

Food & Footprint and Agricultural Advisory

Carbon Neutral Islands Case Study

Equipping island communities with the confidence to achieve their emission reduction objectives.

The Carbon Neutral Islands (CNI) project is funded by the Scottish Government and delivered in partnership with Community Energy Scotland (CES) and is currently run across six Scottish islands – Islay, Barra & Vatersay, Raasay, Great Cumbrae, Hoy and Yell. SAC Consulting was referred to CES by one of our Shetland-based consultants who was working with the Community Development Officer leading the delivery of the CNI project in Shetland.



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Net zero targets are a challenge for all economic sectors across Scotland. In this project, CNI wished to tackle the emissions from Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF). As the challenges within the LULUCF work varies across the islands, the other islands decided to try different providers, with the view that all islands could benefit from one another's projects – sharing the learnings and gaining more value for the CNI programme.

SAC Consulting set out to equip islands' communities on Raasay and Barra & Vatersay with confidence in their LULUCF emission reporting, a comprehensive understanding of its implications and a clear direction for achieving their future emission reduction objectives. After commencing the work for Raasay and Barra & Vatersay, another project on Islay was taken on by the team.

The client challenge

As part of the CNI, each participating island had completed their GHG (Greenhouse Gas) inventories to inform community-led actions to achieve net zero by 2040. The inventory included emissions from LULUCF, agriculture, waste, energy and transport.

SAC Consulting was invited to review the LULUCF reports, developed for the islands by another consultancy. The initial request was to

validate the existing maps and data produced in the desk-based assessment.

Our solution

Following initial discussions, we produced five initial objectives to guide the project delivery. Our overall goal was to work with each island's CNI team and the wider working group to tailor our outputs to their needs, within a framework of the five objectives. As a result, the final outputs for each island changed slightly depending on the identified specific needs and knowledge gaps from working group workshops.



As a result, the project delivery included:

1. A dedicated SAC Consulting team resource per island who worked closely with Community Development Officers (CDOs), and their wider teams, to form LULUCF Island Working Groups.
2. Online workshop meetings with the island working groups to explore island-specific objectives within the LULUCF and wider CNI project.
3. Identification of island-specific queries related to the LULUCF reports previously produced.
4. Agreement on island-specific objectives to guide the work delivered and the limitations of the project.

The objectives identified and addressed with the working groups were; the production of a simplified explanation of the LULUCF and how GHG emissions are assessed, and a breakdown of LULUCF numbers and their local context by island.

Our delivery was fully integrated with local island communities. SAC Consulting worked directly with the CDOs, and the wider island working groups, holding several online meetings, workshops and calls to discuss progress and offer opportunities to input into project delivery throughout.

SAC Consulting worked to strike the right balance between producing island-specific outputs, making it more engaging and accessible to the island communities, whilst maintaining a level of generalisation so that our outputs would also be translatable and transferrable to the other islands participating in the project. We also ensured that our outputs were aligned with LULUCF needs as well as the wider CNI programme on the islands. This meant that our outputs were highly integrable with other CNI work.

On Barra & Vatersay and Raasay, in line with the overarching net zero strategy, focused on identification of priorities and projects to reduce the GHG emissions from LULUCF and



increasing carbon sinks, including woodland, peatlands, removal of invasive species, as well as establishing which land surveys would be required to identify key habitats and land uses. On Islay, we championed an approach which further supported knowledge exchange, skills development and community engagement.

Added value

SAC Consulting's approach was aligned to our roots as part of SRUC – it not only offered knowledge, but also upskilling and signposting to equip the island communities with knowledge and a better understanding of LULUCF to support future decision making. We achieved this partly by delivering a mix of outputs, including a detailed report, short LULUCF options appraisal reports, slides (which can be used as a community engagement handbook) and an interactive presentation session with the island working groups which was recorded, with the recording to be used for future reference and further island community engagement. On Islay, we carried out an extensive soil sampling and testing with the help of a local high school and other volunteers to measure the baseline levels of carbon content in grassland soils. This approach not only enabled the local community to protect soil carbon stocks but also gave the young people and the local community enhanced skills and understanding of the role of soils within LULUCF and net zero.



Additionally, SAC Consulting has a uniquely diverse expertise, which allowed for the successful delivery of this project. Our Agricultural Advisory team, who have directly supported farmers and crofters for over 40 years, and the Food & Footprint team, who have specialist carbon, biodiversity, natural capital and peatland expertise, worked collaboratively to deliver the best result for the project and client. SAC Consulting's ability to mesh our decades of agricultural consultancy experience with our leading expertise in environmental sustainability was a crucial element in delivering a successful project. This shared experience, expertise and streamlined solution in one package was a uniquely valuable element of the project's success.

Our client says

"What was great about working with SAC Consulting was that the island communities already had respect and trust for their knowledge. It worked really well to have varied approaches across the three islands and also to ensure a focus on tangible community engagement which is what we needed to make the project a success."

Darragh Keenaghan,
Community Energy Scotland