to the local economy as well as amenity for local people. In the coastal zone, commercial and subsistence netting were once of significant economic value to the area (e.g. at Red Point). However, fisheries which were in existence for hundreds of years no longer operate as wild stocks of salmon and sea trout have declined below levels at which these netting stations remain economically viable.

109. Current information shows that salmon and sea trout stocks were in decline for a long time prior to the development of intensive salmon aquaculture in the 1980s. However, whilst it is widely acknowledged that salmon aquaculture is not the only cause of the decline in wild salmonid stocks, salmon farming does pose some significant risks

(see references in appendix 5). These may include:

- the transfer of parasites, most notably sea lice, from the farmed stock to wild stock;
- damage to benthic flora and fauna caused by waste feed and medicines;
- disruption of genetic integrity and local adaptations of wild stocks due to escapes from salmon farms

110. Other factors which may have played a part in the decline of wild salmonid stocks include over-fishing and poaching, the loss of breeding redds due to poor river management and small-scale hydroelectric power schemes, global climate change, and increasing populations of predators such as seals.

111. The Tripartite Working Group (TWG) was formed in 1999 to help reconcile conflicts of interest between the wild fisheries and fish farming sectors. This group consisted of representatives of the Scottish Government, the finfish aquaculture industry and wild fisheries interests. The TWG recommended that area management groups should be formed to draw up and operate area management agreements (AMAs) between all the fish farm operators and freshwater fisheries interests relevant to a given sea loch system. Whilst the key work of the group concluded in March 2011, the AMA work continues. The aims of the AMA should be to mitigate

or eliminate threats to wild salmonids through:

- a target of zero egg-bearing sea lice on farms;
- improved fallowing strategies;
- effective single-bay management;
- robust escapes contingency plans;
- free exchange of relevant information.

112. The TWG and the Joint Government Industry Working Group on ISA (Infectious Salmon Anaemia) have recommended specific areas for which area management agreements should be produced. Loch Torridon is included in Management Area 11a (see appendix 5) and an AMA has been completed.

113. The Council fully recognises the important role played by the Area Management Groups in improving communications between wild fisheries and fish farming interests. Given the progress being made where Area Management Groups have formed, it is unfortunate that there has not been a universal uptake of the recommendations of the TWG in all areas. To maximise their benefits the Council is of the view that all Area Management Agreements should be in the public domain and have input from local communities and other stakeholders in the marine environment.

Strategy and Introduction to the Area Policies

Ro-innleachd agus Poileasaidhean Sgìreil

114. The better sites for aquaculture in Loch Torridon, having regard to technical requirements and the mix of other interests in the area, have already been taken up. In light of this and the various considerations detailed above, this strategy identifies only limited opportunity for the establishment of new finfish and shellfish farms in Loch Torridon. This opportunity mainly relates to the outer loch (i.e. north and west of the Ardheslaig peninsula) and to an extent depends on overcoming the technical hurdles associated with developing more exposed sites. Loch Shieldaig and Upper Loch Torridon are more enclosed and tend to be sensitive to development, particularly on landscape grounds. The strategy therefore seeks to contain the scale of operations at existing sites there broadly at their current level. The Council recognises that the changing technologies and economics of fish farming may necessitate modifications of existing operations from time to time. However, its support for such changes will be contingent on the special natural heritage qualities of this area not being compromised and the changes being broadly compatible with other interests.

115. The strategy:

- supports continued finfish and shellfish farming activity in the areas currently used for this purpose, on the understanding that operators give due regard to the environmental sensitivity of the loch and its coastline, the needs of local residents and to other interests in the area;
- identifies opportunities for new aquaculture development in less constrained parts of the plan area. For example, there may be scope for development with suitably robust gear between Craig and Sgeir Dùghall if it takes pressure off more sensitive sites elsewhere in the loch system. There may also be scope for development between Rubh a Chamais Ruaidh and Sgeir Dhubh;
- identifies Red Point, the north and east sides of Loch Shieldaig and the north side of Upper Loch Torridon as areas where further development should be avoided to safeguard scenic quality and amenity;
- encourages the use of aquaculture consents which are inactive or undeveloped.

116. To provide more detailed guidance, the loch has been divided into ten policy zones, labelled A - J respectively. These run clockwise around the loch and are indicated on the fold-out map overleaf. Each policy zone has a corresponding section of text in the pages that follow, where a brief description of its key characteristics and constraints are given along with the resultant area policy. These in effect identify areas which are potentially suitable for new or modified fish farm development and sensitive areas which are unlikely to be appropriate for such development. Under the new single Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), there is a requirement to identify 'isolated' coast, so

where this is present in a particular policy zone, it is mentioned. The map showing the area policy zones also gives a range of other information on infrastructure and other interests within the loch which are relevant to policy and will be taken into account when aquaculture development proposals are assessed.

117. Some of the area policies refer to 'small' and 'medium-scale' installations. These are relative terms. However, as a guide for the purposes of this plan and to maintain consistency with other plans in the series, the Council regards a finfish farm of up to about 2000 m² cage area as 'small' and one of up to 4000 m² as 'medium'. A 'small' shellfish farm using the longline system would employ lines up to 200m length to a maximum of 4 lines. A 'medium' shellfish farm would employ up to 8 lines of 200m length each, 5 lines 300m each or up to 4 lines 400m each. All other things being equal, the longer lengths of lines and the larger enclosed cage areas or raft areas on the water surface are harder to accommodate successfully in the landscape. A 'small' shellfish farm using rafts would employ up to 4 rafts each 10m² and a 'medium' one would have up to 4 rafts each 20m².

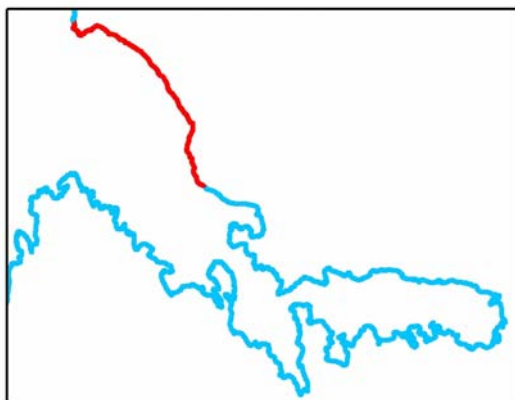
118. When making decisions on aquaculture planning applications the Council will consider each application in its own right within the context of the policies set out below and the relevant terrestrial development plan. In addition to this, the Council will consider relevant policy and technical guidance issued by the Scottish Government, Crown Estate and other relevant authorities.

119. This plan will be reviewed as necessary in line with the HWLDP, which will adopt the AFP as supplementary guidance in due course. The development of the new marine spatial planning system (e.g. the Scottish National Marine Plan and any subsequent Scottish Marine Regional Plans) may influence the content and coverage of aquaculture framework plans in the future. In appropriate circumstances it may also encourage their replacement by integrated (multi-sector) coastal plans at local level.

[A3 map of Area Policy Zones and Key Features]

Area Policies

Area A: Outer Loch Torridon - north side (Red Point to Sgeir Dùghall)



Characteristics/constraints

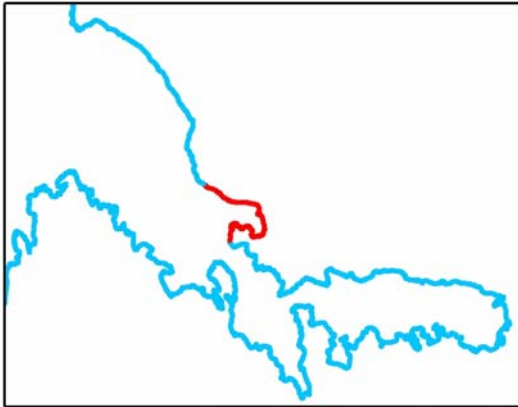
120. This is an exposed, uninhabited coast with few indentations and backed by relatively undifferentiated moorland terrain. The attractive sandy beach on the southeast side of Red Point is however a key feature which attracts a significant number of visitors. There is also a remote hostel at Craig, accessible only by footpath from Diabaig or Red Point, which attracts cross-country walkers. The bathymetry is steep along much of this section of coast with depths of 40m+ close to shore apart from the area near the beach at Red Point. The area is open to the prevailing winds from the west and southwest so would be a challenging one to develop for aquaculture. However, it is possible that equipment may become available in the future which could withstand the exposed conditions here. The stretch immediately northwest of Sgeir Dùghall may be able to accommodate such an installation without impacting significantly on other interests. Closer to Craig, Diabaig, or Red Point, amenity considerations would militate against this.

121. This section of coast is classified as 'Isolated' in the Highland Coastal Development Strategy. There would therefore have to be good justification for siting an aquaculture installation here (e.g. release or downsizing of a site in a more sensitive setting elsewhere in the loch).

Area policy

122. Presumption against development in the vicinity of Red Point, Craig and the section of isolated coast in between, where the footpath runs close to the shore. Development proposals in the area south of the bay at Craig and northwest of Sgeir Dùghall will however be regarded favourably if the equipment is suitably robust, other interests are taken properly into account and it helps to take pressure off more sensitive areas of Loch Shieldaig and Upper Loch Torridon.

Area B: Loch Diabaig (Sgeir Dùghall to Sgeir Ghorm)



Characteristics/constraints

123. Loch Diabaig represents one of the visually most striking inlets in the Loch Torridon system. It is both rugged and intimate in character. It has a wild landscape of steep and rocky Lewisian gneiss topography on its southern side, contrasting sharply with the steep green pastures, woodland and scattered houses on its north side. The loch is sheltered from westerly and north-westerly winds only in its innermost part, which has a substantial stone-built jetty. The loch is a small but relatively deep water mass (42 m at its deepest point).

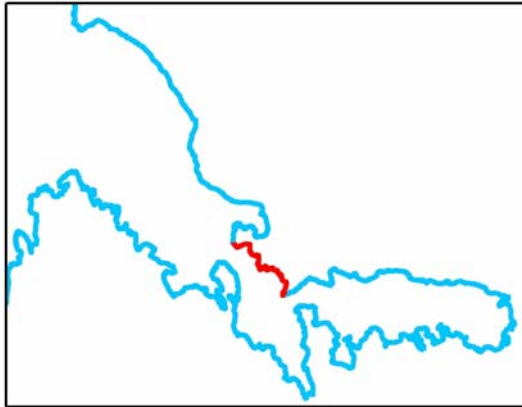
124. The remoteness of Loch Diabaig coupled with the local shelter it affords gives it an enclave character. It provides a sheltered anchorage in its inner reaches and attracts visitors with a sense of adventure who are prepared to negotiate the steep and twisting single-track road which connects it with the rest of Torridon. The area is visited by rock climbers because it has one of the best outcrops in Scotland in an attractive setting. Divers visit from time to time because there is a recognised shore dive from the pier. However, the remoteness of the area and small resident population makes year-round economic activity difficult to sustain. Approximately half of this section of coast, the area south and southwest of the village, is classified as 'Isolated' in the Highland Coastal Development Strategy.

125. Though long used for salmon farming, Loch Diabaig has relatively poor flushing and the access road is unsuitable for larger vehicles. The relocation of finfish production from here to Camas an Leim in the upper loch makes it possible to reappraise the potential of Loch Diabaig. Given the number of houses overlooking the bay, its distinctive scenic character and anchorage function, its future potential is likely to be as a recreation area and forward service base for aquaculture developments in outer Loch Torridon. Shellfish farming here should only be small-scale.

Area policy

126. Presumption in favour of use as an anchorage. Small-scale shellfish farming or fin-fish farming trial units would be acceptable if compatible with the local amenity of the area and kept clear of the main anchorage and navigational approaches. Presumption against larger-scale aquaculture installations or intensive use of Loch Diabaig for this purpose.

Area C: Loch Shieldaig - north side (Sgeir Ghorm to Rubha na h-Airde Glaise)



Characteristics/constraints

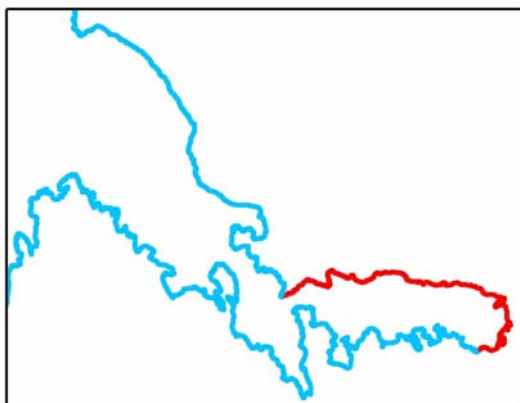
127. This section of coast, which features a compact group of very rugged hills falling steeply to the sea, is a key landscape feature of the Torridon area, as important in its own way as the higher mountains around the head of the loch. The view of this area from Shieldaig epitomizes the rugged scenic grandeur of the West Highland coast but at the same time is distinctive to Torridon. It is accessible only by footpath. The distinctive and dramatic nature of this landscape, along with the fact that the coast has no roads in this section, makes it something of an enclave whose character is well worth conserving. At one end of this section of coast are the narrows between the outer loch and Loch Shieldaig; at the other end is the even narrower passage into Upper Loch Torridon. Navigational considerations are therefore also a significant constraint. This section of coast is classified as 'Isolated' in the Highland Coastal Development Strategy.

Area policy

128. General presumption against aquaculture development within this area to safeguard its distinctive landscape character and to avoid impacting on navigation in the vicinity of the narrows.

Area D: Upper Loch Torridon – the north side and head of the loch

(Rubha na h-Airde Glaise to Annat)



Characteristics/constraints

129. The scenic quality of Upper Loch Torridon, Loch Shieldaig and the surrounding rugged mountains is high and maintaining the landscape's integrity is of particular importance. The upper loch area is very popular with walkers and the vistas over the loch and out towards Skye are wide-ranging. Most of the houses which are close to the shore on Upper Loch Torridon are on this northern side, between Alligin Shuas, Inveralligin and Rechullin, or at the head of the loch. Almost the whole of the upper loch is visible from the high road between Torridon House and Alligin Shuas.

130. Although the upper loch is quite deep close to the northern shore, this shore is more exposed to the prevailing winds (west and southwest) than the south side and it is also relatively straight and undifferentiated. This means it offers relatively little shelter or screening for aquaculture development. At the time of writing there are no extant consents for aquaculture on this section of coast and any surface installations would tend to be exposed visually as well as in relation to the prevailing wind direction.

131. The River Torridon runs into the sea at the head of the loch. It has wild fish interests although contemporary finfish farming practices and Area Management Agreements have gone a considerable way to alleviate fears of impacts upon wild fish stocks. There is an extensive area of maerl bed, a Biodiversity Action Plan habitat, in the shallower waters at the head of the loch.

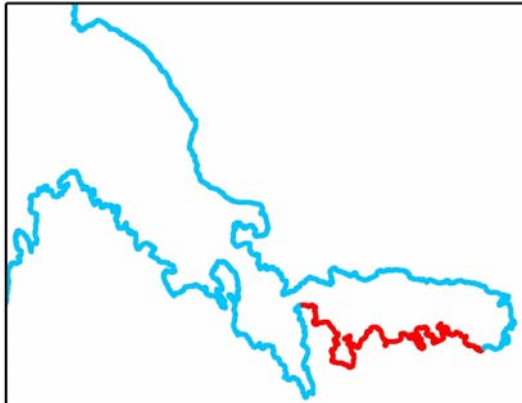
132. A short section of coast at the eastern end of this policy zone, from Rubha na h-Airde Glaise to the western shore of Ob a'Bhraighe, is classified as 'Isolated' in the Highland Coastal Development Strategy. This coincides with an area of landscape and navigational constraint close to the narrows. Strong tidal movement through the narrows makes this a popular drift-dive site for scuba divers visiting the area.

Area policy

133. Presumption against aquaculture development involving surface installations in the sub-littoral zone to safeguard the landscape setting and views over open water from settlements on the north side of the upper loch and to safeguard the navigation and diving interest in the narrows. Small-scale farming of shellfish in the inter-tidal area should be acceptable provided it does not impact significantly on the open, undeveloped character of the head of the loch or the amenity of settlements at this location.

Area E: Upper Loch Torridon - south side

(Eilean a' Chaoil to Annat)



Characteristics/constraints

134. The southern side of the upper loch is highly indented with attractive wooded inlets and bays interspersed with rocky headlands. This intimate stretch of coast provides shelter for several small-scale shellfish farms. It also provides the foreground interest, in the views from the road above, which complements the wider vista of mountains across the loch. This road is an important tourist route, with several viewpoints, the main one being above the head of Ob Gorm Beag. The scale and design of surface installations in and around the inlets and headlands therefore needs to be carefully controlled so that the coastline does not become “blocked up”.

135. The upper loch is bounded at its western end by an undulating peninsula which reaches out northwards to the narrows. There are various small dwellings on this peninsula which are accessible only by footpath from Shildaig. In an area dominated by mountains and rough terrain, this path provides a low-level option for walkers when the weather is inclement on the higher tops. A substantial finfish farm has been developed on the peninsula's east side, at Camas an Léim, to take advantage of the shelter which the peninsula provides from the prevailing winds. However, successive phases of expansion at this site have reached the point where there is a risk of the fish farm becoming an intrusive feature in the landscape if it grows any bigger and the operator has been warned of this.

136. The presence of a shallow sill at the mouth of the upper loch restricts the tidal flushing capacity of the waters and has the potential to make the upper loch more sensitive to nutrient inputs. Ob Mheallaidh is a key site of marine conservation interest, which is separated from the main loch by a tidal rapid.

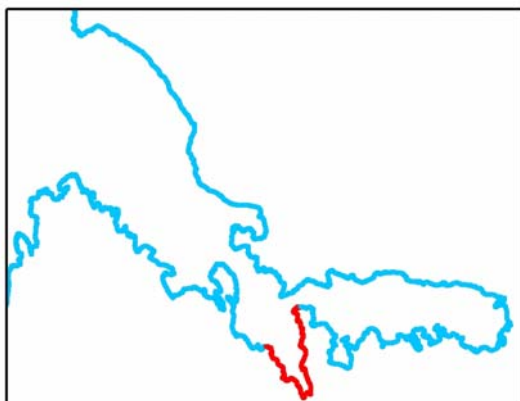
137. The River Balgy, which links Upper Loch Torridon with Loch Damh, the large freshwater loch to the south, has wild fish interests. However, contemporary fish farming practices and Area Management Agreements have gone a considerable way to alleviate fears of impacts on wild fish stocks.

Area policy

138. Presumption in favour of small to medium-scale aquaculture installations which are well spaced, sensitively located and designed to be in keeping with the landscape and avoid impinging on views across the loch. The existing fish farm at Camas an Leim has seen successive phases of expansion and is considered to be at its maximum acceptable size.

139. Shellfish farming should be largely confined to the areas between the eastern side of Ob Mheallaidh and Balgy and between Ob Gorm Beag and Dubh-aird. Surface equipment should be kept to a minimum, buoys should be matt grey in colour, other than navigational markers and space should be allowed within the inlets so they can also function as sheltered anchorages.

Area F: Loch Shieldaig (east) (Rubha an Roin to Eilean a' Chaoil)



Characteristics/constraints

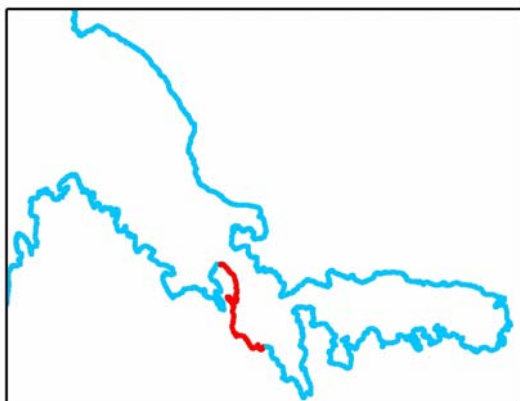
140. This section of the coast forms the setting for the village of Shieldaig. It also includes the sheltered innermost reaches of Loch Shieldaig which provide a safe anchorage for boats. The village is a local hub for tourists and has a narrow slip which is used by both fishing boats and recreational craft. The setting of the village is a large part of its appeal. This relates to both the views of it: across Loch Shieldaig from the west and south and the outlook which the village affords, particularly looking northwest. The nearshore waters are overlooked at close quarters by buildings along most of the length of this stretch of coastline. It is therefore inherently sensitive from a landscape, navigational and amenity point of view. At the time of writing there are no aquaculture leases are present in this area.

141. The southern part of Loch Shieldaig is an attractive, intimate corner, which is lushly wooded. It has been identified by the community as an area to develop for public moorings. Several small islands here are noted for their bird populations and there are recognised dive sites close to the main island. Safeguarding the amenity of the coastal walk on the peninsula to the north of Shieldaig village is also a consideration. The River Shieldaig flows into the southern section of Loch Shieldaig and has an important wild fish population which has been the subject of detailed research.

Area policy

142. General presumption against finfish farm development within this area to safeguard its high scenic and amenity value and its value as a sheltered anchorage. There may be scope for some small-scale shellfish farming on the south side of the loch but this would be dependent on visual impacts being adequately mitigated and there being no navigational constraints.

Area G: Loch Shieldaig (west) (Sròn a' Mhàis to Rubha an Roin)



Characteristics/constraints

143. The west side of Loch Shieldaig is sheltered from the prevailing west and southwesterly winds and has few dwellings along its shores. However, it is sensitive to development in its inner reaches and towards the middle. The views across Loch Shieldaig from the coast road are of high quality with the small islands, skerries and native woodland on the south side acting as a visual counterpoint to the larger scale, more rugged scenery on the north side and around Upper Loch Torridon.

144. There is a long-established finfish farm at a fairly inconspicuous site on this stretch of coast close to the east side of the Ardheslaig peninsula. However no other leases are present within this zone and any further expansion of aquaculture involving surface gear here would tend to detract from the scenery. The road which passes along the coast here is part of the 'Wester Ross Coastal Route' around the Applecross peninsula and is very popular with tourists. There is a small fish farm shorebase at the narrow inlet of Ob na h-Acairseid.

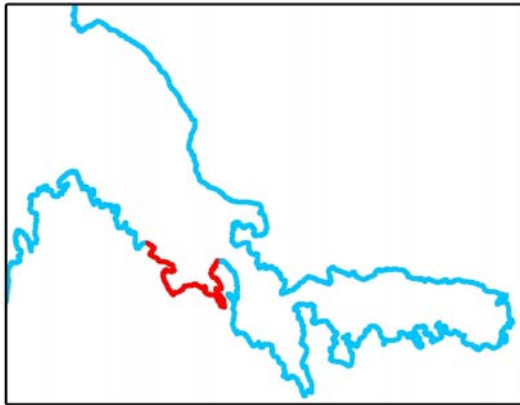
145. Off the northeastern end of the Ardheslaig peninsula, at the narrows between Loch Shieldaig and the outer loch, there is very deep water (down to 50m+) close to shore. This area is often visited by divers on account of the steep underwater gradient. With a charted depth of 144m, the middle of Loch Shieldaig has some of the deepest waters in the whole Torridon system. There is also a shore dive site southwest of Dora Rock.

Area policy

146. Presumption in favour of small to medium scale aquaculture development close to shore, using low-profile gear, in the area between Dora Rock (see hydrographic chart 2210) and Ob na h-Acairseid. Presumption against development elsewhere in this zone to safeguard the landscape character and views across the loch, navigation through the narrows into outer Loch Torridon and access to recognised dive sites. Aquaculture operations in this area should not be expanded

beyond the existing consented level to safeguard the scenic quality of the area, the amenity of dwellings near the coast and the area's value as an anchorage.

Area H: Camas an Eilean, Loch a' Chracaich, and Loch Beag (Camas an Eilean to Sròn a' Mhàis)



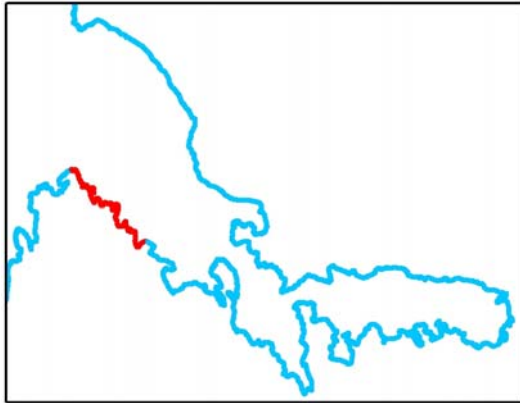
Characteristics/constraints

147. This semi-enclosed area of coast is for the most part sheltered on three sides. Loch Chracaich and the narrow inlet of Loch Beag are served by the public road while Camas an Eilean is accessed by a private track. The area is dominated by the rocky moorland of A' Bhaintir but woodland provides further shelter around the inlets. There are currently two sites consented for finfish farming in this zone, at Camas and Eilean and on the south side of Loch a' Chracaich. There are also several recognised anchorages within this zone which are important as they offer shelter in a variety of differing wind conditions. There is also a shellfish landing and transhipment base in Loch Beag for local creelers. Although it is somewhat off the beaten track, in the long term, recreational use of this area (e.g. boating, kayaking, diving) may increase.

Area policy

148. Presumption in favour of small to medium scale aquaculture development provided that it does not impinge (a) on the immediate outlook and amenity of the coastal settlements in this area, or (b) the sheltered anchorage areas at Camas an Eilean, Loch a' Chracaich and Loch Beag. Aquaculture installations in Loch a' Chracaich should be kept close to the steep shoreline of A' Bhaintir.

Area I: Outer Loch Torridon (south side) (Rubha na Feàrna to Rubha Glas)



Characteristics/constraints

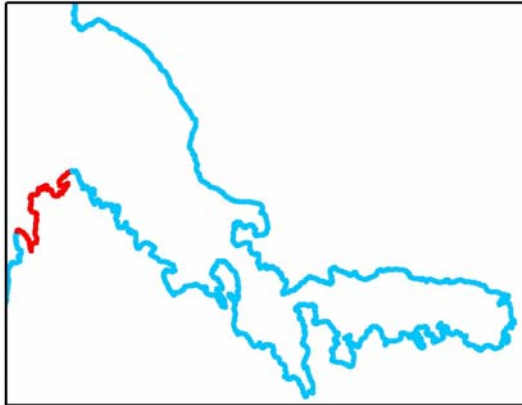
149. The south side of the outer loch is characterised by a series of small north-facing bays backed by undulating moorland. Remote and sparsely settled, with an open outlook to the uninhabited shore opposite, this area is accessible only by single-track road. However, this section of coast is sheltered from the prevailing westerly and south-westerly winds and the waters are well flushed. The main fetch across open water is to the north. The scattering of small hamlets here i.e. Fearnmore, Fearnbeg and Arinacrinachd, are set back slightly from the coast and looking across the outer loch they enjoy good open views of the peaks of Shildaig Forest.

150. Whilst there are opportunities for small-scale shellfish farm development which have already largely been taken up, the visual amenity of these hamlets should be safeguarded. This tends to preclude medium to large-scale development other than along the low-visibility section of coast between Rubh' a' Chamais Ruaidh and Sgeir Dhubh. Although the road is narrow, it is well used in summer by tourists doing the circuit of the Applecross peninsula.

Area policy

151. General presumption in favour of small-scale shellfish farming along this coast and small to medium scale shellfish or finfish development in the section between Rubh' a' Chamais Ruaidh and Sgeir Dhubh. The siting and operation of aquaculture installations should respect visual amenity and the outlook from the small settlements along this coast.

Area J: Cuaig to Fearnmore (Rubha Chuaig to Rubha na Feàrna)



Characteristics/constraints

152. This zone lies on the northwest coast of Applecross but has been included because it is an indented coast which topographically has more in common with the Fearnmore-Arinacrinachd area. It is undulating moorland with two inlets of significant size, Ob Chuaig and Ob na h-Uamha. However these are exposed to northwest swells and the water depths tend to be fairly shallow. The remote hamlet at Cuaig, like Fearnmore, has been restored from old crofts and shielings. The bay at Ob Chuaig has an attractive sandy beach which is sheltered from the west and southwest but it is north-facing. The rocky bay at Ob na h-Uamha is low-lying and this, coupled with the exposure at this northern extremity of the Applecross peninsula, tends to militate against aquaculture development.

Area policy

153. Precautionary presumption against aquaculture development unless the proposed systems are capable of coping with the exposed conditions on this section of coast. Any aquaculture installations placed here should be low in profile and should not detract from the character of the coastline or the amenity of the beach at Ob Chuaig.

Appendix 1: Consented Aquaculture Sites

Crown Estate lease reference	Location	Species	Permitted gear	Lease expiry date**
RC2-58-3	Camas an Eilean	Salmon	12 x 15m ² square cages; 2 x 60m circle cages	31/12/07
RC2-52-13	Loch a' Chracaich	Salmon	12 x 15m ² square cages; 6 x 60m circle cages	31/03/12
RC2-57-4	Meall an Doire Dhuibh (Loch Shieldaig)	Salmon	34 x 15m ² square cages;	30/04/11
RC2-57-2	Sgeirean nan Sgarbh (aka Camas an Lèim) (Upper Loch Torridon)	Salmon	12 x 100m circle cages	31/12/22
RC2-52-14	Camas a' Chlàrsair (Upper Loch Torridon)	Mussels	10 x 150m longlines	30/04/12
RC2-55-1	Ob Gorm Beag (Upper Loch Torridon)	Mussels	3 x 200m longlines*	30/04/09
RC2-55-1	Ob Gorm Mór (Upper Loch Torridon)	Mussels	3 x 200m longlines*	30/04/09
XX100/201B	Sròn an Dubh-Àird (Upper Loch Torridon)	Mussels	8 x 12m square mussel rafts	31/12/14

* These sites are combined therefore can have any configuration of a total of 6 lines

** Crown Estate leases which were due to expire after 31st March 2007 have been given two extensions of timescale by the Scottish Government to allow time for it (SG) to review them and issue planning consents as appropriate. Initially this was until 31st March 2010. More recently this has been extended to 31st March 2013.

Appendix 2: Jetties and slipways

Location	OS Grid Ref	Type	Ownership / access	Condition	Main Usage
Loch Diabaig	NG 795600	Harbour & 2 slipways	Highland Council*	Good	Inshore fishing and some pleasure craft. 2 slipways behind harbour wall both in poor condition.
Inveralligin	NG 845575	Jetty and slip	Highland Council*	Fair	Jetty with low wall at end which is submerged at high water
Torridon House	NG 876570	Jetty	Private		Private slipway
Fasag	NG 894566	Slipway	Highland Council*	Fair/Poor	Stone jetty. Slipway at end in poor condition. Steep drop at low water.
Loch Torridon Hotel	NG 884544	Slipway	Private		Private slipway
Camas a' Chlàrsair	NG 837548	Slipway	Private	Good	Private slipway for aquaculture use
Shieldaig	NG 814536	Slipway	Highland Council*	Good	Southern main jetty in good condition but narrow. Used by creel fishing fleet and from time to time by recreational craft .
Near Eilean Mor	NG 754583	Jetty	Private	Very poor	Ruined jetty of no practical use

* Note; A charge is payable for the use of Highland Council slipways. Arrangements can be made at Highland Council Service Points or by e-mail to: harbours@highland.gov.uk

Appendix 3: List of Organisations Consulted During Plan Preparation*

Association of District Fishery Boards
Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers
Association of West Coast Fisheries Trusts/Association of Salmon Fisheries Boards
Atlantic Salmon Trust
British Marine Finfish Association
Crofters Commission
Federation of Highlands & Islands Fisherman
Food Standards Agency (Scotland)
FRS Marine Laboratory (now Marine Scotland)
FRS Freshwater Laboratory (now Marine Scotland)
Highland Shellfish Management Organisation
Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Historic Scotland
HM Naval Base Clyde
Loch Torridon Hotel Ltd
Mallaig & North West Fishermen's Association
Marine Harvest Ltd
National Trust for Scotland
Panfish Scotland Ltd (now the Scottish Salmon Company)
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (Scotland)
Royal Yachting Association (Scotland)
Scottish Association of Marine Science
Scottish Environment Link
Scottish Environmental Protection Agency
Scottish Natural Heritage
Scottish Quality Salmon (now the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation)
Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Scottish Water
Scottish Wildlife Trust
Sea Fish Industry Authority
Shieldaig Export Ltd
Soil Association
The Crown Estate
The Highland Council
The Scottish Executive
Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council
Visit Scotland - Highlands
West Highland Anchorages & Mooring Association
West Highland Fish Producers Association
Wester Ross Fisheries Trust

* Note these organisations were re-consulted as appropriate once the draft was produced.

Appendix 4: Relevant policies in the Highland Structure Plan

Relevant policies within the Highland Structure Plan, applicable to marine aquaculture, are set out below:

G1 - Conformity with strategy – the Council will support developments, having regard to the Plan’s sustainable objectives, which promote and enhance the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland.

G2 – Design for Sustainability - This policy details at some length criteria against which development proposals will be assessed. Developments which are judged to be significantly detrimental in terms of the listed criteria shall not accord with the Structure Plan.

G3 – Impact Assessments - Where environmental and/or socio-economic impacts of a proposed development are likely to be significant by virtue of its nature, size or location, the Council will require the preparation by developers of appropriate impact assessments. Developments which will have a significant adverse effect will only be approved if no reasonable alternatives exist, if there is demonstrable over-riding strategic benefit or if satisfactory overall mitigating measures are incorporated.

G6 - Conservation and Promotion of the Highland Heritage - The Council will seek to conserve and promote all sites and areas of Highland identified as being of high quality in terms of nature conservation, landscape, archaeology or built environment.

FA5 – Aquaculture Framework Plans – Existing Aquaculture Framework Plans will be updated...to take account of changes in patterns of sea bed leases, current trends in aquaculture and equipment and new information on environmental parameters, such as water quality and wildlife interest.

FA6 - Fish Farming Developments – The Council will make recommendations on Crown Estate consultations and on fish-farming-related planning applications within the context of the policies outlined in its Aquaculture Framework Plans and the guidance in sub-regional Coastal Zone Management strategies.

In determining applications on marine fish farming developments and in considering planning applications for onshore or freshwater-related fish farming development, the Council will support proposals which comply with Strategic Policy G2.

L4 - Landscape Character – the Council will have regard to the desirability of maintaining and enhancing present landscape character in the consideration of development proposals including offshore developments.

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Useful websites

Marine Scotland Development portal:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/18716/fish-farm>

Marine Scotland: aquaculture development areas:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FHI/managementagreement>

Scottish Natural Heritage: protected areas:

<http://snhwebsite:8090/protecting-scotlands-nature/protected-areas/national-designations/nsa/special-qualities/>

Scottish Natural Heritage: Marine priority features:

<http://snhwebsite:8090/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/priority-marine-features>

SEPA fish farming guidance:

http://www.sepa.org.uk/planning/fish_farming.aspx