

# Dùthchas

**Working for the sustainable development of rural areas**

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**STOP PRESS !!!**

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[www.duthchas.org.uk](http://www.duthchas.org.uk)



## What is Dùthchas all about?

**- Agnes Rennie, Chairperson, answers your queries**

'Welcome to the first newsletter of the Dùthchas project – a project dedicated to giving as many people as possible a say in building a sustainable future for their area. Dùthchas is working in three areas: North Uist, North Sutherland and Trotternish. Read on to find answers to some of the questions people are asking us'



### ? What can Dùthchas realistically do for these areas?

'In its 3 year life the project should set in motion the first stages whereby each of the pilot area communities will draw up their own development programme and then with the assistance of the local funding agencies take some of the projects forward. Dùthchas is about sustainability and sustainability is about lasting development and making sure that the individual projects are not considered in isolation.'

### ? What are the roles of the Partners and local people?

'The partners are public organisations, (listed on page 12) some of whom have contributed financially to the project, but all of whom have shown a willingness to participate in the project, to share their experience and learn from the process for future work.

'This is an exciting opportunity to use the project to shape the future of your own area. All local communities and organisations have a part to play once sensible, achievable local solutions are identified.'

### ? How can Dùthchas support local projects to get off the ground?

Dùthchas does not have money to fund projects but most of the organisations who have budgets locally are on the Area Advisory Groups or the Partnership Group. They all will respond to good project applications.

Dùthchas will give you support in getting community projects off the ground. It will give more support to a limited number of groundbreaking projects dealing with land management, green business, environmental and cultural projects.

A lot of the difficult work associated with getting a project off the ground is in the slow process of first selecting the project and then going back and forth between organisations to get funding. Dùthchas staff can help with this stage.

**Continued on the back page...**



## Minister's support for Dùthchas

**Alasdair Morrison**, the Minister for the Highlands and Islands, visited North Sutherland on 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> July, while attending the Initiative at the Edge steering group meeting in Strathay. The Minister met with the Dùthchas Project Manager Vanessa Halhead and local co-ordinators Anna MacConnell and Meg Telfer who updated him on the work of the Dùthchas project in the area. After hearing about

the progress made by Dùthchas in North Sutherland, Mr Morrison said that he was impressed by the **quality and extent of the community consultation** which had taken place. He stressed the importance of **listening to the views of people** in remote communities who were in the best position to identify local needs. The Minister also highlighted the **importance of an integrated approach to sustainable development** in fragile areas such as North Sutherland. While in North Sutherland, Mr Morrison also visited Durness and Skerry and heard the views of local people there.

# North Uist

## - Uibhist a'Tuath



### Introduction

My name is Caitriona MacCuish the Dùthchas Project Co-ordinator for North Uist. I was born and brought up in Sollas and have been studying in Glasgow for the last 5 years.

I returned to North Uist in May last year and have been working for Dùthchas since October. I hope that in the next year the Dùthchas Project will involve many people and it will lead to everyone realising the unique potential of North Uist. I hope we can then build on this and ensure a positive impact within the community.



### A Word From the Chairman

- Uisdean Robertson, chairman of the North Uist Area Advisory Group, outlines the findings so far...

The community in North Uist have been busy over the winter, with Caitriona's help, in looking at the advantages and disadvantages of living in the area. Many people have been giving up their time to contribute to Dùthchas and I, as chairman of the Area Advisory Group, appreciate the effort that has been put into the project. We now have a goal in trying to take forward the ideas that the group has identified as being most relevant to our area.



Tourism is an obvious growth area for the islands and our culture as well as the wealth of wildlife, flora and fauna, etc makes us unique. We must take advantage of the assets we have and make sure they generate income for future generations.

Crofting is a way of life here and people have traditionally raised store livestock. Over the last few years horticultural trials have taken place with bulbs and alternative crops. This, along with the recent upsurge in organic production and consumption, especially of vegetables must have possibilities for our area and will be investigated. Before marketing however, we must make sure that we are producing what is wanted.

Learning from others - members of the North Uist community have visited the other Dùthchas communities on Skye (see page 6) & Sutherland (see pages 3 & 11) to see how they cope with very similar difficulties there. In turn the Dùthchas Partnership Group have been to North Uist and were treated to a bus tour around the islands to meet people and see what their needs for the future are.

I would like to urge everyone to make the most of Dùthchas - which is trying to tackle some of the issues most important for our future.

# Community Survey

*Caitriona outlines what she has been up*

The first most important task was to find out what the people who live in North Uist think about their area.

In order to do this I asked three main questions:

1. **What do you like/ value about the area in which you live?**
2. **What do you not like about the area?**
3. **What changes/ ideas do you think need to happen in the future?**

In total approximately 300 people were interviewed. I held an exhibition to show the communities the ideas and comments that they had made.

## North Uist is special...

I asked the community to tell me what they valued about their area and what made it special to them. What did people value?

- **"Community spirit"**
- **"Peace and Quiet"**
- **"Wild and beautiful landscape"**
- **"Machair flowers in summer"**
- **"The way of life - less hectic"**
- **"Lovely fresh air - no pollution"**
- **"Gaidhlig air a bruidhinn"**
- **"Freedom"**
- **"Beautiful beaches"**

## What ideas did people have?

- **"Use of wind/wave power"**
- **"Uist Bottled water"**
- **"Seaweed/ Marine industry"**
- **"Leisure and sports facilities"**
- **"Preservation & Interpretation of historic sites"**
- **"Diversification of crofting"...** and that's only a small sample!

## What happened to all the ideas?

Approximately **450 different ideas** were submitted at the community survey phase. That's a lot of ideas to look at! The list needed to be cut down to be manageable – this was first done by the **community voting** for their favourite ideas. The ideas were then considered using sustainability checklists and the Area Advisory Group selected two issues:

- **Marketing of Croft Produce** (e.g. both local and export, meat, veg and dairy, and local processing and packaging)
- **Tourism based on Unique Features** (e.g. wildlife, birds, gaelic, sea angling, history)

## What happens next?

The next step is that the Area Advisory Group will select one **demonstration project** for each of these two topics. For Dùthchas to support them, these projects must break new ground. A **task group** will then be set up to turn each of these projects into reality. These groups will involve interested people from the community and agencies.

Meanwhile all the other ideas will be considered by a **strategy team** which will be set up in the Autumn to draw up a strategy for the future sustainability of the whole island.







## Urachadh Uibhist - Revival

**Urachadh Uibhist** is an example of a successful local initiative. It is a community group, formed as a company limited by guarantee and with charitable status. The aim of Urachadh Uibhist is to improve educational and employment opportunities for the community of North Uist.

Urachadh Uibhist will operate from a former school at Claddach Kirkibost on the south-east coast of North Uist. The 120 year old building is at present being renovated and an extension added - it is hoped that the building will be open by January 2000. Urachadh Uibhist is therefore at present operating from a temporary office:  
**Bayhead Unit 1, Bayhead, North Uist, 01876 510777**

### UU Projects

Urachadh Uibhist plans to deliver a variety of projects to the community. These include a **training centre, a kitchen and craft room, a day nursery and after school club and a tearoom**. Although the building is still at the early stages some of Urachadh Uibhist's projects are already underway. A community business making **highland dancing socks** has developed from a training session run by UU in early 97. This has produced 3 part-time jobs.



During January 1999 Urachadh Uibhist offered basic **computer classes**, which was welcomed by over 30 people in the community. Recently desk top publishing classes were also held. Once the Claddach Kirkibost building is completed North Uist will have a local training centre which will be linked to the Further Education Centre in Benbecula. This will also possibly become an out-reach centre for UHI, through computer links.

At present UU are offering a variety of services to the community (individuals, groups or visitors). They are developing office computer services, including offering a service to help crofters with stock records and forms.

Printing, faxing, photocopying, laminating and e-mailing services are already available to the whole community from their temporary office in Bayhead.

### Members of North Uist Pilot Area Advisory Group

Carola Bell, LEADER • Archibald Campbell, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar • Donald Campbell, North Uist Community Council • Gwen Evans, RSPB • Morag Ferguson, Uist 2000 Ltd • Noel Fojut, Historic Scotland • Helen Forbes, Uist Council of Voluntary Organisations • John Love, Scottish Natural Heritage • John Angus MacCuish, Berneray Village Hall • Gina Macdonald, Urachadh Uibhist • Helen Macdonald, Southern Isles Amenity Trust • Donald Macdonald, Scottish Crofters Union • Roddy Macdonald, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar • George Macdonald, North Uist Estates • Mairi MacIver, Western Isles Enterprise • Isa MacKillop, Comann Eachdraidh Uibhist a Tauth • Donald MacKillop, Berneray Community Council • Donald Maclean, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar • Helen Maclean, Lochmaddy Village Hall • Norman Macleod, Taigh Chearsabhaigh • Lucy Macleod, SEPA • Mary Macleod, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar • Kathleen Macleod, Ceum air Adhart • Angus MacMillan, Western Isles Tourist Board • Ena Macneill • Marie Macphail, Carinish Village Hall • Uisdean Robertson, Uist Pilot Area Advisory Group Chairman • John Stewart, Western Isles Fishermans Association • Gordon Wells, Lewis Castle College • Ken Wilson, SOAEFD, Sub Office

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# North Trotternish

## - Iochdar Thronairnis



### A Word from the Chairman



**John MacDonald is the Chairman of Trotternish Advisory Group. Here he shares his vision with us:**

“The representatives of agencies and community organisations who selected Trotternish as the North Skye pilot area for the project saw the potential to achieve some **lasting benefits** for Trotternish while, at the same time, fulfilling the project's aims.

Trotternish is an area of **outstanding scenic beauty** which possesses a rich and varied culture and heritage. The challenge of the project is to support and **sustain these key community assets**, and develop from them economic and social gains for the area. For far too long we have undervalued and failed to realise the potential of the environment around us to support and sustain our communities and way of life. We now have the **opportunity to re-think** that relationship.

Backed by the enthusiasm and commitment of the project workers, Iain and Sine, we must ensure that we take full advantage of the project. I would like to **encourage everyone to take part**, and help plan for an exciting future where we value what is important to us, and take some action to improve the facilities, jobs and services available to all.”

**‘Stiolaidh  
sinn oirnn’  
ma tha.**



### Introduction

*In Trotternish, two of us share the Dùthchas post. We care about the future here because this is our home too.*

#### **Iain MacDonald says:**

*‘I belong to Camas Mór in Kilmuir. For development to be ‘sustainable’, I feel it must fulfill the whole spectrum of life, and meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our communities here.’*

#### **Sine Gillespie says:**

*‘I live in Glas pheighinn, Stafainn. I want Dùthchas to make local people feel that they matter. Every person in Trotternish is a unique asset to the place, and we should be drawing people's talents out into the open.’*



## We sought your views

Last winter we went around the doors in **Kilmuir, Staffin, Uig and Kensaleyre and Borve**. We were the ones with the yellow and pink stickers! We asked 320 people for their views. You told us in your own words what you value about life here.

Trotternish is a **safe place to bring up children** and that matters. But it doesn't matter whether you are staging the old folks' dinner or the Sunday school picnic, because it's the same energy that makes things happen. Trotternish is **tremendous for birds and wildlife**. You want a clear country code in place, as well as interpretation and infrastructure, to protect this great natural asset and economic backbone.

### Crofting needs a new direction

Crofting is a major resource because it boosts the family income, but it's looking for a new direction. With almost no secondary products to fall back on, the sheep market is too risky. Crofters aren't prepared to be at the mercy of markets far away. One idea is to focus on niche marketing of community produce at home.

In all, you gave us 140 different ideas for developing Trotternish. We fed these into an **exhibition** which was shown in each of the four districts. You **cast votes on the ideas**, according to how important you felt these were. We are now using this information to guide the next stage of the work - catalysing local projects and building local strategies for the future.

## Local people pulled out all the

The launch of the exhibition took place at Uig hall, on 12 February 1999. It was opened by **Lord Sewel**, the then Scottish Office Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries. **Norma Macleod's** presentation set the tone for a memorable day in Trotternish.

The hall was packed with local representatives and the Partners of Dùthchas. As is the tradition here, local people pulled out all the stops. **Flodigarry Hotel** made a lovely lunch from local produce. The piper was **Alasdair Macpherson**, and the singers were **Staffin school choir**. Local playgroups painted pictures, as only children can. **Dougie Ross** brought along local fossils from Staffin museum. We had **basketwork** from Kingsburgh, and **pottery and beer** from Uig. **Cailean Maclean** made an audio-visual of your story, and this was narrated by **James Macdonald**. The Dùthchas partners were treated to an interesting bus tour. This combination gave a very direct perspective of life here. We have a great resource - the **well of local knowledge** - with which to go forward towards sustainability.



## Work diary for Dùthchas

### August/September 1999 - Local Projects

Dùthchas will offer constructive help to communities in getting four local selected projects up and running in Staffin, Uig, Kilmuir and Kensaleyre/Borve. Each of the four projects will be selected at an open public meeting in each area.

### September 1999 onwards - The Strategy

Dùthchas will create groups of local people whose task it will be to draw up a strategy for the sustainability of the Trotternish peninsula. The strategy will be founded on our unique features, the wishes of local people and the objectives of the agencies who serve us.

### Groundbreaking demonstration projects

Dùthchas will also be looking for three demonstration projects for the Trotternish peninsula before December 2000. These projects will mark new ground in:

- (1) **integrated land management, eg. grazing management, multiuse forestry**
- (2) **green business development, eg. local produce, tourism**
- (3) **environmental or cultural projects, eg. interpretation, recycling, energy, cleanups**



# What exactly is sustainability?



It is a pool of people from the communities as well as the agencies, democratically working through **common community goals**, to reap a better life and a more reliable reward, **in harmony with our natural surroundings**. The path forward will be paved by us all. When we commit ourselves to the forthcoming 'strategy', don't forget that it is founded on your agenda.

But we have to be patient because this kind of thing has a long lens on tomorrow. **Instant solutions do not stand the test of time**. You might well grab a grant to build a plush village hall, but if you can't pay the electricity bill two years down the line, the project hasn't been 'sustainable'.

Many want to rescue the **medieval castle of Duntulm**. In Uig, people want to develop the **natural bay** and retain their **ferry service** - not least because it sustains ten full time, year round local jobs. Borge people have earmarked **an old road for horses and bicycles**. In Stafainn, you are determined to get an **adequate slipway**. All of you want better roads, parking, sign posting and interpretation. - so let's get our act together.

***"Dùthchas is about bringing people together, identifying their skills and using them to make communities stronger. Our local advisory group are here to keep us on the right track."* - Sine Gillespie**

## Members of the Trotternish Pilot Area Advisory Group

• Andy Anderson, Uig Community Council • Charlie Beaton, Staffin Youth Club • Bryan Bellwood, SEPA • Donald Angus Campbell, Fishing interests • Noel Fojut, Historic Scotland • Donald MacDonald, Staffin Trust • James MacDonald, Crofters' Commission • John MacDonald, PAAG Chair • Lachie Macdonald, Skye and Lochalsh Housing Association • Kathryn MacKay, Youth representative, Uig • Norman Macinnes, SLCVO, Kilmuir • Chirsty Mackinnon, HOST • Linda Mackinnon, Kilmuir Drama Club • Catriona Maclean, Highland Council • Hector Macleod, Scottish Crofters' Union • Norma Macleod, Staffin Community Council • Sandra Macleod, Trotternish Choir • Archie Macnab, Crofters' Commission • Fraser Macpherson, Highland Council • Roger Milet, Archaeologist • Fiona Munro, Scottish Homes • Alastair Nicholson, Skeabost and District Community Council • Gavin Parsons, University of the Highlands and Islands • Grahame Paterson, Columba 1400 • Sally Phelps, Kilmuir Community Council • Andrew Prendergast, SALE • Catriona Purll, Trotternish Tourism Association • Bryce Reynard, Forest Authority • Alasdair Ross, Youth representative, Stafainn • Jane Ryder, Scottish Museums Council • Gavin Scott Moncrieff, Councillor • Jim Tough, Scottish Arts Council • David Webster, North of Scotland Water Authority • Craig White, RSPB • Malcolm Wield, Forest Enterprise • Becky Wills, Scottish Natural Heritage • John Wood, Highland Council Archaeology Service

## Where are all the young people in Trotternish?

A sustainable community is one that hangs on to its young people. This is a serious concern for Dùthchas in an area where many 18-25 year olds have left. Many leave for further education, but are there sound, affordable houses and jobs to come back to?

Hector Mackenzie is from a crofting family in Hungladair. His first language is Gaelic. Hector is 23 years old, and he has been studying for five years now.

He says: *'When I left Portree high school, I was reluctant to leave home, and unsure what career to follow. I did a year at the Gaelic college in Skye, then went to Aberdeen University. It's given me a completely new experience, and helped me to appreciate what I have at home in terms of heritage and the quality of life. I welcome the Dùthchas initiative which hopefully will redress the drain of young people. To get another window on the world, it's good for young people to get away. I am enjoying my life at the moment, but my commitment towards home is real, and it will hopefully be realised in the years to come.'*



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# North Sutherland

## - Duthaich MhicAiodh



### Introduction

Meg Telfer lives in Skerry and Anna MacConnell lives in Armadale. They are working with Dùthchas on a jobshare basis.

#### Anna and Meg say:

"We both feel that Dùthchas is an opportunity for people in North Sutherland to work together to try and bring about a sustainable future for the area since one way or another we all have vested interest in maintaining our communities and the land we live in for future generations."

### A Word from the Chairman

I wouldn't exactly say I volunteered to chair the local Dùthchas Project Advisory Group. Rather, I was volunteered in my absence and accepted the challenge with some trepidation. At the start, I wasn't sure what "Dùthchas" meant and, when I found out that it embraced the idea of "heritage", I still wasn't too impressed. Development, after all, should surely be a future looking thing rather than something rooted in the past. On reflection, though, I came to the conclusion that **everything grows out of the past** and, if we are to shape the future, we must do it from the roots up.



Dùthchas is intended to do just that by offering everyone in the community the opportunity to put forward their own ideas on how North Sutherland may be changed for the better. It has just engaged in a large scale exercise to tease out these ideas and, based on that experience, is now undertaking a major rethink on how to carry the best ideas forward.

The **need for a regeneration** initiative is very great. In the twenty six years over which I have taught in North Sutherland, between sixty and seventy percent of my former pupils have permanently left the area, and many of those who remain can only do so by working in the footloose industries of oil and shipping which permit them to live here and work away. Simultaneously, and consequently, the population structure's bias has shifted towards the older age groups with inevitable consequences for enterprise and on demand for services.

**Something radical is needed** so that our difficult but entrancing area can go forward into the new millennium with hope. "Dùthchas" will not find all the answers but it can at least ask some of the right questions and, most importantly, try to ensure that the partner agencies – all twenty-one of them – are persuaded to match their good intentions with actions in the years to come.

A great many organisations are philosophically committed to the sustainable development of this fragile zone. My intention, as Chairman of the Area Advisory Group, is to help **keep them focused** on translating that philosophy into fact.



# Dùthchas is Different - Meg and Anna

For the first time, probably ever, a survey has been carried out in the communities of North Sutherland and something is going to happen – not just a glossy booklet.

Everybody who has gone to a public meeting, or been spoken to when we've been out and about, has had a chance to have their say about the future of where they live. The method used to interview people has allowed them to be frank and upfront and although it was laborious, it has worked. **We now know exactly what the people want.**

We divided North Sutherland into 11 sub-areas using the village halls as an indication of separate communities. We held a **public meeting** in each and then interviewed as many people out and about in the areas as time allowed, asking people to tell us what they value in the area, what they don't like and what they would like to see happen in the future. The same procedure was carried out in all the local schools.

Everything that people told us was displayed in a **touring exhibition** on the Magnus Arts Bus, with voting boards to allow people to **vote for their favourite ideas** for their own community and for North Sutherland overall. We also delivered hundreds of voting sheets to the shops and post offices. At the end of the exhibition week all the votes were counted and the ideas ranked according to their popularity.

Throughout the Initial Review we have had enormous support from the communities and the Area Advisory Group which reflects the desire to see a positive outcome of this project. Many local people have given willingly of their time and expertise, especially at the **transnational conference** "Looking after the future" in April (see page 11). This was based in Tongue and Strathy but involved the whole area with field visits covering a variety of topics.

## What happens next?

Between now and mid August we will be setting up a **task group** in each sub-area to take forward each community's favourite project. While it is up to the task group to take these projects forward, we will be available in the background for support.

Meanwhile the Area Advisory Group decided to set up two groups to look at two broader issues:

- **local produce**
- **interpretation of the cultural and natural heritage of the area**

These groups will also be charged with developing two groundbreaking projects for the whole area – these will be called **demonstration** projects.

Finally, in the Autumn, we will start work on the strategy for the area. We will do this through groups selected to focus on particular topics of importance to North Sutherland.

## Action targeted at Sutherland

North Sutherland is currently benefiting from two other projects – **Iomairt aig an Oir** (Initiative at the Edge) and the **Social Inclusion Partnership** (SIP) which is targeted at the needs of the 14-25 age group in the area.

**Iomairt aig an Oir** - this initiative is being run together with Dùthchas in the North of Sutherland, with each initiative taking forward a different range of projects identified by the Dùthchas survey.

**Social Inclusion Partnership** funds are available for four purposes :

- **to adapt the industrial units** at Melvich to provide a rural learning centre offering job coaching and skills development;
- **to provide transport services** which will enable young people to access a range of facilities along the North Coast;
- **to upgrade village hall facilities** in the interest of young people
- **to provide a network of IT** facilities to enable young people to develop peer networks, access the Highland Young People's website and access employment opportunities.



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## Securing a future in the sea



### The marine harvest

plays an increasingly important part in sustaining the communities of Durness and Laid. **Lobsters and prawns** from the Durness coast and farmed **salmon** and **mussels** from Loch Eriboll and soon **oysters** too, are sold on the international market. In Balnakeil craft village a young boat builder has enough work to keep himself and his assistant busy well into the future.

### A way of working off the shore

Years ago, before this recent blossoming of marine activity in the north-west corner of Sutherland, the small local pier and pier house at **Port nan Con** were sold to a private owner and have since been developed into a top class guest house – a bonus for the area. A few fishermen were able to carry on working from the old pier but there wasn't room there for the newer businesses. So over the years the local men have developed a way of working off the shore - if the tide is good and weather kind, the boats are launched off the shingle at a small natural harbour called Port Chamuil. This system works but lack of access to the sea throughout the day and the want of berthing facilities for easier landing, or even to carry out maintenance on the boats, is clearly a disadvantage. There are implications for safety too when boats have to wait for the

tide to be right before they come ashore.

### A new pier for Loch Eriboll?

A few months ago the **Durness Community Council** brought the fishermen and sea-farmers round a table to talk about a new pier. Working closely together they have found a site, created a design and are now trying to secure funds to build a pier at Port Chamuil.

At the same time a second group was set up – the **Durness Fishermens Association** - which aims to get a Regulatory Order to help the lobster fishermen protect the stock in the area before it is "fished out" and allow them to manage the wild lobster stock to sustain Durness families in the future.

### The health of the loch

The health of Loch Eriboll is being considered too as new applications for permission to site **mussel strings and oyster beds** are being generated by the success of the shellfish farming pioneers. An effort is being made to keep farming in the loch at a sustainable level.

At Durness and Loch Eriboll the people involved in the development relating to the sea around them are keeping a careful eye on the **balance struck between man and the environment** and demonstrating that this balance is vital for the future wellbeing of their community.

### Members of the North Sutherland Pilot Area Advisory Group

• James Anderson, Bettyhill Community Council • Stuart Baird, SEPA • Willie Beattie, Forestry Commission  
 • Harry Bremner, Melvich Community Council • Sidney Campbell, Strathly & Armadale Community Council  
 • Bill Cattanach, SOAEFD • Ron Celli Bettyhill, Strathnaver & Altnaharra Community Council • Jackie Fairweather, Scottish Natural Heritage • Sarah Fox, Tongue • Margaret Fyfe, Highland Council • George Gordon, Tongue Community Council • Jasmine Grant, Thurso College • Noel Fojut, Historic Scotland • Eirene Jardine, Highland Council • Jim Johnston, PAAG Chair • Francis Keith, Highland Councillor • Fiona MacKay • Angus Mackay, Skerry • Janette Mackay, Strathly Village Hall Committee • Donella Mackay, Strathly Hall Committee • Shirley Mackay, Melvich • Thomas Mackay, Scottish Crofters Union • William Mackintosh, Skerry • Brian Macleod, Melness Gaelic Centre • Kenny Macrae, Eriboll Pier Association • Alison McGee, Highland Council • Graeme McLaughlin, Highland Council • Neil Money, CASE • Fiona Munro, Scottish Homes • Sandra Munro, Bettyhill Community Council • Sandy Murray, Strathhalladale • Sandra Peterkin, HOST • David Polson, Highland Council • Marlyn Price, Highland Archaeology • Wilma Robertson, Melness • Pat Rodlin, NW Sutherland Council for Community Action • Jane Ryder, Scottish Museums Council • Eann Sinclair, CASE • Pat Thompson, RSPB • John Toal, Crofters Commission • Gordon Todd, Highland Council • Jim Tough, Scottish Arts Council • Helen Turnbull, Sutherland Partnership • Alan Wares, North Sutherland Federation of Community Councils • David Webster, North of Scotland Water Authority

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## 'Looking after the Future'

*A transnational conference, April 14-17 1999, North Sutherland*

Delegates from across Europe converged on North Sutherland in April for an international conference on the future for remote rural areas, organised by Dùthchas.

Great fun was had by all but the business of the day was serious. In workshops, delegates hotly debated ways to retain local population, sustain local services and market an area and its produce. Critical issues like funding, information and skills were also discussed.



The messages from the conference came loud and clear:

- **If a project is to be sustainable it has to come from the community**
- **Agencies should work on making themselves more accessible**
- **Be mindful of the barriers presented by regulations – regulations which are not useful should be challenged**



**The inspiration was supplied in plenty by our international colleagues:**

### Lobster Loving...

**Ron Beard** works with the coastal communities of Maine, USA. This area, to which many Highlanders emigrated, mirrors the Western Highlands & Islands in many ways. With much of the community dependent on lobster fishing, Maine successfully pioneered the technique of 'notching' to sustain their lobster stocks. Tourism is also a major source of income, yet much work had to be done to make sure that the needs of

tourists and locals were well balanced and the environment looked after.

### Community Supporting...

**Margarida Guerreiro** captivated the audience with the story of 'In Loco' a project which has for 12 years worked with small mountain communities in southern Portugal. It has supported local people to re-build the economy and community. One of the greatest strengths of the region, its traditional natural produce, has been a key focus of success, with a new boom in old ways of growing food (typically organic) and fashioning crafts. Each year all the producers from the area come together in a huge, colourful local market to boost the image of the area.

### Tourist wooing...

The Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative is working hard to build the islands reputation for environmentally sensitive tourism. **Anne Sinclair**, representing the island said 'The sea will always be a vital part of life in Fair Isle and so will its people. We are fortunate that we can work as a community, can consult and co-operate and have the will, the ability and the expertise to make a difference. Most communities would find that, once focused on a project and with support from the relevant bodies, they have the same.'

A conference report will be available shortly - please apply to us for a copy.

"A  
humbly  
warm  
welcome  
-  
thank you"  
Conference  
delegate

"We, who  
are  
fortunate  
to make a  
living in  
North  
Sutherland,  
must see  
that the  
next  
generation  
are never forced into a  
leaving that is not of their  
making. We must grasp  
this opportunity for those  
who belong, and want to  
continue belonging to  
North Sutherland, be they  
a generation native to the  
land or the children of the  
people who have come to  
live among us, who want,  
along with us, only the  
best for the future of  
what is now their land."  
**Joan Campbell, board  
member of Caithness  
and Sutherland  
Enterprise, from  
Melvich**



## DUTHCHAS PARTNERS

Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise

Cornhairle nan Eilean Siar

Crofters' Commission

Forestry Commission

Forest Enterprise

Highlands and Islands Enterprise

Historic Scotland

North of Scotland Water Authority

Scottish Arts Council

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scottish Homes

Scottish Museums Council

Scottish Natural Heritage

Scottish Executive Rural Affairs Department

Scottish Tourist Board

Scottish Environment LINK

Skye and Lochalsh Enterprise

The Highland Council

The Scottish Council Development and Industry

University of the Highlands and Islands

Western Isles Enterprise

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## Dùthchas – highlights to date

*Vanessa Halhead, Project Manager gives a flavour...*

I'm sure you will agree we have had a very busy first year, with an enormous amount of effort put in by local communities and agencies. We would like to thank you all for your efforts.

This newsletter is dedicated to telling you what is going on in each area. In future issues you will be able to track the project as it moves on from surveys to building actions and strategies for sustainability. Some highlights of this first period were:

### Exhibition Launch

Lord Sewel, then Minister for Agriculture, Environment & Fisheries, attended the exhibition launch in Uig as part of Dùthchas' attempt to bring the difficulties facing rural areas to the attention of politicians (see pages 5-7). More recently, Alasdair Morrison, present Minister for the Highlands and Islands met with Dùthchas in Sutherland. Both Ministers are very supportive of our work.

### Conference

Dùthchas held its first transnational conference in April, attracting 80 people (see p 11). This has been followed by contacts between delegates and in September a group from each Dùthchas area will visit Norway.

### Audio Visual Presentation

We captured your views on tape and matched them to local pictures, voices and music. The result, we were told, brought a tear to the eyes of some who saw it! This work was co-funded by the Scottish Arts Council and LEADER II and has been turned into a video which will be used to promote the areas. Copies are available from the local staff.

### Value statement

People expressed themselves very creatively in the survey. We decided to publish this in a 'value statement' – to explain to the outside world what is special about these areas. Look out for these in your village hall, post office, and tourist information centre.

## Agnes Rennie, Chairperson of Duthchas differentiates myth from reality (continued from front page...)



*If a project doesn't come forward through Dùthchas does it mean it won't get agency support?*

'Absolutely not. The agencies will all respond to good project applications.'



*Why is it taking so long to get anything off the ground?*

'Generally anything that can happen easily has been tried or is being done by somebody else. Dùthchas is an attempt to identify the projects which will make a difference, but will only happen through a community development plan - and this takes time.'



*What happens if Dùthchas fails?*

'Dùthchas can only fail if quite literally nothing happens. So far a lot of work has been done in each of the project areas. The next stage is to identify appropriate projects - some of these will of course progress further than others. All the work of the project - including projects that worked and some that didn't - will be recorded and the lessons will be of benefit to all.'



*What happens when Dùthchas is finished?*

'We hope that those currently involved will continue to work together and the area strategies will be used as the cornerstone for future development, by both communities and agencies.'



*How does Dùthchas relate to all the other initiatives and projects?*

'Over the last few years many communities have attempted to find a way of improving conditions in their own areas. Dùthchas will never duplicate what others are doing but will always work with other bodies with similar aims, and seek to explore new ways forward for development. Specifically in Sutherland, the Initiative at the Edge is being delivered by Dùthchas staff who have the added support of a high profile government initiative.'