

## POLICY ZONE A: SKIPNESS POINT TO MEALDARROCH POINT

### LANDSCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

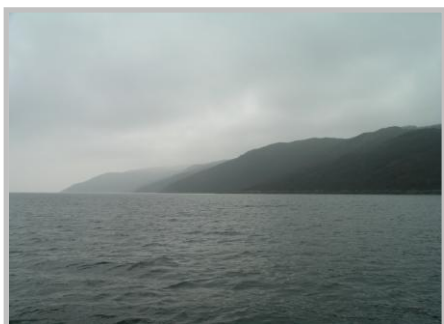
The landscape generally comprises steep wooded, rugged hill slopes with rounded ridges, craggy and smooth rocky outcrops, and an irregular slope profile. Steep narrow glens intermittently cut into the hillside, and there are extensive areas of large-scale open moorland and forestry plantations. There is evidence of historical land use with some dry stone walls and ruins of croft buildings. Modern buildings are restricted to the extreme north and south of the policy zone, either on the land directly adjacent or on the hillside above. There is more intensive livestock farming to the south where there are farm buildings and defined field boundaries. Generally, the hillside moorland area is rather wild and isolated. Going from the shore inland, there is a transition from bedrock cliffs to low-lying scrub vegetation and steep oak woodland, reaching coniferous forestry plantations and an open moorland plateau on the upper slopes, and top of the hills.



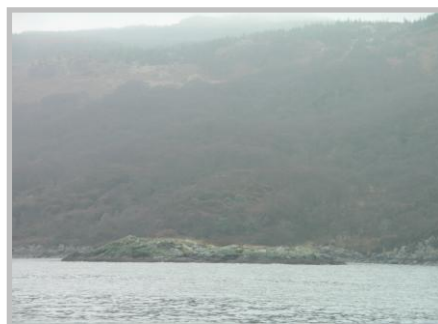
The upper hillside of the land adjacent to Policy Zone A taken from the Tarbert to Skipness hiking trail

### SEASCAPE CHARACTERISTICS

Looking south along the coastline of this policy zone there appears to be a series of hills sloping down to the loch which would indicate a degree of coastline indentation. However, for the most part, this coastline is not particularly convoluted. The shoreline is quite open with steep, but not particularly high bedrock cliffs and outcrops sloping directly into the loch. The bedrock areas are separated along parts of the coastline by rock and shingle beaches of various sizes. There are a few small rocky promontories and a small island, Eilean a' Chomhraig.



Coastline looking south from Barmore Island



Rugged bedrock coastline and Eilean a' Chomhraig



One of a number of gravel/shingle bays which intersect a coastline of bedrock cliffs and outcrops



Mealdarroch Point from the north

### ACCESS

There is no access to the loch from the land adjacent to this policy zone. There are no slipways or jetties, and for vehicles, the coastline is inaccessible south of Mealdarroch Point until Sgeir Bhuidhe where there is an isolated dwelling.

## VISUAL AMENITY

Views over this policy zone from the east coast of the loch are distant. The Tarbert-Lochranza ferry runs parallel to this policy zone during the winter. However, from the water, the eye is drawn to the more dramatic hillside and the bedrock coastline gives a dark gray backdrop, which may obscure developments of low profile and similar colour.

The Tarbert to Skipness forestry path runs over the hills adjacent to the policy zone reaching about 1000 ft above sea level. Although commanding spectacular views of Loch Fyne to the north and east, the path at no point comes close to the coastline, and there are no views over Loch Fyne south of Cnoc na Faire. The topography of the landscape ensures that near-shore views of the policy zone are hidden from walkers on the path.



Views to policy zone A from the Tarbert/Skipness Trail are away from the shore and immediate coast



View to Portavadie and the Cowal Peninsula (with Calmac ferry en route) from the Tarbert/Skipness trail



View across lower Loch Fyne to Portavadie and Cowal from a picnic table and viewpoint on the Tarbert/Skipness trail

## SETTLEMENTS

There are only a few isolated dwellings located to the south on the land adjacent to this policy zone. A small cluster of homes above Mealdarroch Point have open views to the north and northeast and do not overlook the policy zone.



The settlement above Mealdarroch Point. Properties here have an outlook to the



Property at Sgeir Bhuidhe. One of the few that overlook this policy zone, and the one closest to the coast

## CURRENT USES

*Refer to policy zone A map for locations of current activities.*

### Aquaculture

Current Aquaculture Sites						
Location	Species	Consented Equipment	Maximum Biomass	Operator	Shore-base Location	Development Status
Fionn Phort (Tarbert South)	Salmon	14x80 m circular cages (7x2) Feed Barge	1030 tonnes	Lighthouse Caledonia	Portavadie	Developed/Active

## Fishing

Fishing activity in the area is significant with creel fleets regularly deployed along the coast. To the south, shellfish diving occurs for razor shells and prawn trawlers follow regular tows quite close to shore throughout the area. Scallop dredging occurs along the length of this policy zone, from approximately 40 m depth towards the shore. Fishing boats regularly navigate through this area en route to Tarbert.

## Commercial Shipping

The Caledonian MacBrayne, Tarbert to Lochranza ferry operates from November to April, when it switches to a summer departure from Claonaig.

## Recreation

Sailing - There are two designated anchorages - Fionn Phort and in the lee of Eilean a' Chomhraig.

Diving - There are three scenic dive sites in this policy zone: Skipness Point, Eilean a' Chomhraig and Mealdarroch Point.

Coastal Paths - There is one forest path that extends 12.8 km from Tarbert to Skipness.

## DESIGNATIONS

*Refer to policy zone A map for areas covered.*

### Argyll & Bute Development Plan (Structure and Local Plan) Designations

- Skipness Point to Sgeir Bhuidhe - coastline classified as 'Undeveloped Coast' (a coastal area of Sensitive Countryside).
- Remaining coastline north of Sgeir Bhuidhe classified as 'Isolated Coast' (a coastal area of Very Sensitive Countryside).

### Other Designations

- Tarbert Woods Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for Western acidic oak woodland, covers most of the coastline in this policy zone.
- Tarbert to Skipness Coast Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) underpins Tarbert Woods SAC and is designated for upland oak woodland and bryophyte assemblage.
- Mealdarroch National Nature Reserve covers two separate areas of the coastline, within the boundary of Tarbert Woods SAC.
- The 'Loch Fyne Coastal Strip' Shellfish Growing Water extends throughout the length of the policy zone.

## WILDLIFE

The land immediately adjacent to the shore from Sgeir Bhuidhe to the north of the policy zone is particularly noted for its old sessile oak woods with holly (*Ilex* sp.) and hard fern (*Blechnum* sp.). The island of Eilean a' Chomhraig and adjacent shoreline hosts a diversity of seabirds. Seals and cetaceans also frequent this area. Sublittoral surveys, as part of the Marine Nature Conservation Review (Dipper & Beaver 1999) have been undertaken approximately 1 km south of Mealdarroch Point and at Skipness Point. These surveys indicate a mix of steep sublittoral rock dominated by sea squirts, and a seabed of sand with broken shell, loose weed and shell debris. At Skipness Point, the seabed was described as exposed sublittoral dead maerl gravel with brittle stars and bivalves.

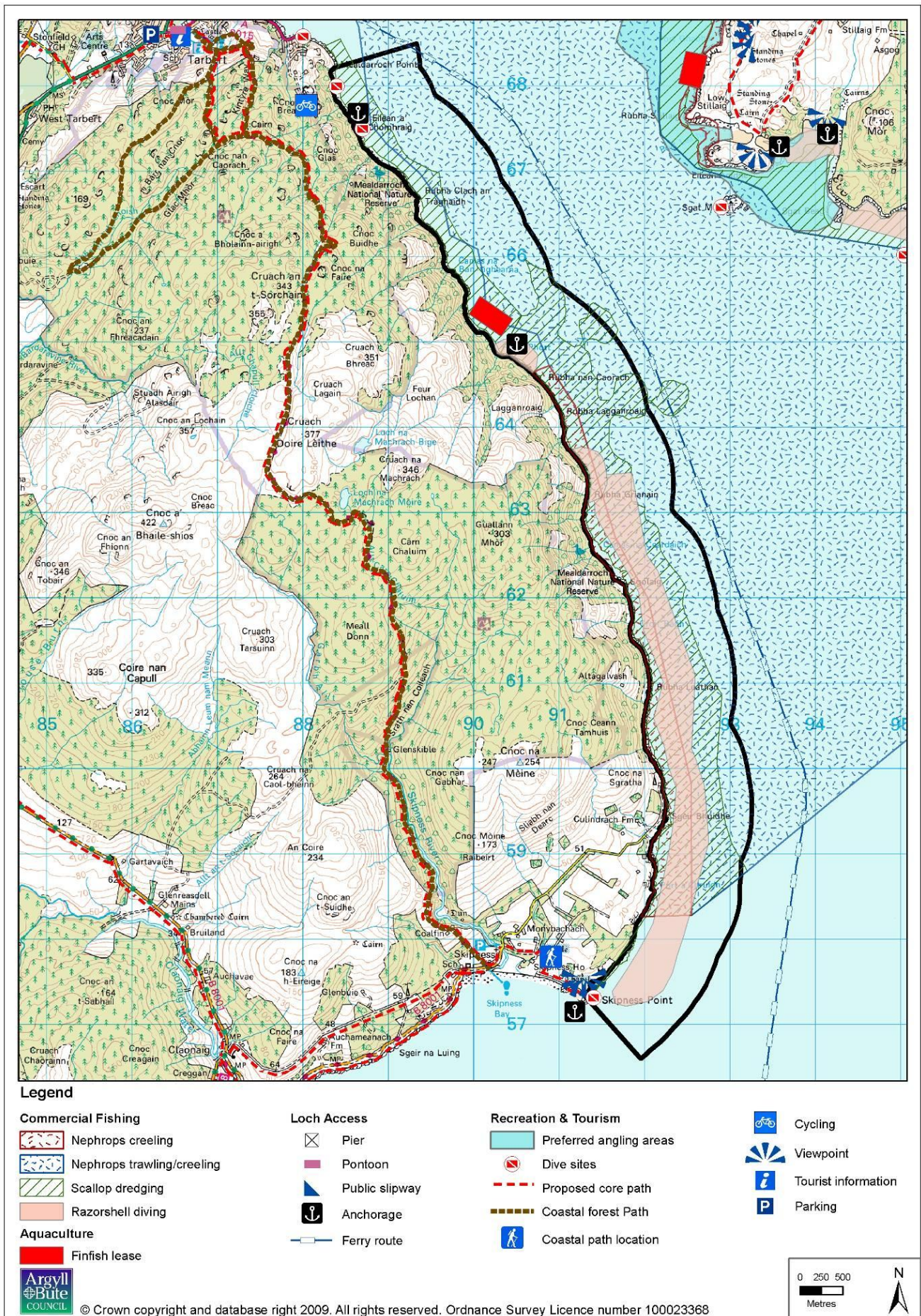
## HISTORICAL FEATURES

Historical features on the land adjoining this policy zone include:

- A small croft ruin at Altagalvash;
- Dry stone walls which intersect the moorland slopes;
- Skipness Castle (Scheduled Ancient Monument & Category A listed building), Guardianship Monument;
- St. Brendan's Chapel, built c.1300 (Kilbrannan Chapel), Skipness Estate. (Scheduled Ancient Monument & Category A listed building). One of the best preserved ancient chapels in Argyll;
- Gate-Lodge and Gate-Way Skipness Estate. This late 19th century Lodge is a Category C(S) listed building;
- Allt Beithe ruin – deserted settlement; and
- The shipwreck Bamba lies approximately 55 metres off the coast, just south (600 metres south) of Rubha Leathan.

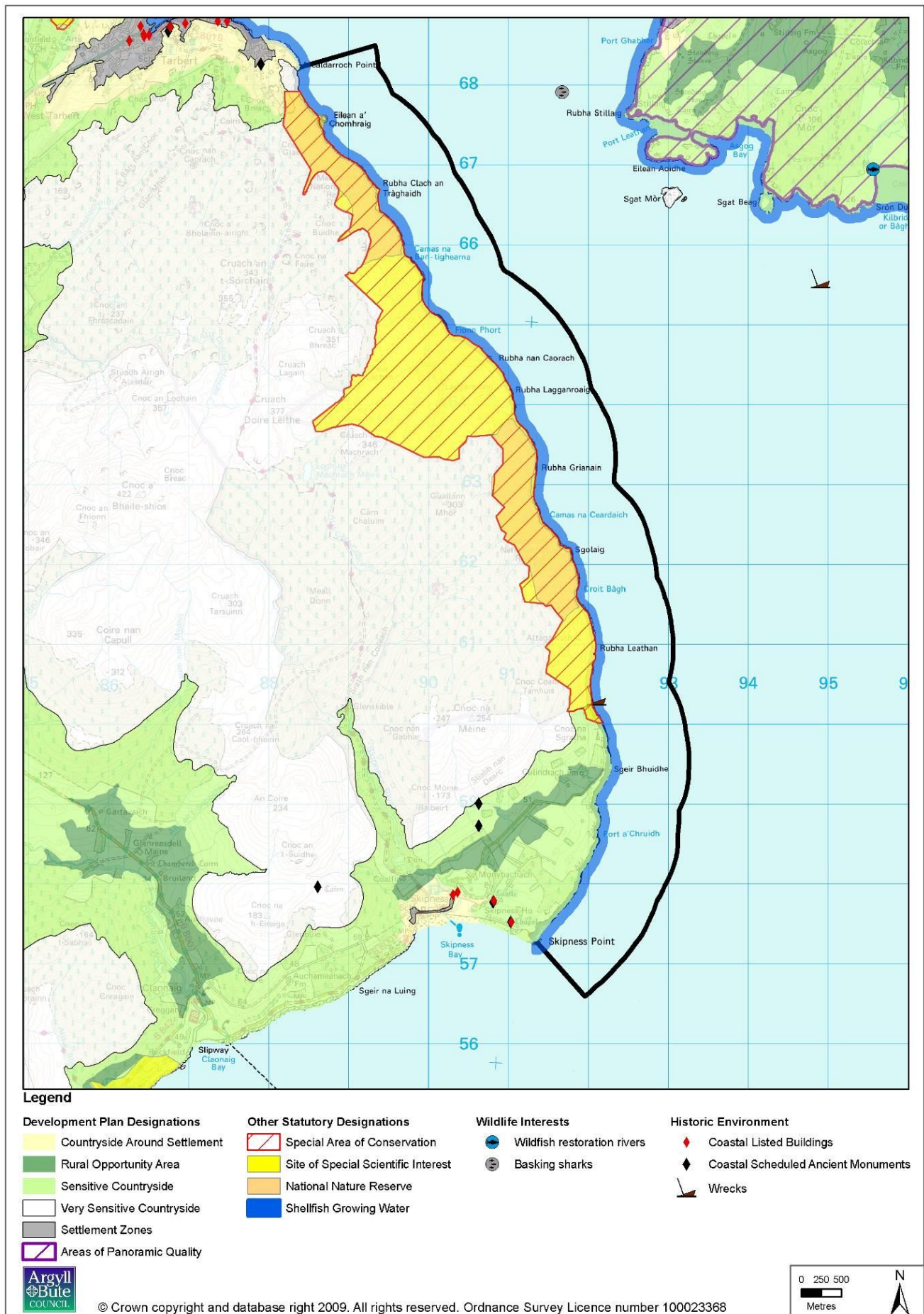


## POLICY ZONE A MAP – Current Uses & Activities





## POLICY ZONE A MAP – Designations, Wildlife Interests & Historic Features



## OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR FUTURE USE AND DEVELOPMENT

### Constraints

<i>Development</i>	
<b>Landscape</b>	<p>The coastline between Mealdarroch Point and Pier House is by far the most remote, isolated and relatively wild stretch of coastline along Loch Fyne, even taking into account activity associated with marine traffic. Development in this area would effectively remove this type of landscape character from the Loch Fyne area, and would therefore reduce the resource of relatively wild coastline around Loch Fyne and in Argyll as a whole.</p> <p>The majority of the coastline is classified as an area of 'Isolated Coast' in the Argyll and Bute Development Plan (Structure and Local Plan) and therefore the capacity for this area to successfully absorb development is extremely limited.</p> <p>While there is limited visibility of this stretch of coast and aquaculture development could relate to the subtle indentations of the coastline and be absorbed within the expansiveness of the sea, these strengths are outweighed by the potential impact of development on the relatively remote and undeveloped character of this coastline.</p> <p>The inaccessibility of this area from the land, and complete absence of onshore development, gives a sense of wildness which could be significantly affected by offshore or onshore development.</p>
<b>Navigation</b>	Large amounts of marine traffic including ferries, fishing boats and sailing vessels pass this area en route to Tarbert Harbour and the entrance to the Crinan Canal.
<b>Activities</b>	This policy zone is an important area for commercial fishing, with trawling, dredging, creeling and shellfish diving all occurring.

### Opportunities<sup>1</sup>

<i>Future Use</i>	
<b>Shellfish Ranching</b>	If agreement was reached with existing commercial fishing interests, scallop ranching could be developed in the south of this policy zone.
<i>Development</i>	
<b>Finfish aquaculture</b>	While no opportunity for new or expansion of existing sites has been identified in this zone, this part of Loch Fyne has been identified as the least sensitive in relation to potential effects on wild migratory salmonids and is a favourable location in terms of other characteristics such as bathymetry, hydrography, navigation, disease control and medicine use, benthic and water column impacts, and economic viability.

<sup>1</sup> Opportunities identified are indicative, subject to obtaining the required consents, and do not preclude development applications and activities elsewhere.

## DEVELOPMENT POLICIES FOR AQUACULTURE<sup>2</sup>

Where the following development policies indicate presumption in favour of development, this will be subject to any development proposal being consistent with relevant policies within the Argyll and Bute Development Plan (Structure and Local Plan).

### MARINE FINFISH DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

#### Marine Finfish Development Policy PZA-1

There will be a general presumption against any scale of new finfish development within this policy zone.

##### Justification

- The remote and undeveloped character of the coastline between Mealdarroch Point and Pier House would be significantly affected by any scale of development. Development in this area would effectively remove this type of landscape character from the Loch Fyne area, and would therefore reduce the resource of relatively wild coastline around Loch Fyne and in Argyll as a whole (Grant 2007).
- Development should be avoided around Skipness Point to protect scenic views and the visual focus and distinctive seascape setting of Skipness Castle and St. Kilbrannan Chapel (Grant 2007).
- The majority of coastline is classified as an area of Isolated Coast (Argyll and Bute Development Plan).
- This policy zone is an important navigation route for fishing vessels returning to Tarbert and is important commercial fishing ground (Marine & Coastal Development Unit 2009).

#### Marine Finfish Development Policy PZA-2

There will be a general presumption against expansion of the existing Tarbert South finfish site, or any proposed change of use from salmon to mussel, scallop or other finfish species.

##### Justification

- The remote and undeveloped character of the coastline between Mealdarroch Point and Pier House would be significantly affected by any scale of new development. Development in this area would effectively remove this type of landscape character from the Loch Fyne area, and would therefore reduce the resource of relatively wild coastline around Loch Fyne and in Argyll as a whole (Grant 2007).
- The majority of coastline is classified as an area of 'Isolated Coast' (Argyll and Bute Development Plan).
- This policy zone is an important navigation route for fishing vessels returning to Tarbert and is important commercial fishing ground (Marine & Coastal Development Unit 2009).

### MARINE SHELLFISH DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

#### Marine Shellfish Development Policy PZA-3

There will be a general presumption against any scale of new shellfish farm development in this policy zone.

##### Justification

- The remote and undeveloped character of the coastline between Mealdarroch Point and Pier House would be significantly affected by any development. Development in this area would effectively remove this type of landscape character from the Loch Fyne area, and would therefore reduce the resource of relatively wild coastline around Loch Fyne and in Argyll as a whole (Grant 2007).
- Development should be avoided around Skipness Point to protect scenic views and the visual focus and distinctive seascape setting of Skipness Castle and St. Kilbrannan Chapel (Grant 2007).
- The majority of the coastline is classified as 'Isolated Coast' (Argyll and Bute Development Plan).
- This policy zone is an important navigation route for fishing vessels returning to Tarbert and is important commercial fishing ground (Marine & Coastal Development Unit 2009).
- There are no suitable areas of foreshore for oyster trestles in this policy zone (Marine & Coastal Development Unit 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Policies do not preclude the submission of applications for shellfish or finfish development in areas where presumption against development has been identified.

## ON-SHORE AQUACULTURE-RELATED DEVELOPMENT POLICY

### On-shore Aquaculture-Related Development Policy PZA-4

There will be a general presumption against all scales of on-shore aquaculture developments on land adjacent to policy zone A.

#### Justification

- The majority of land adjacent to this policy zone is classified as an area of Isolated Coast (a coastal area of very sensitive countryside) and is therefore considered inappropriate for commercial land based developments (Argyll and Bute Development Plan 2009).
- There are no opportunities for onshore development to be located within existing settlement along this coast (Grant 2007).
- Additionally, there is no road access to the shore for much of the coastline to support any new aquaculture development (Marine & Coastal Development Unit 2009).

## SUPPLEMENTARY GUIDANCE ON POTENTIAL AQUACULTURE DEVELOPMENTS

### **Future relinquishment of existing developments**

Aquaculture development in Loch Fyne is restricted by many factors, in particular the potential for effects on wild migratory salmonids. Considerable progress has been made through the work of the Clyde Area Management Group where Lighthouse Caledonia and wildfish interests have worked together to reduce the risk to wild fish from salmon farming operations. This work has included consolidation of operations in Loch Fyne with the removal of farms from the most sensitive parts of Loch Fyne and expansion of existing sites in less sensitive areas.

The existing Tarbert South site is located in an area of very high sensitivity in terms of landscape character and the landscape/seascape capacity assessment recommended that should the opportunity arise, this site should be relocated or relinquished. However, this area is the most suitable for finfish development in Loch Fyne, in terms of risk to wild salmonids, and is also favourable in terms of other characteristics such as bathymetry, hydrography, navigation, disease control and medicine use, benthic and water column impacts, and economic viability. Should this site be considered for relocation, it should be noted that opportunities for alternative finfish sites are limited, and the opportunities identified in this plan will still need to overcome potential constraints as well as being suitable in terms of hydrographics and economics.