



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Tuesday 1 December 2020

Session 5



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ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE
33rd Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Mairi Gougeon (Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment)

Damon Hewlett (Scottish Government)

David Pratt (Scottish Government)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Lynn Tullis

LOCATION

Virtual Meeting

Scottish Parliament

Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee

Tuesday 1 December 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Gillian Martin): I welcome everyone to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee's 33rd meeting of 2020. The first item on our agenda is to decide whether to take items 3 and 4, which are consideration of correspondence from the Scottish Government, in private. Do members agree to take items 3 and 4 in private? I see that members are indicating agreement.

Regional Marine Planning Inquiry

09:00

The Convener: Our second agenda item is evidence on the committee's regional marine planning inquiry with the Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment, Mairi Gougeon. Good morning, minister. I also welcome the minister's officials from the Scottish Government marine planning and strategy division: Damon Hewlett, the marine engagement and information manager; and David Pratt, head of planning and strategy.

Minister, you will know that, this time last year, we carried out a series of visits to the marine planning areas. We have been taking evidence for some time and have produced an interim report, which you will have seen. People have told us that they are worried that regional marine planning is losing momentum. There are three areas where plans are under way, although some are further along than others. What are your general thoughts on the timescales for rolling out more marine planning areas? What are the key ambitions and outcomes for marine planning areas across Scotland?

The Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment (Mairi Gougeon): I thank the committee for the work that it has done so far, which will help to inform our future approach. As you mentioned, convener, there are three regional marine planning partnerships: Shetland was established in 2016, Clyde was established in 2017 and Orkney was established towards the end of November 2020. Our overall objectives have not changed.

A heartening thing in the evidence that the committee has taken so far is that people still see a value in regional marine planning. It is a completely new process and has been a massive learning process for everyone involved. The initial timescales were very ambitious and we have not been able to meet them, but it is only by going through the process that we have been able to see exactly how long it may take and why some parts have taken longer than initially expected. That will inform our approach from here on in. It is not the case that we are losing momentum.

Now that we have established a few marine planning partnerships and are waiting for the plans to be implemented, it is a good point for us to take stock of how the process has gone so far. The areas are very different from one another. There is a learning process involved in each area. It is important that we fully analyse the work that the committee has done and the evidence that it has gathered so far to see where we should take the

process from here, particularly in establishing realistic timescales for further regional marine plans.

The Convener: I take it that you are working on an assessment of how the partnerships in Orkney, Shetland and the Clyde have worked so far and that, off the back of that, you will make decisions on future funding, the roll-out to other areas and timings. Can you give us some more detail on that?

Mairi Gougeon: We hope to undertake an internal review of the processes so far, and we look forward to the committee's final report, which will very much feed into our work and the process of taking stock and looking at where we go from here. The work will cover all aspects, including taking stock of the finances and considering what we need, as opposed to what was projected at first. It is important that we have discussions with each of the partnerships, whose feedback has been really important as part of the process, because there are lots of valuable lessons to be learned that will help us in other areas.

As I highlighted in my first answer, each area is very different. The Clyde area is big, a large delegate and very diverse, and there are also the island authorities. One of the challenges of the process so far is that we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach; we very much have to take it region by region to see what will work where. That will be different for each area. Valuable lessons have come out of the process so far, and we want to ensure that we learn from that as we progress the roll-out.

The Convener: In a moment, I will hand over to my colleague Mark Ruskell, who wants to talk about how the work fits into the national objectives, but I have a specific question about the role of marine planning in the blue economy action plan. Where does that fit in, and how important is it?

Mairi Gougeon: Marine planning is vital, because the overarching themes and ambitions of a blue economy relate to clean, healthy, safe, productive and diverse seas that are managed to meet the long-term needs of nature as well as the people who use them. The vision that is set out in our national marine plan is closely aligned to delivery of the overall aims of the blue economy approach. The national marine plan and the regional marine plans that will be developed will be key to the long-term delivery mechanisms for the blue economy approach.

We are due to review the national marine plan in the first part of 2021. As we go through that process, we will consider whether changes to the plan might be necessary in order to deliver the blue economy approach. There are, of course,

many other challenges to take into consideration as part of that process, given where we are with climate change, the climate emergency, Covid-19 and Brexit. The review of the national marine plan, which we will take forward early next year, will be really important, and the blue economy action plan will be interlinked with, and vital to, that work.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell has some specific questions about that.

Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green): The minister's previous response about how the national marine plan might knit together with the regional marine plans was useful. Where do the regional marine planning partnerships take their lead from? Evidence was brought to the committee about one of the French marine planning partnerships. It has 26 objectives, which are all set nationally, and the planning partnership is working towards delivering those. That is slightly different from the current approach in Scotland, in which regional marine planning partnerships have autonomy and can select their own objectives.

What is your vision? Do you see regional marine planning partnerships as the primary way to deliver the objectives that will be in the national marine plan? How much co-direction from Government do you expect there to be?

Mairi Gougeon: I see regional marine plans having a key role and the work of the partnerships being vital. The national marine plan sets the overall framework, and I very much envisage the regional marine plans supporting that and taking their direction from that. All the work is probably happening at the right time, given that we are taking stock of how the regional marine plans have been operating so far, and that we are due to assess the national marine plan, and whether it needs to be amended, early next year. That will put us in good stead for progressing all that work. I see the regional marine plans being vital to that work. It is important that we have the right policy and framework set out at the national level, but we also need local ownership and decision making. The regional marine planning partnerships and plans will be vital in helping to deliver our national ambitions at a local level and with the buy-in of local stakeholders.

Mark Ruskell: Are there any boundaries to the work of the marine planning partnerships? For example, marine planning partnerships around the world sometimes work with fishers and direct fisheries and sometimes they stay away from that. Are fisheries management, conservation, designation of protected areas and priority marine features and management of those features things that you would expect our marine planning partnerships to take a lead role on, following Government objectives, or are there some things

that are best left to Marine Scotland or other bodies, such as regional inshore fisheries groups?

Mairi Gougeon: It is important that all those different interests are represented on the marine planning partnership. That is the objective and there is flexibility to allow the partnerships to build that. The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership has 24 different delegates, whereas the island authorities have a different set up, with advisory groups that encompass many different interests.

Mark Ruskell talked about the fisheries' interests. We have the regional inshore fisheries groups, which we see as the main route of engagement between commercial fishermen and marine planning partnerships to ensure that fisheries' interests are represented. As ministers, we have the responsibility to approve regional plans. We would check that interests are widely represented.

Regional marine plans are binding on decision makers, including Marine Scotland and fisheries managers. They would also have to be satisfied that any decisions that are taken are done in line with the regional marine plans. Does that answer your question?

Mark Ruskell: If we had a roll-out of marine planning partnerships across every part of our coastline and seas in Scotland, would that speed up or slow down our work to create marine protected areas and priority marine features and get agreed management plans in place? The roll-out has been slow so far.

Mairi Gougeon: I am not too sure about that. There are different statutory roles and it is up to ministers to designate marine protected areas. As you will be aware, there are some areas that are still awaiting designation, but we hope to be in a position to do that very soon. Given that our work on the areas that we have been considering for marine protection is nearing completion, the further roll-out of partnerships may not impact that. However, there are potential measures that would need to be put in place and consideration would have to be given as to whether the partnerships would be looking to implement fisheries management measures or not. I am not too sure whether that would necessarily speed up or slow down that process.

The marine planning partnerships and the regional marine plans have a key role because they have to develop policies that contribute to the conservation objectives of designated sites. We expect to be in a position to announce marine protected area designations very soon, so I do not think that there will be an impact on that process.

09:15

The Convener: Other members want to come in on some of the issues that Mark Ruskell has opened up.

Finlay Carson (Galloway and West Dumfries) (Con): We understand that Scotland is unique in creating new marine areas or regions, but a whole set of complex steps and processes is required to establish marine planning partnerships before the process of planning can begin. As we know, that has led to delays. That contrasts with the position in England, which has established a uniform process. What are your views on the Scottish Government's oversight of the process of establishing marine planning partnerships, particularly in light of the committee's interim inquiry findings that there are

"Overly complex governance structures and ineffective leadership"

and a clear

"lack of guidance and input from central government."

What changes will be made to how the Government oversees the establishment of the marine planning partnerships?

Mairi Gougeon: I can completely understand some of the concerns that have been raised. I reiterate what I alluded to earlier: this has been a massive learning process for us. It is the first time that we have been through the process of establishing marine planning partnerships and regional marine plans. All the work that is happening right now to examine and interrogate the process is really important in identifying what lessons we can learn from that for future roll-out.

As I said, it is not necessarily easy to establish marine planning partnerships and roll out regional marine plans because we cannot take a uniform approach and we must do what is most suitable in each area. Of course, we have seen from the marine planning partnerships that have been established so far that each is different, and that they operate differently. We need to learn from that.

The feedback, and some of the evidence that I have seen from the Clyde marine planning partnership and from looking at the lessons learned, will help with the establishment of marine planning partnerships. There will be a lot of learning to take away from that, which we will be able to use when working with others who are looking to establish themselves and create regional marine plans. The internal review that we are undertaking will feed into that process, too.

I do not know whether David Pratt or Damon Hewlett have anything further to add.

David Pratt (Scottish Government): Scotland has been compared with England. The two systems are very different. In England, there is a UK marine policy statement, which governs the whole of the UK seas. England has split its marine area into regions, but there is no national marine plan for England. I have spoken to a number of stakeholders, and there is a feeling that an alignment between the plans for all the regions is lacking. For example, a developer or a user of the marine space could find that there are different rules in different regions.

Obviously, Scotland has a national marine plan, which provides a solid, central focus for all Scotland's seas. We are trying to layer more into that definition, so that there is the ability to be more flexible on a regional basis and to produce regional plans that are more reflective of the communities that will be affected by them.

We should not lose sight of the fact that we are only a short number of years into setting up the marine equivalent of a terrestrial system that has been in place for decades, if not for far longer. We are trying to get a national plan and some of the regions up and running and delivering their plans in the coming months. If you think about the framework as a whole, solid progress has been made in a relatively short time.

Finlay Carson: There are mixed messages here. On the one hand, you are talking about a flexible national marine plan, but on the other, we have heard that there is a lack of flexibility in the legislation that allows for community representation on and membership of marine planning partnerships. Some stakeholders consider the provisions in the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 on the composition of partnerships as being far too prescriptive and not allowing enough flexibility. Orkney Islands Council required the act to be amended to allow it to be a sole delegate. Are you considering a review of the legislation to allow greater flexibility to provide appropriate local solutions for marine planning?

Mairi Gougeon: At the moment, I do not think that a change in legislation is needed. However, if the committee has received evidence to that effect and has definite recommendations on that point, we will consider its final report in detail.

As you suggested in your question, the legislation already allows flexibility for different approaches to be taken. It outlines what a marine planning partnership should comprise, but it is not prescriptive on that. The partnership has to represent specific interests, but the flexibility in the legislation is shown in the marine planning partnerships that are already in place. For example, Shetland has two members as part of the official delegate and a much larger advisory group, whereas Clyde has 24 members as part of

the delegate. Orkney Islands Council is a sole delegate and, as in Shetland, the partnership there has a wider advisory group to assist in the work.

As minister, I could ask that the delegate includes a community representative, but there are already options to allow marine planning partnerships to consider how to do that. We will consider any specific recommendations that the committee makes in its final report.

Finlay Carson: I will move on to training and guidance. We heard from stakeholders that there is a lack of guidance and input from central Government and that there needs to be clearer guidance on the roles and responsibilities of marine planning partnerships and the process for developing regional marine plans. There was also a call for new national guidance and training to enable a better understanding of the process among stakeholders, which would encourage trust and collaborative working. We know that, unfortunately, that is not happening in the plans at the moment.

What are your ambitions for providing clearer guidance and support for the groups, particularly given that there can be tensions between stakeholders, which could be helped by guidance?

Mairi Gougeon: That is where the lessons that have been learned in Clyde and Shetland are really important. They give us some valuable information to see what we could have done better and how we can improve the process in future. All of that work and the committee's report will help us to identify where there are problems.

All delegates need to have their governance arrangements clearly stated. The importance of those arrangements is highlighted by the Clyde marine planning partnership, given the size of the area that it covers, the size of the delegate and the different issues that that brings in contrast to the situations in Shetland and Orkney.

We have to strike a balance between being overly prescriptive and allowing for structures and approaches that reflect local circumstances and have the flexibility that I mentioned in my previous answer. We must also ensure that we learn from what has happened in the roll-out so far. We want to learn from that and adapt our processes as we move forward.

Finlay Carson: One thing that has been picked up is that the underpinning legislation in Scotland does not provide for the management of fisheries through marine planning. However, we know that marine planning can support fisheries. Given the current limited budget and powers of regional inshore fisheries groups and the fact that they are sometimes classed as being hard to reach because of their working hours and the nature of small businesses, how are you going to strengthen

the RIFGs and ensure that they have an opportunity to collaborate effectively with the planning partnerships and wider marine stakeholders?

I am particularly interested in resources, because I understand that developing a marine plan can cost between £100,000 and nearly £30 million. Scotland's investment in such plans is comparatively low, at between £250,000 and £300,000. Do you have any plans to support regional inshore fisheries groups from that budget or to increase the budget to ensure that they have an effective voice on the planning groups?

Mairi Gougeon: There were a few points in that question, so if I miss one, please remind me of it.

On the regional inshore fisheries groups and their role, I go back to my response to Mark Ruskell. I know that the committee has had evidence on the interaction between the regional inshore fisheries groups and regional marine planning partnerships. We see the regional inshore fisheries groups as being the main route for engagement between commercial fisheries and marine planning partnerships to ensure that fishery interests are represented in that. As ministers, we have a responsibility to approve regional marine plans, so we have to check that that interaction has worked as we intended.

The regional inshore fisheries groups make recommendations on fishery management measures to Marine Scotland, which means that it has the ability to check compliance with regional marine plans. As part of our broader work, the future of fisheries management strategy will be published shortly, and it will also feed into that work. We see the regional inshore fisheries groups' management plans informing the development of the regional marine plans and, in turn, the regional and national plans will take into account any future decisions on fisheries management measures.

Did you also make a point about the financing of that?

Finlay Carson: Yes. One of the big issues for our fishing businesses and the inshore fisheries groups is that there is a lack of finance and resource to make their position clear, particularly in light of the huge financial clout of some of the non-governmental organisations and environmental lobbyists, which are on a completely different scale. What are your plans to fund the groups to ensure that they can effectively represent their members and fisheries' interests?

Mairi Gougeon: First, we regularly and continually engage with and learn from fisheries. We want to look at the financing as part of our internal review, because I know that that point has been raised throughout the evidence.

We work in financially constrained times—I am sure that I do not need to tell anyone on the committee that—and what we have been able to deliver so far, given the budgets that are available, is a testament to the work of everyone involved. Considering where we can best target the resource and what resource is needed will be an important part of our work, following on from the committee's report and our internal review.

09:30

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I will start with the balance between marine activity and development. I represent the north-east of Scotland, and it is clear that there is mixed use of the marine environment for wind farms and potentially tidal energy, while there are significant fisheries interests, both inshore and further offshore, and significant environmental issues with marine life in areas such as the Moray Firth. Are you looking at spatial planning in the regional marine plans? If so, how do we navigate our way to getting a balance between the many interests that are competing for space in the marine environment?

Mairi Gougeon: A spatial approach can certainly be taken by marine planning partnerships, because the national marine plan states that regional marine plans should consider identifying suitable areas for things such as submarine cables, and that they should consider identifying regionally important ports and harbours. Marine planning partnerships and regional marine plans can consider those things if they feel that it is appropriate. As Mr Stevenson outlined in his question, there are lots of competing resources in our waters, but the flexibility that should allow that approach to be taken is in place, should marine planning partnerships decide to pursue it.

David Pratt: We should not lose sight of the sectoral planning that we do. The minister and the energy minister, with us, jointly took forward the sectoral plan for offshore wind energy, which was a huge spatial planning exercise. Although the output of that exercise was spatial designation for large offshore wind farms, there is a huge body of work that takes in many of the marine stakeholders that Stewart Stevenson mentioned.

We need to get to grips with all the data on what is happening in the marine environment, and we will need to compile some comprehensive assessments on the relative marine users before we can get to the point of producing a final spatial plan. Even then, it will have to go through significant consultation processes. That is a big burden, but the more sectors in which we can drive those initiatives and do those exercises in conjunction with regional planning authorities to help and inform us, the more we can get to local

stakeholders by engaging with those organisations for those exercises. We have seen that in working with the coastal partnerships.

There is a lot of merit in trying to produce sectoral plans with that spatial definition, involving the regions and ultimately enabling them to integrate some of those outputs and help us, where they feel it is necessary, to shape more appropriate spatial definitions for the activities that take place in the regions. That is not to say that they will not be able to do that as individual authorities further down the line. We certainly see that as an area that they can get into.

We should not lose sight of the fact that doing spatially defined planning is a big task—for example, our sectoral marine plan probably has upwards of 5,000 pages-worth of consultation through the various stages of documentation. It is a big undertaking for a regional partnership that is still trying to develop its regional plans and policies and get its initial framework in place.

Stewart Stevenson: I would like to probe a little on the role of central Government. Minister, your response was very much about the local decision making, which is welcome because, in the local area, there is the best possible understanding of the tensions that might exist between competing interests. Equally, however, projects such as wind farms and engineering uses of the marine environment involve substantial investments, and we need to start from a position of certainty that they are worth pursuing, because even to work up a proposal can cost a substantial amount.

How will ministers and central Government play their role in that decision making? It will not simply be a matter for local decision making, because it interacts with national policies in not just your portfolio, but others.

Mairi Gougeon: The work that David Pratt highlighted is a key example of how we have been able to make that work, because we have the national marine plan and we will have the blue economy action plan, so we have an overarching framework and policy direction. However, the body of work that he talked about with regard to the offshore wind sectoral marine plan was a large, positive body of work that cut across all those sectors. The blue economy action plan is also vital because, as you say, the work does not just fall within my immediate portfolio, but cuts across all areas of Government. Through the sectoral offshore wind plan, we have shown how we have been able to work across all the interests and bring them together.

Stewart Stevenson: I am also interested in how we might integrate terrestrial planning with marine planning. I will give a small example that might illustrate a more general point.

There was an issue about where an electricity cable was going to be routed from some of the Moray Firth developments to a substation some distance inland. Although there was a view on where the cable could be laid in the marine environment, the initial proposals for where it would hit the land were such that it would cross a beach, and those who are interested in terrestrial planning considered that to be inappropriate. In order to get the cable to hit the beach at a more appropriate point, a lot of work was required to integrate the on-land decision making with the offshore decision making. That illustrates some of the difficulties in integrating marine and terrestrial planning.

How can the Government and the partnerships work together to ensure that the process is more seamless, not just from the point of view of the developers—important as that is—but for local interests and communities?

Mairi Gougeon: That is key, and it will be important as we move forward. We want the terrestrial and marine planning systems to be integrated and work well alongside and with each other, not against each other. That is important if we want the regional marine planning process to work. However, it will be an on-going and evolving process, because we do not yet have regional marine plans in place, so we will have to monitor that.

At present, regional marine plans have to be compatible with the development plans for any areas that they adjoin, and strategic and local development plans are also required to have regard to any adopted national or regional marine plan that adjoins that strategic area or the local area. As part of that, Marine Scotland is a statutory consultee in those processes and it engages in the local development plan processes. Within that role, it can therefore ensure that marine plans are recognised in local development plans that are being reviewed.

As I said, we do not have regional marine plans in place yet, but I think that we have the structures to ensure that the processes are as integrated as they can be and that all relevant plans are taken into consideration. However, we will have to monitor the matter closely as we proceed and the regional marine plans are put in place.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell wants to pick up on something that was discussed under that theme.

Mark Ruskell: Yes—it was in the discussion about offshore wind. One issue that arose from the judicial review a couple of years back was the availability of ecological data that is generated by the industry and whether that is then fed into the

consenting process and is available to wider stakeholders.

Do you envisage that, for example, an east coast regional marine partnership will co-ordinate some of that work, or would that best be done by Marine Scotland or an offshore wind sector working group? Could a regional marine partnership be the conduit for all the data and information that is needed to make sensible decisions about where developments take place and how to mitigate them?

Mairi Gougeon: That probably comes back to some of the points that David Pratt made earlier. That work could be quite onerous for regional marine partnerships to take on, especially given the scale of what we discussed in relation to the sectoral marine plan for offshore energy. We do not want to put too heavy a burden on marine planning partnerships in the work that they can be expected or would look to deliver. However, I will bring David in on that point.

David Pratt: On the point about east coast monitoring, it is essential that we understand the true impacts for ornithology throughout Scottish waters, but that is actually quite a significant burden. We are seeing from some of the early offshore wind farms that have had individual turbine monitoring that the quantity of high-definition, comprehensive data that is generated means that the processing is a big and expensive task.

When we co-ordinate the regional groups, we will look to regional representatives and experts to engage on all the post-consent issues—not just ornithology, but any community issues in certain parts of the country, and issues to do with ports and shipping interests. How can we get those regional stakeholders into the post-planning groups in order to understand some of the issues? There is definitely a role there. We just need to be careful not to give regional partnerships a task that would be unduly burdensome. It can be very resource intensive to process such data and get an output.

The Convener: Claudia Beamish has some questions on financing.

Claudia Beamish (South Scotland) (Lab): I will explore financing, and then my colleague Angus MacDonald will look at resourcing and expertise.

You will learn about this, minister, but I note for context and for the record that the committee's inquiry has found a number of key issues. There is a lack of human, financial and political support to deliver regional marine planning, particularly in the areas of staff, marine planning expertise and resources for marine planning partnerships. There are issues with funding and expertise for research,

data collection and monitoring, and there is insufficient funding for the wider roll-out of marine planning.

I think that it is fair to say that finance, or the lack of it, is one of the most common concerns, if not the most common concern. The research that we commissioned on international comparisons found that funding for marine planning in Scotland—as I understand it, the funding is between £250,000 and £300,000 per plan, spread over three years, but you might want to explore that with us—is “significantly below” the estimated funding levels in the international examples. I will not go into those, because they are in the paper and I am aware of the time. However, I highlight the fact that the research also showed that there was a significant return for the funding that was put in.

I would like to explore the issue of the resources that are currently available within Marine Scotland to support regional marine planning. Could we please get your thoughts on that, minister, as well as those of your officials, as appropriate?

09:45

Mairi Gougeon: From going through the committee's evidence and from reading the interim report, I have definitely picked up the concerns about funding and how a lack of funding could have impeded progress on rolling out regional marine planning.

I do not know whether you have the figures in front of you on the finance and resources that we have put into the area so far. We have a dedicated resource of £150,000 in place for 2020-21; that includes funding for a new regional planning officer to improve communications with and between the partnerships. Crown Estate Scotland is also expected to contribute the same amount—£150,000—for three years as of 1 April 2021.

Beyond that, as I have said in previous responses to questions that have come up today, we will look at our overall approach to funding for regional marine planning following our own internal assessment and, of course, any outcomes or recommendations that the committee makes in that regard.

I have already highlighted the financial constraints that all areas of Government are under at the moment, but this is an area that we will be continuing to look at further. It is important that we take the feedback from people who have been through the process and look to address that however we can. That is why taking stock is absolutely vital.

I do not know whether David Pratt or Damon Hewlett have anything further that they would like to add to that.

David Pratt: I will touch on the point about expertise and what we have internally. There are probably similarities with what I was saying earlier about the development of the planning system as a whole. I suspect—

Claudia Beamish: I am sorry—I do not want to be rude, but I will stop you there, because Angus MacDonald wants to ask about expertise and he might want to set the context for that theme. I am sorry if I was not clear—my question is more about marine finance in general.

David Pratt: That is fine. Damon Hewlett might wish to add a few points on how the system has been working over more recent years. As the minister indicated, it is probably less money than was originally envisaged, but it is still a significant amount of money that is afforded to the partnerships by Marine Scotland and the Scottish Government. That is in addition to the expertise in other parts of the public sector and other parts of Marine Scotland, which continue to engage with the regional planning partnerships as they develop their plans.

Damon Hewlett (Scottish Government): I think that that is right. The minister alluded to the fact that we intend to review our approach to financing and have a look at the internal resources and financing that we allocate to regional marine planning within Marine Scotland and the financing that we allocate to partnerships. At the moment, we allocate just under £400,000 a year to marine planning partnerships and to local coastal partnerships to work towards regional marine plans. As the minister pointed out, we have a dedicated internal staff resource of £150,000.

We have not seen the report on international examples. We look forward to seeing that; we will consider it carefully alongside our review and the final report from the committee. I think that that will be really interesting stuff.

By our estimations, Shetland has spent in the region of £500,000 in getting to the stage that it is at now—it is very close to being able to submit a draft plan to the Scottish ministers. That is a lot less than we forecast way back when we did estimates and when the Parliament passed the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, so we will need to look at that carefully. The financial circumstances that we are in at the moment are obviously different from those that we were in back then, but if we are able to deliver a plan for less than we thought, which we seem to have been able to do, that is a good thing. It is a good use of public resources.

However, it is clear from the interim report that there are concerns, which we will take on board. We will look carefully at where we can make improvements and where we can best target any additional resource. As the minister pointed out, we managed to secure additional funding from Crown Estate Scotland. We need to consider where we can best target that and get the best value for money.

Claudia Beamish: [*Inaudible.*—helpful from everyone in terms of our scrutiny.

The minister and Damon Hewlett highlighted the possibilities as regards the Crown Estate. Could you explain in a bit more detail how that might work? How will things be developed when it comes to any finance that might come from that? Thinking laterally, as we all have to, has any consideration been given to marine industry levies or any other forms of funding that might go to marine planning partnerships?

Mairi Gougeon: You are absolutely right about what we will have to think about and look at in providing any further resource. David Pratt or Damon Hewlett might want to say more about the detail of the Crown Estate moneys, but I know that that is something that areas have looked at themselves. There is obviously the funding input from local authorities that are involved in the marine planning partnerships, too, but I know that those areas have been able to access other funds, whether that is through the European maritime and fisheries fund or other funds. I think that the Clyde partnership has been able to bring in more than £200,000 to help with some of the work that it has been doing on public engagement, and Orkney has received around £120,000 from the EMFF to help with some of its work, so there are other avenues.

I know that the bodies can sometimes be restricted in the type of funds that they can go for, but you are absolutely right—we have to look at where the opportunities are—and we are thinking in that way now. As Damon Hewlett outlined, we will conduct an internal review to look at how we can best target the resources that we have, and we look forward to hearing about the international examples and how things work elsewhere.

I will bring in David or Damon to talk about the Crown Estate Scotland funding.

David Pratt: There are two aspects to that. First, the Scottish consolidated fund provides a distribution of the revenues from zero to 12 nautical miles to local coastal authorities. We understand that certain island authorities are looking to make some of their contributions from what they receive from that fund, because it is a partnership when it comes to what we, the

authorities and other partners that could get involved can bring to the table.

In addition, we are working with Crown Estate Scotland on some of its central funding work. It has committed an additional £150,000 for the next three years, starting next year. We would look to see how we could use that and whether, for example, we could use it to make additional contributions that could introduce another partnership, or something along those lines. Those are the two strands to how the Crown Estate money will work.

Claudia Beamish: Finally, the minister mentioned the European fund, which has been fundamentally important for coastal communities. I had not been aware that it has been fed into the regional marine plans.

Could the minister—either today, through her officials or by writing to the committee—comment on what the hopes are for next year, once we are no longer part of the European Union? Could she tell us what the opportunities are and whether the United Kingdom Government is—[*Inaudible.*—] what I am sure have been requests to ensure that that funding continues in some form?

Mairi Gougeon: Absolutely, because the likes of the EMFF have been vital for coastal communities. I would be happy to write to the committee and give an up-to-date position on where we are with that and with discussions with the UK Government.

The Convener: Finlay Carson wants to ask a brief financial question.

Finlay Carson: It was estimated that the setting up of a marine planning system in England would cost about £34 million and that the running costs would be about £1 million per year, but that, once implemented, the system would bring in benefits of £46 million a year. The Scottish Government is putting in £250,000 to £300,000 of finance per plan over a three-year period, which is significantly lower. I am concerned that there appears to be no recognition that that is a real issue. The most commonly cited concern in the committee's inquiry has been that a lack of central Government finance is preventing long-term investment in regional planning—

The Convener: Could you wind up your question, please? Other members want to come in, and you have already asked that question. Could you put a question to the minister, please?

Finlay Carson: I think that I did at the end, but maybe you did not hear it.

Is the minister satisfied that the level of funding is adequate, given the examples from elsewhere and the fact that the low level of funding has been the most commonly cited issue?

Mairi Gougeon: With regard to other examples, we are not comparing like with like. If there are international examples available, I have already said that we want to interrogate those and look at them in more detail. That is where all this work is important. All the lessons that have come through in the evidence will be in the committee's final report, and we will take stock of that. We will have an internal assessment to look at that and at how we can best target resources. It came across clearly in the evidence to the committee that people recognise the need for and the value of regional marine plans and regional marine planning partnerships, so we want to ensure that those are a success as far as possible. We will consider all that information.

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): I thank Claudia Beamish for allowing me to cover the issue of expertise.

One issue that we found while taking evidence around the country was that, in some regions, there is insufficient marine planning expertise to support regional marine planning. I heard the issue being raised by stakeholders in various areas of the Clyde, and Aberdeen City Council stated in evidence that

"marine environmental knowledge and experience is largely outside of the skills and training of existing staff".

Evidence has suggested that increased funding and longer-term contracts with competitive salaries are required to attract the required expertise or to upskill existing staff. What is the Scottish Government doing or planning to do to raise the profile of marine planning as a profession and increase the availability of marine planning expertise? Will that be considered in your internal review?

Mairi Gougeon: As I went through the evidence, I definitely picked up that point, which is concerning. As you mentioned, Aberdeen City Council raised in its evidence that it feels that the relevant expertise is not available, so we have to take that point away and consider how to tackle it.

As we go through the process of rolling out regional marine plans and developing them in each region, I like to think that that raises the profile of marine planning and I hope that it will generate more interest in the profession.

We also play a constructive role in things such as the marine planning group MASTS—the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland. Alongside that work, we are more than happy to look at what more we can do and how we can best address those concerns. If we want success in marine planning, we need to ensure that we have the expertise to help drive that forward and we need to support that as much as we can.

David Pratt or Damon Hewlett might have something to add.

10:00

David Pratt: That is a good point. I was going to say earlier that, when the terrestrial planning system started, there probably were not many planners. This is about trying to build up a body of expertise and experts, and trying to build marine planning as a profession. Having worked in the area for 10 to 12 years, I am probably as close to being a marine planner as someone could get, but I still do not consider myself a professional marine planner because, as yet, there is no such thing that is professionally recognised and institutionalised. That takes a lot of time.

Obviously, we have town planners who come into marine planning through the Royal Town Planning Institute, and I am from the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment. It is about trying to build all that together over a prolonged period of time so that we have enough experts. We started with very few experts, and the number is continually expanding, year on year. Heriot-Watt University and the University of the Highlands and Islands now have masters courses in marine planning, and we are starting to see roles for graduates in some of the partnerships. That will evolve.

We should not forget that a lot of graduates work with the Marine Scotland licensing operations team, where they get experience in a different part of the marine planning system. Although that is not working specifically on plans, it is within the broader marine management and marine planning framework. We would definitely like to concentrate on that and see it grow in the coming years.

Angus MacDonald: It will be interesting to see how that develops. From our experience in Shetland, the situation there seemed exemplary in my view, but we identified challenges in local authorities around the Clyde. I am pleased to note that the issue is on your radar and that we can look forward to future developments.

I turn to data collection. The committee received evidence that identified the importance of data collection and scientific monitoring to support regional marine planning. On our travels, the committee identified good examples of collaborative working in Shetland and on the Clyde, but there is always room for improvement. What opportunities are there for improving collaboration among marine planning partnerships, academic expertise and fishers in data collection and monitoring for regional marine plans?

Mairi Gougeon: You are absolutely right—there are definitely opportunities for improving that collaboration. As I said in my previous answer, we

play a constructive role in the MASTS marine planning group, which has a role in that, and there definitely are opportunities to improve it and ensure that it works better.

We are also looking to establish a national marine planning forum. The idea is that it would be a forum to help share learning and experience, and we hope that it would provide opportunities for improving that collaboration, too. I also look forward to the committee's findings on that.

There are pieces of work that we are looking at to try to encourage that. David Pratt or Damon Hewlett might want to come in on that point.

David Pratt: I will just add that we continually try to evolve the national marine planning interactive tool, which is a geographic information system tool with 800 to 1,000 data layers. That is publicly accessible, and we expect partnerships to use some of that information. We are trying to develop a new assessment of Scotland's seas. It is important to note from the outset that we are looking to get as much of that data cut to the regions themselves, to enable them to do more regional analysis.

We have the Marine Scotland information portal, which provides a raft of evidence that we are involved with and which has been collected through Marine Scotland science. All of it is publicly available, and we encourage stakeholders to get involved in it. For example, on engaging the fishing sector, I go back to the offshore wind plan, on which we had intensive engagement with the sector about where the activity takes place. We tried to go over and above by sending officials to certain community events and specifically to meet fishermen in ports and understand some of the tracks and routes that they were taking, so that we could factor that into the planning process.

We can get a lot of data through such learning and initiatives, and ensure that it is integrated into the planning process at national and regional level.

Angus MacDonald: That is good to hear. Engagement is what it is all about, so I look forward to further progress on that.

The Convener: That was an interesting line of questioning, given that one of the successes of the Shetland experience was the collaboration with the North Atlantic Fisheries College.

We are looking at a green recovery and at areas in which there will be future jobs and areas of expertise as we push our agenda towards net zero. That seems to be an area of expertise and job creation that we need to put some heft behind. Does the minister have any reflections on that?

Mairi Gougeon: There are exciting opportunities for expertise to build, and the profile

of those roles will obviously be a lot higher as well. Therefore, you have absolutely hit the nail on the head when it comes to a green recovery. There are potentially a lot of opportunities that we can capitalise on.

The Convener: Mark Ruskell wants to come in. I think that his question is off the back of what Claudia Beamish or Angus MacDonald asked about.

Mark Ruskell: It is actually off the back of what you just said, convener. It is about the industrial strategy for sectors such as offshore wind. Developers are already putting in supply chain statements in the ScotWind round, and there will be planning issues associated with that, related to the infrastructure that we need in ports and harbours to supply, build, design, operate and maintain the wind farms of the future.

Does the minister think that the sector will deal with those issues and that marine planning partnerships will then offer a view, or should we integrate all of that into a marine plan that sets out what the economic opportunities are and plans around them? That would mean planning for ports and harbours directly now in order to meet those opportunities for jobs.

Mairi Gougeon: Do you mean in relation to any extra infrastructure that we would look to build around that need, or extra training opportunities and the role of marine planning partnerships in that?

Mark Ruskell: Who will take the lead in the strategy for offshore wind? Will there be a sector plan or will it be integrated into a marine plan? I am trying to work out where that issue sits and who will take the lead on it.

Mairi Gougeon: We have the national marine planning policy because we do not have regional marine plans or marine planning partnerships in place everywhere. Therefore, we would have to look at that on a bigger scale, initially. However, there is a role for marine planning partnerships and regional marine plans, too.

David Pratt might want to come in on that.

David Pratt: It is worth noting that a multitude of bodies have to be aligned. The sectoral plan is, in essence, the first building block in identifying resource areas that we consider have, on the whole, come through a sustainability assessment and can be taken forward.

It is then about getting the other public sector tools into a mode in which they can enable. If a port facility were required, the regional planning partnership would be involved in discussions and, as it evolved its plan, that would be considered. We know that, as the national marine plan evolves and develops, it might prioritise certain ports.

Once the developers are assigned a development area, we need them to start engaging local stakeholders from the outset—or at a very early stage—so that they can say what facilities they will need. Many of our supply-chain problems are related to our need to absorb capital expenditure increases into our projects in a way that perhaps does not apply to our European neighbours. We need to get port facilities to a certain standard so that those ports can compete and, as a result, a project can still have an overall competitive bid.

We have an opportunity with the development of floating wind. The new sectoral plan provides a good framework to allow that to take off.

It is exactly as you say: there is probably no one specific lead here. There are leads from enterprise, regional planning authorities, local planning authorities, Marine Scotland and Crown Estate Scotland. We need to be very well co-ordinated and work together so that, when the planning system is called on, it can respond by having certain areas identified and ensuring that much of the comprehensive planning work is in place, which can allow benefits to be realised for a more localised development of the supply chain for future offshore wind projects.

Liz Smith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Minister, I found your earlier answers to Mark Ruskell and Finlay Carson, with regard to how you hope to align national and regional policy, very interesting. I want to ask about the voice of local communities. As I understand it, there has been a lot of controversy in that regard. How will the marine planning partnerships provide a voice for local communities, particularly when it comes to licensing decisions and the consent that is required for new aquaculture sites?

Mairi Gougeon: The voice of communities is clearly vital. Essentially, that is what regional planning is about. We have our overarching framework, but there is also regional decision making and the engagement of local stakeholders, and communities represent a key part of that work. We absolutely support engagement with community groups in regional marine planning.

A number of initiatives have been undertaken, and we can take a lot of learning from them. I spoke earlier about the money that the Clyde marine planning partnership has through the EMFF. That partnership has a project on community engagement. Work is being done with schools in Orkney, which involves learning about the marine environment. Work is under way in Shetland, too, where there has been engagement with communities through community councils. The community planning partnership there has been developing the Shetland partnership delivery plan, which has helped to identify community

needs so as to feed those into regional marine planning.

Can I confirm that you also asked about licensing decisions in your question?

Liz Smith: [*Inaudible.*—the committee's report when I was not a member of it. It strikes me that there has been quite a lot of controversy in certain areas of the country, particularly in relation to community engagement. There have been some controversial decisions.

Several local authorities will take an interest in what is happening in the Clyde area, whereas that is not so much of a problem for Shetland, for example. How do you foresee better engagement whereby people in local communities feel that they have had their say, they have been well listened to and their opinions can be fed into decisions, particularly on licensing or a new site for an aquaculture business?

Mairi Gurgeon: You are absolutely right about that. I am highlighting the Clyde partnership, noting the size of the region, the area that it covers and the size of the delegate, with 24 members. Ministers can request that we have community representatives specifically on a delegate but, for the other examples that I have mentioned—Shetland or Orkney, for instance—that is not the only way for community interests to be represented.

There is flexibility in the current legislation to enable that, but there will be challenges, such as those in the Clyde area. A community representative on the delegate will cover a wide range of communities. The issue is how best each of those communities can be represented. Throughout the process, regional marine plans are not developed completely in isolation or without the need to engage with communities. Community engagement is key in preparing the plans.

10:15

As for the involvement of regional marine planning partnerships in licensing decisions, the partnerships would be statutory consultees for any applications, so they would have to look at the applications and decide whether they aligned with any regional marine plan that was in place. That would be the partnerships' role. Any members of a partnership could object or feed back through the processes that are in place to deal with that. There are mechanisms that can be used for individual applications and there is a specific role for regional marine planning partnerships.

Community engagement and involving communities are key to the success of regional marine plans, but there are different mechanisms to enable that to work. As I have said in response

to pretty much all the questions, that is where all the work, feedback and learning that we can take from the process so far are important. We need to look at the lessons that we can learn, what has worked and what needs to be done in regions that might have similar issues or cover a similar area to Clyde to ensure that engagement takes place. We will continue to consider all such points.

Liz Smith: I suggest that it is crucial for people to understand how the national plan and the regional plans come together and what the overarching policy objectives are. It is helpful for community voices to be well heard, because that is the best way to ensure that they are enthusiastic about what is happening in their community development and that they feel that they have ownership of the issues.

The Convener: We have exhausted all our questions, but I will ask for clarity on one point. Minister, you mentioned that you will do an assessment, which will take into account our feedback. Did you say that that would happen in early 2021? Is that correct?

Mairi Gurgeon: [*Inaudible.*—internal assessment, which we will look to commence in the coming weeks and months. Once the committee has produced its final report, we will see what work we might need to do following that and consider whether a further assessment is needed. We will aim to respond to the committee's report and any recommendations that it makes in a full way that takes into account all that information.

The Convener: We look forward to having your response to our report. I thank you and your officials for your time.

That concludes the public part of our meeting. At our next meeting, on 8 December, we will consider EU exit subordinate legislation and a draft report on our regional marine planning inquiry.

10:18

Meeting continued in private until 11:09.

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