

Chapter 6 : Coastal Development and Aquaculture

<p>Information required by the Act regarding the issue addressed in this section</p>	<p>Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended: Section 15(5)(a):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the principal physical, cultural, economic, social, built heritage and environmental characteristics of the district. <p>Town and Country Planning (Development Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2023: Regulation 9 requires the LDP to have regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the national marine plan any regional marine plan any river basin management plan; any flood risk management plan; and any local flood risk management plan
<p>NPF4 LDP Requirements</p>	<p>NPF4 Policy 10:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LDP spatial strategies should consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change. This should recognise that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events resulting from climate change will potentially have a significant impact on coastal and islands areas and take a precautionary approach to flood risk including by inundation. Spatial strategies should reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature-based solutions to improve the resilience of coastal communities and assets. LDP spatial strategies should identify areas of developed and undeveloped coast and should align with national, sectoral and regional marine plans. <p>NPF4 Policy 32 requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LDPs should guide new aquaculture development in line with National and Regional Marine Planning, and will minimise adverse environmental impacts, including cumulative impacts, that arise from other existing and planned aquaculture developments in the area while also reflecting industry needs.
<p>Links to Evidence</p>	<p>(THC002) Highland Wide Local Development Plan (THC003) Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 (THC004) Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (THC005) West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (THC052) Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy SMP-OWE (THC053) Highland Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (THC054) Salmon Scotland Highland Statistics</p>

(THC082) Ardersier Port Environmental Research
 (THC083) Finfish Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC084) Shellfish Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC085) Seaweed Consultation Engagement Overview
 (THC086) Ports and Harbours Consultation Engagement
 (THC087) NOMIS Business & Employment Register – Coastal Industry

Ref no.	Online Resources	Date Accessed
THC418	Highland Coastal Zone Mapping	30.07.25
THC419	Active Finfish Sites Map	29.04.25
THC420	Local Coastal Partnership Map	03.06.25
THC421	Planning & Locational Guidelines Aquaculture	01.07.25
THC422	Planning & Development Guidelines	01.07.25
THC423	SEPA Regulatory Framework & Sector Plan	01.07.25
THC424	Skills Review - Aquaculture	17.07.25
THC425	Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 24	17.07.25
THC426	Reducing carbon emissions in aquaculture	04.07.25
THC427	Vision for sustainable Aquaculture	04.07.25
THC428	Creating a sustainable Food Future	04.07.25
THC429	State of the Worlds Fisheries and Aquaculture	04.07.25
THC430	Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023	28.07.25
THC431	Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022	28.07.25
THC432	Visit Scotland International Tourism Update	14.05.26
THC434	Harbours and Ports Map	29.07.25
THC435	Highland Energy Planning Applications Map	30.07.25
THC436	SEPA's Flood Maps	04.06.25
THC437	Dynamic Coast Project	04.06.25
THC438	NatureScot - Coastal Character Assessment	04.06.25
THC439	Scotland's Aquaculture Map	04.06.25
THC440	Coastal Zone Mapping	30.07.25
THC441	THC Coastal Development Strategy	14.05.26
THC442	Biodiversity: draft planning guidance	14.05.26
THC443	Highland Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026	14.05.26
THC444	Highland Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance	14.05.26
THC445	THC Ecology Strategy and Action Plan	14.05.26
THC446	Scotland's People and Nature Survey	30.07.25
THC447	Visit Scotland - Highlands	30.07.25
THC448	Securing a Green Recovery to Net Zero	15.05.26
THC449	HES - Conserving Underwater Heritage	25.09.25

THC450	Diadromous Fish ScotMER Receptor Group	07.10.25
THC451	Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045	29.07.25
THC452	Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity	29.07.25
THC453	Draft Updated Sectorial Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy	30.07.25
THC454	Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance	14.07.25
THC455	Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018-32	25.04.25
THC456	Blue Economy Vision for Scotland	18.04.25
THC457	Siting & Design of Aquaculture in Landscape	14.05.26
THC458	Visualisations for aquaculture - guidance note	14.05.26
THC459	SEPA's Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan	14.05.26
THC460	Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture in Scotland	14.05.26
THC461	NatureScot Guidance on Landscape/Seascape Capacity for Aquaculture	21.03.25
THC462	NatureScot Siting and Design of Aquaculture in the Landscape	05.03.25
THC463	NatureScot Guidance Note for Visualisation for Aquaculture	05.03.25
THC464	Guidance Note - Coastal Character Assessment	14.07.25
THC465	The River Basin Management Plan for Scotland	04.03.25
THC466	Understanding the Potential Scale of Seaweed-based Industries in Scotland	07.07.25
THC467	SEPA Finfish Aquaculture Guidance	10.06.25
THC468	Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture	08.06.25
THC469	Scotland's National Marine Plan 2015	18.04.25
THC470	Seaweed Harvesting, Cultivation Assessment	08.06.25
THC471	Scot Gov Marine Tourism Assessment	10.07.25
THC472	International Tourist Update	10.07.25

In order to avoid repetition of content contained elsewhere within the Evidence Report, this chapter should be read in conjunction with other chapters. We recognise that there are relevant crossovers between Coastal Development and Aquaculture and other topics including:

- **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**
- **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**
- **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**
- **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism & Productive Places**
- **Chapter 9: Housing**
- **Chapter 10: Transport**

- **Chapter 12: Historic Assets, Brownfield Land & Empty Buildings**
- **Chapter 13: Design, Wellbeing, Local Living & Placemaking**

Where apparent, the Council has referenced relevant linkages between policies areas throughout the chapter.

Summary of Evidence

6.1 This chapter presents the evidence relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture in Highland. The Council considers it has undertaken thorough engagement with stakeholders for this chapter and collected sufficient evidence on the topic for the Proposed Plan development. This Summary of Evidence focuses on information relating to:

- **National Context**
- **Coastal Profile**
- **Climate Change and the Implications of Sea Level Rise**
- **Developed and Undeveloped Coast**
- **Local Harbours**
- **Coastal Biodiversity and Environmental Designations**
- **Coastal and Offshore Energy**
- **Coastal Access and Recreation**
- **Aquaculture**

National Context

6.2 Coastal development refers to the human activities and infrastructure development that take place in coastal areas. That can include coastlines, beaches, estuaries and adjacent land. Coastal development encompasses a wide range of activities and involves consideration for environmental impact, conservation of coastal ecosystems, and management of coastal resources to sustainably balance development with environmental protection.

6.3 In considering what approach the new plan will need to take, the latest national policy position needs to be considered. NPF4 sets out a long-term vision for Scotland's development. It emphasises the importance of sustainable growth for our coast and aquaculture industry to protect coastal communities and their assets and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. Coastal development aims to stimulate rural economic activity which in turn, will encourage development of affordable, quality rural homes whilst protecting and reversing biodiversity loss and strengthening nature networks.

Policies

- 6.4 Policy 10 is one of the key policies for this topic. It intends to protect coastal communities and assets and support resilience to the impacts of climate change. It requires the LDP to:
- To consider how to adapt coastlines to the impacts of climate change and coastal erosion.
 - To recognise that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events resulting from climate change could potentially have a significant impact on coastal and island areas.
 - Take a precautionary approach to flood risk including by inundation.
 - Reflect the diversity of coastal areas and opportunities to use nature-based solutions to improve resilience of coastal communities.
 - Identify areas of developed and undeveloped coast.
- 6.5 In terms of evidence, it requires LDPs to be informed by a Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) which identifies areas vulnerable to erosion, sea level rise, and coastal flooding, and outlines appropriate adaptation strategies. This work is guided by the [Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance](#), which outlines a consistent approach to assessing vulnerability and identifying adaptation options.
- 6.6 The HwLDP Policy 49 Coastal Development aims to ensure that the special qualities of the Highland's diverse and often fragile coastline are protected. Development proposals must also demonstrate that they are justified, sustainable, and well-integrated and that coastal assets are safeguarded, where possible, for their environmental and recreational values.
- 6.7 Policy 49 shares foundational principals with NPF4 but lacks critical provisions now required by national policy, particularly in relation to climate change, coastal retreat, nature-based solutions, and alignment with wider marine planning. The new plan will address these gaps to ensure it is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing coastal environment.
- 6.8 Policy 32 is the key policy relating to Aquaculture. It intends to, promote and facilitate aquaculture development and minimise any adverse effects on the environment, including cumulative impacts. Planning should support an aquaculture industry that is sustainable, diverse, competitive, economically viable and which contributes to food security, whilst operating with social licence., within environmental limits and which ensures there is a thriving marine ecosystem for future generations. It requires the LDP to;
- Guide new aquaculture development in line with National and Regional Marine plans
 - Minimise adverse environmental impacts, including cumulative impacts, that arise from other existing and planned aquaculture developments in the area

- Reflect the needs of the industry

- 6.9 In terms of evidence, it requires LDPs to be informed by the Scottish Government Marine Directorate's Planning and Locational Guidelines which aim to balance development needs with environmental protection and community interests. NatureScot's planning and development guidance on marine aquaculture and SEPA's regulatory framework and sector plan that provides advice to support authorities and developers to site aquaculture responsibly.
- 6.10 The HwLDP Policy 50 Aquaculture aims to support sustainable development of fin-fish and shellfish farming subject to no adverse effect, directly, indirectly or cumulatively on the natural and built cultural heritage and any existing activity.
- 6.11 Policy 50 shares foundational principals with NPF4 but is now considered outdated and falls short of the ambitions and requirements set out in Policy 32 of NPF4. It lacks the fundamental national priorities for decarbonisation, climate adaptation, and environmental recovery and does not include climate resilience or emissions reduction. The new plan will address these gaps to ensure it is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing and progressive Aquaculture industry.

National Marine Plan

- 6.12 Scotland's National Marine Plan 2015 (NMP) adopted by Scottish minister in 2015 under the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, sets out national framework for the sustainable use of marine and coastal resources. It applies to all decisions affecting Scotland's marine area out to 200 nautical miles and is a material consideration for Local Development Plans, particularly in coastal areas where land and sea interactions are most prominent.
- 6.13 The NMP contains a series of General policies and sector specific policies covering areas such as aquaculture, fisheries, energy, tourism, shipping, marine transport, recreation and marine cultural heritage. While the aquaculture and coastal development sections are of particular relevance to the evidence gathering for the HLDP, all aspects of the plan are important and should be reflected where appropriate. The NMP sets out clear expectations for sustainable development and protection of the marine environment, and emphasises the importance of coordinated decision making, protection of natural and cultural heritage, and meaningful stakeholder engagement while also promoting the growth of sustainable marine industries.
- 6.14 The development of National Marine Plan 2 (NMP2) is progressing steadily, with significant milestones achieved and key phases outlined for future completion. The final draft of NMP2 will update the NMP's current planning framework and is expected to be adopted in 2027.

Coastal Profile

- 6.15 The length of the coastline within the Highland Council region at low water is 4,905km which is 21% of the Scottish Total. Almost half of the Scottish population lives 8km from the coast. The Highland region sees 87.9% of the population living within 8km of the coast. This coastline has offered employment across the Highland region since settlement began.
- 6.16 The fishing economy began when the Vikings arrived in the 8th Century and is still a significant part of the Highland economy to this date. [Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2023](#) evidence that landings for Highlands region in 2023 amounted to 46,641 tonnes, valued £105.6 million and the industry directly employs 666 people on Scottish registered vessels. The tonnage landed by district in Highland was highest in Scrabster (16,276) and Ullapool (12,702), with Lochinver, Kinlochbervie, Portree and Mallaig also making considerable contributions.
- 6.17 In 1965, the first marine fish farm being was established in Loch Ailort in the West Highlands. There are over 200 active fin fish sites in Scotland, and [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that Atlantic salmon production value for the North Coast and West Highlands equated to £355 million in 2022, equating to 29% of Scotland's national production value. While Highland's economic landscape is more comprehensively detailed within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**, it is recognised that the blue economy plays a significant role within Highland, which has become increasingly diversified.
- 6.18 Shellfish aquaculture has evolved significantly in the region over recent years, with mussel and oyster farming now forming a notable part of the local marine economy. The [Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 2024](#) evidences that the Highland region in 2024 produced approximately 650 tonnes of common mussels destined for the table market in 2024, alongside 314,000 Pacific oyster shells, and 23,000 King Scallop Shells. A small quantity of native oysters was also produced. While 2024 saw the highest level of common mussels produced in Scotland reaching 11,690 tonnes an increase of 13%, the Highland region saw a decline in production from 707 tonnes to 650 tonnes. Employment in the sector remains modest in absolute terms, with about 239 full time, part-time, and casual staff across all shellfish farms in Scotland. At a national level, the shellfish sector was valued at approximately £14 million. While the Highland region has consistently hosted shellfish activity, production trends have fluctuated in response to environmental factors and the operational decisions of a relatively small number of producers. The sector remains niche but important component of the wider Highlands and Islands marine economy, contributing to rural livelihoods and supporting biodiversity through growing experience with sustainable shellfish cultivation.

- 6.19 The historical significance and diverse applications of seaweed make it an enduring part of Scotland's coastal economy. Recent resurgence has been driven by interest in sustainable, environmentally friendly products which include food, health supplements, biofuels and biodegradable packaging. Understanding the potential scale for seaweed-based industries in Scotland (**THC466**) estimated that the seaweed sector's turnover was in the region of £4 million a year, with the total volume of consented seaweed harvesting of 15,000 tonnes. However, challenges in the drying process of seaweed have proven to be restrict further growth and development of this industry.
- 6.20 The expansion of the renewable energy sector as detailed in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, has contributed to the marine sector through the expansion of the offshore wind industry. [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that the Scottish offshore wind sector, which is not included in the overall marine economy numbers, had an estimated turnover of £4.2 billion in 2022, which equates to a 3590% increase from 2014. The Marine Directorate has been investigating how to measure offshore wind farm economic activity, which remains in development.
- 6.21 The announcement of the Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (which includes the Port of Cromarty Firth (PoCF), Nigg, Inverness and Ardersier plus Highland Deephaven) brings significant economic and social benefits to local communities in the Highland region as further detailed in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism and Productive Places**. These ports are set to become hubs for renewable energy and green technology, fostering new industries around offshore wind, hydrogen production, and sustainable logistics. This will create thousands of high-quality jobs, boost local employment, particularly in engineering, manufacturing, and marine services. Attracting international investment, these ports will stimulate regional economic growth while adhering to strict environmental standards, ensuring sustainable development. Furthermore, they will support local supply chains, and improve infrastructure in the region, fostering long-term prosperity for Highland communities.
- 6.22 Highland's coast continues to provide food, employment and economic stability to wider Scotland. There will be an ongoing need to support these industries as a vital part of the economy whilst also challenging rural depopulation, the climate crises and restoring biodiversity so that future generations can continue to benefit from these resources. Data from the NOMIS Business and Employment Register (**THC087**) evidences the contribution that coastal-related employment makes to the Highland economy, with fishing and aquaculture notably highlighted. This role is particularly evident within some of Highland's more remote rural and fragile communities in Wester Ross, Lochalsh, Skye, Sutherland and Lochaber.

Table 6:1 Coastal Industry Employment (NOMIS Business and Employment Register THC087)

	Highland		Scotland	
	Jobs (#)	Industry (%)	Jobs (#)	Industry (%)
Building of ships and boats	50	0.0	7,000	0.3
Repair and maintenance of ships and boats	35	0.0	800	0.0
Sea and coastal passenger water transport	100	0.1	1,250	0.0
Sea and coastal freight water transport	50	0.0	450	0.0
Fishing and Aquaculture (Total)	1,750	1.4	11,000	0.4
Marine fishing	900	0.7	8,000	0.3
Freshwater fishing	40	0.0	250	0.0
Marine aquaculture	600	0.5	2,250	0.1
Freshwater aquaculture	175	0.1	900	0.0
Processing and preserving of fish, crustaceans and molluscs	600	0.5	7,000	0.3
Total	4300	3.3	38,900	1.4

6.23 [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) provide estimates of the marine sector contribution to the Scottish economy, estimating that approximately 71,000 people are directly employed in the marine sector in Scotland, which represents 2.7% of the total Scottish employment.

Climate Change and the Implications of Sea Level Rise

6.24 As outlined in **Chapter 4: Climate Change and Energy**, the world's climate is changing. Evidence has shown that since the 1800's, that human activity has influenced global warming, resulting in an enhanced warming of the atmosphere and oceans. This has led to a decrease in snow and ice and an increase in sea level globally. The Scottish Government's [Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Guidance](#) indicates that sea level rise due to climate change will result in an almost doubling of the number of properties considered to be at coastal erosion and flood risk in Scotland by 2080s.

6.25 Within the Highland Council area, the coastal zone is home to much of the population, and contains significant infrastructure such as roads, railway lines, bridges and harbours. The Council's Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan -

CCAP (**THC053**) provides an overview of the risks across the Highland Council area, identifying communities and assets that are most likely to be negatively impacted by climate change and provides a flexible framework to address long-term and short-term risks. The CCAP should underpin HLDP and steer future development away from risk, whilst safeguarding locations that could provide opportunities for such things as asset relocation or space for coastal retreat.

- 6.26 In line with the requirements of NPF4, HLDP must address the climate emergency and nature crisis and should consider how coastlines adapt to the impact of climate change. Recognising that rising sea levels and more extreme weather events will potentially have a significant impact on coastal and inland development but must also protect coastal communities and assets and support resilience to the impacts of the two main coastal threats of flood risk and coastal erosion. These two areas are now considered in more detail below and are highlighted within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).

Flood Risk

- 6.27 While a full assessment of flood risk is provided in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**, it is important to acknowledge the relevance of coastal flood risk within the context of coastal development planning. Coastal Flooding occurs as a result of high tide, storm surge and wave activity raising the level of the sea above adjoining land. While it is not the primary source of flooding in many Highland locations, it can have the most severe impact on damage to life and property when it occurs.
- 6.28 SEPA's flood risk maps are key in identifying area at risk of flooding from rivers, the sea, and surface water and provide national scale data indicating the likelihood and extent of flood events under various scenarios. SEPA's flood risk maps identify areas vulnerable to coastal flooding, which in Highland's case, risk is identified on almost all of the coastline of the Highland region.
- 6.29 In planning for sustainable coastal development, it is essential to consider potential impacts of sea level rise and increased storm intensity associated with climate change. Coastal flood risk can affect both existing assets and future land use options. Alignment with national flood risk frameworks the [The River Basin Management Plan for Scotland](#) and engagement with SEPA and other relevant bodies will be vital to assess the sustainability of coastal sites for development.
- 6.30 HLDP will take a precautionary approach by avoiding new development in areas of known coastal flood risk and supporting adaptation measures where appropriate. This includes considering opportunities for natural coastal defences, such as salt marsh restoration or dune reinforcement, and integrating blue-green infrastructure where feasible and adaptation in flood risk areas to promote

changes in use of existing land and buildings from higher to lower vulnerability uses, including water compatible uses. The precautionary approach will also identify areas for safeguarding where fallback maybe required for future coastal flood risk. Further detail on flood risk assessment, mapping and mitigation can be found in **Chapter 7: Flood Risk Management**.

Coastal Erosion

- 6.31 The Dynamic Coast project has carried out detailed analysis over the last few years that provides current evidence of how each distinctive part of our coastline is being affected by coastal change. It identifies that Highland has the highest number of buildings at risk of erosion by 2050 (109 buildings) and includes significant lengths of transport infrastructure, such as 4km of rail lines across 27 locations, likely to be affected by coastal erosion by 2050. This strategic evidence base provides an overview of the extent of coastal erosion and the increased risks of coastal flood risk.
- 6.32 The Council's Regional CCAP (**THC053**) identifies coastal erosion and flood risk around the Highland Council area, with twenty nine of the highest risk locations being considered for potential further investigation and possible development of Local Coastal Change Adaptation Plan.

Developed and Undeveloped Coast

- 6.33 HLDP is required to identify and distinguish between areas of developed and undeveloped coast, so that development in future can be directed away from undeveloped coast unless specific circumstances apply. In 2010, the Council prepared a [Coastal Development Strategy](#), which set out a vision for the sustainable development of the coastline. This strategy was intended to inform both marine and terrestrial planning policy in support of the HwLDP (**THC002**) adopted in 2012. The strategy defines the coastal zone and categorises Highland's coastline into three types; developed coast, undeveloped coast, and isolated coast. These do not align with the binary typology adopted within NPF4.
- 6.34 To ensure this baseline is updated and remains relevant to current policy and environmental challenges, the Council have undertaken new analysis to define the coastal zone, identifying the developed and undeveloped coast which is shown within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#). Whilst it is acknowledged that The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 establishes the framework for marine planning, marine licensing and management of development and activities within Scotland's inshore marine region, extending from mean high water springs out to 12 nautical miles offshore. For the purposes of this work the coastal zone has been defined as extending to 1 kilometre inland and 3 nautical miles seaward,

aligning with the terrestrial-marine interface relevant to planning. Within this area, the Council have identified areas of developed and undeveloped coast using updated land use and infrastructure data, and have additionally incorporated Dynamic Coast data, including projected coastal erosion layers to 2100, to provide a future focused understanding of coastal change and to inform decision making on development suitability and adaptation needs.

Local Harbours

- 6.35 The Highland Council area is served by an extensive and varied network of marine infrastructure that plays a central role in supporting the regions maritime economy. This includes commercial harbours, ferry terminals, leisure marinas, and small piers and jetties. These facilities are essential for a wide range of activities including fishing, aquaculture, marine transport, freight, tourism, and recreation.
- 6.36 Across the region, there are an estimated 135 harbour related sites. Highland Council itself is responsible for 11 principal harbours, including key working ports such as Lochinver, Kinlochbervie, Portree, and Kyle of Lochalsh. In addition to these, several major ports and ferry terminals are in operation. Inverness and PoCF support the movement of goods, products and people in and out of the region. PoCF is in the top eleven ports in Scotland serving these functions and enabling significant cruise ship passenger numbers to visit the Highlands. [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that all freight water transport traffic through Highland's ports amounted to 6,463 tonnes, which is the third highest local authority value in Scotland. The region is also home to a substantial number of natural harbours, anchorages, and marinas, with over 120 in total, many of which service the leisure boating sector or private small-scale access for local communities and visiting vessels.
- 6.37 Several ports within Highland continue to support significant volumes of landings, particularly for demersal species and shellfish. [Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics](#) evidence that Scrabster is the largest landing port in the region, handling a mix of whitefish, shellfish, and pelagic species, and serving as a base for oil and gas vessels as well as cruise tourism. Kinlochbervie remains an important demersal port, receiving regular landings of whitefish. Lochinver is similarly significant, with a modern harbour complex that attracts vessels from across Scotland and Europe, especially demersal species. Ullapool supports both commercial shellfish fisheries and the busy CalMac ferry service to Stornoway. Portree is a multifunctional harbour supporting fishing, aquaculture, passenger transport, and leisure craft. Mallaig also plays a central role as a fishing and transport hub, with extensive landings of shellfish, aquaculture service traffic, and multiple ferry connections to the Small Isles and Skye. A statistical summary of recent landings at these six key ports is provided in the below table.

Table 6:2 Highland Ports by landing tonnage and value

Port/Harbour	Highland	
	Tonnage	Value(£000's)
Scrabster	16,276	33,289
Kinlochbervie	6,156	13,716
Lochinver	8,381	16,155
Ullapool	12,702	25,474
Portree	1,308	9,415
Mallaig	1,818	7,500
Total	46,641	105,549

6.38 Some of these facilities are operated as trust ports, which are a longstanding feature of Scotland's coastal economy. Trust ports are locally rooted organisations that manages key harbour facilities and play a vital role in sustaining coastal communities. They are central to the delivery of inclusive economic growth and lifeline services in our region. They are central to the delivery of inclusive economic growth and lifeline services in our region, with surpluses reinvested directly into local priorities. This reinvestment supports essential infrastructure upgrades, creates and sustains employment, and provides wider community benefits, ensuring that the value generated remains within the area. As such, trust ports are not only important transport and logistics hubs, but also key anchors for resilient, sustainable coastal development.

Coastal Biodiversity and Environmental Designations

6.39 While biodiversity and natural places are fully detailed within **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, it is important to note that the Highland coastline supports much of our rich and varied biodiversity, shaped by its extensive length, diverse habitats, and relatively low levels of development pressure compared to other parts of Scotland. Stretching from sheltered firths to exposed western headlands, the coast includes a range of important habitats such as saltmarshes, sand dunes, machair, cliffs, international mudflats, kelp forests and seagrass beds. Natural designations in coastal locations specifically, are also indicated within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).

6.40 Protecting and enhancing coastal biodiversity is a key consideration in planning, particularly in the context of climate change, which threatens to alter habitat disruption, increase erosion, and affect species behaviour. The [Scottish Government's draft Biodiversity Planning Guidance](#), which sets out expectations for delivering the policies within National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) that

support the cross-cutting outcome of “Improving Biodiversity”. This guidance works alongside the Council’s [Highland Nature: Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2026](#) and supports the implementation of NPF4 policies 3 and 4, which require all developments to restore and enhance biodiversity, and, where relevant, to restore degraded habitats and strengthen nature networks.

- 6.41 The guidance provides tailored advice for different types of developments – ranging from local to national, major, and EIA developments – and outlines the application of the mitigation hierarchy, which developers are expected to follow to minimise biodiversity loss and achieve measurable net gains. It emphasises the importance of identifying enhancement opportunities at every stage of the development process. In addition, the Highland Council published its own [Highland Biodiversity Enhancement Planning Guidance](#) in 2024, offering further detail on how to integrate biodiversity improvements into local planning proposals.
- 6.42 It should be noted that aquaculture developments are an exception to the requirement for biodiversity enhancement, whereby under Policy 32 (e) of NPF4, applications for open water farmed finfish or shellfish developments are excluded from the requirements of Policy 3 (b) and 3 (c) and will instead apply all relevant provisions from National and Regional Marine Plans. The forthcoming NMP2 is expected to clarify biodiversity enhancement requirements and help shape future policy on the sector’s environmental responsibilities.
- 6.43 The Highland Council [Ecology Strategy and Action Plan](#) seeks to address the ecological emergency and contribute to Scotland’s goal of being nature positive by 2030 and restoring biodiversity by 2045. The strategy focuses on managing the Council’s estate, influencing others through policy and guidance, and partnering with communities and stakeholders. The Action plan, adopted in November 2024, outlines specific actions to achieve these goals, emphasizing leadership, creating space for nature, and reducing pollution and details how updated planning policy/actions can help deliver outcomes for improving ecology across the Highlands.

Coastal and Offshore Energy

- 6.44 NPF4’s Spatial Planning Priorities for the North – which includes the Highlands - outline that land and sea assets will play an internationally significant role in renewable energy generation and carbon sequestration. The Highland Council Area lies adjacent to several key areas identified for offshore renewable energy development. The Moray Firth wind development zones which have seen extensive leasing activity through ScotWind and future cable landfall and grid infrastructure have implications for the Highland region. The Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters Marine Energy Park are home to the MeyGen tidal energy project,

the largest operational tidal stream array, with ongoing expansion potential. These marine energy zones are driving demand for new or expanded coastal infrastructure, including ports, energy transmission corridors, and services bases. Where coastal terrestrial infrastructure is required to support these important developments consideration on location and risk of from climate change and coastal erosion will be considered with a presumption against engineered coastal defences.

6.45 While **Chapter 4: Climate and Energy** details the scale of Highland's energy and renewables sector, it is important to note the interface between this and the coastline, given the significant presence of offshore wind, which is evidenced within the Draft Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind Energy SMP-OWE (**THC052**) to continue within the West, North and North East regions, which together encompass Highland's vast coastal area, including the entire north coast of mainland Scotland, Lochaber, the Isle of Skye, and the Moray Firth Area. **THC052** highlights that these regions are home to diverse fishing and aquaculture industries, a high level of shipping (with vessels often supporting the offshore wind industry), lifeline ferry services, designated sites, high-tourism areas, and recreational boating. Expansion of the offshore wind sector is therefore subject to the environmental and socio-economic risks for coastal communities and wildlife such as:

- Displacement of marine mammals
- Displacement of benthic species
- Collision or displacement of birds
- Loss and/or damage of reef habitats
- Loss and/or damage of subtidal sands and gravels
- Negative economic impacts to shipping from increased fuel costs due to diversion around Option Areas;
- Loss of sea area for recreational angling and water sports
- Reduction in recreational boating activity or increased fuel costs due to diversion around arrays
- Potential Reduction in tourism expenditure
- Potential impacts on wild salmonoids as identified by Scottish Marine Energy Research (ScotMER).

6.46 Development proposals for onshore wind have in some instances occurred in coastal locations, as evidenced by the [Highland Energy Planning Applications Map](#), albeit the extent of designated NSAs spanning significant coastal areas on the North and West coasts, precludes wind farm developments in these locations. Notwithstanding, offshore wind developments still require significant terrestrial supporting and ancillary infrastructure which often is necessitated within the coastal zone, such as high-capacity pylon routes, subsea cables, offshore and

onshore converter stations, grid connection points, and onshore substations, to transport power using a multi-step process from the coast to existing transmission corridors.

- 6.47 The Inverness and Cromarty Firth Green Freeport (ICFGF) include the Port of Cromarty Firth, Nigg, Inverness and Ardersier and additionally Highland Deephaven, brings significant economic and social benefits to local communities in the Highlands as identified in **Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism and Productive Places**. These ports are set to become hubs for renewable energy and green technology, fostering new industries around offshore wind, hydrogen production, and sustainable logistics. These are pipelined to create thousands of high-quality jobs and training opportunities, particularly in engineering, manufacturing, and marine services. By attracting international investment, these freeports will stimulate regional economic growth while adhering to strict environmental standards, ensuring sustainable development.
- 6.48 The firth is also home to a number of internationally designated environmental sites, SPA's, SAC's SSSIs, and Ramsar sites. As highlighted in **Chapter 5: Nature and Environment**, how these operations can co-exist with highly sensitive and designated sites any development within or adjacent to, must be planned with the utmost environmental sensitivity. The mitigation hierarchy - avoidance, minimisation, mitigation and compensation – must be embedded from the earliest of stages of project design to ensure adverse effects are minimised to an acceptable level.
- 6.49 Examples are emerging from Green Freeport related operational and management practices to better understand and manage potential impacts have been shared by Ardersier port. The port operator has implemented mandatory annual surveys covering a range of ecological features, including birds, habitats, and invasive species, as well as weekly external Environmental Clerk of Works (ECoW) audits during construction. Engagement has taken place with statutory consultees such as NatureScot, but also with non-statutory bodies such as the Whale and Dolphin conservation and Butterfly conservation. A six-month practical trial was carried out to identify the most environmentally sensitive method for treating and eradicating *Crassula helmsii*, a problematic invasive species on the site. In addition, weekly seal counts have been initiated at the whiteness sands haul out area to build a clearer understanding of local seal populations; data from these surveys is being shared with Sea Mammal Research Unit and the University of Aberdeen Lighthouse Field Station. Further efforts include additional rounds of monthly wading bird survey – carried out beyond what was required under condition – to improve the understanding of avian use of the area. A significant body of work (**THC082**) has also been dedicated to understanding the effects of capital dredging. This includes the installation of two Guidance Acoustic Buoys (GAB) guardians to monitor real time dolphin

movements around the dredge and disposal sites, and collaboration with the University of Aberdeen to deploy passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) devices around the port and on barge transit routes. These PAM devices will remain in place for a year, with the resulting data being analysed and published to enhance knowledge of marine mammal movement and behaviour in relation to marine traffic.

- 6.50 Kishorn Port and Dry Dock located on Loch Kishorn in Wester Ross, is a strategically important coastal industrial site supporting Scotland's offshore energy transition as well as a wide range of marine sectors including aquaculture, oil and gas and shipping maintenance and decommissioning. Originally developed for oil platform fabrication, it has been redeveloped by Kishorn Port Ltd as a modern deep-water port and one of Europe's largest dry dock facilities. The site provides extensive laydown and fabrication, decommissioning of oil and gas infrastructure, and assembly of floating offshore wind foundations. [Scottish Government reported](#) that the facility has been backed by up to £24.3 million of public investment from Highland and Islands Enterprise towards a £42 million expansion, the facility is projected to create substantial regional economic benefits and support up to 1,500 jobs. Kishorn contributes to economic diversification in Wester Ross providing year-round employment, supply chain activity, while co-existing with local tourism, aquaculture, and fishing through established environmental and planning controls.

Coastal Access and Recreation

- 6.51 [Scotland's Marine Economic Statistics 2022](#) evidence that marine and coastal tourism contributed £633 million approximate Gross Value Added to the Scottish economy. The regions coastal environment represents a powerful driver of local recreation and tourism attracting millions of visitors each year. Visit Scotland provide insights on national level tourism statistics in relation to coastal tourism, while Highland specific evidence from [Visit Scotland's International Tourism Update:2024](#). [Visit Scotland Research Insights for the Highlands](#) indicates that in 2023 the Highlands welcomed 1.79 million overnight visitors, who spent £756 million during their stay. With 1,550 tourism related businesses operating locally and tourism supporting approximately 19,000 jobs, making up 16.2% of total employment in the region, coastal tourism plays a significant role in rural economic activity.
- 6.52 Coastal walking and marine based recreation, including water sports, open water swimming, wildlife watching, sailing, diving, and sea angling remain deeply embedded in both visitor experience and community life across the Highlands. While Highland specific data is limited, national trends indicate that around 20% of all outdoor visits in Scotland take place in coastal locations, a pattern that is

reflected locally through sustained demand for access paths, viewpoints and related visitor infrastructure.

- 6.53 Popular long distance routes such as the Great Glen Way, the West Highland Way (partly in Highland), the Cape Wrath Trail, the John o' Groats Trail, the Affric Kintail Way, the East Highland Way, the Spey Side Way (partly in Highland), and the South Loch Ness Trail draw significant number of visitors and pass through a variety of coastal and inland landscapes. These trails along with informal and community managed access routes, support growing demand for coastal access while contributing to visitor wellbeing and promoting awareness of the marine environment.
- 6.54 Taken together, coastal access and marine related recreation make a significant contribution to both the economy and the social resilience of Highland communities. This highlights the need to maintain and improve accessible, well managed coastal paths and supporting infrastructure. It also points to the importance of coherent policy integration across tourism, marine planning, and environmental protection. Developing planning and land use policy that accommodates recreational access while safeguarding coastal ecosystems and local wellbeing will be vital to achieving sustainable growth in the Highland regions coastal tourism sector. The role and value of tourism is examined in greater detail in **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism, and Productive Places**, which presents key evidence on tourism's economic impact and highlights the importance of nationally significant visitor destinations throughout the region.

Aquaculture

- 6.55 Aquaculture refers to the breeding, rearing or keeping of fish or shellfish including any kind of crustacean or mollusc. It includes the breeding, rearing, and harvesting of species in marine and freshwater environments for commercial, scientific, or conservation purposes. In Scotland, aquaculture is predominantly focused on the production of Atlantic salmon in marine pens, but also includes shellfish farming, and emerging sectors such as seaweed cultivation. It is a key component of the national blue economy, supporting rural communities, food production, and export markets, while also requiring careful spatial planning to manage environmental impacts and ensure sustainability as evidenced in the [Blue Economy Vision for Scotland](#).

Industry Profile

- 6.56 The Highland region hosts a significant share of Scotland's aquaculture industry, particularly in the production of Atlantic salmon, which is Scotland's and the UK's largest food export reaching £844 million in 2024. The Highlands support a network of finfish farms, shellfish farms, hatcheries, shore bases, and processing

facilities across the region including locations in Lochaber, Skye, Wester Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness where many of Highlands vulnerable rural communities are located.

- 6.57 The importance of the aquaculture industry as a major private sector employer in these remote and island communities is demonstrated by the employment opportunities for a vast range of professions, from on-site farm/hatchery/processing operatives to vessel crews, research and development, biologists, veterinarians, environmental specialists, communications and human resources, finance and administration, engineering, logistics, marketing and sales. As well as this direct employment, the aquaculture industry also supports a further 10,000 jobs in the wider Scottish supply chain.
- 6.58 Supporting the local economy and small business across the Highland's should also be recognised with an estimated £49 million spent annually (**THC054**) on goods and services from local suppliers. The spend includes a wide range of sectors such as equipment manufacturers, haulage, fuel supply, vehicle and boat services, as well as analytical and veterinary support. Companies are strongly committed to sourcing locally wherever possible, recognising the importance of reinvesting in the communities where they operate. This spending sustains local jobs, supports small and specialist businesses, and brings economic stability to remote, rural, and often vulnerable areas, helping to maintain population levels and community resilience. By embedding themselves within the regional supply chain they contribute to not just to local economies, but to the wider social and economic wellbeing of the Highlands.
- 6.59 The aquaculture industry also plays an important role in supporting socioeconomic wellbeing of many rural and coastal communities across the Highland region. Fuller evidence on Community Wealth Building is detailed within **Chapter 8: Economy, Business, Tourism & Productive Places**, but it is evidence that the aquaculture sector play a vital role in this regard. Many operators regularly financially contribute to local communities through sponsorship and donations. This includes funding for community groups, support for local events, and sponsorship of both adult and youth sports team, helping promote health, wellbeing, and social cohesion in areas where opportunities for organised recreation can be limited. Some companies have also contributed to local mental health initiatives and charities, recognising the particular challenges faced by isolated and rural populations.
- 6.60 In addition to financial support, aquaculture businesses have provided a further community benefit through practical contributions and voluntary efforts. Examples include sponsoring and participating in beech cleans, improving access to defibrillators in remote locations, and supporting the upgrading of local infrastructure such as piers, slipways, and harbours used by the wider community.

In some areas, companies have also contributed toward the enhancing of digital connectivity by supporting broadband access in rural settlements. Many companies actively encourage their employees to volunteer for community benefit projects, including retained firefighters, coastguard personnel, or RNLI crew members – roles that are essential to the safety and resilience of remote coastal communities. These contributions, while not formally recognised within the planning process, form a valuable part of the industry’s overall impact and help to sustain the long-term viability and liveability of remote coastal areas.

- 6.61 Shellfish aquaculture is long established and environmentally sustainable component of the Highland coastal economy. The region supports a significant share of Scotland’s small to medium scale shellfish farming thanks to the regions long, indented coastline, clean waters, and sheltered sea lochs that provide suitable conditions for shellfish farming, particularly along the west coast, Lochaber, Wester Ross, Skye and Sutherland. Mussels and Pacific Oysters remain the dominant species grown with some cultivation of queen scallops and razor clams.
- 6.62 While finfish aquaculture in the Highlands tends to operate at a larger, commercial scale, shellfish farming is predominantly undertaken by smaller, often family run enterprises. These businesses make a meaningful contribution to local employment, rural diversification, and the provision of high quality, locally sourced seafood, aligning closely with national objectives for future nature-positive and community supported blue economy.
- 6.63 There are approximately 76 licensed marine and freshwater finfish sites and 52 active shellfish farming businesses within the Highland region (**THC439**). Future demand for food, particularly sustainable sources of protein, is set to rise sharply as the global population approaches 10 billion by 2050. The Highland region is well placed to contribute to meeting this demand through environmentally responsible aquaculture. Shellfish and finfish farming in the Highlands offer a lower environmental footprint than many land based protein systems, using less land, freshwater, and producing significantly less greenhouse gas emissions. Shellfish farming, in particular, requires no feed or fertiliser inputs and can enhance water quality and biodiversity. As global markets increasingly favour climate-smart, traceable seafood, Highland aquaculture – especially when aligned with innovation and sustainability standards – has a clear role to play in the future food system and the future of the Highlands.

Environment

- 6.64 The aquaculture industry operates within one of the most environmentally sensitive and heavily designated coastal landscapes in the UK. Much of the regions west coast, where aquaculture is concentrated, overlaps with multiple statutory conservation designations detailed in **Chapter 5: Nature and**

Environment, including SACs, SPAs, SSSIs, MPAs, and NSAs. These designations, while essential for protecting biodiversity and landscape character; as explained in [NatureScot Guidance on Landscape/Seascape Capacity for Aquaculture](#), create a complex and highly constrained planning environment, requiring detailed assessments of ecological and visual impacts, including cumulative impacts on qualifying features of these designations. All aquaculture proposals in or near designated sites must demonstrate that they will not adversely affect the integrity of protected features; as explained in NatureScot's [Siting and Design of Aquaculture in the Landscape](#) and [Visualisations for aquaculture - guidance note](#). While aquaculture operations can and do operate alongside highly sensitive environmental designations, this inevitably introduces additional complexity, which in turn may lead operators to focus on optimising or expanding their current sites as a means of supporting facility growth and business development.

- 6.65 Finfish Farms are required to undertake routine environmental monitoring as a condition of their regulatory approvals, with a strong emphasis on benthic impact assessments, sea lice monitoring, and evaluations of interactions with wild fish populations and wider ecosystem receptors. Seabed monitoring, governed by SEPA's Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) permits, and from November 2025 the Environmental Authorisation (Scotland) Regulations 2018 as amended (EAsR), involves sediment grab sampling and analysis of benthic faunal composition, to assess the effects of organic waste deposition on the seabed. Where grab sampling is problematic, due to the presence of hard substrate areas or protected marine features (PMF's), visual surveys can be used to inform the operator and SEPA. Sediment sampling and analysis of residues is also required by SEPA authorisations which include the use of in-feed medicines. In addition, the industry is obliged to monitor sea lice levels on farmed fish and report these to the Marine Directorate on a weekly basis, with thresholds triggering mandatory mitigation actions or harvesting. Increasingly, environmental data gathering extends to wild fish monitoring and parasite dispersal to understand interactions between farms and migratory species.
- 6.66 The finfish and shellfish industries are among the most tightly regulated food sectors in Scotland. From early stage of production, shellfish operators must comply with rigorous public health and environmental standards. Before shellfish sites can become operational, they must be classified by Food Standards Scotland, which involves extensive monitoring of water quality to ensure it meets microbiological standards. Only sites classified as A or B are permitted for harvesting, with Class A sites allowing direct sale and Class B sites requiring purification before market. Once in production, operators must comply with a programme of official control monitoring, including routine sampling for biotoxins, E. coli, and harmful phytoplankton. The shellfish industry is also subject to wider regulatory controls: The Marine Directorate issues licences for farm

developments, SEPA regulates activities under Controlled Activities Regulations, and where relevant Local Authorities may have roles in planning and environmental health. From spat collection to market ready product, the industry must also comply with traceability and hygiene rules under food safety legislation. Collectively these frameworks ensure that shellfish products are safe for consumers and that the industry remains environmentally sustainable despite growing external pressures.

- 6.67 The industry also plays a direct and proactive role in marine environmental research and collaborative monitoring, often working with regulatory bodies, local authorities, academic institutes and NGO's. For finfish, examples include participation adaptive management frameworks for MPA's, regional sea lice risk of long-term environmental evidence, seabed image and mapping, regional sea lice risk modelling, and multi stakeholder data sharing. For shellfish, this includes oyster restoration projects, research into biotoxin testing and mussel spat settlement. These initiatives contribute to a growing body of environmental evidence, which is increasingly being used to improve regulatory practices and better understand long-term impacts.
- 6.68 Given this evolving and evidence rich context, it is important to recognise that Policy 50 (Aquaculture) of the HwLDP, adopted in 2012, is now 13 years of age. It was developed prior to significant advancement in aquaculture science, regulatory reform, and industry led monitoring, and lacks alignment with more ambitious and sustainability-focused requirements of NPF4 Policy 32. As such, the new LDP presents an important opportunity to acknowledge and integrate the environmental evidence base generated by sector in recent years. This includes both regulatory compliance data and collaborative monitoring, which can support more informed and spatially nuanced policy, improve community understanding, and ensure that planning decisions reflect the current state of knowledge and practice within the Aquaculture industry.

Biodiversity

- 6.69 While shellfish farming is widely recognised as environmentally beneficial, improving water quality, enhancing biodiversity, while supporting healthy ecosystem functioning without the need for feed additives, or chemical inputs. The finfish aquaculture sector has also expressed a strong and growing desire to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity enhancement (**THC083**) and have contacted both Local Authorities, NatureScot and engaged with local communities for guidance and suggestions on biodiversity net gain projects that would most benefit the local area where the farms are located. Industry stakeholders have acknowledged the importance of nature restoration and climate resilience and are increasingly seeking guidance on how to align

- operations with biodiversity goals – not only to meet regulatory expectations but to actively support ecosystems health and encourage public trust.
- 6.70 Although as previously mentioned, NPF4 Policy 32 (e) exempts open-water aquaculture developments from the requirements of Policy 3(b) and 3(c) which apply to biodiversity enhancement and the restoration of degraded habitats in terrestrial and coastal planning context. Instead, aquaculture is expected to align with relevant policy provisions in the upcoming NMP2, which is anticipated to set out clearer expectations for biodiversity, ecosystem health, and climate resilience in the marine environment.
- 6.71 Despite this exemption, many finfish aquaculture operators across the Highlands are already engaging in voluntary biodiversity, often going beyond statutory requirements. Some projects include the creation of native woodland in collaboration with Scottish Forestry and the Scottish Government where 112,000 native broadleaved trees have been planted across 102 hectares near Loch Ainort in Skye. The wild fisheries fund is a 5-year initiative through which the aquaculture industry body invests £1.5 million to support Scotland's wild fisheries. The fund has provided significant backing to major programmes such as the West Coast Tracking Project, alongside a diverse range of local projects focused on habitat restoration, addressing interactions between wild and farmed fish, and delivering targeted infrastructure improvements. Some producers have committed to conduct salmonoid riparian habitat improvement projects whereby improvements are focussed upon increasing the carrying capacity of nearby rivers as breeding habitat for salmonoids. There is a growing desire from the sector for guidance on what meaningful contributions to biodiversity look like in practice, and how best to align their operations with the wider agenda for nature restoration and climate adaptation.
- 6.72 To support this positive direction, HLDP should set out a clear, locally tailored policy framework for biodiversity in aquaculture. While national marine policy will provide overarching guidance, local policy can guide enhancements to areas where they are most needed, offer practical expectations and facilitate collaborative working with regulators, communities and environmental bodies. By recognising and encouraging industry leadership in biodiversity can ensure these efforts are supported and aligned with broader planning objectives.
- 6.73 A well-structured local policy will give confidence to developers and transparency to communities, enabling aquaculture to continue its role in the regional economy while contributing meaningfully to Scotland's biodiversity and climate goals.

Innovation

- 6.74 The Aquaculture sector in the Highlands is increasingly focused on innovation, particularly in relation to environmental monitoring and operational sustainability. Industry representatives have indicated that future technological development is likely to prioritise systems that improve understanding and management of environmental risks.
- 6.75 In recent years, production has been affected by events such as harmful algae blooms and micro-jellyfish swarms, both of which can have serious impacts on fish health and survival. As a result, there will be an operational requirement for exploring the use of early warning systems and continuous water quality monitoring technologies to detect the presence of harmful species and changes in environmental conditions.
- 6.76 There is also consideration surrounding the use of semi-closed containment pen systems as part of combating these environmental challenges. These advancing technologies offer a range of potential benefits, including reducing interactions between farmed and wild fish, improving control over water quality, and minimising the discharge of organic waste and sea lice into the wider marine environment. By providing a greater degree of separation from the surrounding ecosystem, semi closed systems can enhance environmental performance while also supporting fish health and operational efficiency. Although still an emerging approach, their wider use could play an important role in enabling sustainable expansion of the industry, helping balance economic development with the protection of sensitive marine environments.
- 6.77 There is also a growing interest in the application of AI powered systems that monitor fish behaviour and environmental parameters to support fish health management. In parallel, companies are trialling renewable energy technologies, including tidal and off grid power solutions, to reduce reliance on diesel generators and improve the sustainability of remote operations.
- 6.78 While these developments are largely being led by industry, there is a clear role for policy in supporting innovation. This includes ensuring that planning policy is flexible enough to accommodate the temporary or pilot infrastructure often required for research and development purposes. Planning policy can also support the integration of new technology by facilitating cooperation with other regulators and by recognising the need for space and conditions that allow for environmental monitoring, trialling of new systems, and infrastructure upgrades.
- 6.79 A supportive policy environment can help reduce barriers to testing and adopting new technologies, while also guiding innovation toward areas of strategic importance such as climate resilience, biodiversity improvement, and fish health.

Future Growth

- 6.80 [SEPA's Finfish Aquaculture Sector Plan](#) and the [Scottish Government's Vision for Sustainable Aquaculture in Scotland](#) set out a vision for sustainable aquaculture nationally. Consultation with industry representatives has indicated a range of anticipated future development needs to support sustainable growth of aquaculture in the Highland region. Finfish Aquaculture will see a number of new farm sites being proposed, the primary focus is expected to be on the expansion of existing farms, and consolidation of operations – typically resulting in fewer but larger and more efficient pen systems.
- 6.81 Some operators have also identified the potential for relocating farms to more exposed, higher energy, open water sites which may offer environmental benefits such as improved water exchange and resilience to rising temperatures. In addition, the sector is attracting newer business operators, that are trialing semi-closed containment systems within the Highland region. These shifts are being considered in response to environmental pressures and the need for greater operational efficiency.
- 6.82 In parallel, there is a requirement in some areas for the expansion of onshore support infrastructure including processing facilities in order to meet projected demand and maintain supply chain efficiency. The siting and upgrading of these facilities may require policy recognition of their operational links to coastal farm sites and their wider role in supporting rural economies and ensuring future food security.
- 6.83 Shellfish Aquaculture anticipates a shift in farm locations and operational practices driven by the impact of climate change. With sea level rise and rising water temperature, increased storm frequency, and changing coastal dynamics, there is a growing expectation that sites will move into more sheltered, inshore areas or that existing farms will require reorientation to maintain viability. To support this evolving operational model, the industry has identified a need for improved cold chain infrastructure. This includes ensuring that harbours, some of which are used by shellfish operators, are equipped with ice production and storage facilities as well as suitable landing and handling infrastructure. Additionally, future infrastructure will require support from well-located shore bases that accommodate grading, packaging and dispatch activities. These facilities must also be supported by reliable and appropriate access routes to facilitate efficient transport and logistics. Such infrastructure will be essential to ensure the long-term resilience and growth of the sector while ensuring this form of development has an adaptive approach to ensure that adequate land is available to enable fallback should this be required.
- 6.84 The aquaculture industry has expressed a clear ambition for sustainable future growth. Planning policy has a role in managing this growth responsibly by

supporting well designed development that aligns with national climate and nature recovery goals. This requires meaningful engagement with industry, regulators, communities, and environmental stakeholders to ensure that planning frameworks not only protect the environment but also enable a vital rural industry to thrive alongside the communities it supports.

Summary of Stakeholder Engagement

6.85 A full breakdown of all stakeholder engagement undertaken to support the Evidence Report is provided within the **Statement of Engagement**. A summary of the key stakeholder engagement activities undertaken for this chapter include:

Stakeholders and Key Agencies

6.86 All meetings and engagement exercises with stakeholders and key agencies are detailed within the Log of Engagement (**THC001**). Prior to the drafting of the HLDP Evidence Report an early engagement exercise HLDP Evidence Consultation was undertaken from 31st Jan – 2nd May 2025. Responses to the HLDP Evidence Consultation (including from key agencies) are included in **THC006**. Drafts of the evidence presented in this chapter were then circulated to key agencies and other stakeholders on 31 August 2025, which included:

- NatureScot
- SEPA
- Marine Directorate
- Fishery Management Scotland
- Harbour representatives
- Moray Firth Coastal Partnership
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Crown Estate
- Scottish Association of Marine Science
- Salmon Scotland
- Aquaculture Operatives
- Association of Scottish Shellfish Growers
- Scottish Seaweed Association
- Visit Scotland
- Inverness and Cromarty Green Freeport
- Highlands and Islands Enterprise

6.87 A summary of feedback received includes:

- **SEPA:** No further comments to make on Chapter 6. Council Response: Noted. (**THC089**)

- **Fisheries Management Scotland:** Would like included in section 6.45 wild salmonoids as an example. **Council Response:** Noted and included “Diadromous Fish ScotMER Receptor Group” included in evidence. **(THC036)**
- **Marine Directorate:** No further comments to make. **Council Response:** Noted **(THC038)**

Bakkafrost Scotland (THC075)

Main views raised	<p>Confirms overall the chapter reflects comments made during the engagement sessions held at the evidence gathering stage.</p> <p>Note in section 6.70 that the Highland LDP should set out a clear, locally tailored policy framework for biodiversity in aquaculture aligned with national guidance (noting that there are now expected to be delays in progress of implementation of NMP2) and must be informed by science.</p> <p>There appears to be an imbalance throughout the chapter, with very detailed information provided for aquaculture/ fisheries, but less detailed information provided for other coastal industries. It is encouraging that a high level of topical information is provided on aquaculture, however caution needs to be exercised, as information can quickly become outdated, and other mechanisms for HC staff to keep up to date with aquaculture industry developments should be supported.</p> <p>We note that the Lochalsh Local Place Plan is referenced, including the following priority ‘fish farming on Loch Carron should avoid/ reduce pollution, conserve nationally significant natural habitats and preserve residential amenity’. It is noted that interactions with nationally significant natural habitats are already covered by existing regulations, which should inform HC decisions in this respect.</p>
Council’s response	<p>All points noted. This chapter presents evidence relevant to both Policy 10 – Coastal Development and Policy 32 – Aquaculture. It addresses finfish aquaculture, shellfish aquaculture, seaweed cultivation, ports and local harbours, coastal and offshore energy, ICFGF, and coastal tourism. For each sector, the chapter provides an overview of the industry, outlines its contribution to both the local and national economy, and considers how the Local Development Plan can best support them through a robust, evidence-based policy framework. Stakeholder engagement has been carried out consistently across all the industries covered in this chapter. This has included meetings, questionnaires, and surveys, with the data gathered forming a key part of the evidence base that has informed the analysis and conclusions presented here. While</p>

	<p>the scope encompasses a wide range of coastal industries and activities, the primary focus remains on coastal development and aquaculture. As highlighted at the outset and reiterated throughout, the chapter also touches on activities that take place on, or have an effect on, the coast. It should therefore be read in conjunction with other chapters of the full evidence report—such as Chapter 8: Business, Economy, Tourism & Productive Places and Chapter 4: Climate Change & Energy—for a comprehensive understanding.</p> <p>Whilst it is acknowledged and agreed that interactions with nationally significant habitats are covered by existing regulations, it does not automatically negate the relevance of local plan priorities or override the planning authority's duty to assess planning merits, including impacts on amenity, habitats, and cumulative effects as part of the planning balance.</p>
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC075).
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Cromarty Harbour (THC076)	
Main views raised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confusion could arise from our reference to the Port of Cromarty Firth throughout the chapter and suggested that this be defined as Port of Cromarty Firth (PoCF). 2. Would like to see reference of the struggle historic harbours have in maintaining depth by regular dredging due to costs and licences.
Council's response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted and agreed. 2. We note concern raised regarding the costs associated with regular dredging and maintenance licensing, particularly for smaller harbours. While we recognise the importance of these activities for safe and effective harbour operations, this matter sits out with the scope of the Local Development Plan. Responsibility for dredging and associated marine licensing lies with the Marine Directorate.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.

Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC076).
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Historic Environment Scotland (THC035)	
Main views raised	Recommend that we include their Guidance note on Managing Change in the historic environment conserving underwater heritage in this chapter or to Historic Assets, Brownfield Land, and Empty Buildings Chapter.
Council's response	Noted and agreed. The Council agrees to include their Guidance Note on Managing Change in the historic environment conserving underwater heritage within chapter 6.
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC035).
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Highlands and Islands Enterprise (THC080)	
Main views raised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Would like us to include an acknowledgement that activities at sea require support from land based infrastructure and services. 2. Would like to see within the developed and undeveloped coast paragraph acknowledgement that development activity and potential development extends out to 12 nautical miles, ensuring alignment with marine planning. 3. When discussing local harbours, they would like to see the development challenges addressed highlighting industries they serve,

	<p>capacity constraints as well as opportunities for future investment and expansion.</p> <p>4. The environment paragraph should also recognise emerging business models such as semi-closed containment systems as these systems are increasingly being considered as within the sector and have a potential to address some of the environmental and spatial pressures.</p> <p>5. Supportive of biodiversity section and confirm that developers need to encourage investment is surety and clarity on policy.</p> <p>6. In the future growth section should include semi-closed containment should be noted as important innovation.</p> <p>7. The future growth section should include semi-closed containment as important innovation.</p> <p>8. Under stakeholder and key agencies section HIE would like the list expanded to include HIE, Scottish Seaweed Industry Association, crown estate Scotland and British Trout Association.</p>
Council's response	<p>1. Referenced throughout this chapter is acknowledgement that activities at sea require support from land base infrastructure. (6.37, 6.44, 6.81, 6.82).</p> <p>2. The "Developed and Undeveloped Coast" section is intended to focus on planning on the coastal frontage and land-based development, however we have included reference to development activities extending out to 12nm.</p> <p>3. Challenges facing harbours and ports are discussed in the 6.89.</p> <p>4. Noted and have included in section 6.75.</p> <p>5. Noted.</p> <p>6. Noted and we have included this within section 6.75.</p> <p>7. Noted and now included in section 6.80.</p> <p>8. The Scottish Seaweed Association is already included, HIE now added. Fishery Management Scotland, who's remit includes trout, were consulted.</p> <p>The council agrees with points 4, 6 and 7 and the chapter has been updated to reflect these changes.</p>
Outstanding issues	No outstanding issues.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC080) .
Proposed plan implications	None.

Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Scrabster Harbour (THC078)	
Main views raised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirms the chapter accurately reflects the role of Scrabster harbour. 2. Would like the chapter to recognise this role, protect and allocate suitable quayside and laydown areas, and support infrastructure such as heavy lift capacity, deep water berths, and expanded grid connectivity. 3. Would like the plan to include anticipated visitor infrastructure needs; transport interchange, coach parking, and enhanced passenger welcome facilities in coordination with the tourism strategy in Chapter 8. 4. Current marine licencing and dredge spoil disposal are costly and slow and would like to see the plan have policy support for streamlined marine works planning and disposal licensing for trust ports that service national supply chains. 5. Would like to include safeguarding of both economic activity and lifeline services by prioritising Scrabster in the Coastal Change Adaptation Plan actions, including infrastructure hardening, coastal defences, and flood mitigation, with particular focus on protecting the route to the harbour via the A9. 6. Would like to include recognition that trust ports deliver inclusive economic growth and lifeline services by reinvesting surpluses back into local infrastructure, jobs, and services.
Council's response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Noted. 2. Noted. However, the forthcoming Call for Ideas will provide an opportunity to identify and reserve specific sites for potential development. 3. The link that tourism has with pressure on infrastructures is detailed within Chapter 8. 4. While we recognise the importance of these activities for safe and effective harbour operations, this matter sits out with the scope of the Local Development Plan. Responsibility for dredging and associated marine licensing lies with the Marine Directorate. 5. As outlined in the RCCAP, a local CCAP will be prepared to provide a framework for examining the highest risk areas in greater detail. It will include updated information on the types of risks, assets at risks, potential short-term mitigation measures, and a plan for long term adaptation and community resilience. The comments from Scrabster harbour have been forwarded to the FRMT, who are responsible for preparing these local CCAP's.

	6. Noted and now included in section 6.38.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC078) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
Scottish Seafarms (THC079)	
Main views raised	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree that the HwLDP Policy 50 should be updated to align with NPF4 Policy 32 but observed that priorities for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and nature recovery are contained within separate policies rather than within the aquaculture policy. 2. The sentence "terrestrial marine interface relevant to planning" should be updated to include a reference to this now extended to 12nm. 3. Would like the phrase in section 6.54 "aquaculture refers to the farming of aquatic organisms" align with the definition of development in the Planning (Scotland) act. Seaweed is not included in this definition and should not be covered in the same context as other aquaculture within the planning process. 4. In section 6.58 the phrase "while not formally recognised with the planning process" could be perceived negatively. Acknowledge that and agree that the examples given are not material planning considerations but suggest rewording the statement for clarity. 5. In section 6.61 when discussing shellfish, it is unclear if the number quoted refers to active shellfish businesses or licenced sites. 6. Would like the statement in 6.62 "the spatial footprint for new finfish or shellfish farms is increasingly limited" be removed. Many farms currently co exists within designated sites following the HRA process and do not adversely affect site integrity. Therefore, the presence of conservation designations does not inherently limit the spatial footprint for development. 7. Would like finfish aquaculture acknowledged within section 6.64 where it has been said that the shellfish industry is the most tightly

regulated food sector in Scotland, that the same is true for finfish aquaculture.

8. Agree with the principal of biodiversity enhancement in the local context but highlighted the following points 1. lack of policy guidance tailored to the marine environment and no clear framework for evaluating enhancement success, nor for determining the acceptability of measures in decision making. 2. Currently there is a lack of monitoring and spatial mapping to guide where biodiversity enhancement efforts should be prioritised which presents a challenge when trying to ensure that are ecologically appropriate and targeted to areas with the highest potential for success. 3. For developer led enhancement projects the regulatory process is complex with different permissions, licences and permits required. Onsite projects could impact site operations and infrastructure such as moorings and anchors, depositional footprints and benthic compliance monitoring transects for grab sampling and would require appropriate environmental conditions such as habitat, depth and hydrodynamic forces to support the target species for enhancement. 4. Off-site enhancement or financial contributions to third party enhancement funds is likely to be more practical. Discuss community preferences often favour hyper local initiatives, that may not always align with the ecological requirements of target species or the practical realities of restoration. They note that marine restoration success is highly dependent on-site specific conditions, and hyper local projects may struggle to secure adequate funding or achieve ecological viability. Strategic, regionally scaled initiatives that are ecologically appropriate are more likely to deliver meaningful biodiversity outcomes and offer greater feasibility.

9. Clarification in section 6.74 where there is mention of a requirement for early warning systems as to whether this is a policy or operational requirement.

10. Concerns with regards to wording in section 6.104. The provisions of community benefit are voluntary, is not a material planning consideration, and has no bearing in the planning process. Planning obligations may be used under S75 of the TCPA 1997 (as amended) to mitigate negative impacts of development by providing necessary infrastructure or facilities, however there are strict policy tests around their use.

11. General comment was made around Local place plans and SSF willingness to be involved in the preparation of the plans and requested that their contact details be passed onto any CC currently preparing these plans within the areas they currently operate.

Council's response	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Priorities for the climate and nature crisis whilst fully addressed within their own policies and chapters, should also be reflected and acknowledged in all chapters and topics of the evidence report. 2. This sentence is within the developed and undeveloped coast section and refers how we have defined the coastal zone within our coastal zone mapping, we have added a sentence to define wider marine development. 3. Noted and agreed. 4. Noted. 5. The sentence begins by giving the number of licenses before the number of shellfish businesses. 6. Noted and updated. 7. Noted and updated. 8. Noted. 9. Noted and updated. 10. This section is intended to acknowledge the feedback given by industry and communities on wider pressures, particularly the limited availability of housing and the need for supporting infrastructure and services. The purpose of this reference is to acknowledge the opportunity for further dialogue on how the planning system, working in partnership with operators and stakeholders, might help to address these shared challenges. This includes exploring ways in which improvements to housing, infrastructure and services could provide mutual benefits for both operators and the communities in which they are located. Continued engagement with industry will be central to ensuring any future approach is supportive and proportionate. 11. We would encourage SSF to approach and engage with the local CC's at an early stage to assist in the preparation of any LPP are being prepared.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC079) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.

NatureScot (THC088)	
Main views raised	Confirmed that they are satisfied with the approach taken for the evidence report. Confirmed that their comments previously given under the emerging evidence have been summarised within this chapter and are content that their comments have been addressed and agree that the evidence presented in Chapter 6 will be sufficient in matters relevant to NatureScot.
Council's response	Noted and agree with points made.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC088) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.
THC Flood Risk Management Team (THC037)	
Main views raised	<p>Requested that NPF4 policy requirements should refer to coastal erosion as well as flooding.</p> <p>Ensure consistency in the title of THC RCCAP throughout the chapter. Under policy requirements, section 6.4, should include the impacts of coastal erosion and consideration should be given to provide support for future retreat.</p> <p>In section 6.6 concern over terminology used and question over the scenario if we can not safeguard due to erosion.</p> <p>Section 6.30 should also mention adaptation in flood risk areas to promote changes in use of existing land/buildings from higher vulnerability including water compatible uses. The precautionary approach should also identify areas for safeguarding where fallback/retreat may be required to respond to future coastal flood risk. Would like to see reference in section 6.31, 6.32 or 6.34 to the precautionary approach and avoidance.</p> <p>Section 6.44 should reference the adaptation and resilience seen in other sections, such as the presumption against engineered coastal defences to enable development. Consideration should also be given to</p>

	<p>how we promote this development with sustainability and climate change impacts in mind.</p> <p>Question over how we would build in resilience and adaptation in relation to the shellfish industry's need for shore bases and infrastructure in light of future climate change, increased flood risk and coastal erosion.</p> <p>Section 6.99 This section should also refer to ensuring an adaptive approach to help increase resilience and ensure that land is available to enable landward retreat.</p>
Council's response	All points noted, additions and changes made where required.
Outstanding issues	None.
Is agency content with the evidence?	Yes, statement of agreement has been provided (THC037) .
Proposed plan implications	None.
Actions for proposed plan stage	None.

Summary of Local Place Plan Priorities

6.88 Black Isle Local Place Plan **(THC011)** has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:

- Need for coastal management/protection, marine habitat restoration/recovery, flood/erosion protection for coastal and other settlements, nature networks creating from river catchment sources to coastal zones, including the River Conon (a salmon breeding river).
- Aim of net zero, resilient & sustainable community, regenerate biodiversity.
- Green Freeport should protect & restore of marine/terrestrial habitats & mitigation of predicted impacts of sea level rise.
- Independent environmental baseline survey & long-term monitoring should be in place before work starts so positive impacts of Green Freeport can be demonstrated & any potential adverse impacts in terms of noise (including low frequency noise), water, light and air quality can be mitigated.
- Green Freeport will have to deliver projects creating positive biodiversity
- Conservation & restoration of Black Isle's environment, including marine areas, is central element of Plan, including ongoing seagrass/oyster project.

- 6.89 Broadford and Strath Local Place Plan (**THC012**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Coastal landscape & rich marine ecosystem underpins a blue economy including fishing, aquaculture and marine tourism here.
 - Challenge includes climate change adaptation (increasing sea level rise & flood risk). Vital that build up resilience to withstand future shocks, including future pandemics, extreme weather events and rising sea levels.
- 6.90 Dores and Essich Local Place Plan (**THC013**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- The beach at Dores enables access to loch for amenity purposes and is a popular spot for general amenity and water sports activities.
 - Higher proportion of individuals that work in agriculture forestry/fishing sector (6.9%) and construction (11.2%) compared to Highland and Scotland.
- 6.91 Duror and Kentallen Local Place Plan (**THC014**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Historically farming & fishing community, still an active farming community.
 - New marine conservation group (MaCCOLL) actively working to promote and preserve local coast and marine habitats.
 - Opportunities to preserve & protect marine environment of Loch Linnhe.
 - Lack of marine and other environmental protections in the area.
 - Concerns over water & air quality especially with possibility of new fish farm.
 - Proposal to rewild river & coastal habitats, discourage further industrial development (e.g. fish farms) in the area.
- 6.92 Gairloch Local Place Plan (**THC015**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Traditional industries (fishing) continue alongside new aquaculture ventures.
 - Protect green spaces from overdevelopment including preserving unique marine habitats and enhance environmental protection.
- 6.93 Lochalsh Local Place Plan (**THC018**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:
- Fish farms on Loch Carron/Carrann should avoid/reduce pollution, conserve nationally significant natural habitat, & preserve residential amenity.
 - Many settlements positioned on coastline & main arterial roads run along coast. Coupled with fragile land & marine ecosystems, aware biodiversity & communities will be impacted by climate change & rising sea levels.
- 6.94 Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan (**THC020**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development and Aquaculture:

- Consider what needs to be done to preserve or regenerate the local seabed.
- Flood risk impact needs to be considered in future developments, actions may be required to reduce impact on settlements. Roads covered by sea during high tides, heavy rains & storms e.g. in Inveralligin, Fasaig & Diabaig.
- Plans for Loch Torridon will be developed jointly with communities in the SCC area. Loch is part of Wester Ross Biosphere marine transition zone & restoring seabed, reversing loss of marine life & improving fish farms so they are not so damaging to environment are critical protection issues.
- cross area community project to survey, monitor & share knowledge of loch's marine habitats, in particular, Maerl beds need protecting as an endangered keystone species on which many other species depend.
- Fish farm development and management on Loch Torridon and Loch Diabaig should require strong community engagement and partnership.
- Aspiration that Loch Diabaig could be community owned or managed. Long-term aspiration to use Loch Diabaig as working 'seacraft'.
- Consider flood risk prevention through natural flood risk management and adaptation. To protect coastal assets and strengthen resilience to flood risk.

6.95 Nairnshire Local Place Plan (**THC023**) has identified the following priorities relating to Coastal Development:

- Requirement for effective flood defences, natural & affordable solutions required to mitigate against coastal and river flooding.
- Comprehensive flood management techniques & emergency planning.
- Investments in infrastructure inc. upgrading drainage systems, reinforcing riverbanks, reinforcing & supplementing dunes, implementing SuDS that can withstand extreme weather events are essential.

Summary of Implications for the Proposed Plan

6.96 The HLDP must adopt a proactive approach to coastal change, ensuring that new development is directed away from vulnerable areas of flood risk and coastal erosion to help increase resilience and ensure land is available to allow for coastal retreat. These vulnerable areas will be informed by the Regional Coastal Change Adaptation Plan (CCAP) **THC053**.

6.97 HLDP will integrate flood risk mapping and climate projections into proposed policy. New development will be directed to lower-risk areas and required to include flood resilience measures. The HLDP will take a precautionary approach, should this be required, by avoiding new development in areas of known coastal flood risk and supporting adaptation measures where appropriate. This includes considering opportunities for natural coastal defences, such as salt marsh restoration or dune reinforcement, and integrating blue-green infrastructure into coastal communities where feasible.

- 6.98 The HLDP will be informed by the recent mapping work undertaken by the Council in identifying developed and undeveloped coast and will continue to apply a strong presumption against development in the undeveloped coast, ensuring coastal character and natural processes are preserved.
- 6.99 The HLDP will ensure strong protection for designated coastal habitats and species. This includes requiring robust assessments for nearby developments, promoting biodiversity net gain with opportunities for ecological restoration and blue/green infrastructure being explored.
- 6.100 The HLDP should support coastal and offshore renewable energy infrastructure where appropriate, while embedding the principle of environmental design. HLDP must ensure that development proposals demonstrate use of the mitigation hierarchy from the outset, avoiding impacts on designated sites and sensitive receptors wherever possible. Policy will set out clear expectations for project siting, early-stage environmental assessment, and coordination with marine planning frameworks to manage cumulative impacts.
- 6.101 The HLDP should provide clear and spatially informed policy framework to guide the sustainable development of aquaculture. This includes supporting the growth of both finfish and shellfish farming.
- 6.102 The HLDP must ensure that aquaculture continues to support the long-term ecological health and resilience of Highland's marine and coastal environments and incorporate the evolving position for the requirement of industry to conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, with guidance from the forthcoming NMP2. The HLDP will therefore anticipate this policy shift and lay the foundations for local biodiversity enhancement in aquaculture policy.
- 6.103 This will require collaboratively working with The Marine Directorate, SEPA, NatureScot and the industry to define practical and proportionate approaches to biodiversity enhancement.
- 6.104 The aquaculture industry is recognised as a significant employment sector in the Highlands and makes a tangible contribution to employment and prosperity in many communities, yet has until now done so without explicit policy requirements or a formal mechanism for securing community benefits in place. HLDP will require to consider whether a framework for contributions to community assets such as housing are appropriate and will continue engagement with the industry on these aspects.
- 6.105 The HLDP should recognise and support the role aquaculture development that supports community wealth-building and encourage community benefit where appropriate and facilitate early engagement with local communities.
- 6.106 All Highland ports and harbours, alongside ICFGF tax sites have been identified as developed coast within the Council's [Coastal Zone Mapping](#).

Statements of Agreement / Dispute

Agreement on Evidence

- 6.107 Agencies who responded and agreed with the evidence and content presented included SEPA, Bakkafrost Scotland, NatureScot, and Marine Directorate.

Disputes with Stakeholders

- 6.108 None at the time of submission to Gate check.

Information Gaps

- 6.109 As mentioned, the updated NMP2 is awaited which if available during the course of the HLDP preparation, will be considered in guiding the Council's marine planning framework as NPF4 clearly states that LDPs should align with national and regional marine planning.
- 6.110 It is considered that community-led Local Place Plans would be informative evidence sources of relevance to this section of the Evidence Report, and several are understood to remain in production at the time of writing. To date, 22 communities in Highland have formally registered Local Place Plans. Any Local Place Plans registered will be considered in the production of the LDP if timeously available.