

DUNVEGAN AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING ON Tuesday 28th January 2025 at 7:30pm

Present – John Laing (JL), Donna Campbell (DC), Sylvia Meyer (SY), Tim Wallis (TW), Mandy Boswell (MB), Christine Brennan (CB), Katy Lawrence, Dunvegan Trust (KL), Jennie Chapman (JC), Kyle Sterry (KS), Scott Maclucas-Paton (SMP), Alexander Tindall (AT), and Malcolm MacKinnon (MM).

Apologies – Philippa MacRae (PM), Drew Millar (DM)

1	Chairman's Welcome – JL opened the meeting, welcomed those present and gave apologies.
2	Kelp Farm – JL explained that we'd heard from Bruce Hare of Kaly Group at our September 2024 meeting about what was planned for Loch Bracadale – in particular Loch Harlosh and Loch Caroy. JL went on to say that it's only right that we hear from the men who have fished in Loch Bracadale for many many years and depend on the loch to make a living. AT – thanked the community council for inviting him and MM to discuss main concerns about the intended farms in Loch Caroy and Loch Harlosh. He said he'd met with Bruce Hare a couple of weeks ago. It is felt that there has been a misrepresentation in that Kaly Group have said that all creel fishermen would not be affected by the farms and AT asserts that they will. AT says Kaly Kelp says it will take up 1% of the loch's area – but in reality the proposed sites will take up approximately 25% of Loch Harlosh and 25% of Loch Caroy . The proposed farm in Loch Harlosh is between 3 and 4 kilometres long and the one at Harlosh Island (in Loch Caroy) is roughly 2 kilometres long. Struan Community Council have asked questions of Kaly Group and their answers are “wishy washy”. Kaly Group have told the fishermen that once they've harvested their seaweed that the fishermen can fish the site of the farm for the next six months. However if there are any mooring left in place – Kaly Group have been unable to confirm the number of moorings they'll put in place at each farm, but the fishermen have estimated there'll be at least 112 moorings on the seabed of the farm at Loch Harlosh. There will be chains going to massive mussel buoys on the surface. AT attests that there's “no way” that they'll be able to fish at either farm. Throughout the summer there'll be a seaweed “curtain” around both sites – so no boats will be able to transit anywhere within the perimeter of the farms. AT describes the farms as massive “cobwebs” both below the surface and on it which will not only prevent people from enjoying the beautiful lochs, but cause entanglement issues with whales, dolphins, seals, and birds. Should this application go ahead then there is talk that they would want to expand further within the lochs that form Loch Bracadale as well as elsewhere around Skye. AT pointed out that Kaly Group's assertion that their farms will deter trawlers and dredgers is irrelevant as trawlers and dredgers can go elsewhere in the world whereas the local fishermen in their small boats do not have the luxury of going elsewhere. These are local families whose forebears fished these waters and whose children want to continue so to do. MM said that the two locations are some of the best for prawn fishing – prime fishing grounds – and the loss of these grounds will have a catastrophic impact on the fishermen's income.

The last consultation the fishermen had with Kaly Group was at Struan Jetty when the fishermen were told that these vast farms would only take up 1% of the loch and you can go and fish the rest of it!

MM went on to point out that their fishing was sustainable because they move around the lochs – not only are the proposed farms on prime fishing ground they would remove a quarter of Loch Harlosh and a quarter of Loch Caroy from the fishermen’s use. Forever.

MM has been fishing there for 50 years and it is the scale of these farms that horrify him. JL went on to say that the proposed farms are far more excessive than what the community council were led to believe when Bruce Hare spoke with us in September 2024. JL confirmed that in September the community council had been assured that the fishermen were fully on board and supportive of the proposed farms.

TW asked, if it’s ok for the fishermen, whose families have fished there for generations, to be told to go and fish somewhere else; then surely the kelp farmers can go and farm somewhere else! TW went on to ask if it was essential that the farms went where they’re proposed – or could they go anywhere with a similar depth of water.

MM and AT explained that they’d tried to suggest alternative locations which were not prime fishing grounds but those suggestions were dismissed. Fisherman took one of Kaly Group’s directors out who confirmed that their creels were all inside the boundaries of the proposed farms. AT said he feels that this was just an exercise so that Kaly Group could “tick a box” to say they’d consulted with the fishermen.

JL explained that Loch Bracadale is a very stormy loch and that the siting of the farms couldn’t go much further out of the loch because of storm damage and that the most sheltered areas were where Kaly Group want to put their farms. Of course, it’s because these areas are the most sheltered that they’re the prime fishing grounds!

JL pointed out that the farm by Harlosh Island blocks the channel between Harlosh Island and Harlosh point thereby making the channel unusable. AT said that that channel is used by the fishermen most days to get safely between the lochs (in the winter it is often not possible to traverse the bottom end of Harlosh Island. He went on to say that if fishermen are “caught out” in Loch Harlosh they need the channel to be able to return safely home. TW pointed out that this was a health and safety issue endangering the fishermen’s lives.

Additionally the area around Harlosh point is the site of the only recreational beach in the area which is much used in the summer and will be destroyed.

AT went on to say that not only will there be flashing buoys but there’s a 50 to 100 metre exclusion zone around the farms’ perimeters. He also said that he suspects that the farms will suffer damage due to the conditions in Loch Bracadale which is very exposed. MM said that these farms should not be allowed in Loch Bracadale.

We went on to discuss the funding for these farms which is government “backed”. AT says he sees these farms as bad as the now defunct Highly Protected Marine Areas.

	AT says that once all moorings are in place he fears that if whoever is the eventual owner of these farms were to go bust, or simply decide they're no longer profitable, that they'll leave the (seabed) moorings in place. MB asked about ownership of the seabed and how someone can just demand exclusive rights to it. We assume that the application goes to the Marine Directorate and then Highland Council – no application has yet been made. AT said that the full application is expected before the end of March or early April. AT said he was asked to go to Struan Community Council's meeting having been asked by one of the committee's members what he thought of proposal and it was only after the committee members discussion with AT that it became apparent that that wasn't what Struan Council had been led to believe. AT thanked the committee for their time and reminded us that it's not just the fishermen's livelihoods at stake but the loss of leisure amenity, and the stunning landscape around Harlosh Island but additionally the permanent loss of prime fishing grounds. JL said we'd consider the matter and keep in touch. MM also thanked the committee for their time. AT and MM left the meeting JL went on to say he was concerned about this matter. The committee went on to discuss the importance of the ecosystem and that the islands main income stream is tourism and we're talking about losing prime fishing grounds and the loss of access by boat to these areas as well as the loss of use for leisure purpose and the destruction of the ecosystem. JL reminded the committee that in the meeting in September Bruce Hare was insistent the fishermen were all "on board" and there was "no problem". We need to make as many people as possible aware of any public meeting. We need to use Facebook to increase awareness. KS informed the meeting that Muirhall Energy were carrying on with their plan for a quay on the eastern shore of Loch Caroy for delivery of wind turbine parts. We agreed that we are concerned about the proposals and we must ensure that our residents are informed.
3	Philippa MacRae – JL informed the committee that he'd been approached by Philippa in regard to her absence which is due to family illness. She offered to stand down, but the committee unanimously agreed that we value her input and won't accept her offer of resignation.
4	Declaration of Interest – None to note
5	Minutes of last Meeting – SY said she's been advised that in regard to solar panels on the roof (of the school) that the fire fighters would need to know that the supply had been isolated before being able to use water. (Clarifying November 2024's minutes – item 19). SMP said he was a firefighter. He said the buildings usually have a separate isolation point and the fire service holds a database of those. SMP confirmed that there is no additional risk in having panels.

	TW proposed the minutes of November's meeting and SY seconded their approval.
6	Police Report – none forthcoming. MB has tried to contact PC Reid and will continue to try and make contact. .
7	Treasurer 's Report – We have £8639.23 in the bank of which £5000 is from Dunvegan Trust and is ringfenced for the hardship fund. £3639.23 available. Expenditure on 21 st January for insurance.
8	Council Update – Councillor Millar had sent his apologies as he's chairing a meeting in Inverness. He wrote of two points raised previously. Repairs to the road in Dunvegan Village will be carried out by a contractor in this financial year. Claigan passing place improvements will be carried out by Eyre Plant pre-season (end of February / beginning of March). The meeting discussed the deterioration of roads in Harlosh and between the main and Kilmuir Roads. CB expressed dismay that Mrs Gentleman, who lives along the adopted road opposite St. Mary's church, is unable to go out on her own. CB had been out with her and it was virtually impossible to manoeuvre Mrs Gentleman's wheelchair around the very deep potholes.
9	Trust Report – KL said there'd been a suggestion to do a gardening/clean up day at the carpark. Could a trust and community council event be organised. 22 nd of February was proposed. Community Action Plan – KL reminded everyone to complete them. The Trust are hoping for at least a 50% response rate. Playpark should be finished next week. KL confirmed that permission had not been given for gravel to be dumped at the church Mali MacLennan will be sending apologies and the gravel is being moved. An official opening is planned. KL said Mail MacLennan has been looking in to community purchase of Dunvegan's unused police house. The Police Authority are not making a decision at present and are awaiting relocation of the police "station". The Trust will continue to push for further discussion in the hope that funding can be obtained for surveys and feasibility studies before future progression to purchase. KL asked if anyone knew who owns the telephone exchange.
10	Planning – the meeting discussed the two current planning applications and agreed that there were no objections. 25/00003/FUL Erection of porch Leobost Orbest Dunvegan Isle Of Skye IV55 8ZB 25/00017/PIP Renewal of 21/05360/PIP Land 75M SW Of 59 Kilmuir Dunvegan Isle Of Skye
11	Visitor Levy – JL said we'd discussed this at the last meeting but that a lot of concerns had been brought to our attention since then – and nobody seemed to support it. He asked JC to speak.

JC comes from the perspective of being quite supportive of a tax for tourists however she is most concerned about the form of the current plans. The devil is in the details.

She said she understands that many people automatically dislike change – but this is different. The trade has accepted short term licencing and gone through considerable change.

She is asking if Dunvegan Council will hear what she and her colleagues have to say and put something in writing to The Highland Council as she feels that this will help their case and support the depth of feeling that there is.

Primary things that concern her – some relate to the Scottish Government’s legislations, others Highland Council’s suggested implementation of such:

- HC has the option to introduce a visitor levy within the scope of The Act.
- HC has the option to reject it.
- HC have discretionary powers which they have chosen not to adopt.
 - The HC have chosen not to exempt Highland residents staying in the Highlands - attending hospital appointments, etc. who have to stay away from home.
 - The HC have chosen not to make the implementation seasonal (not applicable in the winter)
- Tradesmen will have to pay the levy – making it more expensive to have work carried out by people visiting the island.
- The levy is to 5% of the accommodation charge (which is difficult to define), unlike charges in Europe of a couple of Euros a night.
- Taxation for tourists is already at least double in the UK (VAT) over any other country in Europe.
- The levy is counted as turnover which for small businesses may make them break the VAT threshold. This means prices go up 26% to earn no more.
- The liable person to pay the levy is the accommodation provider.
- Most people who provide hospitality in the Highlands are small businesses and this is an onerous task. With the increased costs of employing staff (increased employers’ NI contributions from April 2025) it is untenable.
- We want to encourage more people to stay on Skye for a week – not fast tourism.
- Motorhomes are not covered – unless they stay in recognised campsite.
- Accommodation providers who stay open in the off season often do this just to keep staff employed year round. The additional cost of this levy will mean that that is much less likely.
- JC says she feels the levy is impossible to administer.

SMP – spoke and said it’s a tax on accommodation. This will drive his business over the VAT threshold and he fears that the increase in prices will drive some businesses out of business. He feels there’s be a knock on effect for other businesses dependent on the people who visit the Highlands. He said we can’t be compared with Amsterdam – millions of people visit there – it’s not the same as a rural location. He agrees there should be a charge and he attended a consultation with the Scottish Government a few years ago where the talk was of a few pounds a night.

He went on to say the Highland Council have yet to say where this money will be spent nor will they commit to money being raised on Skye being spent on Skye. We need money being spent on infrastructure and facilities on Skye – not art installations in Inverness!

	Covid, short term licensing, increased NI and now the threat of the Levy is hammering the hospitality business. JC pointed out the Highland Council have not carried out a business impact assessment. There is a business impact assessment being carried out within Skye and Lochalsh and currently 48% of the respondents are saying that this levy will probably “put them under”. TW noted that this will increase depopulation and that families will be unable to stay on Skye The meeting discussed the intricacies of the calculation and the complexities in regard to bookings via an OTA (online travel agent) and also that bookings via an OTA might not be paid for for eight weeks; while Highland Council expect the money monthly. CB confirmed that campgrounds are liable for the levy which she feels will drive more to campers to illegally park overnight. JC says we know from research that tourists are quite happy to give something to the areas they visit. MB asked if businesses would be happy with a £2 per room per night or £2 per person per night fee and JC pointed out that the legislation dictates that IF a levy is implemented it follows the Act and the Act is for it to be calculated as a set percentage of the accommodation charge. JC appealed that Highland Council refer to The Scottish Government saying “Halt, halt now, and say that this is not going to work in our area, we want you to amend the legislation”. She feels that other councils will follow if Highland Council do this. JS said that he’d spoken to the councillor who’d put the proposal together, Ken Gowans, who said he’s not interested in shaping it to use the discretions given by the Act – for example to take it off during the winter because it’s too complicated. KL asked if the hope was that if enough community councils speak out that the council will pause. JC said she hopes that it gives a weight to the argument. She said that every submission to the consultation will count equally. KS said there are 102 community councils in the Highland Council. MB reminded the meeting that HC talked of restarting the Ward 10 forum for community councils and this subject would be the perfect thing for us to be able to discuss together. JL said that we should write a letter, with a copy to the West Highland Free Press, saying we opposed the levy. He also asked that it was noted in a Facebook post that Dunvegan and District Community Council voted unanimously against the current implementation and that they have deep concerns and will be opposing it. JC, KS, SMP left the meeting.
12	Community Council Review – JL said we’re being asked for more and more consultations – more being put on community councils. MB pointed out that she’d, at a resident’s request and with the community council’s authority

	raised an issue with the council that went on for many weeks before finally being resolved. If we bring something to the council's attention and they then do nothing, we lose respect. What is the point of having us if you're not going to listen to us. TW said the weight we carry is somewhat irrelevant – it is that we are making clear the local populations views and opinions and if the council who have set up community councils then choose to take no notice of those local views and opinions then the local populations' recourse it to "vote for the other gang". DC said she'd spoken to DM again about the grit bins which have yet to be provided. He said he'd put it to the council again. Apparently they ran out of bins about a month after DC last asked for them – they went everywhere else; but not here. The recent snow and ice was "awful" and the situation with grit "ridiculous". JL - We'll have a look further at the review.
13	Christmas Lights – Lights are down, they were late coming down but had been isolated earlier. SY asked if they'd been damaged. DC confirmed they were OK, they were down before the most recent gales. She confirmed that there are 2 of them which are broken. We agreed that replacing the broken lights should be carried out sooner, rather than later.
14	Hardship Fund – Dunvegan Trust has kindly funded this and DC has spoken with those who might be in a position to make a referral.
15	Beach Clean – DC said Kyleakin Community Council have provided containers and grabbers on the beach then those walking on the beach could pick up litter and waste. KL said the Highlands and Island's Climate Hub might be able to supply funding for these to be provided for Harlosh Beach. KL is attending a meeting soon on which beaches around Dunvegan are in need of a clean. KL and DC are to liaise.
16	Any Other Council Business SY has had an email from community briefing – regarding funding from Bank of Scotland Empowerment Programme. KL said there was a new bout of unrestricted funding. KL and SY said she'd forward details to DC. MB noted the new rubbish collection regime was about to come in to force. Skye.scot – MB asked if the committee wants her to crack on with trying to get a consolidated approach from other community councils in regard to this and mentioning the visitor levy. The committee agreed. CB asked for clarification about what she was authorised to post to Facebook and it was confirmed that reposting Highland Council and Trust posts was acceptable and to use discretion with other posts.
17	Next Meetings – The committee discussed our next planned dates coinciding with Dunvegan Trust's meetings and also a member's unavailability for the originally proposed dates. The next meetings are to be rescheduled in the Dame Flora Lounge at Dunvegan Community Hall on ○ Monday 24th of February 2025 at 7:30 ○ Monday 24th of March 2025 at 7:30.

