

Moray Firth Partnership – Conference
Monday 23rd May 2005
Highland Council Headquarters, Inverness

Opening Address

I am delighted to be here to give the opening address of the Moray Firth Partnership Conference 2005.

On that perfect Saturday afternoon we had two weekends ago, I was part of a group known as the Radical Ramblers which walked from the Eathie Burn on the Black Isle, along the shore to St Bennetts Well – up on to the Cromarty Sutor and down into that historic town. It was a disparate company which had come together to honour the memory of the late John Smith, MP. There were politicians of course, including a couple of Members of the House of Lords; a High Court Judge; a distillery worker, a Dounreay Scientist, people from London, Glasgow, and Caithness.

The sea was still and pale blue. We saw a dolphin, ducks cormorants, nesting and diving, sailing boats, and cargo boats. Across the Inverness Firth we locals pointed out Fort George, the sheds at Ardersier; Nairn and Rosemarkie. On the other side, the Cromarty Firth side the, thankfully few, drilling rigs, the Nigg graving dock, the gun emplacements in the Sutor, the bird reserves at Nigg Bay.

The steep hillside plunging down to the firth was itself a sea of bluebells and as we walked the final stretch to the Sutor a lark was signing. That afternoon's walk encapsulated for me the essence of the Moray Firth and all that the MFP seeks to encompass – the protection of our natural environment while at the same time sustaining the socio-economic and cultural needs of all who live around its shores.

There was a time when we assumed that the sea would cope with anything we did to it – effluent discharges, rubbish dumped (it used to be a regular sight on the salt marshes between Alcaig and the Cromarty Bridge). I have actually seen an old car floating out from the Conon into the Firth, and we expected to be paid back with bountiful supplies of fish forever. It is only comparatively recently that we have begun to examine our interaction as coastal communities with the sea and begun to modify our behaviour, and begun to plan for our future aspirations for our coastal heritage.

Sometimes this has been extremely painful – as has happened with the fishing communities, more and more tightly squeezed by quota cuts, other times probably a relief – when a farmer gives up mending his sea defences and allows the water back in to recreate the salt marsh that existed 60 years ago.

We now have to examine how we can factor in sustainability to existing uses and to new proposals. How we can adapt to the challenge when environmental necessity affects our livelihood as with fishing or lifestyle – the lead shot directive for example affected wildfowlers locally, but also the clay pigeon shoot at Evanton.

Other initiatives even will bring their own pressures – freight facilities grants for shipping will increase coastal traffic and will help address climate change by culling carbon emissions, but could also impact on the marine environment – on the dolphins and porpoises, for example.

The Executive and the Scottish Parliament are absolutely committed to protecting and enhancing the water environment, including estuaries and coastal waters. They have

quite deliberately gold plated the water environment directives which have come from Europe.

And we have seen a very significant improvement in the quality of our beaches, thanks to SEPA implementing stronger regulations and improved monitoring and the huge investment through Scottish Water in a waste water treatment plant – not always entirely popular with local communities.

We are all acutely aware of the pressures on the marine environment and coastline, and the choices we have to make now and in the future. We want to encourage tourism and leisure pursuits, from sailing dinghy's to cruise ships. We use the dolphin logo to attract eco-tourism but we must take care not to put further pressure on these animals. The Nature Conservation Bill passed last year introduced a statutory code of conduct for whale and dolphin watching. At a marine environment seminar held at the Scottish Parliament some months ago, a dolphin cruise operator made the observation that the more we attract dolphin watchers, the more pressure the dolphins are under and we have to educate tourists in what is acceptable. I commend the Moray Firth Partnership initiative on this and the involvement of the areas schools. Marine wildlife tourism is an important part of the tourist economy – generating £60 million in the Highlands & Islands – but it must be sustainable.

We have done well in the Moray Firth in balancing the needs of coastal based industry and tourism and the needs of the wildlife of the area and their habitats.

We have not had the pressures here that the west coast has had from the aquaculture industry, but it is in our interest for that industry to be sustainable because much of the processing and the added value is done around the Moray Firth. There is now a strategic plan for aquaculture which brings together communities, fish farmers and wild fisheries interests so that aquaculture progresses in a sustainable way and continues to provide jobs in remote rural and island areas. On this side of the country we have to manage the interaction between our seal colonies and wild salmon. I am glad to see progress there too.

Perhaps the most exciting development is the impact of which on the marine environment is yet unknown, although the good it will do in combating climate change is incalculable, is the advent of offshore renewables, whether it be offshore wind turbines, as proposed for the Beatrice field, or whether it is wave or tidal power. These will be needed if we are to achieve 18% electricity from renewables by 2010 and 40% by 2020.

A strategic environmental assessment is being undertaken around the coast of Scotland to ascertain the most appropriate location for wave and tide. The Beatrice pilot in the Moray Firth is a project which has the potential to point the way to substantial generation offshore and if successful will be replicated.

It is obvious that we need to have a strategic framework for the marine environment if we are to factor in all pressures, all aspirations and have a way of drawing together all legislation which pertains to the coastal and marine environment. We are not alone on this. We are playing an active role with the UK Government in the development of the EU Marine Strategy, and we are committed to a coastal strategy, and possibly a national coastline park and marine national park. These commitments will be delivered through ICZM roll out, through the SEA Bill which is currently being scrutinised by the Environment & Rural Development Committee.

Moray Firth Partnership Annual Conference
Note of Coastal Heritage Workshop

Chair: Dr Kenny Taylor, with Sinclair Young

WELCOME

KT welcomed those present and outlined the purpose of the workshop which was to share information on the Partnership's current heritage initiatives, to ask participants how best local communities could get involved in these (particularly in relation to the "Hands Across the Firth" project, and to tap into participants' own knowledge of their community's heritage and local heritage projects in their area. Feedback from the workshops would be posted on the Partnership's website

SY, who was to outline the Partnership's current heritage projects, expressed his pleasure in seeing representation at the conference from a good geographic spread across the Partnership area, although he also recognised the need to increase awareness of the Partnership and its activities in peripheral areas. He felt that the Moray Firth Trail project (part of the EU-funded Nortrail project), which would cover the whole of the Partnership's area as part of a wider project covering the coastal areas of all North Sea countries, would provide an excellent opportunity to involve peripheral communities.

MORAY FIRTH TRAIL (NORTRAIL) PROJECT

This project had now been underway for some time, with a website due to be launched in September 2005. The Partnership's project covered the area from Sandend to Wick, with Aberdeenshire Council leading their own Nortrail project covering the remainder of the Moray Firth coastline. The aim of the project was to encourage people living along the Firth to experience their unique natural and cultural heritage. There were opportunities to renew former transnational links between the Moray Firth area and other North Sea countries - for example, Scandinavia (Vikings), Holland (fishing) and Norway (WWII). He felt that many people in the Moray Firth area were currently not aware of the area's heritage.

A particular aspect of the project was to promote walking routes within 10 miles approx of the Moray Firth coast. (These could range from surfaced paths suitable for general access to cross-country trails). It was also hoped that the project would link coastal communities along the Firth (which had tended to be isolated in the past) and to encourage them to share best practice and keep initiatives moving in their communities. The project website/database (which would be map-based) was to be launched on 4th September 2005 and SY asked those present to become involved by providing information on their local area (for example, details about sites of interest, buildings, land forms, geology, paths/trails suitable for public access, local history, folklore and custom, crafts, links with other North sea countries, photos/videos of coast, and details of visitor services such as accommodation and restaurants) to make the website and database as comprehensive as possible. SY also wanted to encourage local communities along the Firth to think about putting on special events on the launch day. Anyone with ideas for events, or anyone who would like further information on the project, should contact Kathryn Logan at the Moray Firth Partnership.

"HANDS ACROSS THE FIRTH" PROJECT

This project was the preparatory phase of a Heritage Lottery Fund application, and was based on the idea of developing local heritage projects on the theme of the sea and coastal heritage. Rowan Tree Consulting of Inverness had been appointed to undertake this preparatory work which would focus on the research and preparation of an Audience Development Plan. The first phase would be to research the cultural and natural heritage resources of the Firth, identify problems which people might be experiencing in

accessing these resources (for example, physical access and lack of transport), identify opportunities for encouraging more people to experience the area's heritage, and looking at how barriers to participation could be overcome. It was a large job to undertake but it was also good to see that things were now underway at last.

MORAY FIRTH FLOTILLA PROJECT (2007)

SY circulated details of the Moray Firth Flotilla project and explained that the central idea was that the flotilla of traditional boats would start off from Wick and travel to various places along the Moray Firth, with special local events taking place at each stopping-off point to coincide with the flotilla's visit. Ideas from local communities as to how they might become involved in the project were very much wanted. The issue of funding the project was rather complicated but, in terms of local special events, the proposal was that local groups would hopefully handle the funding for their event and be eligible to apply for funding from their Local Enterprise Company.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Geoffrey Skeet (Nairn River Community Council) raised the issue of the recently-developed cycle trail which linked Nairn to Cawdor and expressed concern that it did not follow the coast. SY advised that this project was not part of the Nortrail project but rather part of a separate "North Sea Cycle Route" which used small side roads and some new paths, and whose route was not necessarily entirely coastal). In contrast, the Nortrail project was largely focused on promoting coastal walking routes. In Aberdeenshire, where Aberdeenshire Council was the lead partner, new sections of path were being developed during the period to 2007. The Moray Firth Trail, however, was a "virtual trail" which promoted existing paths (with landowner consent) and which, in conjunction with the "Hands across the Firth" project, aimed to connect communities around the Firth.

GS also highlighted that some local residents were sometimes against the promotion of coastal paths due to concerns about litter. However, he felt that litter was not a problem apart from in the immediate vicinity of car parking areas.

It was noted that the Moray Firth Partnership was not responsible for creating or maintaining routes. Local authorities were responsible for developing core path networks in their areas, however, and this provided a mechanism for local communities to have an input into the development of core paths.

In response to a query from Sheila Robbie (Findhorn Village Heritage), it was confirmed that details of all walks within about 10 miles of the coast would be very welcome in relation to the Nortrail project.

Alastair Cameron (Black Isle Partnership) highlighted that, under new land management contract arrangements, there was an opportunity for landowners and farmers to receive funding through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to help with the costs of creating or maintaining public paths. Due to tight timescales for applications and problems with the scheme's rules, the scheme had been of limited value this time around but it was hoped that it might become available again next year. It was noted that the scheme could assist with the development of circular routes which included including coastal stretches.

Janet Crummy (Scottish Ornithologists Club) raised concerns about provision of parking places at the starting points of coastal walks. It was noted that the Nortrail project would provide details of parking and toilet facilities wherever possible.

Valerie Mackenzie-Harris (Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society) asked whether drove roads would be included in the Nortrail project. KL advised that they would be included and that information on the subject from local groups would be appreciated.

Stuart Morrison, Lennox Community Council, highlighted the many traditional paths linking country with coast which had fallen into disuse. KL advised that the Nortrail project could help to identify and promote these. It was also noted that this was a good time to make local authorities aware of these paths as part of the process of developing core path networks.

KL advised that information about the Nortrail project was available on the Partnership website and also circulated a handout with details.

Discussion then turned to the "Hands across the Firth" project. It was noted that the project was aimed at developing audiences and that ideas from local groups as to how to help develop audiences and overcome barriers to participation would be very welcome.

Margaret MacPherson, Invergordon Community Council and Invergordon Heritage Museum, reported that the new Heritage Museum had attracted lots of visits from people whose families were based there during WWII and that the high levels of interest in the WWII period had led the Museum to invest in new display boards to display archive photographs. The local heritage group had also published books prepared by local primary schools on WWI and WWII. There was also local interest in developing a path to link Invergordon and Evanton.

It was felt that the WWII heritage shared by various communities along the Firth could be the basis for a shared project.

It was noted that Nairn had a plaque showing where training in advance of the D-Day landings had taken place.

Another possibility could be to develop a project linking coastal heritage and artists working in local communities. It was noted that there had been an Aberdeenshire "open studios event" (artists' trail) last year and that a similar initiative was underway in Sutherland this year, and that there might be scope to develop these existing initiatives and add in coastal heritage themes.

Moray Firth Partnership Annual Conference
Note of Fisheries Workshop

Chair – Mike Comerford, Roddy McColl – FAL

The chairman welcomed everyone present and gave a brief outline of the MFP Fisheries Action Group (FAG).

A Seminar was held in 2003 from which the FAG was established in 2004. The Group has held two meetings and this has been funded by the Fishermen's Association Ltd, Scottish White Fish Producers Association Ltd and the Crown Estate.

The FAG have identified three areas for further discussion

Integrated strategy for Management
Seal Management
Stock Assessment and Restoration

Roddy McColl raised an issue regarding concerns that local school children were saying dolphins were being killed by fisherman.

Mike explained that as part of the MFP community grant scheme, funding had been provided for "Friends of Moray Firth Dolphins" (FMFD) to go round the local schools with an exhibition on dolphins. MFP were also involved in the Dolphin Defenders Programme which and both these highlighted the dangers to dolphins through illegal nets.

Rachel Harding-Hill was aware of the fishermen's concerns and had investigated the situation. She was confident the children had been informed about the dangers of illegal nets but, unfortunately, it appears some children may have misinterpreted the information they were given.

Mike explained MFP were there to enable parties to discuss issues in a non-confrontational way and suggested a joint meeting be arranged between Friends of Moray Firth Dolphins and representatives from the fishermen.

Roddy McColl agreed we should move forward.

The MFP have prepared a Draft feasibility study to implement plan and is currently seeking potential funding. An outline of this strategy and proposed key outcomes are available on the MFP website www.morayfirth-partnership.org.

Where do we go from here?

We require further resources and funding has been requested from FAL, SWFPA, Moray Council, HIE/LECs, HIMARCS

Other possible funding sources included the Scottish Executive and Talisman Energy UK Ltd.

Lord Burton said there had been a great come-back on salmon and sea trout numbers, but no reason was given

Pollution is still a concern.

Dolphin Management does give a legislative requirement to ensure water quality is maintained. Consider

Suggest water temperature assists some breeds but not others

Concern at effluent discharge and chemical reaction at point of entry to sea. Sandy asked to contact Ben to raise at next meeting.

These can be addressed through Dolphin Management plan and SEPA

Marine litter dumping causing concern. MFP are involved with other coastal forums to address marine litter – involved in raising awareness to school children. Litter comes from land and sea

All fishermen have been requested to take all litter home to port

MFP to run conference with MCA for small harbours to raise awareness of marine litter.

Timetable and priority of 3 issues?

No priority – all equally weighted

Roddy McColl though priority would be stock assessment followed by integrated management

Stakeholders	SNH
Should include	RSPB
	SEERAD – contact Gabby Pieraccini replacement
	NGO
	LINK
	Inshore Fisheries Officer – Clyde (Jason Coombes)
	WWF – Contact Clare Pescod – WWF Scotland

Sand eel fishing to be included in seal plan

Where does fish go? Spain, Italy, France and locally – particularly haddock

Marine National Park advocated by Maureen MacMillan. Fishermen need to be encouraged to engage in conversations and to be heard.

Herring fishing seems to be at a standstill. FAG needs to continue to encourage debate.

Moray Firth Partnership Annual Conference
Workshop 4 – Offshore Windfarm Demo Project

Chair – Peter Tilbrook, MFP

Presenter – Jan Rusin, Talisman

Q & A Session

Q1 – How will the planned output of 10 megas be utilised?

A – Beatrice uses 14-16 megas ex grid so entire output of demo can be utilised on the field.

Q2 - How can Beatrice operate on intermittent power supply?

A – Beatrice will continue to be connected to the grid to supplement supply. Note that the project provides a good opportunity to assess the effectiveness of variable winds in power generation.

Q3 – How will the project deal with the varying costs of alternative pile options? Can the turbines be floated on barges?

A – Whichever piling option is chosen will be paid for by Talisman. The structures will be delivered to site by barge. (This latter was a misunderstanding, SB intended to ask if the turbine tower could operate from a barge rather than be piled into the seabed. He was later told that this was impractical because of the stresses imposed on a floating structure.)

Q4– How will the Demonstrator be translated into an urban supply source?

A – The Demo is “springboarding” from conventional onshore technology, developing the bigger scale required to justify the extra costs of deep-water installation. Turbines of 10 megas are now being proposed (largest onshore are 3 megas) and the additional tower height allows access to more stable airflows. (The clear implication is that the Demo is just that, aimed at testing new boundaries in order to achieve the scale of production required to justify connection of deep-water generators to the grid.)

Q4– Who has dictated the 5 year assessment period?

A – The minimum assessment period has been negotiated with the funders – the length is apparently a justification for the size of the input! Positive early results may well encourage further investment before the expiry of the 5-year period.

Q5 – What will be the effect of vibration transmitted through the structure by the turbines?

A – There is no present real knowledge on this aspect and it will be closely monitored as part of the assessment process.

Q6 – Can you clarify the use of radar, noted in the address?

A – The radar will be a standard marine radar with filters to specify activity – it is believed that this can be sensitised to identify specific species of birds. Radar is a research tool to discover how birds react to the installation, not an operational means of changing that behaviour. There already exists some evidence that birds will alter flight paths to avoid installations.

Q6a – How can that be done in poor visibility or at night?

A – Further research has to be done on this. Lighting on structures for navigational purposes may in fact attract birds at night. Talisman’s Swedish partners have a dozen

offshore turbines in the Baltic, with high bird populations. Their experience is that from a resident population of 12 million birds they experience perhaps six strikes per annum.

Q7– If all goes well, when will commercial development proceed?

A – Technology development is the key and installation procedures have to be refined. There are also potential changes in the electricity generation market which will have an effect on the timing of new production being introduced.

Q8– What is the timing of the decommissioning of the Demo?

A – This depends on the future of the Beatrice field, presently scheduled for closure in 2010. The turbines will be kept in operation for so long as Beatrice is in production.

Moray Firth Partnership Annual Conference
Climate Change Workshop

Chair: James Curran, SEPA

Climate change poses an enormous threat to the world and all of its inhabitants. The risk is so great that we must urgently change our behaviours and technologies.

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the global atmosphere has risen from 280 parts per million (ppm) to 380 ppm, an increase of 40%, over the last century or so. This has caused a warming of the Earth's climate by around 0.7 °C. In Scotland, a recently developed temperature index shows a rise of 0.69°C since 1860. The sea around the Hebrides has increased in temperature by about 0.30°C over the same period.

A warmer atmosphere holds more water vapour and is more energetic. It is logical that we will experience more frequent and severe storms. SEPA has recorded an increase of average annual rainfall in Dumfries of 10% since 1860. This increase is concentrated in the winter months so river flows then are considerably higher, since the rainfall runs straight to the rivers. There are many examples of rivers showing as much as a 40% increase in average winter flows over the past 40 years (for example the River Tay, River Teith). A major problem is increased flooding – expected to increase around 3x by 2080. Sea level is also rising, by about 1mm per year from historical records at Aberdeen, and shows signs of accelerating. Coastal flooding will probably be 10x more frequent by 2080. There are 170,000 properties at risk from flooding, either from rivers or the sea, in Scotland.

These predictions are based on current climate change models and their predictions. However, there are increasing concerns that the global carbon cycle itself may create feedback which will worsen climate change. An example is the growing evidence of erosion and landslide of peaty soils in upland Scotland. As these soils are dried out in summer and then washed out in autumn/winter, their high carbon content is degraded and released into the atmosphere as CO₂ – thereby aggravating climate change. It would take only 0.4% of Scotland's soils to be degraded each year for our total CO₂ emissions to be doubled. These same risks exist around the world – as well as other possible feedback mechanisms such as tropical rainforest die-back and melting of permafrost soils.

If these mechanisms are confirmed as important and active, then the current predictions of around 2 to 3 °C rise in temperature in Scotland by 2080 could actually be 5 to 7 °C with associated greatly enhanced storminess, flooding and gale damage. If these mechanisms are powerful enough then climate change could get out of control, the Earth itself releasing CO₂ into the atmosphere in sufficient quantities to cause further changes. This is clearly a very disturbing possibility.

We all need to take responsibility for climate change - reduce our own environmental impacts, improve our energy efficiency, and encourage the development of all forms of low carbon energy production.