



'WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DECADE MAKES'

The Moray Firth Partnership celebrates its tenth birthday this year. Many people have been involved in many different events and projects since then. The following is a collection of information, thoughts and views of the Partnership's work over the last ten years.

Pre-partnership

"The Scottish Wildlife Trusts' two conferences in 1992 and 1993 brought together local communities, businesses, statutory organisations and the voluntary conservation bodies in a meaningful collection of ambitions for the future, and played a significant part in building the momentum for the MFP"

Magnus Magnusson, at the launch of the MFP

A partnership approach to management was a key recommendation of these conferences

Launch of the Moray Firth Partnership (July 1996)

Following a seminar in 1995 and an inaugural meeting in June 1996, the Moray Firth Partnership was launched by Magnus Magnusson on the magnificent cruiseliner 'Splendour of the Seas'.

"The Moray Firth presents a kaleidoscope of overlapping, and sometimes conflicting interests. It presents so many different values, and opportunities, that cataloguing them, establishing some kind of order and developing means of optimising the beneficial use for all concerns is indeed a daunting task. Our priorities are two-fold; The first is to provide a communications system whereby the range of stakeholders can discuss rationally and calmly their needs and aspirations and attempt to reconcile their inevitable differences. Second, and essential to the fruitful outcome of the discussions, is the need for more knowledge and understanding of the Firth. "

David Mackay, former chair of the MFP

Cromarty Firth Management Strategy and Action Plan

The Cromarty Firth Liaison Group was set up in 1992 to provide a forum for the discussion of issues affecting the quality of the coastal environment of the Cromarty Firth. It produced one of the first coastal management strategies in 1998; the Cromarty Firth Management Strategy and Action Plan. The work of the Liaison Group made a significant contribution to that of the Partnership, trailblazing as it did the concepts of integrated management through dialogue and consensus.

In 2002, the Cromarty Firth Group amalgamated with the MFP.

Becoming a Company and Scottish Charity

In May 1999 the MFP became a Company Limited by Guarantee and a Scottish Charity, very ably steered by chairman David Mackay.

Moray Firth EU LIFE Project

The Partnership was successful in securing funds from Europe (through the EU LIFE Environment programme) to implement coastal zone management that effectively involved communities and brought together voluntary and statutory management measures. The 3 year project ran from 1998 – 2001 and included a community grants scheme for coastal projects, the development of a sustainable management approach for the Moray Firth Special Area of Conservation for dolphins and Management Guidelines and an Action Programme, completed with wide consultation and involvement.

The project proved that it really is “good to talk”. The MFP was able to bring together the scheme’s many partners by providing them with an opportunity to air their often widely disparate views. This proved integral to building trust and understanding and in helping to lay the groundwork for future ICZM development. We wouldn’t have been able to do this without the LIFE injection of cash. LIFE gave us the boost we needed, right at the beginning.

The pioneering ‘bottom-up’ approach to ICZM has not always been easy. We were seeking voluntary participation. It was asking a lot of people, often in their spare time. But communities were actively involved from the start and principally because of this, the Project was selected as an international example of best practice by the European Commission from more than 1,400 projects supported by EC LIFE Environment funding over a 12 year period.

This was testament to commitment and participation of the many organisations and individuals to whom the Moray Firth is clearly very important. These parties were able to get together through the Partnership, air their often contrasting views and create a new atmosphere of trust and understanding.

An Independent evaluation of the LIFE project said

“The Partnership is perceived as an efficient and effective voluntary partnership that has built strong informal relationships between key organisations and individuals who have an interest in the Firth,. The main benefits of the Partnership were seen to have been

- *establishing contacts beyond the normal scope of statutory consultees,*
- *providing for informal decision making and*
- *reducing the level of perceived tension between partner organisations .*

In particular, the MFP has developed distinctive identity with respect to its involvement of local communities in its work, and is recognised for progressing a number of tangible projects and initiatives that are considered unique and innovative. “

Management Guidelines and Action Programme

One of the Partnership’s first tasks was to produce the Management Guidelines and Action Programme. This involved a 2 year public consultation exercise with Topic Papers and an issues report.

Meetings were never dull and participation with flip charts, post-its and sticky dots was requested! We tried to create as many opportunities as possible for swapping views, talking and listening.

After 2 years hard work and the participation of hundreds of people, the Management Guidelines and Action Programme were launched

“ The Moray Firth Partnership has produced a document which is unusual for a corporate body with so many interests represented. It challenges organisations and individuals to set aside their prejudices, their jealousies in regard to their responsibilities, and their defensiveness against criticism from ‘outsider’. It breaks new ground, it breaches old boundaries, and it may presage a new and rewarding approach to managing our total environment”

David Mackay, former chairman, MFP

SAC Management Scheme

As part of the LIFE project a Management Group was set up for the Special Area for Conservation for bottlenose dolphins, to look at the main issues and management measures for the site. The Group considered legislative and voluntary measures, identified gaps in regulation and made management recommendations. After extensive consultation a Management Scheme was produced. It has since been revised a scheme for sandbanks, for the the Moray Firth is also internationally important, has been produced.

“ Although the approach is challenging and has required many hours of individual hard work and collective discussion and debate, all who have been involved have fully entered into this spirit of joint working “

Mike Comerford, former chairman, cSAC Management Group

Review of MFP business and re-structuring -

The Partnership was restructured following a strategic review in 2004.

“This has resulted in a robust and vibrant organisation that has been successful in engaging with key economic sectors, active in the Moray Firth area, and that has achieved meaningful, broad and successful stakeholder involvement in coastal management.”

Mike Comerford, Chairman, MFP

Community Grants Scheme

The MFP Community Grants Scheme, started during the LIFE project and is now in its 6th year, aims to encourage Moray Firth residents, through a small up-front injection of funds, to plan and implement their own projects that contribute towards the better management of the Moray Firth at a local level.

Quotes from participants

“ [The Project] has increased the confidence to take on future projects of this nature” Kiltearn School Board.

“ We approached the MFP for part-funding towards or project and were delighted when they informed us that our application had been successful and we had the way opened to planning a new Information Board as well as the tableau and structural improvement work” Brighter Brora.

"The appreciation of the heritage and culture of the Whitehills area, and its contribution to the Moray Firth, has been increased markedly by all the work ... Appreciation of the environment has been enhanced too. It is hard to see where or when this process will end! Tourists and locals alike, however, are delighted with the result....thank you for your support" Duncan Leece, Whitehills Heritage Trail

Jeff Baillie, General Manager, BG Aberdeen, who are supporting the scheme this year, said: *“We’re delighted to be able to show our support for the communities around the Moray Firth. We believe that it’s important to recognise the great work that goes on within these communities and this grants scheme is an ideal way to help the projects that make a real difference.”*

The MFP is now increasingly involved in developing, fundraising and managing projects. This is the mechanism through which we carry forward some of our key objectives. Here is a whistlestop tour ...

Fisheries

The MFP initiated a Moray Firth Fisheries Action Group which has improved discussion amongst those interested in fisheries management in the Moray Firth.

Roddy McColl, Secretary of The Fishermen's Association Ltd (FAL) explained *"FAL is delighted to be involved in the Fisheries Action Group. It's great to see local people coming together for the benefit of each other and their communities. I urge anyone interested in fisheries in the Moray Firth to get involved with MFFAG. It's a tremendous opportunity to express your opinions on a number of major local issues and to work towards a constructive plan for the future of the Firth"*.

Dolphin Defenders

The Dolphin Defenders project was launched in June 2004. Supported by BP and managed by the Moray Firth Partnership, the campaign encouraged local people to pledge to change something about their behaviour that could affect the dolphins and their environment. This project was a huge success and over 3,000 pledges were made, exceeding our targets. The campaign included a pledge poster and website where people could make their pledge; a schools programme offering Moray Firth schools a dolphin 'study kit', workshop and encouragement to enter a competition for the most effective 'dolphin defenders team'. Much credit goes to the local schools, especially the competition winners, Portgordon, Keiss and Elgin East End Primaries, who worked hard in telling local communities about Dolphin Defenders.

The Dolphin Defenders campaign won a gold award in the charity/Not for profit category and silver in the Best Community Campaign of the Chartered Institute of PR Scotland Pride Awards.

MFP Strategic Group

Maintaining a strategic, integrated overview of the Moray Firth is a key role of the Partnership and a critical component of Integrated Coastal Zone Management. This will be delivered through the activities of the Strategic Group, which provides a forum to develop a vision for the Moray Firth area and priorities for its management.

"The Moray Firth Partnership has an important role to play in steering sustainable management of the Moray Firth and I look forward to playing an active part in this through contributing to the Strategic Group discussions."

Maureen Macmillan, MSP

Communications

Communication is critical to the MFP's work. Included within the communications toolbox are the annual conferences, quarterly members updates and our regularly updated website

MFP members said that the MFP has:

“...provided a neutral forum to discuss ideas”

“..caused otherwise disparate interests to sit around the table and find common interests to build on for the future”

“...raises awareness of issues that can best be tackled on a Firth-wide basis”

Conferences

Participants at MFP Conferences have said:

‘information exchange in small groups was invaluable’

‘exchanging views and hearing other suggestions’

‘sharing and exchange of information’

‘I look forward to the next event’

Talisman Beatrice Windfarm meeting

The Moray Firth Partnership facilitated an event in 2005, as part of the public consultation process for the Talisman Beatrice Windfarm project. We were involved in this consultation meeting because we believe that all those interested and who might be affected by the Beatrice Wind Farm Demonstrator Project should have the opportunity, at an early stage, to discuss the issues and any concerns and benefits of the project in a neutral forum and to be party to the consultation process as the project develops.

“The Moray Firth Partnership facilitated a very efficient stakeholder dialogue meeting for the Talisman wind farm project. This could only have been done through an organisation like the MFP, bringing together all interests in an impartial way.”

Jan Rusin, Talisman

Nortrail

The Moray Firth Trail website www.morayfirth.org and leaflet was launched in June 2006. The Trail website holds details of more than 75 walks around the coast between John O' Groats and Cullen, plus information about our coastal heritage and links to local services.

“I just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed reading the Moray Firth Trail leaflet. [It]... was very well done and beautifully produced. The text was informative and interesting and the photographs beautiful and inspiring. It certainly makes me want to explore more of this region on my next visit to Scotland. Your [leaflet] was far and away the best I came across on this visit and one that I will be keeping”

Trail leaflet reader.

Dr Mark Horton, presenter of the BBC “Coast” programme, said *“The Moray Firth is a fantastic coastline. You have everything here – dolphins, whales, archaeology, natural heritage, Pictish stones and castles. The best way to see this environment is on your own two feet, not whizzing past in a car. That is why this Trail is such a brilliant idea”*

Flotilla

The vision for the Moray Firth Flotilla 2007 is of a fleet of traditional boats, each with its unique history, skimming on the wind from northerly Wick, south past cliffy Caithness, and the sandy beaches of Moray to historic Portsoy with the Scottish Traditional Boat Festival. On its journey the fleet will pass and sometimes call in at a succession of beautiful villages with names recalling their historic origins, Lybster, Helmsdale, Cromarty, Lossiemouth Findochty and Cullen.

Hands across the Firth

The Moray Firth Partnership's "Hands Across the Firth" project aims to make the coast's rich cultural and natural heritage more accessible to local people and visitors, and to provide opportunities to link up and promote local projects on a firth-wide basis as part of a wider national and international campaign. Working with communities, the first two projects we hope to take forward are exploring the folklore and traditions behind, and encouraging, traditional hand knitting for fishermen's ganseys and bird watching for beginners.

Beach Guardians

Beach Guardians is an exciting project that is helping communities all along the Moray Firth coast from Fraserburgh to John O'Groats to become "guardians" of their local beaches and reduce litter in the long term. The Beach Guardians team have been busy along the Moray Firth coastline, coordinating beach cleans, giving workshops to schools, visiting communities with an especially designed exhibition and organising a number of seminars to try and tackle litter at source.

Getting to grips with marine waste in the Moray Firth was the subject of a seminar organised as part of the MFP's Beach Guardians project in Inverness on 29th March 2006. Delegates from local harbours met to discuss current best practice in waste management and to look at how local harbours might address the implications of forthcoming marine waste legislation.

Dolphin Echo

Funded by the BG group, the Dolphin Echo newsletter provided lively and current information for anyone with an interest in the dolphins including where and how to see them, recent sightings and research. Four editions of the newsletter were produced.

General manager of BG Group in Aberdeen, Jeff Baillie, said *"working with the Moray Firth Partnership on the Dolphin Echo was a great opportunity to produce an educational, informative and original publication to be of use to schools, local businesses and the community at large. The bottlenose dolphins play a special role in the Moray Firth and have lived there for many years. Projects such as the Dolphin Echo not only help to raise awareness of the dolphins, but also what individuals and businesses can do to help ensure they will still be around for many more years to come."*

'The Moray Firth – Produce to be Proud' of conference

'The Moray Firth – Produce to be Proud' of conference will take place next week on Thursday 29th November in Nairn. This groundbreaking conference will be the first step in a process to explore how we can build new opportunities to add value to our local marine produce - opportunities that will recognise its full potential within the local economy, and increase enthusiasm and demand for this high quality, diverse and very local produce.

Funders

All this has been possible through the generosity of our funders; european, private, public agency, Charitable trusts and foundations. Some of these fund corework and some projects – to all we are very grateful.

Current funders are: Aberdeenshire Council, BG Group, Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise, Chevron Upstream Europe, Cromarty Firth Port Authority, The Co-op, The Crown Estate, Event Scotland, The Fishermen's Association Ltd., The Heritage Lottery Fund, HIE Inverness and East Highland, HIE-Moray, The Highland Council, Highland 2007, HiMaRCS, Interreg IIIB, Inverness Harbour Trust, LEADER +, LifeScan Scotland Ltd., Maritime and Coastguard Agency, Moray Council, Platform PR, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish White Fish Producers' Association Ltd., Talisman Energy (UK) Ltd., The Big Picture and VisitScotland.