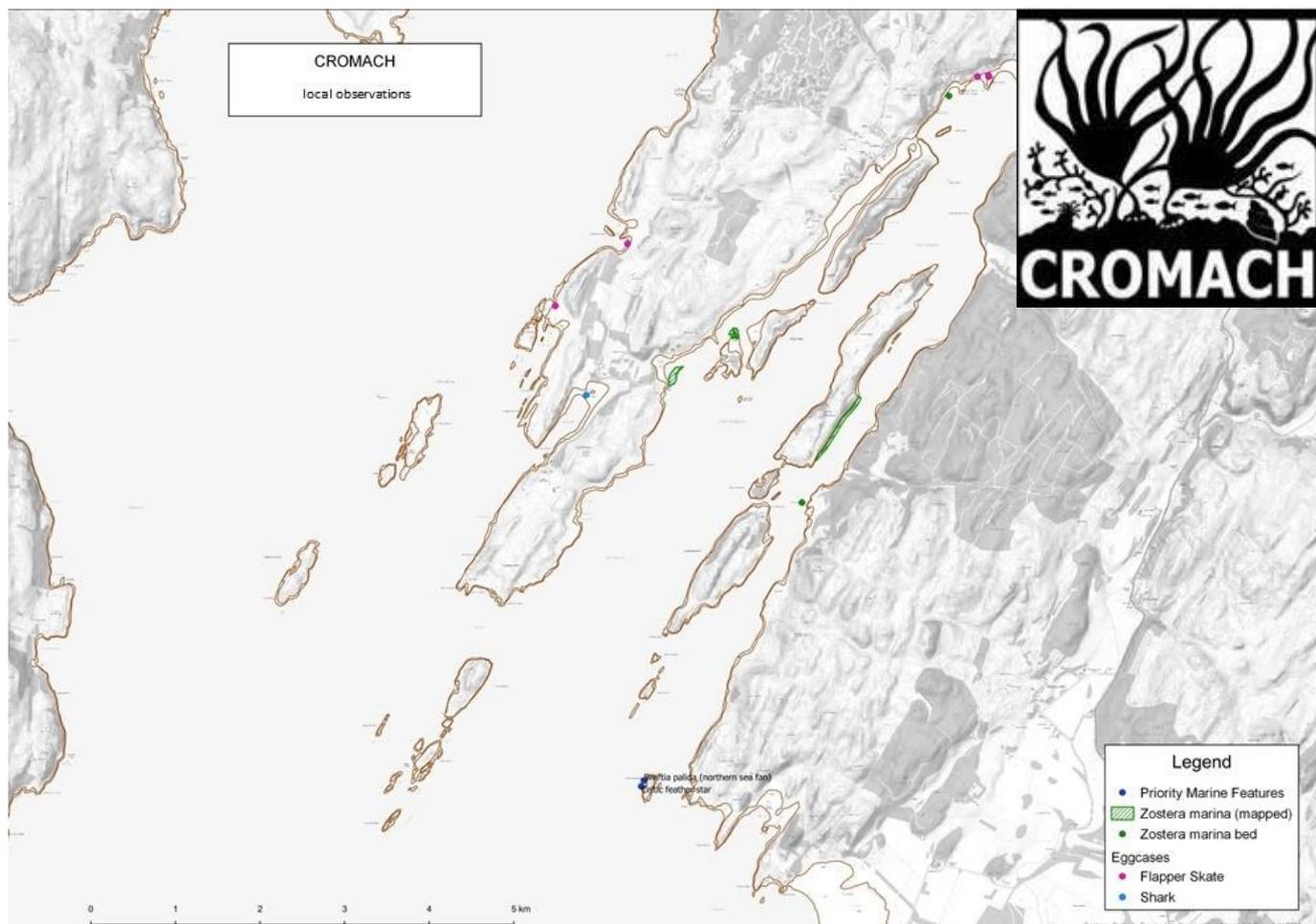# CROMACH ACTIVITIES 2019 – EARLY 2020

Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitats (CROMACH) is a voluntary community organisation dedicated to promoting the long-term wellbeing of local waters and coastline. Our aims are to:

- Build community awareness and understanding of the local marine environment
- Improve coastal and marine habitats and biodiversity
- Increase community representation in marine management
- Help sustain the livelihoods of those dependent on the marine environment

CROMACH have been very active over the last year or so with more lobbying work and building on their long-term partnership with the Coastal Communities Network (CCN). Marine Scotland, SEPA, SNH and SAMs (see the Glossary below for a who's who) have been in close touch with us as community stakeholders. National publicity on illegal dredging in the late summer propelled us into action and there were lobbying activities aplenty – letters, emails and meetings. CROMACH also participated in a call for Marine Scotland to be more effective in protecting the sea's resources for legal fishing and conservation. We also agreed to support the call for reinstatement of the 3 nautical mile exclusion zone for dredging.

Our native oyster reintroduction project has been very well reported and supported. It could not have happened without the enthusiasm and expertise of Danny Renton, who has now joined the group. The more we succeed, the bigger his ambitions – and ours – get, so watch this space. Biodiversity and licensing are critical issues which we are learning more about, in order that oyster reefs may soon stretch across the sediment of the lagoon. Brighter, clearer waters will be the result with many more species finding homes on the crinkly shells of this dinosaur-like species.

The following is a summary of recent activities divided up by CROMACH activity area.

Building community awareness and understanding of the local marine environment

1. The community has continued to collect and log Flapper skate egg cases with the shark Trust. The beach clean offered an opportunity to bring information about the Facebook posts stimulated others to report and to date over a dozen egg cases have been found and logged.
2. We have mapped two seagrass beds so far, just off Eilean Dubh. Zostera beds absorb carbon and they are are nursery grounds for several fish species and possibly even a home for seahorses! Seagrasses are the only flowering plants able to live in seawater and pollinate while submerged. Their presence supports our population of wigeon.
3. We supported a Friends of the Sound of Jura public meeting – Philip was a speaker and represented CROMACH.
4. Craignish became part of the Argyll Coast & Islands Hope Spot. This internationional designation draws attention to the quality of our marine environment and that the community is actively engaged in conserving it. CROMACH is one of 4 marine groups which compiled the application and work in the Hope Spot area, the others being CAOLAS, Friends of the Sound of Jura, and Save Seil Sound. Ours is the first ever Hope Spot on the UK mainland and the designation recognises our unique and precious habitat including the Flapper skate – more endangered than the giant panda. Important sites around the globe have been adopted as Hope Spots in a bid to raise awareness and put pressure on world leaders to protect the marine environment. The recognition means the sea lochs, deep-water sounds, peninsulas and islands of the Argyll coast now rank alongside areas such as the Gulf of California, the Sydney coast and the Coral Sea in the South Pacific. In Scotland, the Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot has greater marine biodiversity than anywhere except St Kilda. Parts of the seabed have rocky reefs, covered in soft corals, feather stars and northern sea fans. The complex habitats provide vital nurseries for other animals, including commercially valuable fish and crustaceans, which are especially vulnerable to pollution from fish farms and illegal dredging for scallops. There were 3 launch events: the first one in Ardfern, then Morvern and lastly Holyrood. We were invited to defend the Hope Spot in Tarbert at a meeting chaired by Michael Russell MSP with the dredging community. There were some good exchanges at the meeting, but subsequent correspondence has been nervy. We will continue to strive to build bridges and be respectful. Find out more and watch the beautiful video of submarine sealife here https://www.argyllhopespot.scot/
5. We have been communicating a lot on Facebook along with our partners. For example Argyll Hope Spot tweeted a thread about native oysters in August, which included Loch Sween's native and protected population, and our own introduced population. Our Facebook page has 235 people following and the most recent event reached 1322 people. There have been 33 posts in the last 6 months.
6. Heart of Argyll Wildlife (HAWO) helped us by delivering a class on oysters to Craignish primary school and developed teaching material for the class which can now go to other schools.
7. EMFF and SNH conducted a survey of the Sound of Jura MPA in June 2019 and surveyed 225 sites. Northern sea fans, football squirts and sponges were found on silty bedrock and boulders to the east and west of the Sound and to the west of northern jura. Burrowed mud with volcano worms were seen in Loch Sween MPA and abundant sea pens in the mud of Loch Craignish. We have requested all the research files and will add them to our survey material.
8. Our partners at Seasearch spent a weekend surveying Loch Craignish and have gathered lots of data from two sites – we hope to be able to share this with the members and to be able to compare it with the survey data we have from 1988. Two of our Board members are now trained and insured divers and can undertake voluntary dives with Seasearch. Many thanks to Owen Paisley of Seasearch for all his support.
9. We built a website this year too – www.cromach.org

Improving coastal and marine habitats and biodiversity

1. Last year we introduced a thousand juvenile native oysters in cages to Loch Craignish beside Eilean Dubh. The aim is to improve the quality of the water, re-establish this keystone species and to learn how to manage a marine species reintroduction. Native oyster beds are an essential part of a healthy marine ecosystem. Each adult oyster can clean and filter 30 gallons of water a day, and oyster reefs provide a vital habitat for many other species. The project, funded by Sea-Changers, supported by Scottish Natural Heritage and supplied by John Hamilton of Lochnell Oysters, a North Argyll business, is the first community-led native oyster restoration project in Scotland. This introduction necessitated learning about all the licences required and monitoring techniques, but on the way we have picked up lots of help, expertise and offers of help. We are currently measuring mortality rates, size of shell, water temperature, salinity and dissolved O_2. 450 of the oysters survive to date.
2. Two of the Board attended an event in Southampton where a marina and oyster project has been established (see www.bluemarinefoundation.com/projects/solent/) and we are now developing a similar joint project with Ardfern Yacht Centre, where boat owners can offset their pollution by sponsoring a cage of live oysters to clean water under the pontoons.
3. Following the success of the KIPPER guide to spotting illegal dredging, members have scoped for sites to obtain reliable long. and lat. data to report illegal dredging to Marine Scotland
4. In February 2020 we are holding an event on Rewilding and hope this will lead to more community-driven habitat and species restoration.

Increasing community representation in marine management

The Statutory bodies have increasing requirements to engage with communities so we have been in touch with them:

1. Rural Economy and Connectivity (REC) committee on aquaculture
2. SEPA on their One Planet Prosperity strategy
3. Community-led Marine Monitoring with Caitlin Orr, MASTS (Marine Alliance for Science and Technology Scotland). This has now been taken over by SNH and there is funding for survey equipment, which it is our intention to explore.
4. The Coastal Communities Network represents its members at a Marine Scotland meeting in Pitlochry on aquaculture, ADDs and PMFs (Priority Marine Features).
5. A meeting in Edinburgh on proposals for MPA marine management measures.
6. A Community Compliance seminar at SAMS, with Marine Scotland's Aquaculture sub-group. This included discussions on giving communities access to the fish farm sites benthic modelling at the pre-app stage so they can see where pollutants such as fish faeces and chemical treatments are likely to go, and they can comment on it. Discussions also covered ways to calculate the values of different habitats and developing systems for reporting. There was also a Marine Scotland event at Pacific Quay in Edinburgh.
7. Following a BBC piece on illegal dredging there was a meeting in Oban of concerned groups and citizens – several members attended. After this we attended a meeting in Glasgow at which the #OurSeas campaign was born (check it out on Twitter), which is pushing for the reinstatement of the 3-mile limit for dredging and is currently supported by a coalition of over 40 organisations ranging from coastal community groups to industry bodies like the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation.
8. Two of us attended an international marine conference in Glasgow. Another two attended a native oyster re-introduction conference in London, hosted by the Royal Zoological Society – from this, the Native Oyster Network was born.
9. We encouraged and made comments on marine issues to Argyll and Bute Council's planning departments for LDP2. (Local Development Plan).
10. We made representations to Argyll and Bute Council on several marine issues as they arose.
11. CROMACH attended a meeting at SAMS on the Public Perception of Aquaculture
12. We met with MARPAMM on MPA management- MARPAMM is the body tasked with management of the MPAs and is currently exploring what is important to coastal communities and the monitoring they feel should be undertaken.

Helping sustain the livelihoods of those dependent on the marine environment
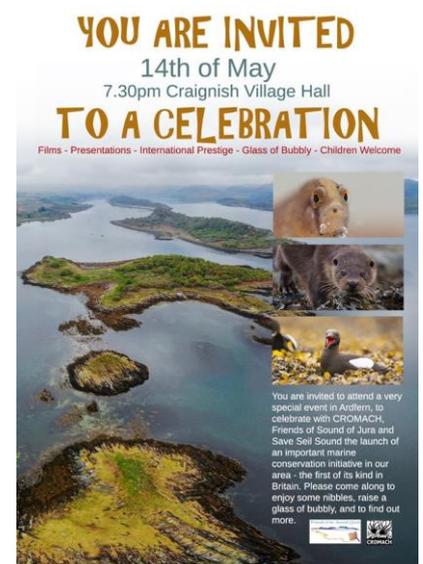
1. We have called for the reestablishment of the 3-mile limit for dredging, so that larger boats have to fish further offshore and increase the sustainability of the fish populations for the local fleet. The 3-mile limit was created to protect spawning grounds and maintain the fishery. It was then removed in 1984 after a decade of debate after the recommendation of the Cameron report.
2. There has been an increase in the number of eco-tourism businesses and we work with two of those. Eco tourism depends on a pristine habitat and we will continue to campaign to protect and restore this here.

The survey of the loch in August 2019 discovered a number of PMFs including a handful of native oysters. It was coordinated by Seasearch and supported by SAMS and SNH

The CROMACH Sea-Changers reintroduction of native oysters project was covered by Scottish Field (twice), the Scotsman and other media

In May we celebrated the launch of The UK's first Hope Spot, which included Loch Craignish and the Sound of Jura.

Some Marine Acronyms & Organisations

The number of regulatory, management and voluntary organisations concerned with marine and coastal management can be confusing, so we thought this short glossary might help:

ADDs - Acoustic Deterrent Devices. Used for scaring seals away from open cage fish farms. Detrimental to cetaceans as well as seals.

COALAS - Community Association of Lochs and Sounds. Coastal community group on Morven. Member of CCN

CCN - Coastal Community Network. Collaboration of locally focused groups. The CCN was founded by Flora and Fauna International to give voice to Coastal Communities and enable them to learn from and support each other.

The Crown Estate - Independent commercial business with a diverse portfolio of UK buildings, shoreline, seabed, forestry, agriculture and common land. Works with HM Treasury.

EMFF - European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. An EU body.

FFI - Flora & Fauna International - UK based (Cambridge) conservation innovator working worldwide to protect and enhance biodiversity. Funds CCN.

FoSoJ – Friends of the Sound of Jura – our neighbouring community conservation organisation to the south

HAWO – Heart of Argyll Wildlife

LDP - Local Development Plan, which includes coastal as well as building and development planning

Marine Scotland – Government office responsible for integrated management of Scotland's seas.

MARPAMM - Marine Protected Area Management and Monitoring

MASTS - Marine Alliance of Science & Technology in Scotland

PMFs - Priority Marine Features which merit particular protection

REC - Department for Rural Economy & Connectivity

SAMS - Scottish Association of Marine Science. Based at Dunollie outside Oban

SEPA - Scottish Environmental Protection Agency

SNH - Scottish Natural Heritage

SSS – Save Seil Sound, our neighbouring community conservation organisation to the south

About CROMACH

CROMACH stands for Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitats. Our group has been established to give voice to local people to help bring about effective marine management. We aim to encourage and promote sustainable use of local waters for recreation, fishing and other marine activities; to promote and carry out research, surveys and investigations of the local marine environment; to involve the community and raise awareness of marine issues and related cultural heritage; to educate and involve younger members of the community; and to protect and allow recovery of biodiversity and natural processes in Loch Craignish, the Sound of Jura and the Firth of Lorn, the seas of Scotland and the wider marine environment.

Want to help?

Become a member – it's free and the more supporters we have the more we can do! Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cromach/, on the web at www.cromach.org or email info@cromach.org. Or talk to Antonia Baird, Angus Bevan, Rory Day, Will Goudy, Aidan Gregory, Philip Price, Danny Renton, or Caroline Younger.