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Changes in Scottish coastal fishing communities—Understanding socio-economic dynamics to aid management, planning and policy

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates how coastal areas, socio-economically dependent on marine capture fisheries, are working towards long-term sustainable community development. Two case studies (Shetland Islands and the North East region) were selected from Scotland, on the basis of their geographical (island versus mainland) and sectoral representation. The challenges facing these areas are typical for many coastal communities around the world.

An outline of the current decline in fishing activity is described, with a spotlight on Scotland, to illustrate trends and issues at stake. The relationships between onshore human settlements, employment prospects and offshore activities including aquaculture, fishing, oil and gas, are explained. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis summarises emerging questions and new developments, highlighting the need to include information on social and economic factors in management plans and formulation of policy. The case study profiles inform on advances in economic and social diversification opportunities, e.g. through aquaculture, leisure and tourism initiatives. In recognition of the declining economic value of the oil industry to Shetland, this community has adopted a policy to identify and encourage potential development opportunities in its traditional industries, e.g. supporting fishing activities. In contrast, the North East of Scotland's approach is to create a more diverse sustainable economy by broadening its business base and re-training its workforce. Lessons learnt from the case studies are considered in the context of how they can

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aid current developments in policy such as the UK's efforts towards implementing the European Commission's recommendations on ICZM.

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1. Introduction

Along with most European Governments, the UK is committed to the implementation of the European Commission's (EC) recommendations on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) [1]. In 2004, the UK completed a national stock-taking exercise where an analysis of major actors, laws and institutions that influence management of the coastal zone is summarised [2]. This exercise was undertaken to inform development of national strategies (to be completed by 2006) for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with a view to improving management of coastal zones. This is timely for Scotland given its many fragile coastal communities, especially those socio-economically dependent on threatened marine resources, like fisheries. The continual decline of fishing activity and related employment has forced hardship on many fisheries-dependent areas around the world, highlighting the need for coastal communities to consider economic diversification into other sectors such as, marine aquaculture, leisure and eco-tourism.

This paper examines how different coastal regions of Scotland and their corresponding activities, communities and industries are changing in response to emerging issues and new developments. The relationships between onshore human settlements, employment prospects and offshore activities including aquaculture, fishing, leisure, oil and tourism, are briefly described. This study outlines the current decline in fishing activity and highlights how some coastal areas are diversifying from fishing into other sectors, particularly leisure, marine aquaculture and eco-tourism. Fishing was chosen as the main theme of the case studies in recognition of its historical influence on shaping coastal communities in Scotland and worldwide. In addition, the fisheries sector provides a useful basis for geographical and sectoral analysis (both case study areas rely on fishing and the oil and gas industries as a major source of employment and income). Trends and key issues identified are summarised in the form of a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. The recommendations herein can build on the UK's ICZM stocktaking exercise [2]. Similarly, there are lessons from the case studies that could be considered in other government's initiatives on coastal management, planning and policy agendas. For Scotland to sustain a marine fishing industry then the underlying social and economic factors—in addition to other issues including sustainable use, protection and conservation of the resource—need to be understood and integrated in the development of its national coastal strategy. Furthermore, this needs to be made explicit in the current developments for a European marine thematic strategy, due July 2005. To date, less attention has been given to the socio-economic factors when compared to the environmental and technical aspects of the marine capture fisheries sector. A broader knowledge base is required for the

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