Centre for Good Relations

Making Waves Project

Summary notes of the two Civic Workshops held on Thursday 6th March and Wednesday 23rd April 2025 in Shetland.

1. The process so far

Following a similar process in sustainable upland deer management, and cross-sector interest in the application of civic mediation methodology to the Marine space, in August 2024, Centre for Good Relations (CfGR) received funding from Marine Fund Scotland to undertake a pilot project to understand the need for, ideas about, and willingness of stakeholders to be involved in a potential multi-year project of relationship building and productive conversations between marine users in Scotland.

Initial scoping exercises were undertaken in Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides.

With the assistance of a National Reference Group, and follow-up conversations with key stakeholders in the various areas, it was determined that a lengthier assessment would be undertaken in Shetland to understand the context more fully and to assess if there was an appetite and willingness to engage in a process of dialogue to discuss the issues, perspectives and concerns that people shared.

During the assessment process Shetlanders outlined their perspectives on the increasing pressure and significant changes facing Shetland's marine space; how these changes affect people in different ways and across different levels, and from these conversations many felt that it would be useful to be able to discuss this collectively in some way. With the additional support of a Local Steering Group, this led to the organising of a Civic Workshop held in Lerwick on Thursday 6th March 2025.

The aim of the workshop was to provide the opportunity for local participants to explore in conversation with others from across different perspectives how they felt about the changes, how these changes impacted them, and what they felt this could mean for Shetland's culture, environment, and economy.

2. 1st Civic Workshop – Thursday 6th March 2025

The workshop programme was varied and flexible, and included opportunities to explore:

- How various interest groups feel they are perceived by others.
- The many pressures facing fishermen, particularly inshore, and the threat to their livelihoods and communities.
- The pressure felt by the wider community facing extensive development.
- How development can be balanced with other interests that make use of the marine space.
- Concern around environmental factors, climate change and the impact on biodiversity.

The workshop provided participants with opportunities to engage and connect informally with each other in between formal sessions. The overall feeling of the process was positive; with participants showing a general curiosity, open-mindedness, and willingness to participate, whilst recognising there may be a degree of scepticism and concern on the part of some people more widely which will need attention as the process develops further.

Here are some of the comments shared on the day for why people participated:

- Exploring the concern for how Shetland's communities are affected by these changes,
- Being interested in how Shetlanders can work better together,
- Considering how we can marry the protection of livelihoods and the environment,
- Explore how Shetland might gain greater control and benefit from upcoming developments,
- Wanting to address the concern about national policy and how it affects things locally.

Working Agreement: In order to set the right tone and spirit for conversation during the workshop, a Working Agreement was established at the outset and agreed by all participants:

- Listen to understand
- Recognise difference of opinion
- Keep an open mind
- Value honesty, and permit people to think out loud
- Chatham House Rule - general statements can be shared with those outside the workshop space, though not in a way that attributes what you share to any particular individual or organisation here.

3. Some observations and messages shared by participants at the workshop (in no particular order):

- Spatial squeeze threatens the livelihoods of fishermen, particularly scallop fishermen, and this comes in several forms, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), new/expanded aquaculture sites, renewable energy developments and associated infrastructure. The pressure to livelihoods also impacts the sustainability of wider communities and the culture of the islands. Consideration of, and protections for, existing marine users is not felt to be sufficient enough; there was a cross-sector desire for sectors to better understand the perspective of fishermen and collaborate better to ensure there is greater consideration of their concerns.
- Aquaculture interests feel they have become unfairly associated with large and imposing upcoming developments, overshadowing the sectors' longstanding community benefits to the islands, and past collaborative relations.
- Environmental interests recognise the role of wider and deeper collaboration and relationship building to help better protect the marine environment.
- Valuing the opportunity to hear directly from other sectors about matters that others would often only be exposed to through the media, and improving their understanding of the challenges experienced by different sectors.
- The value of local science and its critical role in fostering better relations.
- The need for local science to enable long-term data gathering which considers impacts across environment, economy and society.
- When it comes to national policy, Shetland feels out of sight and out of mind, and there is a widespread feeling of imposition from outside when it comes to significant development, including offshore renewables.
- It was felt important for those in positions of civic leadership that the different interests recognise the challenge of finding the balance of priorities within a changing environment and increasing financial constraints. Civic leaders have to consider a wider variety of societal needs and interests, and the marine environment, while critical, is one part of this.
- The need to strengthen relations in the face of any proposed development to ensure things are done with Shetland, not to Shetland.
- The need for greater collaboration among Shetland's marine users towards developing a strategic vision.
- The need for the Scottish Government to recognise that people are threatened by change. There is a need to make change palatable and desirable.
- Future: The need for the ongoing involvement of more local stakeholders, and the participation of wider organisations and sectors.

4. Participant Reflections on the Workshop

Feedback from some of the participants on their experience of the workshop included:

- It was a safe environment to discuss the issues
- It was good to get everyone in the same room as this group has not met together before
- It was good to spend the time together to really listen to what people had to say.
- Good to have done this, wish we had done it 20 years ago!

5. Looking Forward

- Centre for Good Relations, with the support of the Local Steering Group, are planning a follow-up workshop in late April, in which the aim is to bring national policy and decision makers to Shetland to directly hear, consider, and further explore the perspectives and issues raised during the 1st workshop.

6. Public Communications Statement for the 1st Workshop Agreed by Participants

On Thursday 6th March a civic workshop was convened in Lerwick, involving people from across Shetland with an interest in the marine space. People from fishing, aquaculture, the local scientific community, environmental interests and civic society gathered to collectively explore how they felt about the increasing pressure on, and significant changes to, Shetland's marine space; how they were personally impacted by these changes; and what this means for Shetland's culture, environment, and economy.

Open and honest conversations took place that were independently facilitated by Centre for Good Relations, a small, impartial not-for-profit company that specialises in Civic Mediation, a methodology which takes a broad approach that facilitates multi-party/multi-issue dialogue to strengthen relations and build greater understanding.

The civic workshop was the start of a process with stakeholders looking forward to the next stage, in which the aim is to involve national policymakers in the conversations.

Some of the comments shared on the day on why people participated included:

- Exploring the concern for how Shetland's communities are affected by these changes,
- Being interested in how Shetlanders can work better together,
- Considering how we can marry the protection of livelihoods and the environment,

- Explore how Shetland might gain greater control and benefit from upcoming developments,
- Wanting to address the concern about national policy and how it affects things locally.

Some reflections on the experience of the workshop included:

- It was a safe environment to discuss the issues
- It was good to get everyone in the same room as this group has not met together before
- It was good to spend the time together to really listen to what people had to say.
- Good to have done this, wish we had done it 20 years ago!

End

Notes of the 2nd Civic Workshop begin on Page 6

1. Aims of the Civic Workshops

The aim of the 1st civic workshop was to provide the opportunity for local participants to explore in conversation with others from across different perspectives how they felt about the changes, how these changes impacted them, and what they felt this could mean for Shetland's culture, environment, and economy.

During this workshop, a common view expressed was that people feel 'out of sight and out of mind' when policy decisions are being made on the marine environment that can have a significant impact on local people's livelihoods, and island life. As such, the 2nd Civic Workshop aimed to provide the opportunity for local people, and national policy makers and influencers to come together to:

- Directly hear and consider each other's perspectives, build understanding, and explore how Shetland's seas are impacted by national policy.
- Collectively consider how people can work together to maximise the potential of, and minimise the impact to, Shetland's culture, environment and economy.

2. 2nd Civic Workshop – Wednesday 23rd April 2025

In a similar vein to the 1st gathering, the 2nd Civic workshop programme was varied and flexible, and provided participants with opportunities to engage and connect informally with each other in between formal sessions. The overall feeling of the process remained positive; with participants showing a curiosity, open-mindedness, and willingness to participate and appropriately challenge each other through the day. There was also a recognition and appreciation of the continuing concern on the part of some people, though they value the process, of the personal financial challenges they face in their ongoing participation and the impact this has on their livelihoods.

Working Agreement: In order to set the right tone and spirit for conversations a Working Agreement was established at the outset of the 1st workshop and agreed by all participants. This was revisited and again agreed upon by the participants of the 2nd workshop:

- Listen to understand
- Recognise difference of opinion
- Keep an open mind
- Value honesty, and permit people to think out loud
- Chatham House Rule - general statements can be shared with those outside the workshop space, though not in a way that attributes what you share to any individual or organisation here.

1. Dilemmas and challenges explored during the workshop, and some key observations and messages shared by participants (in no particular order):

- Shetland feels out of sight and out of mind. The decisions that affect Shetland the most are not made locally but imposed by distant officials with seemingly little knowledge of local reality and with little connection to the sea.
- There are clear issues with the existing mechanisms/infrastructure for engagement between different stakeholders, and between local stakeholders and central government.
- There exists a broad frustration with "consultation culture". Shetlanders state that they are consulted more and more but feel this is meaningless as it appears that developments are predetermined prior to them being "subjected to" consultation, and the process of consultation alters the development little, if at all.
- There is a desire for an alternative approach/solution to current consultation methods. This could take the form of a more people-centred approach: one that genuinely involves the local community, with cocreation in developing any consultation process and the questions that will be asked.
- The greatest dilemma is the balancing of competing interests: fishing, aquaculture, environmental protection, and energy production.
- There is a need for balancing economic development with environmental protection, with a common consideration for the sustainability of all elements that exist in the marine space.
- There is a recognition of the need to coordinate viewpoints, to collaborate with a strategic vision, and ensure there is cohesion within all parts of the marine environment.
- Shetland could be in a better position in terms of power and influence vis-à- vis Scottish Government., if there is more of a single collective vision.
- A commitment, particularly from Scottish Government, to support long- term high-quality scientific research and data sets would be very significant, particularly to show the community and eNGOs how well the environment in Shetland is being protected.
- Acknowledgment that value should also be placed on more anecdotal evidence, alongside more scientifically rigorous methods.

- The need to ensure there is greater consideration and respect for existing marine users. Users, particularly the fishing sector, increasingly feel squeezed out/ displaced by new developments.
- The need to recognise the role fishermen play in the day-to-day of looking after the environment, their immediate surroundings, and ensuring its sustainability.
- The need for more open and measured face-to-face conversations about significant/contentious issues, particularly earlier on in the development process.
- There is a broad desire for better cooperation, and to be better neighbours, and for trying new things that might make this possible.
- Both those perceived as being at the top and bottom of structures of power are looking for more help and support, and opportunities to collaborate better.
- Regarding 'Just Transition', it would be just if those who may lose out in any development, are able to continue their business and have their basic needs met.
- What is 'just' is the creation of community wealth. There needs to be more local benefit, and Shetlanders believe the voice of local communities should be fairly considered against the voice of big industry.
- There is a desire for more local control and a more responsive central government.

2. Participant Thoughts and Reflections on the Workshop

Feedback from some of the participants on their experience of the workshop included:

- It was a useful day, a move in the right direction.
- Today has demonstrated that talking face-to-face is invaluable. A sense that there could be a solution found by people in the room, and we want to continue these conversations.
- We dug deep today, even got to the root of solutions, especially talking about the scale of development – bigger is not always better.
- Engaging in this process is a step closer to resolving the issues that have been explored. There is a need to try something different, and engagement with this process is hopefully one step closer to achieving something that has taken decades to get to.

- Despite all the different interests, sustainability came up with everybody, which is a great thing.

- It was useful to hear different people's views on similar subjects. I hope that officials from government and non-government organisations can put these hopes into practice to bring something positive into action. It is important to remember when people go back to their day jobs.

- Was not sure what to expect, but this was a very useful opportunity to talk broadly, widely and openly about difficult things. Also great to hear different perspectives, unlike in day-to-day life. The trick is what is next and what comes out of this.

- The day reinforced feeling of the need to take the time to trust this process. It is key to think about what comes next and reflect on today.

- Let's talk, but also really listen.

3. Looking Forward

- Centre for Good Relations will have follow-up discussions with participants, the National Reference Group and Local Steering Group to determine if, and in what form, the process may continue. It will be explored whether building further upon the Civic Workshops in Shetland might be considered helpful or if the process might be valued in other locations.

- Informal commitments were made between different stakeholders for ongoing conversations on specific issues that currently impact relationships and trust between them. A commitment was made from Scottish government officials to further consider what was discussed on the day. CfGR will check back on these commitments and ensure some form of feedback is provided at appropriate points to those who have engaged in the process to keep them informed.

4. Public Communication Statement for the 2nd Civic Workshop Agreed by Participants

On Wednesday 23rd April 2025, a 2nd civic workshop was convened in Lerwick Town Hall involving people from across Shetland with an interest in the marine space. People from local fishing, aquaculture, environmental interests, the scientific community, and civic society came together with national policy makers and influencers to:

- Directly hear and consider each other's perspectives, build understanding, and explore how Shetland's seas are impacted by national policy; and
- Collectively consider how people can work together to maximise the potential of, and minimise the impact to, Shetland's culture, environment and economy.

Open and honest conversations took place that were independently facilitated by Centre for Good Relations, a small, impartial not-for-profit company that specialises in Civic Mediation, a methodology which takes a broad approach that facilitates multi-party/multi-issue dialogue to strengthen relations and build greater understanding.

Some reflections on the experience of the 2nd workshop included:

- The day has demonstrated that talking face-to-face is invaluable. A sense that there could be a solution found by people in the room, and we want to continue these conversations.
- There is a need to try something different, and engagement with this process is hopefully one step closer to achieving something that has taken decades to get to.
- Coming to these discussions is grounding. A lot of work is at the national level, though it is not until you come to an area that you actually understand the issues.
- Was not sure what to expect, but a very useful opportunity to talk broadly, widely and openly about difficult things. Also great to hear different perspectives, unlike in day-to-day life. The trick is what is next and what comes out of this.
- The day reinforced feelings of the need to take the time to trust this process. It is key to think about what comes next and reflect on today.
- It was a useful day, a move in the right direction.

End.