

# Case Study: Celebrating the Flow Country with local communities



# Background

In 2024, the Flow Country became the first and only peatland UNESCO World Heritage Site in the world, as the most extensive and diverse example of a blanket bog ecosystem. The same year, a Facility for Investment Ready Nature in Scotland (FIRNS) funded *Flow Country Green Finance Initiative* project was piloted successfully at Armadale farm in Sutherland, delivering large-scale peatland restoration on a working farm, with a completely new model where profits generated by the sales of carbon units will be re-distributed between the landowner and the community.

To support these transformational projects, the group of organisations that have traditionally worked together to support the management of the Flow Country Peatland has also become a constituted body: The Flow Country Partnership Scottish Charitable Incorporate Organisation (SCIO). The Flow Country Partnership SCIO board of Trustees thus brings together UHI (ERI), NatureScot, the Highland Council, RSPB, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, alongside a broader membership that includes North Highland Initiative, local businesses, several landowners and community groups, as well as individual members from the local communities.

In many ways, 2024 was the culmination of more than a decade of partnership work that has radically changed the way in which people interact and interface with peatlands in the region, and more widely, and it seemed fitting to ensure that this was celebrated and made visible. This project was part of the wider celebrations and focused on the local members of our community.

# Project Overview

(min 100 words, max 250 and include any high-quality graphics (graph/chart/video/audio))

## Project task:

*The project had two main tasks, for which funding was secured from the Land & Community Challenge Fund:*

- + *To celebrate achievements in the Flow Country with local communities through two separate events : a celebration of the completion of the first Green Finance Pilot Project at Armadale farm and a local launch of the UNESCO World Heritage Site ahead of bigger events planned for Inverness and Glasgow.*
- + *To showcase the potential opportunities that the Flow Country peatland can unlock for the region socially, economically and environmentally.*

*Oftentimes with big projects, significant milestones are not celebrated enough with local communities, who may feel left out. Our two events focussed on completely different audiences : landowners, crofters and farmers at the Armadale Demonstration Day, and local residents and nature enthusiasts at the World Heritage Launch. Yet, the same message carried through: the Flow Country has enormous potential to support local communities by bringing in much needed highskill jobs, business opportunities, and contributing meaningfully to the global biodiversity and climate crises.*

*For this project, Prof. Roxane Andersen (UHI-NWH) worked with the project officer and peatland restoration officer from the Green Finance Initiative project, the board of Trustees and the wider World Heritage Site communications team. For the Armadale demonstration day, Roxane answered many of the technical questions around the effects of peatland restoration and climate change during and after the field visit, while at the Lyth Art event, she gave the introductory speech.*



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## Project action and activities:

### *Armadale Farm Pilot demonstration*

*Funded by KE Challenge Fund (Land Use and Community) and NatureScot's Peatland ACTION*

*The event took place on the 9th of December 2024, hosted by the Flow Country Partnership and Joyce and Ian Campbell, owners of Armadale Farm. The event started at 10.00 in the Armadale village hall, with a welcome and a short presentation about the FIRNS funded "Flow Country Green Finance Initiative" project by Graham Neville (NatureScot), and explanation about the Armadale Farm Pilot Project.*

*The event coincided with the end of the first phase of restoration, with the next phased planned for 2025. Following the presentation, attendees were taken out in the field to see the site, with short presentations in the field by Joyce Campbell (farmer), Gearóid Murphy (Peatland ACTION), Prof. Roxane Andersen (UHI), and contribution from the Green Finance Project delivery team. Everyone was then taken back to the Armadale Hall for lunch and discussion until the end of the event at 15.00.*

*The event was used by the Peatland ACTION team to film a "case study" which can be seen [here](#).*

### *Lyth Art Flow Country World Heritage Site Launch Event*

*Funded by KE Challenge Fund (Land Use and Community) with in kind contribution (film and score) from Jim Sutherland and Morag McKinnon.*

*On December 13th, 2024, Lyth Art hosted a "local launch" event for the World Heritage Site with a short speech by Councillor Raymond Bremner, followed by a short speech by Prof. Roxane Andersen (UHI NWH) and the Presentation of the film "[When fish began to crawl](#)", an immersive and provocative cinematographic experience co-directed by internationally renowned composer maker Jim Sutherland and BAFTA award winner film maker Morag McKinnon, inspired by the Flow Country landscape.*

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## Project outcomes and results:

### *Armadale Farm Pilot Demonstration*

*The event was extremely successful, with 35 attendees representing a cross-section of the landowning and managing community in the Flow Country, including farmers, crofters, common grazing clerks, estates managers, contractors and NGOs. Representatives from NatureScot's Peatland ACTION including the Delivery Manager Amanda Ophof, were there as well. The discussions were open, respectful, and positive, with attendees able to ask a wide range of questions about the project, the process, the benefits, the science and the practical aspects of peatland restoration delivery at scale.*

*Joyce Campbell, owner of Armadale Farm, said “When we met in 2023 to talk about this new Green Finance Initiative in the Store Café in Bettyhill, I spoke about my anger at the empty seats around the table, where the crofters and farmers should have been. I can tell you, I am not angry anymore – I am so glad to see all those seats filled with more people than I could have ever hoped for.”*

*Following the Armadale event, several attendees have followed up with the project team to enquire about potential projects on their land using the Flow Country Partnership model. One of the attendees enquired about further collaboration with UHI on his estate and is currently scoping a possible PhD project. Following the success of the event and of two training courses for peatland restoration contractors delivered jointly by UHI and Peatland ACTION (Sept. and Dec. 2024), Prof. Roxane Andersen has been approached by the BBC to take part in a feature (Radio and TV) highlighting the concrete steps undertaken by the Flow Country Partnership to realise the benefits of World Heritage Site Inscription in the Flow Country.*

### *Lyth Art Flow Country World Heritage Site Launch Event*

*The free event sold out online (70 tickets) and attracted a varied audience made up of local people who were able to mingle with the Flow Country Partnership team after the film as nibbles and drinks were provided.*

*Although the venue didn't do justice to the film or the score (it is meant to be played lived by an orchestra and projected as a triptych on three screens), many people commented on their appreciation of a free and local event before the “big” celebrations in Inverness and Glasgow, where they would be unable to take part.*

*Following the event, a dozen more people became members of the Flow Country Partnership SCIO. Prof. Roxane Andersen provided a short “introductory lecture” to two national-scale events in Inverness (28th January) and Glasgow (2nd February) celebrating the World Heritage Site Inscription.*