

CASE STUDY OF GOVERNANCE OF WESTER ROSS

Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism
Deliverable DT 3.2.1

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1. Brief Introduction to SHA

Wester Ross, located in northwest Scotland, is dominated by rugged mountains, remote glens and long, steep sided straths (valleys), which extend down to the sea. The conditions are exposed and the terrain difficult to cross and cultivate, leaving the area very sparsely populated – with around 8,000 people over 5,200 km². People here have been managing the landscape for centuries, and their historical and present knowledge are vital to the future of our economic, cultural and environmental well-being.

2. SHA Vision and Core Objectives

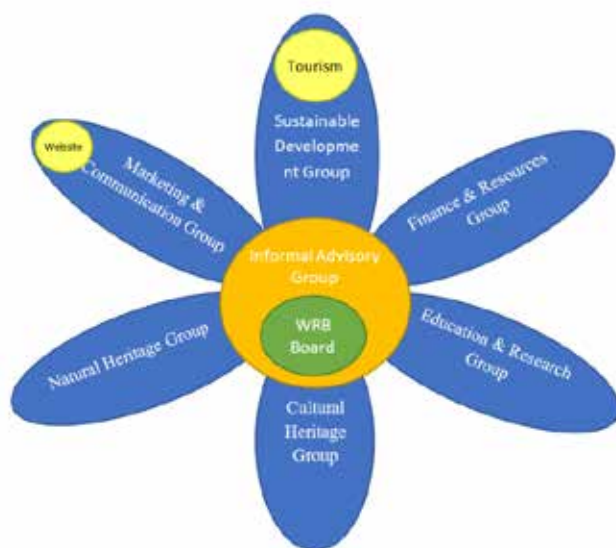
Vision: “To help people and communities to work together with our natural and cultural landscape to create a positive future.”

Mission: “The Wester Ross Biosphere provides a framework for residents, organisations and businesses to work together for the sustainable development of our area along with the conservation of its natural and cultural heritage.”

Objectives (summarised from the 2019-23 strategy):

- 1) Raised awareness of the Biosphere designation and MAB programme in public, private and third sectors
- 2) Promote sustainable economic, social and environmental practices
- 3) Increase community awareness and understanding of the importance and value of our shared natural and cultural heritage
- 4) Support research and knowledge exchange with partners within and outside of WRB

3. SHA Governance Structure



The WRB Board are elected by and from the WRB Membership. At present these individuals represent a wide range of interests including community council, community development, business, NGOs, conservation groups, regional council and business. The Informal Advisory Group are made up of representatives of the Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, University of the Highlands and Islands and Scottish Natural Heritage but this is fluid arrangement based on organisational requirements. Members of this group are kept informed of developments but do not always have regular input unless needed.

Figure 1: Governance Model of the WRB

Thematic groups of the board meet regularly to develop operational themes outlined in Figure 1. These groups report back to the core board. Tourism is a discrete sub group within the Sustainable Development group. This model was designed shortly after the inception of the organisation.

4. Decision Making Process

The WRB membership is open to all residents within the WRB boundary and to others via special application. From this membership pool board members are elected at an Annual General Meeting and given decision making control. The board then sets the strategic direction of the WRB. To ensure objectives are representative of the community interests, stakeholder interviews and workshops are carried out. Once strategic objectives are agreed by the main board members the broad plan is agreed at an Annual General Meeting. Implementing plans involves further decision making (for example actions that should be included in a Destination Management Plan or path building project); these decisions are guided by the thematic groups of the main board who then in turn consult with members and wider stakeholders. This includes interviews, questionnaires, attending meetings of stakeholder groups (for example a community council meeting to ask a question) and organised workshop style meetings where workshop techniques such as Borda Counta are deployed to take decisions. Depending on the impact of a decision, powers can be delegated to staff members, the Biosphere Coordinator and the thematic groups, but ultimately the WRB board are responsible for decisions.

5. Communication

- Posters in community hubs such as shops, village halls etc
- Local and regional news outlets
- Social media, both our own pages and shared in community pages
- Our own website
- E-newsletter to members

6. Resources

(What are the key resources you require to deliver effective governance in your SHA, what is currently missing?)

- A full time permanent Biosphere Coordinator plus a part time administration assistant
- Accountant
- Expenses for local meetings and advertising
- Expenses for national and international meetings, particularly participation in EuroMAB and NordMAB

We current do not have any resources beyond ring fenced project funding. Our Biosphere Coordinator is part time and contributes many voluntary hours.