

Autumn 2026

Introduction

This is the Autumn 2026 newsletter from the Orkney Islands Council (OIC) Marine Planning team.

As you may recall from our email in Spring, the Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan has now been formally adopted by Scottish Ministers. This marked the beginning of an exciting new phase in regional marine planning, as alongside Shetland, we became the first regions to publish a Regional Marine Plan. This newsletter provides updates on what has been happening since, the next steps, and other marine planning news from Orkney and further afield.

Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan

The [Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan](#) was endorsed by Orkney Islands Council in December 2025, and formally adopted by Scottish Ministers on 19 February 2026. The Plan now provides the statutory policy framework for decisions on marine developments and activities within, or that affect, the Orkney Islands Marine Region. The Plan will help decision makers to balance sustainable economic development with the protection and enhancement of our unique marine environment.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed throughout the Plan's development. From providing support through our Advisory Group to attending consultation events and workshops, to submitting comments and sharing local knowledge, this input was essential to create a plan that reflects the priorities of Orkney's communities and industries.

Next steps for marine planning in Orkney

With the Plan now in place, the OIC Marine Planning team is focusing on implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

A key priority is the preparation of supporting guidance to help applicants, developers, consultees and decision-makers understand how the Plan's policies should be applied in practice.

Following discussions with the [Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group](#) (OMPAG) to identify priorities, work has now commenced on developing guidance on:

- Supporting sustainable social and economic benefits.
- Marine enhancement and restoration.

- Shellfish Farming Spatial Guidance.

Working alongside the Advisory Group, the OIC Marine Planning team are preparing draft guidance documents, which will be open for public consultation in due course.

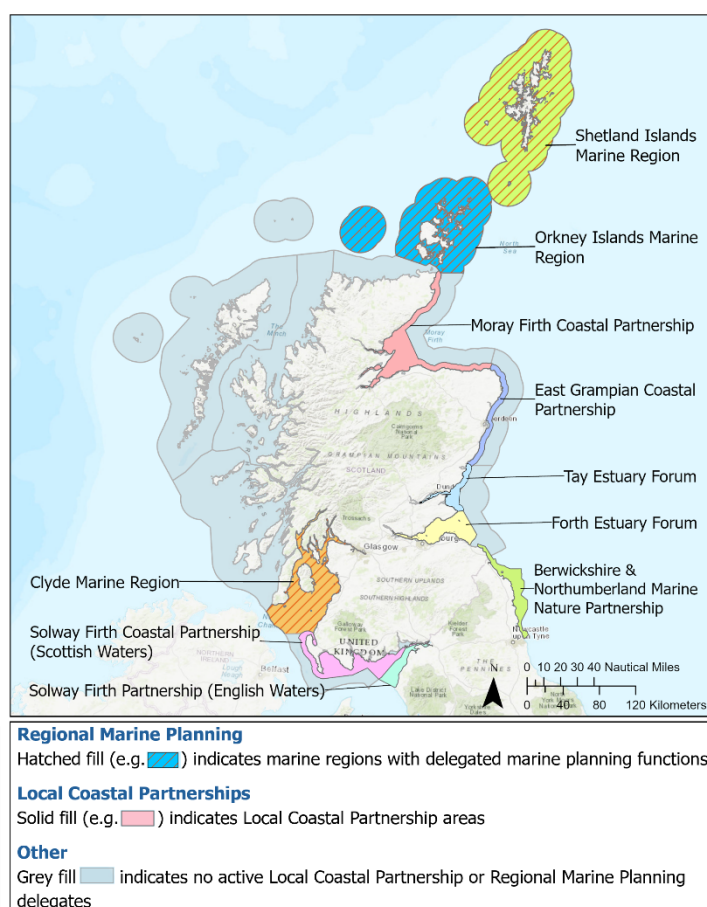
A new Chair and Vice Chair of Orkney Marine Planning Advisory Group

Following Councillor Kristopher Leask being elected as an MSP, we are very pleased to welcome Councillor Mellissa Thomson as the new Chair of OMPAG and Councillor Leslie Manson as the Vice Chair. We would like to wish Kristopher all the best in his new role and thank him for his significant input to marine planning in Orkney over the last few years.

Regional Marine Planning Forum

Orkney Marine Planners met in person in Aberdeen with the other Scottish Marine Planning Partnerships and the Local Coastal Partnerships for the bi-annual Regional Marine Planning Forum (RMPF). This was an opportunity to discuss key opportunities and challenges, areas of collaboration, and the future scope of regional marine planning. Importantly, this was an opportunity to discuss ambitions for regional marine planning post-adoption of the Regional Marine Plan and its role in the national context with Scottish Government officials.

Current Scottish Coastal and Marine Partnerships



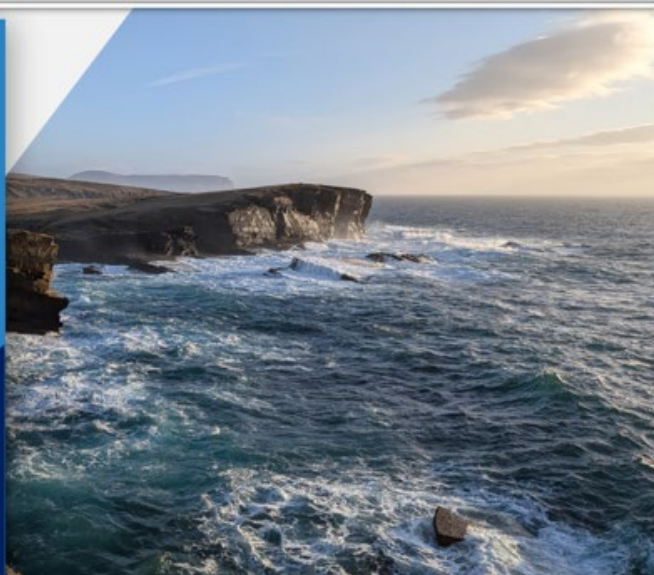
Regional Marine Planning Forum 2026: Strong Foundations, Shared Future event

REGIONAL MARINE PLANNING FORUM 2026

How can we build stronger connections between planning, science and policy to support Scotland's seas?

Join us at the Regional Marine Planning Forum 2026 on **28 October 2026** in **Dundee** for a day of discussion, collaboration and knowledge sharing with partners from across Scotland's marine and coastal sectors.

REGISTER NOW



The Regional Marine Planning Forum 2026: *Strong Foundations, Shared Future* event will be held in Dundee in October and is open to all stakeholders with an interest in marine and coastal planning in Scotland. It will be held on Wednesday 28 October at Discovery Quay, Dundee, and provides a great opportunity to learn about and discuss current marine and coastal planning issues with practitioners.

The OIC Marine Planning team has worked with marine planning and coastal partnership colleagues from across Scotland to help organise this event. It would be fantastic to see you there!

Free places at this event can be reserved [here](#).

Sea Scotland Conference 2026

This year marks the 10-year anniversary of Sea Scotland, a milestone that arrives at a pivotal time for the future of Scotland's seas. The conversations and discussions that take place here can build innovation, trust and tangible change across Scotland's marine community, particularly at the start of a new Session of the Scottish Parliament. The theme 'Joining the dots' explores how action at different scales can work together to secure resilient seas for Scotland.



The [Sea Scotland 2026](#), 10th Anniversary Conference, will be held on 27 October at Discovery Point, Dundee.



Tickets for this event can be accessed [here](#).

Beautiful Island: Supporting Managing Authorities to Restore the Oceans and Waters on Islands (Isla Bonita)

The Oceanic Platform of the Canary Islands (PLOCAN) and Heriot-Watt University's International Centre for Island Technology (ICIT) in Stromness has led a successful funding bid to deliver an oyster restoration and lost and abandoned fishing gear removal project in Orkney. This project sits within the [Beautiful island: Supporting Managing Authorities to Restore the Oceans and Waters on Islands](#) (Isla Bonita) EU Horizon funding programme under the EU Mission Ocean funding call.

Orkney Islands Council, represented by the Harbour Authority and Marine Planning team, has joined the Isla Bonita programme as a partner, alongside the Orkney Fisheries Association, to support project delivery in Orkney.

The [EU Mission "Restore our Ocean and Waters"](#) aims to protect and restore the health of ocean and waters through research and innovation, citizen engagement and blue investments.

The project will combine the restoration of oyster habitats using recycled shell waste with the retrieval and reuse of lost fishing gear in a demonstration site in Orkney.

Widespread marine pollution by abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear poses an ongoing threat to marine life and contributes significantly to plastic pollution in coastal ecosystems. At the same time, shell material from processed scallops is another fisheries waste management problem that the project aims to address. This Orkney demonstrator project sits alongside eight other demonstrator projects from islands across Europe with significant potential for collaboration and learning between projects.



Sanday Foy

Members of the Marine Planning team recently attended the Sanday Foy, a six-day event organised by the Sanday Development Trust that explored their coastal and marine future and how island communities can respond to the growing challenges of climate change.

The event brought together representatives from island communities from across Scotland, researchers, multi-disciplinary practitioners and policy specialists to share knowledge, experience and practical solutions for adapting to coastal change. A key theme throughout the week was the role that nature-based solutions can play in increasing coastal resilience, including the protection and restoration of dune systems, kelp forests, seagrass meadows and saltmarsh habitats.



The Sanday Foy was attended by a wide range of stakeholders, specialists, and members of the community.

The programme combined expert presentations with practical workshops, coastal field visits and opportunities for networking and collaboration. Discussions focused not only on the science of marine restoration and coastal adaptation but also on the people and places affected by coastal change. Each island faces unique challenges and recognises that these vulnerable coastlines support communities, businesses, cultural heritage and essential infrastructure.

UArctic

In April, members of the Marine Planning team attended a workshop hosted by Heriot-Watt University ICIT in Stromness, bringing together researchers, organisations, fisheries representatives and environmental NGOs from across Scotland, Norway, Canada and Greenland to discuss the growing challenge of marine litter and plastics.

The event formed the first meeting of the UArctic-funded project [*"Collaboration for research and education addressing marine pollution and clean-up operations in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic areas"*](#).



A trailer full of marine litter collected from Evie beach after the UArctic Conference

The project aims to strengthen international collaboration on research, monitoring and practical solutions to marine litter, particularly litter associated with fisheries and aquaculture.

To finish the programme, participants took part in a beach clean in Evie, where large quantities of abandoned creels, buoy lines and other fisheries-related debris were recovered. The exercise reinforced the significant impact that storms and marine currents have on the accumulation of litter around Orkney's coastline, while also highlighting the vital contribution made by local community groups and volunteers in tackling marine pollution.

Community Catch

Orkney's crab fishery made headlines this July for becoming the first fishery in the world to be certified under the [Community Catch Standard](#). This accreditation is the result of a lot of hard work from fishers, Orkney Crab, and a wide range of individuals. It recognises the environmental sustainability and social responsibility of our crab fishery. A huge congratulations to all involved.



Orkney crab achieves Community Catch Status

MSPACE: Marine Spatial Planning Addressing Climate Effects



MSPACE
Marine Spatial Planning
Addressing Climate Effects

The [MSPACE](#) project, discussed in our last newsletter, has now published its findings and recommendations for marine spatial planning in Orkney. The report is the most detailed analysis yet of how climate change will affect the Orkney Islands - its marine habitats, fishing grounds, aquaculture and the coastal communities that depend on them. The MSPACE project



has published a series of spatial marine planning recommendations unique to Orkney's marine environment.

The MSPACE Recommendations: Orkney Islands Regional Marine Plan can be accessed [here](#).

Scottish Government Consultations

Our Marine Planning team continues to engage with national marine policy and consultation processes to ensure that Orkney's interests are represented in the development of future marine management in Scotland.

Since our last newsletter, the team has participated in the Scottish Government Marine Restoration Plan Steering Group and submitted responses to Marine Directorate consultations including the [Marine Restoration Plan](#), [Regulation of fish and shellfish farm deposits](#), [Extending marine planning zones](#) and the [Updated Sectoral Marine Plan for Offshore Wind](#).

Responding to these consultations helps ensure that local knowledge, experience and objectives are considered as Scotland's marine policy continues to evolve. We will continue to engage with future consultations where they are relevant to Orkney and our stakeholders.

The Council continues to engage with the Scottish Government on the emerging Proposed Inshore Marine Protected Area and Priority Marine Feature fisheries management measures in Orkney waters.

Marine consent applications

A significant part of the OIC Marine Planning team's work is responding to consultations on coastal and marine planning applications, marine licence applications and Section 36 consents, as a statutory consultee for developments and activities affecting the Orkney Islands marine region.

It has been a busy year for marine development applications, with OIC Marine Planning being consulted on over 40 marine developments since the last newsletter. Consent applications and Environmental Impact Assessment scoping requests have ranged from new wave and tidal devices, to fish farm developments, sub-sea cable and pipeline works, north isle pier dredging plans, and pier and pontoon extensions and maintenance.

Invitation to the Isle of Arran

The Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) on the Isle of Arran recently celebrated 30 years since their establishment and the creation of their community established no-take zone. Having heard about the Marine Spatial Planning Boardgame that the OIC Marine Planners have used in their own community engagement events, COAST invited the team to run a stall at their



30th anniversary event. Our Marine Planner Danny attended, in what was a return to where his professional career started in 2019, when he worked for COAST as an MPA Project Assistant.

It was a great opportunity to showcase the work ongoing in Orkney and discuss the differences and similarities in the challenges faced by another island community, and the different approaches to tackling issues.



Thank you for reading our newsletter!

Contact us

If you would like to get in touch, please contact us on the email address below.

Email Address: Marine.planning@orkney.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.orkney.gov.uk/our-services/planning-and-building/development-and-marine-planning-policy/marine-planning/>

As always, please feel free to pass this newsletter on to anybody who might be interested.

OIC Marine Planning Team

