



# Moray Ocean Community – Annual Report 2024/25

## 1. Welcome & Introduction

### Message from the Directors

This year has been one of steady development and deepening roots for Moray Ocean Community. As a young organisation, we are still finding our rhythm, but we are truly proud of what has taken shape along our Moray Firth coast: a community of people who collectively care deeply for the sea, their coastline, and for one another.

Each project, partnership, and event this year has helped strengthen that sense of connection. We have built new relationships, developed skills, and learned more about how to grow an organisation that is both practical and heartfelt. There has been a real feeling of progress; not only in what we have achieved, but in how we work together and the confidence that is growing within the group.

A particular highlight was the success of our Kickstarter Project, supported by Fauna & Flora, which provided vital capacity-building support. It gave us the space to think strategically, plan ahead, and invest in the tools and training that now support us. Producing our first short community film as part of that project was a reminder of how far we have come, and of the many hands, minds, and conversations that make this community what it is.

This year has also brought its challenges. Like many small organisations, we are learning to balance ambition with capacity, and to grow at a pace that remains sustainable for our volunteers. These experiences have strengthened our understanding of what is needed to build a lasting organisation and have helped shape our priorities for the future.

We are now taking time to shape a clear shared vision for the years ahead, reflecting on how we can continue to make a meaningful contribution to our coast and community while

staying grounded in our values. It feels like the start of an exciting new chapter, where the lessons of this past year are helping us build something lasting.

All of this has been achieved through the dedication and goodwill of volunteers who give their time freely alongside work, study, and family life. Their care, humour, and determination have kept us moving forward even when things have been challenging.

We would like to thank Francis Williams who was one of the founders of Moray Ocean Community and stepped down as a Director in March 2025. Francis helped make MOC what it is today and we are incredibly grateful for all his time as a Director. We are delighted that Francis is now our Seagrass Volunteer Lead and is building on all the fantastic work he initiated with putting Moray Firth seagrass on the map!

A big thank you also to everyone who has supported us through 2024/25: our volunteers, partners, funders, and the many people who have joined us on the shore, in the water, or in conversation and thought.

Together, we are proving what is possible when a community takes collective ownership of its coast and its future.

Signed by the Director's of Moray Ocean Community

*Gianluca, Terrie, Catherine, Robyn and Lynne*



*Terrie, Francis, Gianluca, Catherine, Robyn and Lynne at Hopeman Harbour in Snorkel gear*

## About Us

Moray Ocean Community (MOC) is a coastal community group dedicated to exploring, protecting, and celebrating the Moray Firth coastline. Our mission is to bring people together through practical action, learning, and shared appreciation of the sea.

We run activities that connect people directly with the coast, from citizen science and species surveys to educational workshops, clean-ups, and coastal restoration. Through these projects we aim to build understanding, encourage stewardship, and strengthen the bond between people and place.

The group began as a handful of like-minded individuals who wanted to see more community-led marine conservation efforts along the Moray Firth. When we couldn't find an existing organisation focused on this, we decided to create one. Moray Ocean Community formalised as a Community Interest Company in early 2024, with currently five incorporated directors and a growing network of supporters. Today, our community includes more than 80 ocean-minded members through our Rising Tides group, helping to plan activities, share knowledge, and take part in events across the region.

Our work stretches from Tain to Hopeman, with volunteers joining from as far as Macduff, reflecting the diversity and reach of the coastline we serve. Together we monitor habitats, raise awareness of marine life, and promote sustainable interaction with the sea.

At the heart of MOC is a belief that conservation should also bring joy. We recognise the wellbeing that comes from being in or near the water and want to share that sense of connection with others. By combining science, learning, and community spirit, we hope to create a lasting positive impact for both people and the marine environment of the Moray Firth.

## 2. Year in Review

# Year in review 2024/25

## Moray Ocean Community's Goal

Our goal is to showcase the important marine habitats and wildlife that we are so lucky to have in the Moray Firth. We want to provide opportunities for local people of all abilities, experience and background to participate in citizen science efforts that will protect and enhance our local seas. This activity summary is part of our first Annual Report highlighting what we have been up to between April 2024 and March 2025. A huge thank you to everyone who took part!

## What did we get up to?

8

Seagrass surveys, both intertidal and subtidal were completed by volunteers

278

We engaged nearly 300 folk in MOC events!

63

volunteers completed 14 citizen science surveys for seaweed, oyster shells and slipper limpets

10

Members completed 10 Shorewatches recording whales and dolphins

5

Education days with over 100 young people

5

5 presentations including our MOCTales talk series

1,161

An incredible 1,161 hours were donated by volunteers!

88

MOC now has around 88 volunteers on our Rising Tides whatsapp group

28

28 meetings, training sessions and field trips were completed by volunteers

1

Radio interview with BBC Radio Scotland

10

Members ran 10 snorkel, swim and paddleboard events

14

MOC volunteers helped with saltmarsh restoration and beach cleans and litter surveys

## Partnerships

Moray Ocean Community has been delighted to work with many partners, projects and networks this year including the Findhorn Watershed Initiative, Project Seagrass, Coastal Communities Network Scotland, Project Seagrass, Restoration Forth, Solway Firth Partnership, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Comarty Courthouse Museum and Mossy Earth. We can't wait to continue to build on these partnerships!

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who has made MOC such a success this year. From just 20 folk on our Rising Tides group at the end of 2023 to now nearly 90 we can't wait to see where we go next! Everyone is invited to join so please do share and together we can celebrate, protect and restore our incredible local seas.

A huge thanks to our funders:  
NatureScot, Seachangers, Flora and Fauna

hello@morayoceancommunity.co.uk

## Key Achievements

We officially became a Community Interest Company in March 2024 which was a fantastic step forward in formalising Moray Ocean Community and helping us secure funding and support for running the group.

As a community we ran or supported 84 events, meetings, training courses and field trips throughout the financial year with 278 volunteers from Tain to Macduff.



We were especially proud of our first media invite with several volunteers being interviewed by BBC Radio Scotland for their Go Outdoors show!

## Community Impact

We asked a few of our partners and volunteers for their thoughts on Moray Ocean Community.

Ceris Jones - Flora and Fauna

*'I've seen MOC grow so much over the past year - they are ambitious, hard-working & so full of passion for their local environment. I can't wait to see how MOC develops over the next few years, sharing their joy and care for the marine environment of the Moray Firth with more and more people living around this coastline.'*

Orsi Gila - Moray Ocean Community volunteer

*'I find it very inspiring how many people are involved with MOC with many different types of knowledge and expertise. Both in the Rising Tides whatsapp group and all of the events are inclusive, everyone is welcome. So no matter how little experience and expertise I have, I feel I do belong.'*

*'Looking at the state of the world sometimes it's difficult to not be disheartened, but being part of a community with the same passion to help the environment lifts the spirit.'*

Kat Murphy - Mossy Earth

*'We really value the expertise, passion and time MOC members bring to protecting and restoring our local coast and its wildlife. Volunteers from MOC have helped us survey many hectares of seagrass and collect thousands of seagrass seeds. They also discovered invasive slipper limpets in the area and have been invaluable in monitoring and controlling their spread.'*



## Project Highlights

### Kickstarter Fund and Project by Fauna and Flora

This fund has helped MOC grow so much quicker than we could have done on our own. Having the funding to create, consult and co-develop outputs has been fantastic and new volunteers have been joining throughout the time we have been using the fund. We are now in a much stronger place to grow MOC further through recruiting more Directors and a new role of Volunteer Project Leads who will be able to use the capacity building we have done through the fund as well including the website, policies written on consultancy time, finance support and resources available.



### Community Learning Fund by Sea-Changers

From the 28th-30th June 2024 nine members of Moray Ocean Community attended a snorkel and marine survey upskilling weekend with the Field Studies Council at their Millport site on the beautiful Isle of Cumbrae.



The aim of the trip was to help us encourage more folk along the Moray Coast to get engaged in marine citizen or community science and learn more about our incredible coast.

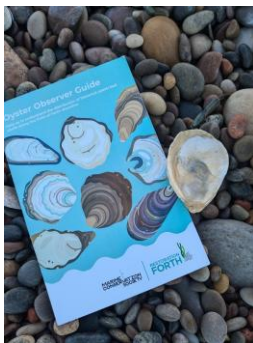
Thanks to FSC staff & guest snorkel instructor Laura Curtis-Moss we covered some snorkelling basics, duck diving, survey techniques, data analysis and of course lots of fun seeing and looking up all the amazing species we saw.

## Citizen Science

One of Moray Ocean Communities main aims is to increase the amount of data on the Moray Firth coastline gathered through citizen science.

Over 50 volunteers helped 8 different seagrass survey events across Merkinch, Findhorn, Nairn, Cromarty, Burghead, Shoremill and Tain. Some of these surveys were for mapping using equipment funded by NatureScot with whom we share the data with. Other surveys were using the Project Seagrass Spotter app.

Other citizen science projects Moray Ocean Community have taken part in include the Big Seaweed Search run by the Natural History Museum and the Marine Conservation Society at Hopeman and Cullen.



Nearly 20 volunteers have helped run 7 Oyster Observer Surveys at Nigg, Findhorn, Hopeman, Burghead, Cromarty and at Bow Fiddle Rock. This survey was developed as part of the Restoration Forth project and the Marine Conservation Society hold the data gathered now from the Moray Firth.



Shorewatch surveys for Whale and Dolphin Conservation were also completed by 10 volunteers at Burghead, Chanonry Point, Findochty and Cullen with a highlight being a feeding Minke Whale during watches at Burghead and breaching Bottlenose Dolphins and Chanonry Point.



Moray Ocean Community volunteers have been gathering vital data on Slipper Limpets which are an invasive species. Over 130 hours have been donated by volunteers conducting surveys and removal of Slipper Limpet Shells and we are working closely with NatureScot, Marine Directorate, Mossy Earth and the Moray Firth Coastal Partnership on next steps.



## Education

One of our education highlights was running two citizen science days at Ardersier for 75 pupils from the Inverness Royal Academy. Pupils had the chance to take part in Shorewatch, Seagrass surveys and a beach clean and litter survey.

One of our volunteers also took 26 pupils from Speyside Highschool out for seagrass surveys at Findhorn while another gave a presentation to P5,6 and 7 at Cromarty Primary School. We also supported the Marine Conservation Societies Youth Ocean Network event in Inverness.



### 3. Financial Overview

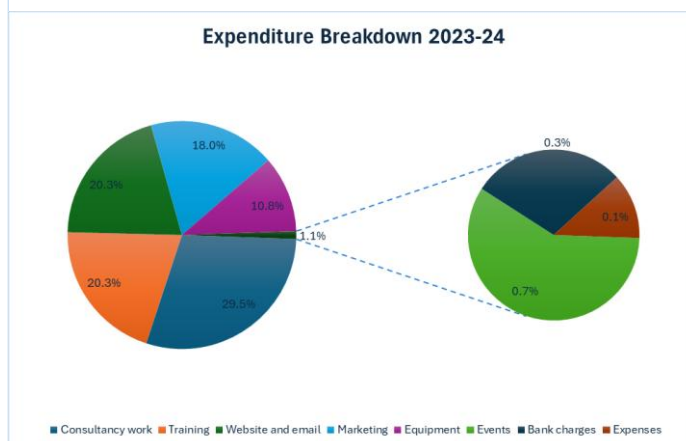
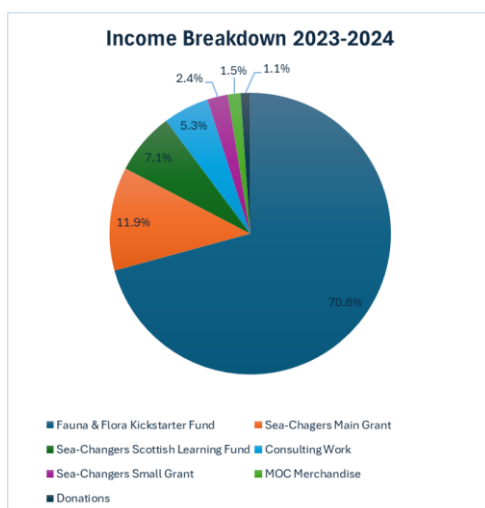
- Income & Expenditure Summary

Income has been sourced from funders such as Fauna & Flora and Sea-Changers for specific projects, as well as from donations made by volunteers for activities undertaken. MOC was also contracted by the Findhorn Watershed Initiative to carry out seagrass survey work in Findhorn Bay, most of which was used to reimburse volunteers for their time. Expenditures have related to specific projects, as agreed with funders, and to ongoing costs required to keep the MOC CIC operating. The tables and charts below provide a summary on the sources of income and expenditure.

| Funding source                      | Description  | Amount     |
|-------------------------------------|--|------------|
| Fauna & Flora Kickstarter Fund      | Funding and support for helping with capacity building and getting our foundations established.  | £14,887.00 |
| Sea-Changers Small Grant            | 2 x SUP boards funded to help with seagrass surveys and to assist volunteers who are less confident in the water.  | £499.00    |
| Sea-Changers Scottish Learning Fund | Funding to partly cover a snorkel survey skills training weekend at Field Study Council (FSC) Millport for nine volunteers.  | £1,500.00  |
| Sea-Changers Main Grant             | BSAC Snorkel Guiding Course for 6 volunteers - to allow 6 MOC volunteers to guide others into the Moray Firth coastal waters so that more members of the community can get to know, love and understand our local marine ecosystems. | £2,500.00  |
| Donations                           | Made by volunteers and community members to support our ongoing costs and activities. Sources include Eventbrite, GoFundMe and other fundraisers.  | £231.01    |
| Consulting Work                     | MOC provided paid consultancy services to the Findhorn Watershed Initiative.   | £1,109.84  |
| MOC Merchandise                     | Volunteers were able to order MOC merchandise at cost - all payments were sent directly to the local business, Dallas Designs.   | £308.20    |
| Expenditure                         | Description  | Amount     |
| Equipment                           | Equipment for surveys such as 2 x SUP boards and snorkeling equipment and IT equipment such as the MOC laptop and projector, among others.   | £1,331.56  |



|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Training                       | Training for some volunteers to be able to manage MOC and share their acquired knowledge with other volunteers and the wider community. Included training in snorkelling techniques, accounting and first aid. | £2,501.94  |
| Insurance                      | Liability insurance for MOC events and activities.   | £269.92 - Paid by directors and not included in totals |
| Website and email              | Funding from Flora & Fauna as part of the Kick Starter Fund helped MOC get their foundations set up, including website and email accounts.   | £2,491.46  |
| Bank charges                   | Monthly charges to keep a MOC Business bank account.   | £40.00   |
| Marketing                      | Included merchandise (bought and provided to volunteers at cost) and the MOC short film, among others.   | £2,211.20  |
| Events                         | Venues and MOCTales speakers.  | £80.50   |
| Consultancy work               | Volunteer time covered with paid consultancy.  | £3,628.55  |
| Expenses                       | Expenses incurred as part of MOC events and activities.  | £16.99   |
| <b>Total Income</b>            | <b>£21,035.05</b>  |  |
| <b>Total Expenditure</b>       | <b>£12,302.20</b>  |  |
| <b>Balance carried forward</b> | <b>£8,732.85</b>   |  |



| <b>Expenditure Category</b>              | <b>Description</b>  |
|--|---|
| Internal Consultancy & Capacity Building | Strengthening MOC's structure, governance, and skills through internal coordination, systems development, and capacity-building support by Fauna & Flora.                                     |
| External Professional Services           | External specialist support such as accountancy, design, and technical services that ensure sound governance and professional delivery.   |
| Equipment & Field Resources              | Investment in tools and materials that enable safe, effective and inclusive participation in marine conservation and education activities.  |
| Training & Skills Development            | Participation in accredited training, including the BSAC Snorkel Guide course funded by Sea-Changers, which expanded local capability for safe marine access and future volunteer engagement. |
| Community Engagement & Events            | Activities, workshops, and volunteer gatherings that connect people with the Moray Firth and foster community-led stewardship of the marine environment.                                      |
| Operations & Communications              | Storytelling, outreach, and communications works, including the creation of MOC's short community film to share our journey and impact.   |

- **How Funds Were Used**

Link spending to project impacts - see below

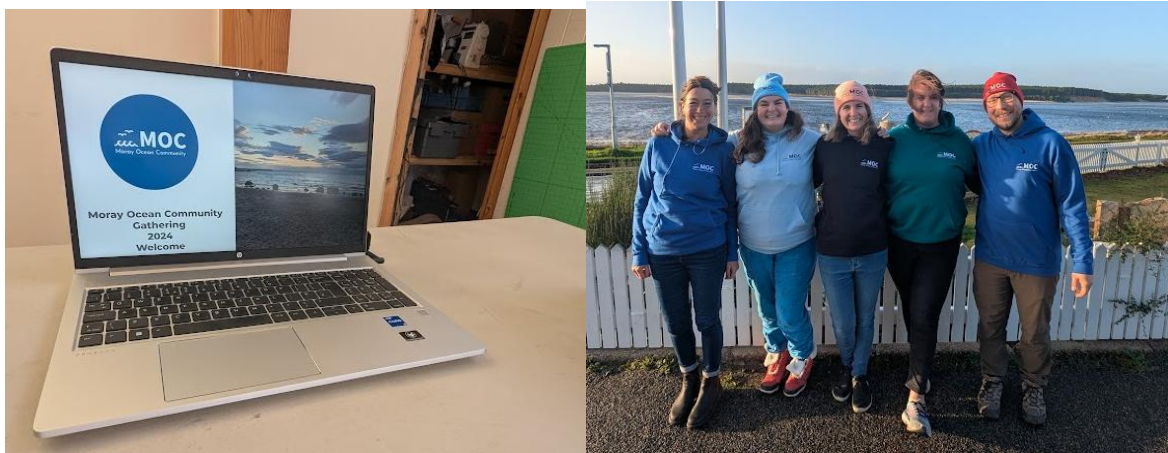
### **Kickstarter fund - Fauna & Flora**

- Capacity building
  - Policies
  - IT set up
  - Website
  - Outreach material (banners, etc.)
  - Film
  - Training
  - Strategy sessions

Support from Fauna & Flora through the Kickstarter programme has given us the opportunity to strengthen our foundations and build the capacity needed for lasting impact.

This support allowed us to put in place the core elements of an effective organisation: developing policies, IT systems, and our website; producing outreach materials, and creating our short community film. It also enabled training and strategy sessions that helped shape our direction and deepen the skills of those leading the organisation.

This investment in our foundations has been central to our growth, transforming Moray Ocean Community from a newly formed group into a structured, connected, and confident organisation ready to deliver lasting community benefit along the Moray Firth.



### **Stand-Up Paddleboards - Sea-Changers**

Our main aim for using SUP boards was to enable our volunteers to help increase our seagrass records to the Seagrass Spotter app whilst taking part in fun and shared learning experiences and using the SUP boards as a tool to enable this to happen. We required the boards to safely support our volunteers over marsh land and seagrass meadows with minimal impact, we carried survey equipment, used the board for those who needed a rest and also for a snorkelling platform.

The continuous collection of data by volunteers spread along the Moray Firth coastline will allow us to determine the change over time of coastal habitats and using the SUP boards has been an essential part of this monitoring.

We are delighted that we achieved a successful project where members of the community and volunteers came together to take part in citizen science SUP seagrass surveys.

At our August event we found a blue mussel bed and the SUPs let us view the bed without disturbing the habitat. We are looking forward to going back with the SUP boards to fully map the bed when the winds come down to a safe level.



### **BSAC Snorkel Guide Course - Sea-Changers**

It has taken many years of corresponding with BSAC to finally get a Snorkel Guiding Course up along the Moray Firth Coastline - thanks to Sea-Changers we are delighted to be the first community led group to undertake the training.

We are focused on having a clear progression of skills and sustainability and strengthening funders relationships in all our activities. An example of this is learning the techniques of surveying from our trip to Cumbrae, thanks to Sea-Changers funding. Which then enabled us to use the Sea-Changers funded SUP boards to assist us and our volunteers when conducting surveys and accessing the water environment. The Snorkel Guide training helps us to bring all of our previously acquired skills and knowledge together and share it with our community, in a safe way.

We aim to empower the community to safely access the marine environment and contribute to citizen science by getting involved in a wide range of snorkel surveys in 2026.

## **4. Seagrass Spotlight**

Seagrass Update from Francis Williams - Seagrass Volunteer Lead for Moray Ocean Community

Following on from mapping seagrass, further surveys were carried out on seagrass both intertidal and subtidally. Most significantly, previously un-recorded seagrass meadows of both common and dwarf eelgrass were found and mapped together with volunteers in Merkinch LNR near Inverness. Whilst only small, this is significant and a further engagement session



was held to introduce existing volunteers of the Local Nature Reserve to the presence of seagrass in the area.

Following a tip-off by a local boat builder MOC co-ordinated with Burghead Sub Aqua Club to survey subtidal seagrass in Burghead Bay. On the first dive trip areas of seagrass were found and photographed with locations being shared with NatureScot and Project Seagrass. This initial survey has led to an ongoing collaboration between MOC and BSAC, but also the nearby barracks who undertook an additional scuba survey later on in the year.

MOC volunteers also undertook a snorkel survey in the summer and successfully mapped the shoreward edge of the bed. This bed is potentially the largest subtidal bed on the east coast of Scotland and MOC have facilitated meetings between BSAC, NatureScot and Project Seagrass to understand next steps to fully map and then assess the health of the bed.

Beyond the Moray Firth, volunteers have used the experience and knowledge gained from seagrass surveys to record seagrass at new locations across Scotland primarily using the Seagrass Spotter app.



Still from Seagrass SUP and Snorkel in Burghead Bay

## 5. Challenges & Lessons Learned

- Be honest and reflective: highlight what was tough, how you adapted, and what was learned.

It has been an incredible year of growth and learning for Moray Ocean Community. All of our Directors are volunteers with full time jobs so balancing running and developing MOC alongside jobs has been challenging but by keeping an open communication between us all we have been able to share roles and responsibilities.

We are extremely grateful to Flora and Fauna for their Kickstarter Project which gave us the funding and the support to build MOC through developing a new website, purchasing a laptop, working with a local graphic designer for our sail flag and roller banner and also providing the opportunity for Directors to work on the project on consultancy time. This type

of funding is extremely rare and we now face the challenge of securing ongoing running costs for MOC which is a similar challenge across all community groups and organisations and one we will continue to tackle through brainstorming, trying new things and working with our community.

## **6. Looking Ahead**

As we move through 2025/26, Moray Ocean Community is deepening its roots, like a kelp holdfast anchoring to the seabed and drawing strength from the coast and community that surround it. The foundations built last year: equipment, systems, training, and relationships; are now helping us grow with greater direction and purpose. What began as a small group of volunteers along the Moray Firth has evolved into a network of people, skills, and projects that are beginning to take lasting shape.

Our focus this year is on strengthening what we have started: developing our environmental projects, guiding new opportunities for connection with the sea, and shaping a shared direction that can carry the organisation forward. The completion of our Snorkel Guide training, supported by Sea-Changers, opens new possibilities for exploring the coast and bringing people closer to the underwater world we are working to protect.

We are also taking time to plan carefully for the future: to define the structures, partnerships, and funding that will support MOC's growth while keeping our community roots strong. Over the coming year, we continue to seek new funding and grant opportunities, while also exploring sustainable revenue streams that reflect our values as a Community Interest Company. Our goal is to secure the resources needed to bring in dedicated staff capacity to help coordinate projects, manage delivery, and support our volunteers.

Alongside this, we are expanding our Board to include new voices and experience, and creating a volunteer and membership structure to strengthen how people can take part in our work. We are especially keen to hear from potential lead volunteers who can help coordinate activities or champion specific areas of our projects.

Building an organisation that can last means moving at a pace that matches our capacity, staying collaborative, and keeping the wellbeing of people and the environment at the centre of everything we do. Although winter brings quieter shores, it is also a time of reflection and planning. We will continue developing our citizen science and community programmes, and look forward to sharing our short community film in the coming months as a celebration of what has been achieved together so far.

There are many ways to be part of this journey: from joining surveys and events to sharing ideas or lending a hand at the coast. To stay connected, visit [www.morayoceancommunity.co.uk](http://www.morayoceancommunity.co.uk), follow us on Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn, and get in touch through either of these channels to join our Rising Tides WhatsApp group for updates and opportunities.



Moray Ocean Community volunteers at the Kickstarter funded filming day. The short-film can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg8VVKu8G6I>

With thanks to Spiral Out Pictures for producing the film and to Fauna and Flora's Kickstart Capacity Building Fund and Arcadia for the funding.

## 7. Acknowledgments

Thank you to everyone who has been involved and supported Moray Ocean Community. From funders understanding the needs and capacity of a small coastal community group to our partners who facilitate excellent collaboration opportunities.

However our biggest thank you goes to you - members of Moray Ocean Community. To everyone who has run, supported or attended an event - thank you! To everyone who has shared information for our website, social media channels and whats app group - thank you! To everyone for being part of it we are so glad you are here and we wouldn't be Moray Ocean Community without you.

### **Partnerships**

Moray Ocean Community has been delighted to work with many partners, projects and networks this year including the Findhorn Watershed Initiative, Project Seagrass, Coastal Communities Network Scotland, Restoration Forth, Solway Firth Partnership, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Cromarty Courthouse Museum and Mossy Earth. We can't wait to continue to build on these partnerships!

### **Funders**

A huge thank you to our funders including NatureScot, Sea-Change and Flora and Fauna. Without your support we wouldn't be able to run our projects, gather data, involve the community or keep Moray Ocean Community going - thank you!