

Neart Na Machairí

Creative | Coastal | Resilience

DECEMBER 2025



LEARNING BRIEF



Neart na Machairí was a creative climate action project based on Maharees on the Dingle Peninsula, Co Kerry, involving three artists working with the local community and a group of community partners. It was led by the Maharees Conservation Association, in partnership with Dingle Hub. The project ran from January 2024 until December 2025.

This learning brief was co-created by the project steering group: Aidan O'Connor, Martha Farrell, Jeanne Spillane, Patricia Herrero, Emer Fallon, Silke Michels, Zoë Uí Fhaoláin Green, Zoë Rush and Deirdre de Bhailís. It also includes the experiences of the community partners who participated in the project. The reflective learning and evaluation process was led by Clare Watson and involved individual interviews, group discussions, analysis and collation of responses, with follow-on reviews and additional contributions by steering group members.



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SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Maharees is a 5km long natural tombolo located on the northern side of the Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry. It is home to 300 year-round residents and a holiday destination for thousands more in the summer.

The tombolo separates Brandon Bay on the western side from Tralee Bay to the east. It is a sandy spit for much of its length, with sand dunes giving way to earth and rocky ground towards the northern end. Lengthy beaches are found on both sides and the Brandon Bay beaches, open to the North Atlantic, often receive long swells suitable for surfing. Maharees is a Special Area of Conservation and home to the rare Natterjack Toad.

Dune systems shift naturally. However recent patterns, particularly during and after extreme weather conditions, have gone far beyond the traditional ebb and flow of the dunes and are threatening the delicate ecosystem and causing major concern to the inhabitants of the Maharees (especially since the one road in and out of the tombolo was blocked by sand in 2016).

EXPECTED PROJECT OUTCOMES

(as agreed with Creative Ireland when funding was granted)

- Participants will acquire an enhanced understanding and knowledge of:
 - how to reduce emissions in everyday life.
 - meaningful actions that can be taken to facilitate climate adaptation and coastal resilience (from learning about nature-based solutions aimed at strengthening coastal defences and protecting biodiversity to understanding how to engage a community in taking positive collaborative action).
- The resultant impact will be a change in behaviour, an actual reduction in carbon emissions in participants' everyday lives, an increase in volunteerism to effect climate adaptation actions and a community that is actively participating in developing and implementing community led plans for climate adaptation.
- This project will ultimately result in an enhanced community capacity and sense of agency from creative engagement with climate change, its impacts on Maharees, and a knowledge of community visioning, coastal resilience and adaptation strategies. The legacy of the project will be a Maharees community that is resilient, engaged, equipped, and well-placed to adapt to climate change.

- This project will also result in an understanding of the most effective messaging strategies to communicate climate adaptation and biodiversity enhancement messages and actions and will inform the design of communications strategies used in Maharees and beyond.

PROJECT GOVERNANCE

The project was led by the Maharees Conservation Association, in partnership with Dingle Hub.

Maharees Conservation Association CLG is a 100% volunteer/community-led registered charity established in 2016 which has pioneered nature-based solutions (e.g. marram planting, fencing), regenerative tourism, and climate adaptation initiatives on the Maharees tombolo. This work has resulted in transformative changes in the health of the sand dunes and much more awareness amongst the resident and visiting community about their fragility and importance.

Dingle Hub is a non-profit community enterprise connecting innovative, forward-thinking people and organisations – local and national – to develop co-operative approaches to the challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.

STEERING GROUP

Aidan O'Connor, Maharees Conservation Association

Aidan is a founding member and director of Maharees Conservation and was Chair throughout this project. He is from Kilshannig West and has extensive experience growing vegetables in a variety of landscapes in Kerry, particularly the sandy soils of Maharees. Alongside other Maharees Conservation Directors, he has travelled the country providing groups with practical skills and knowledge for protecting their sand dune systems. Aidan recently completed a certificate in Nature Conservation and Interpretation with Munster Technological University, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Leave No Trace. He also brings his experience of being a participant farmer in the 2022 creative climate action project, Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe (with artist Lisa Fingleton).

Martha Farrell, Maharees Conservation Association

Martha is a Marketing lecturer at the Department of Business Studies, and a member of the Green Campus committee, at Munster Technological University. She is a founding member and a director of Maharees Conservation. She is also a board member of Tralee Tidy Towns, working with local stakeholders to enhance the physical and social environment of the town. Since her involvement with the Heritage Council Collaborative Town Centre Health Check in Tralee in 2016, Martha has been an active member of Tralee Chamber Alliance, as a member of the steering committee (2016-22) and as board member and company secretary (since 2022).

Jeanne Spillane, Maharees Conservation Association

Jeanne was born and raised in Maharees. She is an active member of the Maharees Conservation subcommittee on biodiversity. Jeanne is pursuing a PhD in Sociology exploring the rollout of solar PV in Ireland in the context of a Just Transition. She holds Master's degrees in Development Practice and International Peace Studies. She has previously worked with the Scottish Government on energy advice for citizens, on communications with the United Nations World Food Programme, and on the SDGs negotiation process with the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs. Having worked at national and international policy levels, Jeanne has come to believe that local action is crucial for substantive, sustainable change.

Patricia Herrero, Maharees Conservation Association

Patricia has lived in Maharees for over five years. She came on holidays, looking for wind and surf, but it was the community that kept her. She has now planted roots, literally! Her veggie garden connects her to the Maharees soil. She joined Maharees Conservation's biodiversity subcommittee to learn about her new home. Patricia has a degree in Literature and brings many years of experience on Project and Strategy Management working for a large corporation. She joined the Neart project to make use of her knowledge to protect her adopted home.

Emer Fallon, Writer

Emer explores climate and environmental issues in her poetry, fiction and printworks. She uses local rock pigments to create lino prints that complement her written work and has co-delivered creative environmental programmes to Corca Dhuibhne schools since 2021. In her current role as Kerry County Council writer in residence she delivered a project exploring a sense of place through a series of journeys on Kerry's Local Link service. She loves to work collaboratively, and her postgraduate in Irish Folklore and her experience growing and preparing food for the café she managed for a decade inform her creative work.

Silke Michels, Artist

Silke is a visual artist and mindfulness teacher living on the Dingle Peninsula for over 20 years. Over recent years her focus has been exploring creative ways to re-connect a sense of belonging and identity within the natural world. In her practise she is committed to working with sustainable materials e.g. making her own inks and pigments. She uses performance aspects to immerse herself into site specific exploration of place. Silke is an experienced facilitator in art and health education. In her creative wellbeing classes, the focus is on slow art and process led activities like mindful drawing/walking to increase a sense of wellbeing through creativity.

Zoë Uí Fhaoláin Green, Artist

Zoë is a visual and performance artist working at the intersection of ecology, community, and embodied storytelling. Living in the Corca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht, she collaborates with landscape, people and natural materials to create multisensory work that responds to place and fosters belonging in nature. Her practice of 25 years spans film, performance and installation, drawing, sound-recording and socially engaged arts. Working closely with communities and people of all ages and abilities, she likes to create encounters that ignite curiosity, and nurture empathy and a sense of wonder.

Zoë Rush, Project Manager/Designer

Zoë is a designer based in Castlegregory. She has volunteered in community projects throughout her life, exploring local mechanisms for building social and environmental resilience. Zoë holds a degree in Psychology from the University of Edinburgh and a Master's in Integrated Design from Köln International School of Design where she specialized in co-creation processes and participatory design. She worked as a researcher and educator for Ireland's Knowledge Centre for Carbon, Climate and Community Action (2022-2023) and as a socially engaged artist on Hometree's Dinnseanchas project (2024-2025).

Deirdre de Bhailís, Dingle Hub

Deirdre's key focus is to build a sustainable community by fostering an ecosystem that supports the creation of enterprise and employment on Corca Dhuibhne. Through Dingle Hub, she works on multiple projects that address the peninsula's transition to low carbon ways of living. These projects involve working in partnership to explore coastal resilience, energy communities, greener transport initiatives and anaerobic digestion solutions to address climate change. Deirdre is also a member of the County Kerry SEAI Sustainable Energy Community Mentor team. She is a Chartered Engineer and holds a degree in Electronic Engineering from NUIG and a Master's in Engineering Science from UCC.



COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Maria Browne Leahy

Maria grew up in Maharees, surrounded by the beauty of its expansive beaches and sand dunes, and immersed in her family's tourism business. After living and working in many vibrant and exciting places around the world, the desire to give her own children the same magical upbringing she experienced drew her back. Wanting her young family to enjoy the natural playground she cherished, Maria returned to live in the local community two years ago. She joined the Neart na Machairí project as a volunteer to gain a deeper appreciation of the area's unique biodiversity and to better understand how the local community might build resilience against future climate challenges. Her hope is to instil in her children a passion for protecting this extraordinary place, empowering them to be advocates for its future.

Ed Fitzgerald

Ed moved to Maharees from Dublin nearly five years ago and it has very much become home. It was always a 'home from home' as his mother is from there and his father comes from across the bay, Brandon. Ed was very lucky to spend every summer and holiday on Maharees so the place has always been such a part of his life. He has seen the impacts of climate change and how it has affected the area and wants to be able to give back and help support this place he calls home. Especially now that he has a young family, he wants to ensure that the area is preserved for future generations to enjoy it as much as he always has.

Kate Gay

Kate and her family first visited Maharees on holiday from the UK in 2013. Its unspoilt beauty and scope for outdoor activity planted a seed that grew. They bought a house in Kilshannig in 2016 and became residents in 2023. Kate loves swimming. After a career in marketing, she retrained as an open water swimming coach. She swims year-round in the sea and mountain loughs and is captivated by the beauty above and below surface, which she enjoys photographing and filming. Kate joined Neart na Machairí to creatively explore practical and constructive ways to protect this extraordinary tombolo and to strengthen the connection between people and place.

Hannah Hennessy

Hannah, born and raised in Maharees, is passionate about her community. She is an active volunteer within the locality. She is a leader with the local youth club and serves as treasurer for the Summer Festival Committee. Excited to be a community partner in the Neart Na Machairí project, Hannah is committed to making a positive impact on her local area. Recently returning to education at Munster Technological University, she is studying Home Economics and Business to become a teacher, after many years as a special needs assistant. With a deep connection to her roots, she strives to empower others while fostering sustainability and growth in both her studies and community initiatives.

Pat Frank Hennessy

Pat Frank, originally from Kilshannig, grew up around vegetable production, tourism, and fishing. After an international career in offshore wind, he now works in offshore renewable development in Ireland. Pat also supports his wife, Kelly, with their young family and the running of their guesthouse. His interests include history, archaeology, regenerative food production, and traditional practices that promote sustainable living. On their smallholding, he breeds Connemara ponies, reflecting his love for animals and nature, and is secretary of Castlegregory Agricultural Show. Through his involvement in the Neart Na Machairí project, Pat has come to believe that the strongest response to climate change lies in building informed, cohesive, and empowered communities, capable of facing future challenges together.

Mairead Kinsella

Mairead Kinsella is a visitor to Maharees from March to October, spending most weekends and all the summer months at her mobile home with her family. She is interested in sustainability and especially how our everyday actions impact climate change and living healthier. Mairead and her family are very interested in the Maharees, the work of Maharees Conservation and the learning about the unique biodiversity in the area.

Duncan Knox

Duncan is a passionate watersports instructor, deeply rooted in the Maharees where he was born and raised. Working alongside his father in the family watersports business, he has developed a profound connection to the ocean and its impact on their small community. Witnessing the environmental threats facing the Maharees firsthand, Duncan actively participates in local projects focused on safeguarding their coastal environment. His commitment to both his profession and the well-being of his community drives him to advocate for sustainable practice, ensuring that future generations can enjoy the beauty and resources of the Maharees.

Ben Spillane

Ben is a dedicated advocate for the Maharees community, drawing on a strong background in marine engineering and over five years of experience in the oil and gas shipping industries. After returning home three years ago, he launched two local businesses: a wood-fired sauna and a seasonal food trailer serving coffee and breakfast. Having witnessed the devastating impact of storms on the Maharees especially in recent years, that flooded roads and homes, he is passionate about implementing measures to protect the Maharees. Ben is committed to fostering resilience and sustainability in the community through active participation in local projects.

REFLECTIVE LEARNING AND EVALUATION LEAD

Dr Clare Watson

Clare lives near Ballydehob in West Cork. She has a background in social work, community-based social and environmental projects and a PhD on community engagement in climate action. From 2018 to April 2023, she led the MaREI engaged research team in Dingle Peninsula 2030, supporting the sustainable transition on the peninsula. She established a process of reflective learning within the partnership and co-created a series of learning briefs, which tracked the benefits, challenges, experiences, learnings and achievements. Clare now works on a freelance basis. www.clarewatson.ie

OUR APPROACH

Neart Na Machairí was an embedded artist project and took a creative, process-oriented approach combining the skills of artistic and non-arts partners to support the communities of Maharees to reflect on, discuss, and co-create ways of adapting to the twin pressures of climate change and biodiversity loss.

The aim of the project has been to build upon the existing strength of the Maharees through a creative exploration of how the community can prepare for the future and be resilient, engaged and equipped to adapt to climate change. Three crucial elements underlay this work:



Artwork by Zoë Uí Fhaoláin Green



LEARNING JOURNEY

Learning Journey

to understand the future impacts of climate change on our tombolo while also deepening our knowledge and celebrating the beauty and unique biodiversity of our home.



CREATIVITY

Creativity

working as the glue of the project, we have used creativity to explore Maharees as a place, to build relationships, tell stories of what is important, and open new possibilities for the future.



COMMUNITY-LED

Community-led

bringing together diverse perspectives from within the Maharees community has been central to the project, both in its governance structures (steering group), community partners and the creative practice of the project team.

FUNDING

The project was funded by the Creative Climate Action Fund, a joint initiative of the Creative Ireland Programme and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications which supports creative, cultural and artistic projects that build awareness around climate change and empower citizens to make meaningful behavioural transformations. It was one of 19 successful two-year large scale Ignite projects. The amount received was €249,193.27¹. Additional funding of €10,000 was obtained to support the work for the 'Will It Stay Fine?' podcast from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment through Community Foundation Ireland.

¹ Towards the end of the project, an additional sum of €25,380 was granted by Creative Ireland to fund dissemination and legacy planning.

SECTION 2: WHAT HAPPENED

SELECTION OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

In May 2024, at a project launch event, a call was put out for interested people living or working in Maharees to join a group of eight ‘community partners.’ With the support and encouragement from members of the steering group, 14 people subsequently responded. Ten were chosen to maximize diversity around gender, age, length of time living in Maharees, and different communities of interest (e.g., surfers, business owners, young families, families involved in fishing and farming, long-term visitors, and other community groups in the area).

At the end of the first year, two of the community partners had to pull back for personal reasons. While some of the remaining eight community partners were actively engaged in the project, both contributing significantly to it and benefitting greatly from it, others contributed in the way they felt was most useful or possible for them. For example, differences in work schedules (9-5 weekdays vs evening and weekend shift work during the holiday season) meant the group struggled to find a day that suited everyone during the summer months. In the end, some community partners didn’t follow all the set project days or project activities but flowed in and out of the project, offering their perspectives and support at various stages.

PROJECT RUNDOWN

Neart na Machairí brought together members of the Maharees community to explore what makes this tombolo special, how it is changing under the twin pressures of climate change and biodiversity loss, and what new perspectives and actions the community can engage with to support and protect their home and way of life. Combining scientific research, artistic processes and local knowledge, we explored how a creative approach can facilitate new ways of connecting to each other and our place, ultimately supporting us to co-create a vision and an adaptation plan for the future of Maharees that we can all contribute to.

Over the two years, we held 18 local public events (often full day, featuring creative workshops, expert speakers or community workshops) plus an additional ten events (including two field trips) specifically for the community partners. An average of 40 people attended our local public events, with about 80 at our final exhibition in Kerry County Museum, Tralee and over 70 for our final local event, ‘Movie Night at Spillane’s’. The ‘Will it Stay Fine?’ podcast drew on over 98 interviews (6 external experts; 12 people from 7 other coastal communities and 80, including local experts, from the Maharees community itself) and gave an opportunity for people to express their opinions, hopes for the future, and reflections and memories about how people lived and supported each other in the past in Maharees.

We have estimated a total of 2,800 volunteer hours were given to the project by the four Maharees Conservation members of our steering group, which is comparable to two full-time positions. This high level of commitment was possible by these member’s dedication to their place, community and creating a livable future. Their motivation was supported by the project’s commitment to being community-led, shaped by their values and ideas of what would work locally.

Throughout the project, a wide diversity of ideas was collected regarding possible ways that the Maharees community could adapt to future climate predictions, from mitigation efforts to creative heritage initiatives, to large-scale projects. During our August 2024 reflective interviews, it became clear that the community partners wanted to contribute practical actions with the overall aim of exploring pathways to greater community resilience and climate adaptation. The following six ideas emerged as thought experiments or practical actions that the project would support financially:

- growing events to build a local growing network
- visitor information flier
- storytelling community events
- exploring heritage skills and events to extend the local tourist season;
- exploring signage and visual information
- a comprehensive approach to adaptation planning (which all these ideas, including future seed-bank ideas, could sit within)

Subgroups were set up and some ideas moved ahead, including the production of the ‘Go Gently on Maharees’ leaflet, published in April 2025 and a Growing Learning Day, held in June 2025. A subgroup created and supported a plan to gather local knowledge and stories, which in turn fed into the ‘Will It Stay Fine?’ podcast.

An exploration of ways to lengthen the tourist season in Maharees led to an independently funded project around the revival of the Maharees Onion Basket (a collaboration between Castlegregory Agricultural Show and Maharees Conservation Association, with funding from The Heritage Council).

In May 2025, a trial workshop, aimed at validating a proposed ‘vision’ for Maharees was run by Maharees Conservation for its members and our community partners with a view to engaging the local community in a vision for the future of Maharees and the development of community resilience. This was followed two months later by another visioning workshop, hosted by Maharees Conservation, in Spillane’s Bar.

NEART NA MACHAIRÍ KEY EVENTS

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
YEAR 1				
Monday 8 January 2024	Project Designer begins work on project		Early work included: attending Creative Ireland’s Ignite Residential; ‘Future Backwards’ exercise to understand members’ expectations for project; and supporting artist brief development and interview process.	
Sunday 14 January 2024	Steering Group (except artists) established			
Tuesday 30 January - Friday 2 February 2024	Creative Ireland’s IGNITE residential training	Borris House, Carlow	Presentation, workshops, networking and panels for members of Ignite projects. Aidan O’Connor presented on Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe.	2 representatives of the project. c.65 people from other projects and speakers
Thursday 8 February 2024	Brilliant Ballybunion Launch	Ballybunion	Attended their project launch, Aidan spoke about previous experience as a participant with Lisa Fingleton on Corca Dhuibhne Inbhuanaithe as well as mentioning Neart project.	2 from project team, c.50 people
Friday 23 & Saturday 24 February 2024	Shifting Tides Launch	Rostrevor / Carlingford	Martha presented on community-led climate action eg work of MCA and introduced Neart project. Zoë & Martha facilitated workshop on community action.	2 from project team, c.60 people
Monday 1 April 2024	Three Artists begin work on project		Early work included exploration of place, relationship building and attending Maharees Conservation’s events.	
May 2024	Door-to-door drop of anonymous Survey	All Maharees Households	Members of Maharees Conservation (steering group and some Directors) went door-to-door, dropping off the first survey (with addressed and signed envelopes to return anonymously) and introducing the project, along with an invite to the launch event. Survey and Launch invite to every household (c.120), short conversations with about 1/3 about project themes. 20% response rate (including surveys completed at launch event).	4 steering group members and 3 Directors.
Monday 13 - Sunday 19 May 2024	1 week Artist Residency	Harbour House, Maharees	Artists were introduced to Maharees and work of Maharees Conservation by steering group members, and their own explorations. Talks were given by: Martin Lynch and Eoghan Ó Loingsigh on local history and culture of Maharees; Monica Kane on unique ecology; Alex Grassick & Cathy Fisher (Kerry County Council Climate Action Team) on their work.	3 artists, and project designer during presentations.

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(*Project team* refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Saturday 18 May 2024	Local Project Launch	Green Room, Maharees	An evening event featuring food, music, an interactive mapping activity (Favourite Places Fingerprint Map) and a 20-minute project information presentation by Neart team members and call out for community partners (live-streamed)	9 members of steering group and c.65 members of community, plus children
Monday 20 May 2024	Meeting with KCC Climate Team	Harbour House, Maharees	Introduction to artists and project aims with climate action team – Alex Grassick and Cathy Fisher	7 people, 5 from project team
Saturday 22 June 2024	Initial Meeting of ten Community Partners, Project Designer and Artists	Green Room, Maharees	Informal tea/coffee and homemade cakes to answer a few questions about the project and get to know each other.	14 (all partners, artists and project designer/manager)
Saturday 29 June 2024	Learning Day 1 World Sand Dune Day	Spillane's Bar, outdoor walks & Castlegregory Clubrooms	Public events: The morning session focused on talks on sand-dune formation (Monica Kane, local ecologist) and unpacking the policy behind special areas of conservation (William Hunt, NPWS), before heading outside for a biodiversity walk through this habitat (Sally Griffin, local ecologist) and practical demonstration of nature-based solutions e.g., marram planting and chestnut fencing (Maharees Conservation). The afternoon focused on community-led resilience, with presentations from eight Maharees Conservation volunteers on their different strands of work and a talk by Dr. Eugene Farrell (NUIG) on examples from around the country. Project team only: A Consultant Engineer (Malachy Walsh & Partners) introduced the unpublished coastal study for Kerry (focus on Maharees) and explained the recommended actions. OPW and Kerry County Council were present and contributed to conversation, suggesting funding opportunities.	18 members of project team (8 community partners). 50+ members of public, many local, across the two events, plus representatives from state agencies
Monday 8 July	Strategic Design Meeting with other Creative Ireland projects	Online	6-minute Presentation on Neart na Machairi in Creative Ireland hosted systems thinking network - 1.5 hour meeting	14, one project partner
Saturday 13 & Monday 15 July 2024	Cyanotype Chats	Harbour House, Maharees	Artists met with community partners (split into small groups) over three hours, for walks around Maharees, during which they discussed their backgrounds, interests, and engaged in general conversations, stopping on a beach or near rockpools to make cyanotype prints with the artists.	13 members of project team across the three sessions

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Saturday 27 July 2024	Learning Day 2 <i>Preparing for a Changing Climate</i>	Castlegregory Clubrooms	<p>The day began with a deep mapping exercise facilitated by the artists where the project team painted their route to the venue with different coloured eco-paints for different modes of transport. This began a conversation around car-pooling and ideas on how Maharees could be more sustainable.</p> <p>Public event: Expert talks and short Q&A panel session, facilitated by Jeanne Spillane: the science behind predicting future climate change (Claire Scannell, Met Eireann); research on Corca Dhuibhe carbon emissions and examples of local mitigation projects (Muireann Kelleher, Dingle Hub); role of local authorities and examples of community/individual actions (Alex Grassick, Climate Action Officer in Kerry Co Co); shifting the narrative from mitigation to energy resiliency (Paul Deane, Clean Energy Futures, UCC).</p> <p>Project team only: Roundtable on learning so far and further deep dives into local projects including Sustainable Energy Communities (Dinny Galvin, Dingle Hub), cycle to school initiative (Hazel Reid) and demonstration of Codema Home Energy Saving Kit by Patricia Herrero (Nearth steering group).</p>	30 members of public at public event. 13 members of project team present for full day (1 for morning session only)
Saturday 3 August 2024	Project Stand at Castlegregory Agricultural Show	Castlegregory	Artists ran a pop-up interactive art station, using eco-art practices and discussing the themes of the project with local community.	c.60 people interacted, including families of project team.
Saturday 17 & Thursday 29 August 2024	Project Team Visits led by Community Partners	Maharees	<p>Visit to community partner Pat Frank Hennessy’s home, to explore his passive house design, including underfloor geothermal heating system and extensive veg garden, poultry, etc.</p> <p>Visit to caravan park, with community partner, Mairead Kinsella, to see where many long-term visitors stay.</p> <p>Trip to Maharee Islands and snorkelling with community partner, Ben Spillane.</p>	10 members of project team over 3 days.

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Saturday 31 August 2024	Learning Day 3 Resilient Seas, Resilient Communities	Castlegregory Clubrooms	Public talk held in partnership with Castlegregory Community Council, Irish Whales & Dolphin Group, Irish Elasmobranch Group and Waterworld Dive Centre, covering the following topics: Local marine biodiversity and effect of human activity (Sandra Fitzgibbon, Waterworld Dive Centre); significance of Tralee and Brandon Bay for particular species e.g., dolphins, angle sharks (Dr. Simon Berrow and Louise Overy). The artists facilitated a lino printmaking activity to begin the event, gathering suggestions and questions from the audience on building marine resilience. These talks were then followed by a creative workshop using marine themed cyanotype maps exploring how a community could form a vision and develop a local action plan.	c.35 members of public, plus 16 from project team
Sunday 1 September 2024	Reflective Learning Discussion with Steering Group	Harbour House, Maharees	Presentation by Clare Watson on feedback from recent community partner interviews (and their desire for concrete action), followed by discussion of next steps (including ways to give them agency to follow their own actions within project, and ways of storing all their other ideas for possible future use).	6 to 7 members of project team per workshop
Wednesday 11 - Sunday 15 September 2024	Artists’ Residency	Maharees	Weekend of foraging and eco-dying workshops: Foraging walk & eco bundle dying to create tablecloth for feast; blackberry gathering for collective painting exercise & making blackberry cocktails; and seaweed foraging & baking for feast. The artists also met with many local growers to gather veg and eggs, and crab claws from fishers; and they communally prepared and cooked a range of dishes featuring ingredients gathered from local producers and home growers.	6 to 7 members of project team per workshop
Sunday 15 September 2024	Maharees Feast & Sense-Making Workshop	Pat Frank’s House, Maharees	A potluck feast of Maharees ingredients foraged, gathered and prepared by the project team (particularly artists) followed by a 3-hour workshop synthesising learning so far and discussion of challenges and opportunities for the future of Maharees, and next steps for Neart project in response.	19 members of project team
Monday 21 November 2024	The Gathering Learning Event	Aviva Stadium, Dublin	Organised by Creative Ireland to share the learning from the ending of the Creative Climate Action Spark projects.	3 from project team 100+ participants

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>('Project team' refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Saturday 2 November 2024	Seed-Bank of Ideas and Community-filming Workshops	Harbour House, Maharees	<p>Workshop 1: Maharees Conservation outlined their approach to community action, barriers experienced, what worked and didn't work over the last decade, to give context to community partner ideas. Project team used open space technology activity to explore all project ideas gathered so far. The ideas could be thought experiments or practical actions that the project would support financially. Small groups formed, with the following six key project ideas selected to explore further: Growing Events to build Local Network; Visitor Information Flier; Storytelling with Community Events; Extending Tourist Season with Heritage Events; Exploring Signage & Visual Information; All ideas feeding into Adaptation Plan All other ideas were collected & stored in a 'seed-bank' container.</p> <p>Workshop 2: Artists and project documentarist (Michael Kelly) led workshop on community-filming project to explore changes to the landscape over time (this idea had been suggested during September workshop as a practical way to collectively gather data on erosion and other changes). This footage was gathered and edited by Zoë Green and Michael Kelly and is featured in the exhibition in Kerry Museum.</p>	16 members of project team, including 9 CPs
November 2024	Door-to-door drop of anonymous Survey	All Maharees Households	<p>Members of Maharees Conservation and some Neart community partners went door-to-door, dropping off the second survey and collecting it once it had been completed. Analysis via collaboration with a student research team from the Department of Business Studies at MTU. These students provided descriptive statistics and interpreted the findings. These statistics were then checked and validated by a member of Maharees Conservation. This approach resulted in an 82% response rate.</p>	Collaboration with a student research team from the Department of Business Studies at MTU
Friday 22 November 2024	All Things Living Environmental Film Festival	Waterford	Panel on how coastal communities can build their resiliency, including Marina Mulligan, Craig Dower; Sile Walsh and Aidan O'Connor.	1 member of project team, c.35 audience members
Thursday 27 November 2024	Sustainability within Projects Workshop	Online	Training delivered to Neart na Machairí project team and Dingle Hub team by Catriona Fallon, looking at how to run projects sustainably (travel, accommodation, materials), calculating carbon footprint (with examples).	c.6 from project team, 10 overall
Friday 13 December 2024	Eco-Lantern Making Workshop and Winter Project Update	Spillane's Bar, then Green Room, Maharees	Artists led eco willow lantern-making workshop. This was followed by 20-minute project update and gathering in Green Room where project materials (including lanterns) were exhibited.	c.23 people (women and children) for lantern workshop c.40 for Green Room gathering

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
YEAR 2				
Saturday 1 February 2025	Steering Group Reflective Interview Workshop, followed by visit to Opening of Lisa Fingleton’s ‘Square Tomato’ Exhibition at Siamsa Tíre, Tralee	Kelp Cottage, Maharees then Tralee for meal and Siamsa Tíre	Workshop with Clare Watson on feedback from reflective interviews with steering group, followed by lunch in Tralee and then attendance at Opening of Lisa’s Exhibition.	10 members of project team
Saturday 8 February 2025	Follow-Up Seed-Bank Workshop	Castlegregory Clubrooms	Artists and project designer kept in touch with community partners as they explored their ideas and this session dedicated time and group feedback to the different ideas. The Heritage Subcommittee of Maharees Conservation shared their projects and listened to community partner ideas (as many touched on heritage themes).	18 members of project team and 2 members of Heritage Subcommittee
Saturday 23 February 2025	Optional Field Trip: North Kerry Sustainability Day	Tinteán Theatre, Ballybunion	Presentations, panels and information stands on sustainability themes, created by Brilliant Ballybunion. Neart na Machairi had a stall.	7 project members, c.149 members of the public.
Saturday 8 March 2025	Optional Event: The Art of Sustenance, Sisterhood and Solidarity	Siamsa Tíre, Tralee	Day of artists’ talks for International Women’s Day; two Neart na Machairi artists and Project Designer presented their work and hosted workshops.	5 project members, c.30 participants
Saturday 15 March 2025	Field Trip 1	Cloughjordan Ecovillage, Co. Tipperary	Project team heard from a variety of members of the ecovillage about their vision for designing a low-carbon community, and the practical barriers and enablers. A guided tour showcased the community gardening, member-owned farm, forestry, bio-mass fuelled district heating system, and overall eco-design of community and creative spaces.	14 members of project team, one family member and photographer
Saturday 12 April 2025	Field Trip 2	Burrenbeo Trust, The Burren, Co. Clare/Galway	Brendan Dunfort presented on the spectrum of place-based sustainability projects he is involved in, from Burrenbeo’s Heritage Keepers to Farming for Nature and new initiatives like Refarm. Brendan explained his model for community action, paying attention to the head (scientific research), the hand (financial needs of people) and the heart (values). He then led the group on a biodiversity tour of the Burren.	11 members of project team, two family members and photographer
Saturday 19 April 2025	Launch of ‘Go Gently in Maharees’ Visitor Information Leaflet	Green Room, Maharees	Community partner, Mairead Kinsella, launched the leaflet and explained the purpose behind it. The event also included food, music and printmaking with artist, Emer Fallon.	6 members of project team c.25 local people and long-term visitors

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Friday 2 May - Monday 5 May 2025	Neart na Machairí Exhibition & Showcase for Féile na Bealtaine	An Díseart, Dingle	Presentations given at Showcase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Link between project and climate change (Zoë Rush, project designer) - Socially engaged art practices used in project (Zoë Green, Emer Fallon and Silke Michels, artists) - The experience of taking part in project (Máiread Kinsella and Pat Frank Hennessy, community partners) - The relevance of this work to the Maharees community (Martha Farrell and Aidan O’Connor, Maharees Conservation) This was followed by a mapping exercise of coastal vulnerabilities and favourite areas across Corca Dhuibhne.	8 members of project team. c.35 members of public at showcase c.100 at exhibition
Saturday 10 May - Saturday 31 May 2025	Artist Residencies	Maharees	Artists began recording community interviews for the podcast, ‘Will It Stay Fine?’ with support from project team. Each artist stayed in Maharees for one week.	50 community interviews across three artists
Saturday 24 May 2025	Maharees Conservation Adaptation Workshop (trial)	Castlegregory Clubrooms	Maharees Conservation invited certain members of the community alongside the Neart project team to a trial workshop. Presentations: Climate predictions (Pat Frank Hennessy, community partner); future work plans in area and constraints of council (Kerry County Council Engineer); community survey results and vision statement (Maharees Conservation). Workshop discussions: Additions or changes to the community vision; topics the community want to explore further; ideas for uses of a community building. This was followed by a mapping activity on vulnerable areas, facilitated by artist Silke Michels.	c.18 members of Maharees Conservation 13 members of project team
Saturday 14 June 2025	Learning Day 3 (led by Growing Group) Growing in Maharees	Gardens in Maharees	Tours of different sized and designed gardens within Maharees for growing veg with advice from the growers (and snacks from the ground) before taking part in a reflective activity prepared by artist, Emer Fallon, eating locally prepared food and adding memories and reflections on the value of these foods to illustrations.	14 from project team 3 others working in food-related research
Friday 20 June 2025	Irish Times visit to Maharees	Maharees	Members of Maharees Conservation and the Neart na Machairí Steering Group met Kevin O’Sullivan to highlight the community-led approach to climate adaptation for an article in the Irish Times.	5 project team members

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Saturday 28 June 2025	World Sand Dune Day	Spillane’s Bar and beaches, Maharees	This day was designed to connect with other coastal communities as well as locals. Living Roots combined local history and ecology while walking through the local landscape. Creativity by the Sea was an exploration of items found on the beach through cyanotype printing on flags and banners to spread key messages about protecting sand dune eco-systems, facilitated by the three artists. Community Marram Planting was led by Aidan O’Connor, explaining the work of Maharees Conservation and demonstrating planting methods.	c.25-30 people across the day, including reps from Inch, Fenit, Ballybunion and Rossbeigh
Tuesday 15 July 2025	Community Adaptation Workshop	Spillane’s Bar, Maharees	A public workshop based on the trial held on 24 May. Mapping exercise was changed from ‘What are the vulnerable areas in Maharees?’ to ‘What actions can the community take and where is support needed from state agencies?’, facilitated by Zoë Green (artist).	12 members of project team c.35 members of public
Saturday 2 August 2025	Project stand at Castlegregory Agricultural Show	Castlegregory	Extracts of podcast were played alongside corresponding Maharees ingredients, e.g., the story of seaweed harvesting matched with seaweed biscuits and carrot hummus matched the story of growing carrots locally.	c.50 people
Saturday 9 August - Saturday 6 September 2025	Artist Residencies	Maharees	Artists continued recording and editing community interviews for the podcast, ‘Will It Stay Fine?’, with support from project team. Each artist stayed in Maharees for one week and they spent one week together to prepare for community feast event.	48 community and expert interviews by three artists
Saturday 16 August 2025	Harvest Festival	Fahamore & Aidan’s Barn, Maharees	Soundwalk: artists mapped a walking route through Fahamore to correspond with extracts from different podcast episodes which everyone in group listened to via individual radio transmission headphones. Community Feast: A thank you to the community for sharing stories for the podcast. The Neart exhibition was set up and an extract of the podcast played, alongside words from the three artists and Martha Farrell.	Soundwalk: 16 Community Feast: 9 members of project team c.36 members of public, including project team families

DATE	EVENT	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	ATTENDEES <i>(‘Project team’ refers to members of steering group and community partners)</i>
Friday 22 August 2025	Poetry Workshop	Maharees	Facilitation of creative workshop by Emer Fallon. The poem was later published in UCC’s Aigne Journal (vol.11)	4 members of project team
Sunday 7 September 2025	Onion Basket Weaving Workshop	Castlegregory Clubrooms	This was a craft revival project realised by Pat Frank Hennessy, through a partnership between Maharees Conservation & Castlegregory Agricultural Show. The workshop trainer taught the project team how to make traditional onion baskets. A second workshop was held the next day, supported by Maharees Conservation.	8 members of project team 7 community members the following day
Sunday 2 November 2025	Final Community Partner Day	Dingle	Guided walk through Loch a Dúin, followed by the first screening of project documentary, at Wave, Dingle and then dinner at Benners Hotel	13 members of project & family members
Thursday 6 November 2025	Near na Machairí Exhibition and ‘Will It Stay Fine?’ Podcast Launch	Kerry County Museum, Tralee	Artworks created during the project were exhibited. Speeches were made by Kerry Arts Officer and Director of Maharees Conservation, alongside the three artists. The Near na Machairí documentary was screened and extracts from the first episode of the podcast was played. The Exhibition remained in the Museum until 7th January 2026.	12 members of project team c.58 members of public
Wednesday 3 December 2025	Project Close: Movie Night	Spillane’s Bar, Maharees	Five local documentaries made about heritage and climate of Maharees were screened, ending with the Near na Machairí documentary. Mulled wine and mince pies were served. Final words were given by Jeanne Spillane and Martha Farrell (steering group).	12 members of project team c.63 members of public
Wednesday 7 January 2026	Public Talk & Interactive Session	Kerry County Museum	Lunchtime public talk & interactive session about Near na Machairí to close exhibition and project.	3 members of project team 20 members of the public

KEY EXPENDITURE TABLE

A synopsis of how the budget for the project was spent:

BREAKDOWN OF KEY EXPENDITURE			
WHAT WAS FUNDED	AMOUNT	% OVERALL BUDGET	TOTAL BUDGET
Wages	Project Designer €34,800 per annum. 24 months, full time. Embedded Artist(s) €65,000 - divided by three artists during project. Reflective Evaluator: €20,000	55%	€156,600
Additional Project Management Costs	Financial and Hiring Management: €9,200 Accommodation in Maharees: €9,500 Other employment costs (travel, PRSI, equipment, additional administrative support during final quarter): €13,800 Insurance, Materials & Contingency: €2,000	12%	€34,500
Learning Journey	Event Production (venue hire, tech, local catering etc): €8,000 Fieldtrips: €2,000 Speaker Fees: €1,500 Community Partner Stipend to cover cost associated with participation eg childcare, loss of income, travel, etc: €9,500	7%	€21,000
Creative Workshops, Outputs and Responses to the Project	Regenerative tourism leaflet design and printing: €3,000 Willow weaving team-building workshop: €1,800 Support for podcast creation (illustrations, signage design and construction): €2,500 Community Adaptation Planning Resource Creation (graphic design and printing): €800 Postcard invites & project updates; survey printing and stamped envelopes for first round returns: €1,000 Household Booklet - graphic design and printing: €3,200	4%	€12,300

BREAKDOWN OF KEY EXPENDITURE			
WHAT WAS FUNDED	AMOUNT	% OVERALL BUDGET	TOTAL BUDGET
Documentation	<p>Learning Brief - Graphic design and printing: €3,000</p> <p>Documentary Creation: Interviews & additional filming e.g. drones, editing, music composition: €9,000</p> <p>Continuous Project Documentation: Photographers and event videography: €6,000</p>	6%	€18,000
Dissemination	<p>Podcast adverts x 8, creation and payment via meta-suite to promote podcast: €2,000</p> <p>Press release through PR company x 2 (at the beginning and ending of project, most press releases created and disseminated by team): €2,800</p> <p>Updates/maintenance across partner's websites: €2,000</p>	3%	€8,800
Total			€248,500
Additional Funding for Podcast Creation from Community Foundation Ireland	Podcast musical composition, recording equipment purchases & professional technical support, editing and mastering	3.5%	€10,000
Additional Funding for Dissemination and Legacy Planning from Creative Ireland	<p>Dingle Hub General Manager's support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting and Interviews with national press • Meetings with local and national government figures • Supporting legacy of the project • One-to-One Mentorship 	8.4%	€24,000
Additional Funding for final project event from Creative Ireland	Dinner and Documentary Screening	.5%	€1,500
			€284,500



MEDIA COVERAGE

The team worked consistently with local press to highlight upcoming public events and project highpoints over the two years. The project partners also disseminated information about the project in national press coverage about their wider work. Unexpectedly, media interest in a message in a bottle discovered on Scraggane beach by Kate Gay, one of our community partners, went viral and spread news of the project and Maharees Conservation's work internationally. Towards the end of the project, the podcast 'Will It Stay Fine?' was highlighted nationally in the Irish Examiner's podcast corner recommendations and was chosen by writer Eoghan O'Sullivan in his best podcast list for 2025. For details, please see Media Table (Available on Maharees Conservation Association's website under Creative Resilience - Neart na Machairí - Learning and Evaluation).

REFLECTIVE LEARNING AND EVALUATION

Over the two years, Clare held two rounds of individual reflective interviews (online and recorded) with the community partners (August 2024 and April 2025) and shared their feedback in writing with the project steering group. She held two rounds of individual reflective interviews (online and recorded) with the steering group (April 2024 and January 2025) and shared the feedback in writing with the group, followed by group discussions to draw out learnings and identify follow-up actions. In November 2025, the steering group gave their final feedback in writing and online interviews were held with some community partners (with additional feedback in writing). Clare distilled and collated the feedback into this learning brief, supported by Zoë Rush, with follow-on reviews and additional contributions by steering group members.

SUSTAINABILITY POLICY

In an effort to minimise the carbon footprint of the project, the following principles and actions were agreed by the steering group at the outset.

Community Wealth Building: Where possible, the project funds will be distributed across local suppliers to strengthen local businesses and services, with an emphasis on sustainable options (e.g., accommodation, catering and venue hire). If it is not possible to obtain something within the local community, we will try the wider peninsula of Dingle Peninsula/Corca Dhuibhne and Tralee town, failing this then further afield within Kerry.

Celebration of Local Food: Local food systems will be supported and promoted by the project, celebrating and strengthening the rich traditions and current offerings within.

Maharees. Catering will emphasize vegetarian cuisine based on local Maharee vegetables as the default, with meat considered an optional add-on.

Zero-waste: Re-usable crockery, cutlery, tap water, etc, will be used for all events, thus minimizing single-use items.

Sustainable Materials: Artist's materials will be sourced sustainably, prioritising recycled and sustainably produced paper, notepads, drawing materials, inks, etc., and buying only what is necessary. We will keep material and digital waste to a minimum, reusing and recycling what we do consume.

Low Impact Digital Footprint: All project materials will be saved to two external hard drives at the end of the project and kept by Maharees Conservation Association and Dingle Hub. All digital media such as emails and shared files will be deleted at the end of the project. Photos and project materials will be shared with the community partners and steering group members on USB sticks.

Sustainable Transport: During the second learning day, 'Preparing for a Changing Climate' on 27 July 2024, the focus was on mitigation, so the artists facilitated a mapping exercise to explore how the team was using transportation to arrive at events. This began a conversation about reducing our transport impact. In November 2024, Catriona Fallon presented a two-hour workshop on this topic for the full project team and the Dingle Hub. The following hierarchy of transport methods was agreed.

1. Have online meetings where possible (to reduce transportation impact for team members not living in Maharees)
2. Walk and cycle when possible and feasible (e.g. during the summer, close distances)
3. Use public transport when possible (with timing of local events and activities based around these)
4. Hire buses for field trips and events outside of Maharees
5. Lift-share between group members to events, particularly in EVs
6. Use diesel or petrol cars as a last resort.



Artwork by Zoë Uí Fhaoláin Green



SECTION 3: WHAT WE ACHIEVED

The Maharees community is now actively participating in developing and implementing a community-led plan for climate adaptation.

We have supported Maharees Conservation to develop a mechanism for community participation, beginning with articulating a vision for the future and identifying areas for further exploration. The community is now more open and aware of a multitude of soft and hard options available to them for coping with worsening climate effects, including rock armour, mitigating resource and energy use, future proofing households and creating projects and networks that strengthen local relationships.

Through their own primary and secondary research and the immersion in conversations about community-led climate action and experimentation with different workshops, Martha Farrell, Aidan O'Connor and Pat Frank Hennessy developed, and are road testing, a robust, community-led climate adaptation planning process that could shape future statutory plans.

“*The project has put adaptation front and centre of our work in a way that it wasn't before. We now have an adaptation team in Maharees Conservation, and we have done a very sound piece of work to support the community's involvement in the vision and adaptation plan. We have a vision for the future that is of the community and we have buy-in from the state to work on actions to achieve it.*

Martha, November 2025

“*We started with a community that had a very, very strong foundation, and we've been working with them to get to that plan, and to work through it using creative process and the reflective learning process.*

Deirdre, January 2025

“*In some people there were mind set changes, as initially most people wanted action straight away and perhaps the slow and gentler approach was new learning with regard to deepening the reflection of what could be the right approach and might lead to stronger future visions together, bringing everyone along.*

Silke, November 2025

A seven-part podcast 'Will it Stay Fine?' was produced and uploaded onto the Maharees Conservation website in November/December 2025

Embedding conversations of change and climate within the wider community, the podcast drew on over 98 interviews with local fishers, surfers, conservationists, food-growers, business owners, visitors, and climate, ecology and biodiversity experts.

It was designed, interviews recorded, and episodes edited by the three artists, with technical support and composition by Chris Somers, and enormous support from Maharees Conservation members of the steering group and community partners to connect with the wider community. It was made possible thanks to additional funding from the Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment through Community Foundation Ireland.

Interviewees were encouraged by the artists to reflect on past and future challenges, their hopes for the future and to celebrate what they hold precious about Maharees. Multiple extracts from the podcast have been developed as soundwalk pieces and tested within Maharees (for continued dissemination in 2026) as an embodied artistic technique to connect the community to the topic of future change and climate change impacts. The podcast was chosen as one of the Irish Examiner's 10 best podcasts from 2025.

“*The podcast was an important way to bring the project and climate conversations into the very households of the wider community, in a way that valued all contributions and perspectives on the topic. I think allowing space for personal reflection and contemplation, and listening to each other's view via the episodes themselves, will have a much greater impact than if we as a project group tried to tell people what behaviours they should change.*

Zoë R., November 2025

“*The podcast series which has emerged from the project's learnings is a beautiful oral and aural record of the tombolo and its inhabitants at this moment in time. But it also provides an account of how a small community can take action on coastal erosion which can be accessed and learnt from by coastal communities around Ireland.*

Emer, November 2025

“*The podcast has definitely drawn in new audiences. Capturing these voices and memories feels incredibly special. When you listen to it, there's a real sense of pride - a reminder of how special Maharees is, and how lucky we are to call it home.*

Maria, November 2025

“*It has helped to preserve the history and heritage of Maharees, especially since they captured so many older people.*

Mairead, November 2025

Link to podcast: <https://mahareesconservation.com/creative-coastal-resilience/will-it-stay-fine.html>

There was deep place-based engagement across the community

The conversation around climate action and adaptation has been strengthened by this project and will be kept going by Maharees Conservation Association.

“The project is doing what we wanted it to do, which is to talk about climate adaptation with our community in a structured way. It's giving us a channel, a reason and a timeline to do it. We might not have got ourselves together to do it but for the project.

Martha, January 2025

“It's helping to start important conversations about climate change, and the challenges that are coming down the road for us.

Maria, November 2025

“I think the community is definitely more engaged in climate change. I meet people now who'd start talking about it, who would never have mentioned it before. So, it's definitely woken people up to it.

Aidan, November 2025

“It's definitely encouraged a lot of locals to be more mindful about the local community and about the erosion.

Duncan, September 2024

“It's very helpful having projects like this. It's bringing positive attention to a negative occurrence.

Ben, September 2024

“There's a heightened sense of visibility in terms of the long-term future of the place. The people who are part of it have got a lot from it and maybe this will encourage others to get involved in some way, shape or form.

Ed, March 2025

“Community resilience is about building bonds. The biggest thing we can do is become a community, connected on ideas, and by support systems. We can't put the rock armour in, but we can foster a snowball effect. The more we build community, the stronger we and the fabric of the Maharees become. I hope that more of those foundations are built to connect the community in looking after this special place we call home.

Kate, March 2025

“It has shifted perspectives.

Hannah, November 2025

“In a way, sustainability and community resilience against climate change is a brilliant vehicle for bringing communities together because you never reach the end. There's always something to do and there's always something to improve. And as well as that there's so

much added fringe benefits, you're empowering communities, you're educating communities, you're developing community spirit. You're looking at other ideas that can have socio economic benefits for the community in the long term, how best to utilize the place sustainably. I really think that that's the big win for me.

Pat Frank, March 2025

We built on and fed into a deep pride of place

We celebrated local culture, food, and knowledge while building relationships and pride of place. The talks and walks helped spread awareness of climate change impacts and the wonders in Maharees (geology, cultural heritage, nature) that need to be protected. Maharees Conservation's knowledge and expertise was an important contribution to the walks and talks, and the exploration through cyanotypes and foraging by the artists opened up new ways of experiencing the place.

“Encouraging project members and the extended community to celebrate the precious resources of the tombolo through communal celebrations also provided a positive focus for action.

Emer, November 2025

“When you look at the podcasts and the video, there's such a pride. It's gorgeous, really gorgeous.

Mairead, November 2025

“There's something so magical about the place, but it is also very fragile. People here have deep roots to their place through the heritage, place names and language.

Silke, April 2024

“It's nice taking the new people around on walks and showing them the places and seeing the excitement. The artists have such a genuine interest in the place.

Duncan, September 2024

“Since the project has started it has been fantastic being able to share with the artists where we live.

Ben, September 2024

We built on existing connections and forged new ones

The project helped bring together disparate people from across the community who might not otherwise interact, and it encouraged conversations about climate change and the possible impacts that might face Maharees in the future.

“By supporting project members to build on existing connections and to forge new ones, the project helped strengthen the community's resilience to future challenges.

Emer, November 2025

It brought people together who normally wouldn't even meet, not to mind collaborate.

Mairead, November 2025

Relationships have been built, which is wonderful to see, that people who maybe didn't know each other very well are now friends that share a vision.

Silke, November 2025

“ *I'm passionate about Maharees, but now I know there's loads more people who are too. Just because they're not part of Maharees Conservation doesn't mean that they don't care.*

Aidan, November 2025

“ *It was great to have an opportunity to better get to know people in the local community who I might not have known well previously, through working so closely with the community partners and other steering committee members.*

Jeanne, November 2025

“ *I got to know people in my community that I didn't know or didn't know well and realised we all have something in common, preserving our community.*

Patricia, November 2025

“ *I've really enjoyed meeting up with the local community and getting to know everyone's interests and what they want to do to help protect and save the Maharees and working together. Everyone's really chill and respectful of each other.*

Duncan, March 2025

“ *It's that sense of community and being part of something.*

Maria, November 2025

We spread knowledge and resources

Thanks to the connections and trust built up by Maharees Conservation over the years, we were able to bring a wide range of experts into our community and they, along with our local experts, made an important contribution to our public learning events.

We made the events public so that everyone had a chance to learn from their expertise and to ask questions that directly relate to their place and to local concerns.

We also spread information about Maharees Conservation's work and the role of Dingle Hub (and Kerry County Council to a certain extent) in the area, so the local community is aware of the mechanisms available for future projects.

I'm thinking a little bit differently. It's just opened my eyes a little bit. I'm very interested in the topics of conversation at the meetings, and what we can do to make the Maharees more coastal resilient. I really enjoy listening and finding out new information about the Maharees, like the history or certain areas. Definitely, I've gained a lot more information, and it's kept me enthusiastic about this whole thing.

Duncan, March 2025

We helped spread more awareness of, and engagement with, the work of Maharees Conservation Association

The project brought more people into the organisation and strengthened community partnerships. It also provided an opportunity to build on the work of Maharees Conservation to further engage with local policy makers, other communities around Ireland and experts in climate change.

“ *I hoped that the project would bring more people into Maharees Conservation, and that's happened with community partners becoming new members. The variety of events really broadened the reach.*

Deirdre, November 2025

“ *People know that we're in safe hands when we have Aidan, Martha, the whole gang, and then everybody rowing in on top of that. There's the Maharees Conservation group and the Heritage group, you have us, so there's so many different subgroups now involved, they're real community.*

Hannah, November 2025

“ *It's great that the project has grown so much, that it got the legs that it got and that it expanded.*

Ben, September 2024

“ *It's putting the spotlight on Maharees again, in terms of the great work that is being done by a small community.*

Maria, November 2025

“ *I feel like it has brought the community even closer and, also, I feel like there's just going to be another programme set up straight after this one, so there is going to be continuous action. Just because this one is ending, I don't think it's going to finish.*

Duncan, March 2025



Serious discussions have begun with Kerry County Council

This project provided a conduit through which the Maharees Conservation and Dingle Hub have strengthened engagement and relationships already built on trust with key officials in the Council. Current discussions are focusing on how to build in local authority support for the Maharees community-based plans and to consider bringing the approach to other coastal communities.

“ They see the benefit of having a community that is working well, they see that as an asset for them to work with.

Aidan, November 2025

“ It’s great to see so many people showing such an interest and to see the engagement from the governing bodies. We have to be able to say that this place is worth saving, that it’s worth keeping and it’s valuable, and I think this project is doing an excellent job on that - it’s really raising a lot of awareness.

Ben, September 2024

We showed how bottom-up approaches work by centring the voice of the community in the project

“ I have been a student and a teacher of community development themes and topics over the course of the last twelve months, and I have really learned about, and had my own practice of ground up, DIY approaches confirmed as something positive. I probably started out thinking that our community would be facilitated in the adaptation planning work, but we ended up driving it and that is a great thing.

Martha, November 2025

“ It was very challenging at times to balance the contribution of the community with the paid roles, as the steering group weren’t compensated in any way for their time. We didn’t want to be making decisions that didn’t come from the community themselves and the steering group and community partners dedicated so much time both to the events themselves and the decision-making behind the scenes. It meant constant balancing of speed and energy of the project, yet I am really proud that we can say at the end that the community was able to take what they needed from the project to drive local action and we supported this, from event logistics to creative projects like the podcast.

Zoë R., November 2025

We created an Interactive Neart na Machairí Exhibition to share the project with other coastal communities

This exhibition, created primarily by artists Silke Michels, Emer Fallon and Zoë Uí Fhaoláin Green, brings together many of the artistic outputs of Neart na Machairí, including: listening stations with extracts from the podcast, Will It Stay Fine?; the Deep Map Series alongside an interactive map that audience members can add to; and the eco-printed tablecloth, illustrations, lino prints, willow sculptures and cyanotypes created with the community of Maharees throughout the project. This exhibition was first shown at the Féile na Bealtaine Festival, Dingle, in May 2025, and then ran between 6th November - 7th January in Kerry County Museum, Tralee. We are currently exploring touring options for 2026.

An additional output showcased in this exhibition was a photography and video project by some of the steering group and community partners which was made into a short creative film. They chose a place in Maharees to photograph/film once a day, or once a week, over a year, to help to connect deeply with their place, and potentially record changes to the coast/landscape over time.

A visitor leaflet ‘Go Gently on Maharees’ was published and distributed locally in summer 2025

The leaflet was produced by Mairead Kinsella, one of our community partners and a long-term resident of Sandy Bay Caravan Park, with the support of the steering committee. It informs visitors of the work of Maharees Conservation and the importance of preserving the biodiversity and heritage of the area and protecting the sand dunes. It also outlines ways in which visitors can support sustainability and help protect this special place.

“ It is important that visitors are made aware of the challenges and what they can do to help. It all starts with awareness and how to get involved with small steps e.g., leave no trace, mind the nesting birds.

Silke, April 2024

“ We just want to make sure everybody can still live here. Come and respect the place. I suppose sustainable tourism is what we’re looking for. People camping on the dunes isn’t sustainable for us.

Aidan, April 2024

Link to leaflet: (Available on Maharees Conservation Association’s website under Creative Resilience - Neart na Machairí - Creative Responses)

We wrote a poem! (see final page)

Emer Fallon facilitated a creative workshop out of which emerged a beautiful poem, which was accepted for publication in UCC's Aigne Journal (vol.11)

“Hearing Jeanne, Zoë Rush, and Mairead give voice to what Maharees means to them felt powerful and special, and the poem that emerged from the workshop demonstrates their deep emotional connection to the place. It's a lovely memento of the project group's time together, and an example of how collaboration and mutual respect can produce something beautiful.

Emer, January 2026

A 20-minute documentary was made on the project 'Nearth na Machairí' and launched in October 2025

This short documentary brought together filmed documentation of the two-year process, alongside 12 interviews with the project team, to explain what happened during the project and to reflect on what was learnt from it. We hope it will be an inspiration to other coastal communities.

Link to documentary: (Available on Maharees Conservation Association's website under Creative Resilience - Nearth na Machairi)

The Maharees Almanac

This is a tool created by Kate Gay, one of our community partners and a Maharees resident, intended to help the community better prepare for the challenges and opportunities each season brings. It is a perpetual calendar presented month-by-month, summarising valuable information researched on-line, that impacts the resilience of Maharees, like spring tides, rainfall distribution, storm patterns, breeding, fishing and growing seasons, migrations, traditional festivals, school and bank holidays, annual conservation works, and beach cleans amongst other things.

'How Maharees is weathering'

This is a piece of research also undertaken by Kate Gay. Kate's idea was to use conversations about change to connect with a wider community of long-term residents, to learn how the community has weathered storms and the constant reshaping of its landscape in the past, in the hope that it may help us better prepare for the future.

The research concludes that DEFENCE - COMMUNICATION - STEWARDSHIP are three pillars we can use to strengthen our coastal community resilience. Kate shared her research with the project team as a visually engaging presentation on the 7th July 2025.

“We have a lot of information available to us today that can help us plan and prepare better for the seasons.

But I also think it's important to learn about how the community adapted in the past, when resilience relied on a closer relationship with nature. There's a lot of embedded knowledge and experience out there that can guide us in strengthening the fabric of Maharees for generations to come.

Kate, January 2026

“The theme common to Maharees Almanac and How Maharees is Weathering is connection: connecting easily accessible information to flag high risk months and inform local pro-action; connecting with more people in a relatable way and recognising the value of lived resilience, as experienced by those who have weathered decades of change; re-connecting ourselves to the natural world and its signs and understanding that its seasons and health are linked to our own.

Kate, January 2026

The Maharees Household Booklet (in development)

The project group is creating a booklet to go to each household of the Maharees to support the adaptation process. It will summarise key information from the learning journey which will run alongside and support Maharees Conservation's dissemination of their work on a collective vision and further adaptation planning.

We were widely covered by traditional and social media (see Section 2)

Information about the project was featured in the Irish Times, The Journal Investigates, with an image in the Irish Examiner. One community partner's discovery of a message in a bottle spread the news of the project and the work of Maharees Conservation worldwide as the story went viral.

“I couldn't believe the response to the story. It's a lesson to us all. Never underestimate the ripple effect of your actions! I also saw it as a metaphor for resilience. That bottle survived so many storms that have hit Maharees hard, yet it arrived intact. And because it did, we have connected with new friends in Newfoundland. By growing the conversation about the climate challenges faced by coastal communities in Ireland and overseas, we have a louder voice and can share learnings to help each other become more resilient.

Kate, July 2025

There was also consistent local press highlighting events throughout the project which was secured through press releases created by the steering committee. We relied primarily on Maharees Conservation's social media accounts, local posters and word-of-mouth to invite locals to events and disseminate key learnings (e.g., our launch night live stream had over 1,500 views).



This coverage was important because it highlighted the work and activities of the Neart project and it also helped spread the story of Maharees Conservation and how a small community can take the lead on climate adaptation. Our podcast was highlighted by the Irish Examiner as one of its 10 best podcasts from 2025.

Relationships with other coastal communities in Kerry were strengthened

While Maharees Conservation was already very established and known both nationally and internationally, connections with other coastal communities in Kerry (including Fenit, Ballybunion, Inch, Rossbeigh and Rosstrevor and further afield, including Tramore and Kilmore Quay) were reinforced in this project through creative methods and by inviting them to take part in events and contribute to the podcast.

We took a gentle approach to reducing carbon footprints

As we all know behaviour change is a difficult and on-going process and cannot just be achieved by telling people what to do! At the beginning there was discussion about tracking carbon footprints on Maharees but this subsequently morphed into a more subtle approach. We provided some initial information (dedicating one learning day to mitigation) and then encouraged discussion and reflection on resource use throughout the two years. While it is hard to quantify how much impact this had on actually reducing people's carbon emissions, feedback from a number of community partners and members of the steering group shows that the project definitely helped them to develop more sustainable habits around recycling, transport and energy use.

“ My expectations changed throughout the project! I started out thinking that everyone in Maharees would have been audited on their behaviour and awareness and knowledge levels before and after the project and we'd have a very quantifiable measure of awareness and behavioural change, but this changed to a more indirect and delicate engagement approach.

Martha, November 2025

“ I went in thinking, although this is an adaptation project, that mitigation would be very prevalent, but what I'm gauging from people and how it went with our mitigation day is that that's not really that inspiring, and people just move away from it, or look away and when we had all the different ideas of what community partners could do, nobody chose any of the mitigation ideas. I think adaptation plays into a part of our headspace where it's like, okay, this is a challenge, I can see the challenge, I can do something about this. So, I feel we need to mitigate through adaptation.

Zoë R, January 2025

“ It has definitely helped me to think more critically and to question why I think certain things. I mightn't have inputted a whole lot at meetings, but I'd be sitting there thinking, questioning and pushing myself. It's helped me to grow as a person, which helps me in other aspects of my life.

Hannah, November 2025

For more detail, please see the Outcomes and Impact Table: (Available on Maharees Conservation Association's website under Creative Resilience - Neart na Machairí - Learning and Evaluation).



SECTION 4: IMPACT OF PROJECT ON COMMUNITY PARTNERS

“ I love Maharees. The project gave me more of an appreciation and an awareness of what is going on, the sounds, the birds, everything, and what we need to mind because there's so much life around us. As Maria said in the podcast, Maharees is not just a backdrop. It's very picturesque but there's so much more to it.

Hannah, November 2025

“ It's been a terrific asset to me to be involved in, and my sister Emer and my family have also gained a lot out of it. I feel more hopeful about climate change and the world after this. I'm so glad and I'm so lucky that I got involved in it.

Mairead, November 2025

“ I have learned more about the climate challenges we are facing and have formed connections with a wider community and broadened my perspective on Maharees. I have also been inspired to explore with an open mind what we can learn from the community's past, to help us prepare better for the future and I see the value of grassroots action. I believe there are some easy wins that the community can action to strengthen Maharees coastal resilience.

Kate, November 2025

“ Even though Maharees is a vulnerable place, and we know there are real challenges ahead with sea-level rise, climate change, and more frequent storms, we're going ahead with building our house - armed with this knowledge and a heightened awareness of how we can adapt our approach to be better prepared when those storms do come. At the end of the day, it's such a beautiful and special place, and it's where we want to live and call home. I haven't switched to an electric car yet, but my next one definitely will be electric. We also plan to become more self-sufficient by growing our own vegetables and incorporating solar panels when we build.

Maria, November 2025

“ I'm not new to sustainability. I've been working in green technology for years. I grew up in Maharees and have lived here for most of my life, and I've always been interested in these things, and I follow all the green feeds. I've been somewhat of an environmentalist for a long, long time before I joined this, but I wasn't a community activist. I've always been inclined to do things on my own, think about stuff in private and little projects that I just think of and do myself. So, the big takeaway for me in all this is using sustainability as a platform for creativity and for empowering communities, and people coming together to work on a positive, shared goal. So that's really been a big wake-up call for me.

Pat Frank, March 2025

Pat Frank came off a work contract in January 2025, and in March he got a job as senior marine and fisheries advisor with North Irish Sea Array (NISA). One of the main tasks of the job is delivering sustainability measures for impacted fishing communities, and a compensation package for co-existence for fisheries and offshore wind.

“ It's amazing. So that's another sort of funny thing that's happened since I've joined the project and started learning about community work and how it's done. I was always in the private sector, so I didn't understand best practice and community work, and the amount of time it takes and all the engagement that's involved, and the talking, but I do understand it now. And I think that's very good learning for me, going into this new role. I know it from both ends, so it all clicks together.

Pat Frank, March 2025



Artwork by Silke Michels



SECTION 5: WHAT WORKED (FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STEERING GROUP)

Working with an active and respected local organisation

“ Working with such a respected and high-profile group that is at the forefront of mobilizing a community and shaping community-led dune management was exciting.

Emer, November 2025

Maharees Conservation is known and respected for their work and has already built trust and support within the area, so Neart na Machairí was not starting from scratch. It would have been difficult to get to the impacts we're seeing without this local buy-in and support.

More specifically, Maharees Conservation was also in a position to:

- advise (based on experience) on what ideas would or wouldn't fly
- proof-read/provide critical evaluation of project outputs (e.g., podcast, leaflet, etc)
- nudge people to apply as community partners
- suggest names, and provide introductions to local people (e.g. as potential interviewees for podcast)
- provide a webpage for the project on their website
- circulate information through their media/social media channels (from the get-go, we had access to over 4,700 followers of Maharees Conservation on Facebook and their 1,300 followers on Instagram)
- draw practical support from their members for our events, including the use of Spillane's Bar & Restaurant and the Green Room on multiple occasions
When we were preparing for our first event, suddenly about five people from Maharees Conservation showed up with lights and flowers so we could make the space more beautiful. **Zoë R., November 2025**
- draw audiences for public events (the level of attendance far exceeded the norm for sustainability events in other areas)
- provide contacts with expert speakers, state agencies and other coastal communities, based on relationships built up over the years
- apply, and secure funding, for projects (e.g., wildlife walks and talks, the podcast)
- raise awareness of Neart na Machairí through speaking engagements (e.g., CARO conference 2025, MTU Sustainability Plan Launch 2025, Climate Cocktail Club 2025, Ireland's Edge 2025)

Most importantly, the work will be continued by Maharees Conservation, now that the Neart na Machairí project has ended. At their AGM in November 2025, the group agreed to create a new subcommittee focusing on climate adaptation.

“ Whereas other projects might die a death, this one will continue

Aidan, November 2025

The length of the project

It was very important to have this amount of time to build relationships and trust with the local community, particularly for the artists who don't live on Maharees.

“ We three artists agree on the idea of delicate activism, being respectful and walking very carefully into a community and an environment and listening to what they have to say and not trying to impose anything that we have in our heads, because we're going to be learning from them.

Emer, April 2024

“ After a year of getting to know the place, we had built the trust needed so that our group was happy to introduce us to family and other locals for the podcast recording. For example, our community partner, Hannah, arranged for me to join her on her uncle's fishing boat and speak to him and her brother about fishing. Their contribution went well beyond what I could have hoped for. They reflected on the changes to fishing techniques and equipment, the impact on stocks that has brought, as well as changes they've noticed in the behaviour of their target species due to the warming seas and climate change, as well as it being an honest and emotive conversation. **Zoë UFG, November 2025**

“ Two years gives great scope, we were able to slow down and give in to the way the project organically unfolded, with some guidance and shaping of course too.

Silke, November 2025

“ Those months provided us with time and space to get to know the steering group and community partners and to understand the work of the Conservation Association within the community.

Emer, November 2025

Artists' residencies in Maharees

The three artists stayed on the Maharees for five periods across the two years. In May 2024 they spent a week together exploring the area, getting to know people and being introduced to its heritage and ecology and the work of Maharees Conservation by members of the steering group and local experts. In mid-September 2024 they spent a week together foraging and running workshops with the project team. In May and again in August/September 2025, they each spent a week in the area recording local interviews for the podcast and they also spent a week together in August, preparing for the Community Feast.

“ I love immersing myself in a place and it was extremely special and a great privilege to have spent this time in such a unique and beautiful landscape, and to have experienced it through the eyes of the locals, as well as discovering it for myself and with Emer and Silke.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ Being an embedded artist allowed for deeper listening and seeing a place through different perspectives. It felt like a privilege to stay in Maharees for certain lengths of time, it gave a great insight into the everyday life there and it made creative responses more authentic and relatable to this particular area.

Silke, November 2025

Building connections with people and place through creativity

The creative process began with simple, subtle methods such as hanging out, walking together and listening. These were a great foundation and led to deep connections, understanding and trust. Introducing some eco-art techniques at the same time led to deeper connection to landscape, and a joy in close-looking, deep-listening, and responding to nature. Cyanotype printmaking at the beach, and later cyanotype flag-making for World Sand Dune Day and using plant inks and earth pigments are examples of these processes.

“ The artists are pulling out the beautiful food they have, celebrating it, the lantern making, the creative pieces they are making from what they're finding on the beaches. What's coming across is that pride of place.

Deirdre, January 2025

“ Communally dying a tablecloth using leaves gathered from a Maharee hedgerow, printing images of local flora and fauna using foraged rock pigments and celebrating the abundance of local food with a colourful feast, all rooted the project in the physical and made it meaningful in a deeply personal way.

Emer, November 2025

“ I have felt like an extension of Maharees Conservation and the wider Maharees community, as we have been so openly welcomed and supported by them. Over time I felt comfortable representing the community in other circles, by remaining open and continually checking back in with the steering group. I feel we became creative catalysts and there was a real spark of interest and excitement around the project as it ran in parallel to, and intertwined with, the continued work of Maharees Conservation and the support that they give to other groups and communities.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

Building relationships and working with our community partners

The steering group was particularly interested in hearing from people in Maharees, who were not already members of Maharees Conservation, and to pull in a wider variety of perspectives from across the locality. Therefore, the community partners were chosen to maximize the diversity of gender, ages, length of time living in Maharees and different communities of interest (from surfing, business owners, young families, families involved in fishing and farming, long-term visitors, and involvement in other community groups in the area). The artists began the project by spending time exploring Maharees from these different perspectives and continued interacting separately with the community partners throughout the project, over and above the more formal project discussions, so that their opinions helped shape the work.

“ I hadn't spoken to some of the community partners before, you might salute them in the car, but you wouldn't get a chance to talk. So, definitely bonds were made and now there's more people outside of Maharees Conservation that have a real interest in Maharees, which is good.

Aidan, November 2025

“ Having people with a range of different views and experiences coming together, listening to each other, learning from each other and from experts was very inspiring.

Silke, November 2025

“ The commitment of the community partners was extraordinary - from Almanacs to the interviewing of the elders, to food production work.

Martha, November 2025

“ I get very excited about plants, wildlife, geology and so on, and I hope sharing that has encouraged others to be curious too. I think that our enthusiasm and the creative activities helped some of our community partners re-discover their home place which led to them getting interested and excited about ideas they then had during the project.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ Realising the power of working together makes me happy. If there was a happiness index, I'd definitely be one or two rungs on the ladder up than where I was when I started.

Pat Frank, March 2025

The learning journey

The learning journey included four learning days, two field trips, eight workshops and one online talk. The quality of expert speakers really framed the backdrop of the community discussions and offered a shared understanding of the science underpinning climate change, biodiversity and climate adaptation. There were different levels of knowledge within the community partners and local community, so this provided a starting point and helped people who were not so confident in their understanding to enter the discussions. Similarly, the two field trips opened minds and added experiential learning (as well as of course being great fun!)

“ I think the days that we had with all the experts have definitely opened doors for people to talk about climate change and sea level rise, it has given them different words and also more knowledge. There is some information that you just now know.

Silke, January 2025

“ This was a great foundation for us all to share in, and I enjoyed how what we learned fed into the creative methods we facilitated, especially the mapmaking.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ I learned a lot from the outings and speakers and loved the general spirit of the info. It is a bleak picture, but with knowledge comes power, and working together we can make things happen.

Patricia, November 2025

The three artists working together

The three artists applied to work on the project together. While internal communication did take effort and time, they felt that working as a trio was mutually supportive and allowed for the sharing of experience, ideas and workload, and a mix of creative approaches and activities.

“ If you imagine working on your own, there's perhaps more freedom, but this project is big, and we were holding it collectively. You learn from each other. In between we have our own chats and that's been a great support. We can have bigger groups, we can take on different things because we also have different skills. We just mix and match them a little bit.

Silke, January 2025

“ Working together and sharing so many interests enriched the work and brought a huge amount of joy and fun to the processes.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ Working as a trio also allowed us to share the workload and step in for each other when needed.

Emer, November 2025

Tapping into people's (sometimes hidden) creativity

“ I loved that the project group are all so creative-minded (even if they wouldn't have described themselves like that), and by centring creativity in the project they could tap into that side of themselves and explore new ideas.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ I was excited to explore artistic processes as I generally don't consider myself to be an artistic person but do enjoy being guided in creative practices. The community meal was a highlight for me, as was the lantern-making workshop.

Jeanne, November 2025



Artwork by Emer Fallon



The deep mapping exercises

A 'deep map' is a map that displays more information than just places, names, and topography. It recognises that people and their emotional connection and experiences are central to an area's identity. Three deep mapping exercises, based on the map of the Maharees tombolo, were led by the artists in the first year and another three in the second year.

They sparked conversation between people, and the artists as outsiders learnt a lot about the heritage and culture of the place, as well as more specifically the most vulnerable areas in terms of erosion and flooding. The exercises also helped highlight challenges and led to the generation of problem-solving ideas.

“The maps were so simple yet so effective at getting people to think about their special places, the vulnerable places, how they travel.

Patricia, November 2025

“When I saw the maps of the Maharees, with one showing places where there's an issue, and then another map saying this is what we could do to solve it, that's so absorbable.

Deirdre, January 2025

“The co-creation with the community was a highlight, just witnessing how powerful participation in a creative exercise can be because of its inclusive nature. The “your favourite place” map exercise at our project launch gave people a chance to look at their place in a different way or from someone else's perspective, as they marked their favourite place on the map with their fingerprints. It sparked lively conversations.

Silke, November 2025

The feasts at Pat Frank's house (Sept 2024) and Aidan's barn (August 2025)

Being food resilient as a small community is very important for the future, so these feasts, prepared collectively from locally sourced and foraged ingredients, illustrated to people the abundance of what's around them. The artists spent time listening to people and realised how food is a touchstone of pride and heritage as well as being an accessible route to discussing climate change, climate action and resilience. Moreover, producing food is something that ordinary people can do and are already doing on Maharees (to a greater extent than in other areas).

The feasts were also a fantastic way to spend time together, deepening our relationships with each other (foraged blackberry syrup cocktail anyone?) and with nature, with reciprocity and mindful use of resources at the heart.

“I just love these processes of working with and as part of nature, so I got a lot out of designing and sharing them with the community partners and steering group, and later with the wider community.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

“This whole slow exploration of place through its food systems is a really powerful practice. The meal at Pat Frank's house brought everyone together, contributing different ingredients or dishes to the group and I had a feeling of getting into some of the deeper questions in the project during the workshop afterwards.

Zoë R., November 2025

The sound recordings, soundwalks and seven-part podcast

During the creative process, audio-recording emerged as an important tool for engagement. Short sound pieces were created around food growing and agriculture on Maharees to share at the Castlegregory Agricultural Show in August 2025, which provided a way to start to share Maharees' voices further afield. Three short extracts were matched to a food that people could eat whilst listening to local people talk about them - carrot (sticks and carrot hummus), onion (onion tart) and seaweed (biscuits with three types of locally foraged seaweed). Each artist had done a drawing (using natural inks and pigments) of that ingredient to which people could add their written memories and associations of that food.

“It was a really fun multisensory way to engage the Agri Show goers and it led to a lot of interesting conversations.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

Later in the month, the artists organised a soundwalk (an artistic method usually involving listening to an audio piece while walking through a specific environment). They mapped a walking route through Fahamore to correspond with extracts from different podcast episodes which participants listened to via individual radio transmission headphones as they walked along.

“I have a deep relationship with soundwalks, and hearing the first extracts of the podcast while walking through Maharees surrounded by a group I wouldn't have known so well two years ago, or some at all, and now feeling like I really have a sense of their characters and a feeling of closeness to them, was a moment that really resonated with me.

Zoë R., November 2025

“The soundwalk in August was really beautiful, as we matched short extracts of the recordings to the places we walked, and it was a gorgeous occasion to share as a group. It was very moving to be at the pier listening to the fishermen, Sandra from the dive school and Carol a daily swimmer, talk about the places we were walking in and looking at.

Zoë UFG, November 2025

The podcast drew on over 98 interviews and gave an opportunity for people to express their opinions, hopes and reflections in a supportive, non-confrontational way, and will have a lasting legacy. It also opened more doors for Maharees Conservation into the local community.

“ So, with the fishermen who took part, we know we can go to them and work with them. That's very positive for us. They seem keen to do things right. There could be a project done with them in the future.

Aidan, November 2025

“ The podcast has been an amazing way to get people beyond the project involved. Sure, half of Maharees is on it! It felt wonderful to hear the love and pride in everyone, whether born and bred here, blow-ins or visitors.

Patricia, November 2025

The documentary ‘Neart na Machairí’

This short documentary brought together filmed documentation of the two-year process, alongside 12 interviews with the project team.

“ The documentary is a great way of summarising the project, so beautiful, the images, the sound. It tells the story really well for both the people involved in the project and I think anyone watching it.

Patricia, November 2025

“ The documentary does a great job of letting it sink in with people what the project is actually about, and how it started involving locals.

Aidan, November 2025

The only pity is that it couldn't be shown at the start to explain to people what the project was going to do!

The household surveys & community visioning workshops

This initiative was designed and led by Maharees Conservation, with support and input from Neart na Machairí. It began in May 2024 with an anonymous drop-off survey of all adult Maharees residents. This survey asked two questions to elicit organic, non-biased thinking about what people loved about Maharees and what they hoped for the future. The questions were entirely open-ended and respondents had a choice of returning responses by post, by online survey link or at public events run by the Maharees Conservation/Neart na Machairí team. There was a 20% response rate, and the survey yielded some very detailed and useful responses. Though the response format and respondent responsibility to return the survey impacted on the response rate, it was a useful device to craft a community-led agenda for the second phase of the research.

The second-phase survey was carried out the following November and was administered by members of Maharees Conservation in a drop-off, pick-up approach. This was more quantitative in nature, using insights from the first survey to create easy-to-answer multiple item scales which aimed to support a community vision statement and collect ideas to support a community-led climate adaptation plan. Sealed and anonymous questionnaires were collected within two weeks in a sealed box by members of Maharees Conservation. In addition, conversations at the doorstep provided an additional source of insights. This survey was conducted in collaboration with a student research team from the Department of Business Studies at MTU. These students coded the responses, entered the data to the statistical package IBM SPSS and provided descriptive statistics and interpreted the findings. These statistics were then checked and validated by a member of Maharees Conservation. This approach resulted in an 82% response rate.

Both surveys were used to generate an initial vision statement for the community and a list of climate adaptation measures, as well as ideas for topics to explore in the future to build climate resiliency.

Following a trial workshop in May 2025, Maharees Conservation (again with the support of the Neart project) organised a community adaptation workshop in July 2025, where climate change impact predictions were presented, a coastal engineer from Kerry County Council explained the role of the Council, the results of the surveys were shared, and there was a call to help develop an action plan, followed by a mapping exercise and discussion in small groups focusing on the vision and key areas to explore as a community.

“ We had been talking about a community vision and plan since 2020 - I think the Neart na Machairí project was a great excuse to do it, we had signed up to creating an adaptation plan - it was great to finally start this work and also to do the secondary and primary research ourselves to provide a really strong platform for action. We were so grateful for the participation of the community respondents, the dedication of our own team and Hannah Hennessey (community partner) to go out to the households and drop off and pick up the responses and we were really impressed with the level of engagement of the five MTU Business students: Nelson Ovbude, Rapolas Buivydas, Maxime Chaput, Patricia Oprisan and Samanta Siwak who went above and beyond to support this important research project. Having the artists there to engage the participants in a creative exercise also made the workshops more engaging.

Martha, November 2025



“ *The surveys were quite brilliant, the approach of going out first with very open questions, that piece of hand delivering in an area to invite everyone to participate, to then take the answers from those surveys and feed them back in, a simple way to say, do you support this or not? Do you support that or not? That, to me, is buy in for things, that's real, true engagement, that is something that I can see being replicated, that is a very specific step within this.*

Deirdre, January 2025

“ *I am bubbling with the potential of this approach. I really believe this is the template for a fair climate transition.*

Zoë R., November 2025

The message in the bottle

In July 2025, community partner Kate Gay and her husband Jon were walking on the beach in Scraggane Bay when they came across an old wine bottle with a message inside. Very generously, they waited until a Neart na Machairí meeting in their house that evening (which had been set up for Kate to present her ‘How Maharees is Weathering’ findings) to break it open. It transpired that the message (and phone number)

in the bottle had been thrown into the sea from Bell Island, Newfoundland in September 2012, by a young couple, Anita and Brad. After 4,680 days it had washed up on a Maharees beach. After the number rang out multiple times, a call was put out on the Maharees Conservation Facebook page and within hours Anita got in touch. Thus started a frenzied few days of intensive international, national and local media interest and many interviews with Kate, Jon, Martha and Jeanne. All ensured that sustainability, Maharees Conservation and Neart na Machairí were brought into the story. In early September, Anita and Brad were flown to Ireland by Tourism Ireland and West Jet, and they spent a few days in Maharees.

This was such a fluke thing to happen, but as well as being a lovely story, it was great coverage - over 664,639 views were routed from the Maharees Conservation Facebook page, so you can't get much more coverage than that!

“ *If Kate found that and she wasn't part of the project, she would have just opened it and contacted them herself, but because she was part of the project our work was brought into it then, along with the story.*

Aidan, November 2025



SECTION 6: WHAT WORKED (FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY PARTNERS)

Leading with positivity about the future

“ I thought it was going to be a lot of doom and gloom, very heavy, because obviously it is a heavy topic, and you are talking about the future and trying to protect ourselves, but there was a positive spin, I feel, everywhere we went. It was very much about what can we do to protect what we have, rather than focusing on what we're going to lose. There are actions that we can take.

Hannah, November 2025

“ For me, just listening to different opinions and perspectives and seeing people actively trying to do something about its' long-term viability as a place to live and work, it's been nice to see.

Ed, March 2025

Developing relationships and connecting with a wider community

“ Getting to know people who live here that I never knew before and deepening friendships and relationships with people I knew, but didn't know that well, as well as meeting new people.

Maria, November 2025

“ I would have known all the community partners, except for Mairead, but it would all have been very surface level, whereas I feel like I know them all on a deeper level now.

Hannah, November 2025

Having the time to talk

“ A lot of our activities, some of them were formal, some of them were informal, but it gave us a reason and a location and a space and an environment to talk. I think that was the most important thing about it. It wasn't contrived, a lot of it was almost like continuing conversations.

Mairead, November 2025

“ I think the bigger the conversation we can create around climate adaptation, amongst our community and by connecting with other coastal communities, the better the outcome will be.

Kate, November 2025

The sense of community and pride

“ Especially when I hear the older people in the community talking on the podcast, I think it's so special to capture those voices and those memories. Listening to it, it just fills you with pride. Maharees is an amazing place, and we're lucky to live here.

Maria, Nov 2025

“ It's nice to hear that Maharees is a great spot, and for different people, they all have different reasons why they enjoy it, or why they love it and why they keep coming. It's also nice to see that people genuinely care about the future of the place as well. People are actively trying to make an effort to sustain what it is and where it is, as a place. Because in ten years, is it going to be a lot different as a landscape? In 50 years is it going to be a lot different? Who knows?

Ed, March 2025

The learning journey

The information sessions, presentations, workshops and the access to experts who transferred their knowledge in a very understandable way

“ You didn't need a PhD to understand anything.

Mairead, November 2025

“ Zoë and the artists are bringing lots of different unique perspectives and ideas to it. So, anything that I have been able to attend, I have enjoyed, and I feel like I've learned from it and gotten something out of it as well.

Ed, March 2025

“ Having the people at the top of their fields come down to discuss how the Maharees is, how it's formed, and how it is forming, and what biodiversity and life is around. It was a great, informative day, and also very practical towards the end, because then we were talking with the county council and the engineers about the issues and what's going on and what needs to happen.

Duncan, August 2024

“ It is really nice to see community members being educated and taking action and doing things that can help preserve the Maharees and its history and culture. It's been nice to learn more about what's been done before us.

Ben, September 2024

“ I got a lot of it, personally. I definitely feel better educated, I learned a lot about the topics that were covered and I also learned an awful lot about community work and capacity building and how people can tackle things by coming together in groups and linking up with others.

Pat Frank, November 2025

“ I have found this process challenging, but also so thought-provoking and empasing as well. It's been such a learning curve. It's incredible, and it just makes you want to make a difference.

Kate, March 2025

“ One of the biggest ideas that came out for me is if Maharees disappears, it affects communities from Brandon to Ballyheige. So, it affects Tralee because the whole water system there will change. It will probably flood. So, it's bigger than just us. There's a huge, huge power in that idea. Maharees is creating a barrier, it's protecting other places.

Kate, August 2024

The field trips

“ There's a childhood innocence about going on these guided trips as adults.

Mairead, November 2025

“ I thought the trips were great - always informative and really valuable. It was inspiring to see how other communities are responding to shared challenges. I personally got a lot out of them. One of my favourites though, was Patricia's garden at her home. It really resonated with me because it was so relatable - local, familiar, and simply someone's own garden. It was a beautiful day, and being in that small, personal space showed what's possible when you focus on what you can do in your own patch.

Maria, Nov 2025

“ Listening in Cloughjordan, the way they do things, I was thinking parts of it could be implemented here. There are things that we can bring home and we can do, like with the farm shop. We grow so much down here, we could have a little community farm shop going on if we really wanted to.

Hannah, November 2025

“ Seeing the district heating system in Cloughjordan, that was a new concept to me, and I was amazed by it. Maharees isn't huge, something like that could work here.

Maria, November 2025

“ I really enjoyed the road trips, the bus trips, the days out. You can't beat a bus trip, everyone's put into the same vehicle, it makes you shut off and just focus on what's going on that day, because you're not in control. You'd speak to people you wouldn't usually speak to, different people throughout the day and different settings, and then coming home on those buses, talking about stuff and spit-balling with people, I really enjoyed it.

Pat Frank, November 2025

“ It's like being back in school, on a bus, away we go. It was brilliant.

Mairead, November 2025

The podcasts and documentary

“ The documentary, seeing it all come together, and seeing how much work everyone has put into the project.

Hannah, November 2025

“ The podcasts are beautiful. They put together such lovely stories.

Mairead, November 2025

“ Doing the podcast was really enjoyable. I brought Zoë out with my brother and my uncle in the fishing boat, and we recorded some of the podcast out there. So that was lovely, I probably would never have gotten to do that with the two of them, only for this. My brother took over my dad's boat, he passed away a few years ago, and it was actually really emotional.

Hannah, November 2025

“ I think it brings people along in a roundabout way, they don't even realise they're talking about climate changes, particularly the older generation. I think if you went to them and said, all right, we're going to talk about climate change, they'd be like, no.

Hannah, November 2025



The household surveys

“ The surveys were fairly intensive, and it was impressive to see the work done and involving the entire community, going door to door. It was great to see the feedback from it.

Duncan, September 2024

“ An absolute light bulb moment for me was in December when there was a community meeting, it was just a bit of an update in the pub at the Green Room. What was incredible was the second survey that was done. It had an excellent response, the most amazing thing was 180 people replied to that survey, and the army that was organised to go around and make it happen, but the fact that people then did it, that's community engagement right there.

Kate, March 2025

The involvement of children

“ The children's table at the project meal in Dingle, there was something so significant and powerful that for these children it is normal to go on this trip, it's the Neart na Machairí project, and they're included. It's about climate, it's about the locality and they were together at the table. I just thought there was something very significant about that and really lovely.

Mairead, November 2025

“ I've brought my family - my parents, my husband, and my children - to many of the events. My kids might not always understand why they're there, but I feel that by being part of so many moments, something will resonate with them over time and there will be a point where they recognise what they were part of and why it mattered.

Maria, November 2025

SECTION 7: THE CREATIVE ASPECT (FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STEERING GROUP & COMMUNITY PARTNERS)

The artists' approach came from a place of respect for the Maharees community, and they began the project by taking time to listen and get to know both people and place. They held a space for delving into difficult conversations, as well as facilitating playful creativity and celebrating the local pride and love of Maharees. Helping to preserve the heritage, lore and history of the tombolo, whilst exploring novel ways of addressing the challenges climate change may bring, was of key importance. As three individual artists, sustainability is embedded in their work and they each brought that sustainable approach to the shared creative activities, such as: deep mapping, cyanotype printing, lino printing with earth pigments, foraging and cooking together, and eco dyeing. They also integrated photography, video and sound recording into the process. At the heart of the approach was the desire to support the community in exploring the challenges they face and to ensure that the project leaves a lasting legacy.

“ We artists have different backgrounds and strengths to offer, and we have different personalities as well. So, we can deliver a wider span of activities and interactions. We all get on, we all trust each other, we know we can depend on each other, and we would respect each other's work. We're all very committed, we've all worked in groups, we have organic structures in place that work for us. There's a good energy. People will pick up on that, I hope.

Emer, April 2024

“ People almost don't know why you're there or what you're doing, but it is effective. It's like magic or something. It's a lot to do with patience and empathy and relationship building, those are the things that make it different. I think artists just tend to have a slightly different way of approaching the world and that might be the useful bit, rather than the actual art. We make connections.

Zoë UFG, January 2025

“ It was wonderful that this project was about the creative process rather than focused on a finished product, it left a lot of freedom to offer a creative, inclusive space for meeting the community, whether on walks or meeting for coffee.

Silke, November 2025

“ I think that creativity can help people to think outside their own boxes, but a lot of us are afraid of it - I'm not artistic so I can't do that. Stepping outside your comfort zone is good for everyone, so the more people are exposed to it the more likely they are to do it. And there's an element of that I think that builds community as well.

Jeanne, January 2025

“ Food was an unexpected way to also feel in awe of what we have, how self-sufficient we can be and how we can reduce our food miles. It was also a great feeling to share such delicious food with my neighbours.

Patricia, November 2025

“ There was an event in my shed here, where they put loads of stuff on the walls and they showed photographs on the screen and they did food, but it was still an event. Who would have come over to the shed otherwise? But they made an event out of it, and that's what the art does. Without it, you'd be inviting people to nothing.

Aidan, November 2025

“ We laughed a lot. I really feel the creative side of it brought a playfulness to what could be a very depressing conversation.

Patricia, November 2025

“ I think the deep listening that occurred in the creative experiences supported the conversations and the percolation of ideas for adaptation actions. It elevated the work from just another workshop or community survey to a long-term conversation with creative flashes that interested and involved people on a different level to what we might have done on our own.

Martha, November 2025

“ I think creativity brought a lovely new way of thinking, and a way of expressing ourselves, tying in the creative and emotional side as well as the facts. At the end of the day, people only do things if there's an emotional connection to it and it definitely achieved that.

Mairead, November 2025

“ They have a nice take on things. I suppose that is artists for you, they see the romance and they see the beauty.

Ben, September 2024

“ I think creativity definitely has value, and adds value, and makes people look at things differently, and interpret stuff differently. I really enjoyed Lisa Fingleton's exhibition in Tralee, the way her interpretation of some of the common stuff we're always used to looking at and the concept of the Square Tomato and regeneration has me thinking about heritage, skills that are being lost, and practices that are being lost that are sustainable. The majority of the traditional practices were sustainable because they had to be. So, there's a lot of possibilities stemming out of it.

Pat Frank, March 2025

“ Zoë mentioned 'slow art' in the documentary and that definitely resonated with me. There were lots of different strands, like the lantern making, or the cyanotype. It was a great way of getting the wider community involved and families and children, it was nice and social, it was about building that sense of community, drawing in people that mightn't naturally go to a climate event.

Maria, November 2025

“ We wrote a beautiful poem with Emer. What's lovely is that it's new poetry from the area, and it does capture hopes, fears and dreams for the area.

Mairead, November 2025

“ The soundwalk was so special. It was amazing, it was so nice with all of us together with headphones on, walking silently. We listened to the one with my brother and my uncle as we were walking down the pier, and I found it very emotional because they mentioned my dad and he would have loved it. We were actually listening to that one and my uncle, who was in the podcast, had just come in from fishing, he was bringing up the canoe after coming in from the boat. And it was so lovely because he was literally talking in our headphones and then he was there in front of us finishing what he was talking about.

Hannah, November 2025

“ The cyanotype really struck a chord with me. After learning the technique, I used it with my third-year students to show them how X-rays work. Their first lab back after the summer, it was a sunny day, and we were outside making art, and they thought this was the best thing that they've ever done.

Mairead, November 2025

“ When you speak about resilience you're presented with challenges, and then you need to come up with solutions that are practical, workable and affordable. It can get dry and narrow and negative. The creativity and the art gave it a fresher, more fun type of approach.

Pat Frank, November 2025

“ If you approach it from a very solution orientated, practical direction, it could become stifled, or you could miss solutions. In the end, it's all about getting people on board. The more ways you approach that the better.

Pat Frank, November 2025

“ It's a more subtle way of reaching out and engaging people and helping them get involved in the conversation and understanding that even the smallest action can make a difference.

Maria, November 2025

“ When you're making something, you're doing your cyanotype, or you're doing the podcast or sharing stories, or whatever creative aspect it is, it's the engagement and the building on trust. I feel like you're more open and you say more. When it's creative, it's open to anything, and people can give different interpretations and different opinions, and it allows people to challenge things. I think it's really powerful.

Hannah, November 2025



Artwork by Silke Michels

SECTION 8: EXAMPLES OF CREATIVE APPROACHES USED IN PROJECT



Your Favourite Place map at project Launch event

Deep mapping

The artists created outline maps of the Maharees tombolo for a variety of engagements, which were added to by the community. Examples include the 'Your Favourite Place' map at the project's launch event, where people put their fingerprint of earth pigment paint on their chosen place. This was a great conversation starter and provided much initial insight for the artists into Maharees life, and it also highlighted some of the challenges.

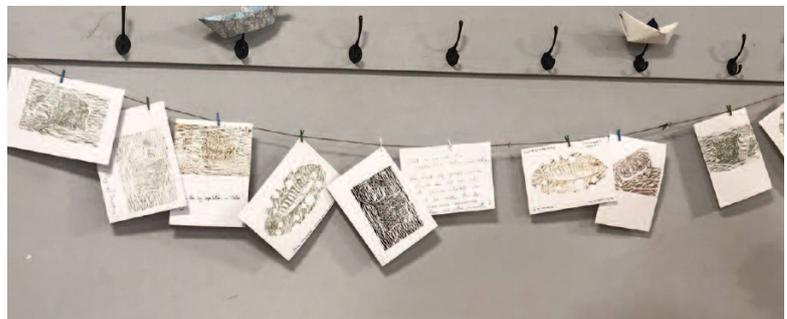
Another example of the mapping methodology was used during our Resilient Seas community engagement day. After expert talks, and small group discussions, the attendees added their words using sticky notes to two cyanotype maps created by the artists. The artists later painted the community's words onto the maps as lasting documents of the consultation and the ideas generated.



Deep mapping series

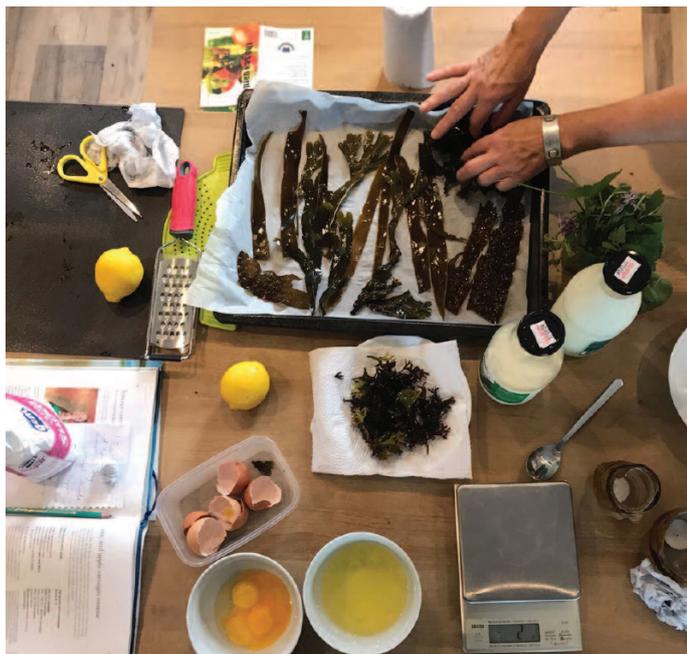
Cyanotype printing

The Marine Day maps were created using the cyanotype method – an old camera-less photographic technique using non-toxic chemicals. The prepared paper or fabric reacts to sunlight – exposed areas turn cyan blue, resulting in striking imagery. Cyanotypes were also made by the community partners on walks with the artists, and by the wider community to make flags and banners for World Sand Dune Day 2026. By carefully using the natural materials found around us, we can connect more deeply with place, whilst enjoying creating a beautiful piece of art. The banners were also a way to celebrate the impressive dune restoration work done by Maharees Conservation and spread messages about the importance of conservation.



Lino printing at Learning Day ‘Resilient Seas, Resilient Communities’ in August 2024

Attendees were invited to make a marine-related print and list some of their concerns and questions about the health of our seas on the image, for later dissemination. Using images of local marine life and biodiversity tied in with the ongoing work of the Maharees Conservation, and the fact that the images were printed using pigments made with rocks gathered (with care and respect) on the tombolo, was a nice talking point (particularly with kids). It also brought conversations to interesting places – What is the geology of Maharees? What spots are more vulnerable to erosion? And what chemicals are washed down the drain after an acrylic painting session that might then end up in the sea?



Communal Preparation

Harvest Feast in September 2024

The Harvest Feast gave the wider project group an opportunity to gather joyfully and celebrate the wealth of local food Maharees has to offer. In the preceding days seaweed foraging sessions, blackberry picking and ink making, and the communal preparation of local dishes brought food security and food resilience into direct focus. Gathering ingredients from local producers and inviting project members to contribute homegrown produce, as well as bring their own dishes, made the meal extra precious and brought home just how powerful the act of sharing food can be.



Eco dyeing workshop with project team for Harvest Feast in September 2024

Connecting with place has been an important aspect of the creative engagement. We invited our project group to forage seaweed and cook some dishes together. We also went out to source local plants that are high in tannin, so they will leave an imprint on fabric when steamed as a tight bundle. We collected a few different plants like yarrow, rose, blackberry, willow, oak leaves and onion skin to dye fabric that was later used as a tablecloth on the feast day.



Lantern-making event with wider community in December 2024

This workshop was open to the whole community, and we had a lovely turn out of all ages. We sourced the willow locally and made our own non-toxic glue. We taught people the basic form and techniques but since the willow lends itself to be shaped in many different ways, it was possible for everyone who seemed a bit apprehensive about their artistic skills to let their own creativity flow in different ways. It was a very reflective and meditative way of working together. The lanterns were later used to brighten up the space for our December gathering.



Soundwalk

Sound recording – voices and ambient sound

Recording the voices of the Maharees people and the ambient sound of the place, was a central creative method of engagement, that succeeded due to the trust that had been built between the artists and the community. This resulted in the seven-episode podcast, *Will It Stay Fine?* produced by the artists in collaboration and consultation with the project team. Other ways the recordings were experienced included a beautiful soundwalk through Maharees in summer, and a ‘Sound Bites’ engagement at the Castlegregory Agricultural Show 2025, where people could listen to three food-related extracts of the podcast whilst tasting food featuring the Maharees ingredients that were being spoken about.

SECTION 9: CHALLENGES

(FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STEERING GROUP & COMMUNITY PARTNERS)

The complexity of delivery with a large and diverse group of partners

The Neart na Machairí team comprised a large and diverse group of partners with different perspectives and varying degrees of experience in community development. Besides the core creative team, it included representatives of the Dingle Hub, representatives of Maharees Conservation Association and ten community partners (two for the first year only). The diversity of the partners brought the advantage of diversity of perspectives but also added complexity in the delivery of the project.

The steering group had multiple discussions on role definition at the outset of the project, and a structural planning workshop was facilitated in June 2024 but because the intention was to cocreate the process, it was difficult to prescribe very specific definitions of how team members would contribute.

In addition, Maharees Conservation was the channel through which action would be taken arising out of this project. This is due to the governance structure in place, the relationships with the state agencies, landowners, the community and the knowledge of the place and the relevant constraints e.g., environmental designations, private land ownership, cultural norms, etc. Having an already established group leading a project of this nature is both a hindrance and a help. While Maharees Conservation was a strong ally throughout the project, it could also be a source of frustration as decisions took longer and some ideas had to take account of constraints pointed out by the Maharees Conservation team.

Lengthy discussion, sometimes disagreement, compromise, communication, resilience and persistence are part of community work of this nature. The challenges relating to evolving roles, associated workload and emotional load that are required should not be underestimated by communities considering a project of this scale. We recommend professional facilitation of discussion on these issues to set the scene from the outset.

Thanks to the structure of the Creative Ireland funding programme, this project had the luxury of time and flexible funding to deeply explore many aspects and possibilities of community-led adaptation planning and so the team dove into the complexity, finding the points of tension, complications and communication as well as points of deeply impactful actions.

The project was challenging, as we expected it to be, but we navigated these challenges because of:

- the time we spent building strong relationships at the beginning.
- the professional evaluative mechanisms we had embedded in the project to identify issues and deal with them as they arose.
- the highly skilled and highly committed project team we had assembled who could relate to, collaborate and act with a very diverse and motivated group of people.

It must also be noted that Maharees Conservation really benefited from new perspectives and valuable ideas from the community partners - who were not members of the community group at that point and therefore brought alternative perspectives to the project.

The high pace of the action

The fast-paced and collaborative nature of the project required high levels of energy and commitment from all involved.

The first year of the project was focused on building relationships, embedding the creative team, learning about the future impacts of climate change, the context for climate action and co-creation of climate adaptation messaging for the community. We never anticipated the community partners' sense of urgency to act so soon in the project as the ideas bank was emerging during Autumn 2024. This led to the creation of small action groups who initiated impactful climate adaptation projects, some of which were completed in the lifetime of the project, some of which are more long-term affairs.

The scale and quality of the outputs from the project required a significant input from all concerned. The project team applied for and won additional funding to support the creation of the Neart na Machairí podcast 'Will it Stay Fine?' based on the learnings of the project - which was a valuable device to engage the entire community in the concept of climate adaptation in a very subtle and engaging way. The sheer volume and value of the outputs from Neart na Machairí, such as the visitor leaflet, the podcast, the household publication, the Maharees Almanac, the Neart na Machairí documentary required significant commitment from the project team and wider community.



In addition, Maharees Conservation continued its own annual schedule of events and activities which dovetailed and interlinked with the Neart na Machairí activities. Significantly, Maharees Conservation and the Dingle Hub engaged with state agencies and policy makers to ensure that the outputs of Neart na Machairí had a much more far-reaching impact and secured greater trust in community-led climate adaptation endeavours.

There is no doubt that the scale and pace of delivery created a heavy operational load - particularly in the management of and administration of several interlinked projects. The learning is to carefully consider the capacity for action within the team, the number of projects, and also to recognise the value of administrative support in large scale projects - potentially allowing for the provision of additional administrative support when required.

Supporting the volunteer ecosystem

Maharees Conservation Association has been operating as a volunteer-led community group since 2016. Supporting the involvement of up to sixty community volunteers, community volunteerism is one of its greatest strengths. The potential impact of a project of this scale, with paid project members, on the volunteer ecosystem was a concern for the steering group from the outset. It required a careful balance and management of the workload to ensure the paid project members did not encroach on the work of the volunteers and that continued volunteerism was supported instead of being stifled.

Trusting the creative process and balancing it with project management

As the intention was to cocreate the process with the artists and community partners, flexibility was an important feature in the creative process. There is no doubt that some team members would have preferred a clearer roadmap and deliverables, however the project's flexibility resulted in unanticipated and highly valued outcomes that were not part of a plan or schedule from the outset e.g., the podcast 'Will it Stay Fine?'

Fully implementing the sustainability policy

Fully implementing the sustainability policy proved challenging as the project grew in scale and complexity. While strong progress was made in sourcing sustainable materials and reducing waste, transport and carbon tracking were more difficult due to local constraints. Nevertheless, positive steps were taken - such as carpooling, designing artist residencies to minimise travel, and encouraging lift-sharing - highlighting the importance of practical, flexible approaches to sustainability in community projects.

Despite the challenges relating to the volume of people, perspectives and projects and the first major creative project in the history of Maharees Conservation, what emerged was an incredibly powerful series of outputs. The project was challenging but it succeeded because of the strength of the relationships and friendships forged within the project team and with the wider community. The skillsets, wisdom, commitment to the project and dedication to the community of Maharees all contributed to an inspiring team performance and resilience that saw the project through.

SECTION 10: RECOMMENDATIONS (FROM STEERING GROUP & COMMUNITY PARTNERS)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SIMILAR PROJECTS

Talk to groups who have run similar projects and learn from their direct experience.

If working with a community group, make sure that, at the outset, the community group explains its role and remit and how things work locally, so that all involved in the project, particularly the community partners, understand the context for any future actions.

Facilitate bonding between all team members from the start by having the whole project team (steering group, artists, project manager and community partners) in the same communication channel.

Organise experiential field trips at an early stage in the project, as these are such a good way of building relationships and having fun (as well as developing learning and fostering discussion)

Take plenty of time at the beginning to agree a decision-making structure, communication channels, time commitments, roles, boundaries and expectations.

Keep objectives clear, and refer back to them regularly, but don't over-prescribe outputs - let them emerge naturally.

Try to really drill down into people's availability and agree work hours to allow for reasonable time off for everyone (volunteers and paid workers) involved (although this is very difficult when working with community volunteers who have jobs and personal commitments). In particular, agree protocols for communication.

Provide regular project oversight and mentoring reviews (from someone not directly involved in the day-to-day of the project), to check what's going right or proving difficult in the project, to discuss the emotional labour and monitor the pace – in order to support decision-making and flag where changes could be made and ultimately help avoid burnout.

Choose community partners carefully, define and communicate their role, and highlight the time commitments that will be required of them. Clearly outline priority events and non-priority events.

Explain the role of embedded art, the flexible approach required and lack of set outcomes at the outset, knowing that this approach is unusual and will likely need to be continuously restated and communicated, both internally and externally.

The more diverse the project team is, the more ideas for action there will be (whether specific experiments in building resilience or pathways to developing a community-wide conversation and plan). Carefully consider how additional actions or teams will affect the workload on volunteers and paid staff and clearly communicate whose responsibility it is to drive these ideas to action.

Place enough emphasis on the artist role in the budget and agree expectations and time commitments based on the budget.

Ensure adequate administration support is included/ considered at the proposal stage of the project and review again once the full project team is in place. If the team is much larger than originally anticipated, consider necessary amendments to the budget to support specific tasks.

Use creativity to help engage and involve people, and to open up different perspectives. Also, use local culture and heritage to help build capacity as part of the process.

- Start with a sense of place and a desire to learn about, and get to know, the community through deep listening to the stories, history, ecology, geography, etc.
- Offer a non-judgemental, relaxed and safe space for open non-judgemental exchange.
- Get out into the community and meet people where they are, e.g., fishers at the pier.
- Get together in non-formal ways, e.g., through walks and soundwalks.

Ensure strong links with policy makers early on so community voices feed into formal planning.

Always include mechanisms for local ownership - national plans need local tailoring to succeed.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATIVE IRELAND

Creative Ireland's residency at the beginning was a great idea, but our team was much larger than the two allocated places and it was difficult to fit those exercises into the planning days with the wider team due to time limitations. Potentially a combination of in-person (representatives) and online sessions (for the wider team - to access material and discuss in breakout rooms and/or recorded sessions) would be helpful, to signpost available support and learning.

We suggest that future residencies could focus more on the learnings and challenges from previous projects to help prepare and plan for some of the challenges we came across during Neart na Machairí.

Our project benefitted from overlapping roles with other Ignite projects such as Brilliant Ballybunion (Clare Watson) and Dinnseanchas (Zoë Rush). We also benefitted from networking with a range of other project teams at events like the Creative Ireland Gathering (2024) and recommend the continued support and honing of links and relationships between creative climate action projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Build mechanisms for local input into county/regional/national plans - communities need a real seat at the table. Support flexible frameworks rather than rigid templates so plans can adapt to local needs.

Work with communities. Respect local knowledge and experience as it's critical for practical solutions. Recognise that most solutions start locally and that policy should enable and amplify that.

Listen deeply to the community: What does a community need? What is important to them? What knowledge is already there? What supports can be provided?

Find a balance between the "ground up" and "top down" approaches, a middle ground where everyone has a voice.

Invest in processes that foster collaboration, not just consultation - true partnership leads to better outcomes.

Provide mechanisms for community-led change, such as participatory budgeting, whereby communities go through a facilitated process to form their plan and then allocate the budget to the actions that they want carried out.

Provide funding for Creative Ireland to continue supporting these ground-breaking creative climate action projects. The impactful empowerment of community action and the harnessing of thousands of volunteer hours is fantastic value for money and helps build invaluable social capital across the country.

Provide more defined administrative support structures for local organisations (Maharees Conservation is very lucky to have people in the group and in Dingle Hub who know how to apply for funding, but not all community groups have this available to them). Making people with expertise in areas like fundraising, communication and project management available to community groups, rather than them having to understand the processes and seek out and employ people with the relevant skills, could encourage wider and deeper participation across different communities.

Provide core funding for community development 'anchor' institutions like the Dingle Hub. The Hub is uniquely positioned as they support both local job creation in the green economy and the voluntary sector. They also have the ability to manage the financial reporting for projects with large budgets like this one and the legal requirements for hiring staff.

To cut down on administration and repetition, develop one generic application programme where community groups go in and upload all their financials, summaries, previous projects, local climate and biodiversity plans, etc. Schedule new funds in an ongoing calendar and community groups just choose the fund and write a specific project application for it rather than having to go through the entire process for each separate (and often tiny) fund.

Make it easier to live more sustainably. The cheapest and easiest choices are often the least sustainable. Consumers have the power to make choices, but they also have bills to pay. Enable producers through policies, and the change will trickle to consumers.

SECTION 11: LEGACY

“ I hope the legacy is a clear, community-led climate adaptation planning process that others can follow. It should show how bottom-up approaches can be embedded in statutory plans and give communities a real seat at the table. Ideally, it sparks a shift where policy makers see local voices as essential for sustainable futures.

Deirdre, November 2025

“ I would love to see the project’s learnings being used by other coastal communities. We are hoping to bring the current exhibition now showing in Kerry Museum on tour next year, and several communities have already expressed interest in hosting it.

Emer, November 2025

“ As part of the podcast project, three signs will be erected around Maharees featuring a quote from a Maharees resident alongside a QR code that brings you to the Conservation Association’s website, where the podcast links are displayed. Our hope is that through visiting the website and following the links to the podcast, casual visitors to the tombolo will begin to appreciate just how delicate and precious a place Maharees is.

Emer, November 2025

“ I think the project helped several of the community partners realise the power they have to help effect change at a local level and I hope many of them will continue to be involved in the work of Maharees Conservation and drive further positive change for the community. I hope the project will open doors and create opportunities for Maharees to engage with other communities to share what we have learned, as well as help bring more funding to the area to implement some of the other ideas that came up during the project.

Jeanne, November 2025

“ I hope there is better knowledge of climate change impacts within Maharees community, and there will be more behaviour change, better visibility at agency level and more power to effect change.

Patricia, November 2025

“ The relationships that have been built and the new perspectives and supports with regards to building community resilience will be something that can be strengthened in the future.

Silke, November 2025

“ The podcast is a beautiful record of Maharees: its heritage, culture, memories, challenges, and so on, it is a real archive of the place, its people, and a legacy of the project which I hope will continue to connect with other coastal communities and inspire them to take action and pursue creative projects too.

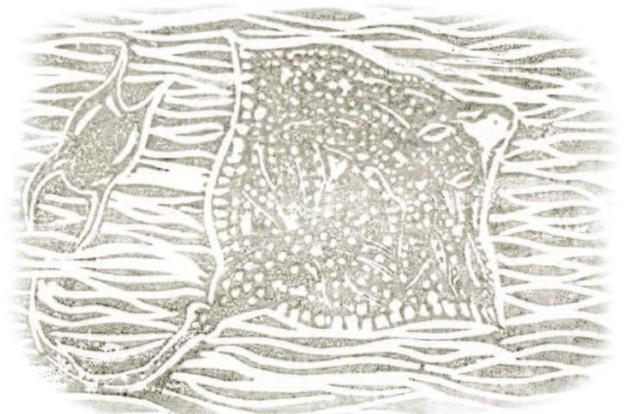
Zoë UFG, November 2025

“ I hope there will be continued collaboration between the three artists and Maharees Conservation Association, such as bringing the soundwalks and podcasts into the community and events around exploring the food systems and foraging potential of Maharees.

Zoë R., November 2025

“ I think the long-term impact will be a community that is working towards its own vision in an empowered way and that we will help each other to live in Maharees, in as good a state as possible for as long as we can. That we protect our biodiversity and our heritage and that we transition to a low-carbon, renewable energy secure community. That we have a visitor who understands and is mindful of the fragility of the place and does their best to support the protection of it. That we have systems in place to deal with visitors and that the community is one that supports our young people to continue living here if that’s what they want.

Martha, November 2025



Artwork by Emer Fallon

Shades of Maharees

Mairead Kinsella, Zoë Rush, Jeanne Spillane, Emer Fallon
Neart na Machairi Project, August 2025

Béal Geal - sandy bay, sandy hair, feet and toes in bed,
 soft and warm, coarse, cold and wet -
 sand displaced from marram green dunes
 lovingly protected by chestnut centurions.

Brambles reveal the stone remnants of old Maherabeg.
 Ruins on dunes, the orange and black caterpillars curled
 on yellow-green ragwort, paper-white cocoons.
 From tall straw marram stalks, moths and larks ascend.

Sun falls behind Garrywilliam, every day it drops
 but every day it's different.
 Swallows chirp over Fahamore, swooping and climbing,
 they signal an end to summer.

Wrinkling our noses against the tang of sunbaked seaweed,
 journey under starling thronged telegraph wires and along gentle laneways,
 clamber down through the white-worn limestone rock
 - melting and folded -
 drift into crevasses and find the marks of deep time in Port a'Cathasaigh.

A sense of home, lonesome, sometimes.
 Soaring cacophony; saltwater smell; constant, changing light.

Found home or temporary harbour? It's uncertain sometimes.
 The fierce salt winds and soft light remould me.

Home from home - overwhelming sometimes.
 The future is an echo of hard-fought resilience.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Events and Venues

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Exhibitions

With thanks to Claudia Köhler at Kerry County Museum and Joan Maguire at An Díseart and the wider Féile na Bealtaine team for hosting project exhibitions and supporting public engagement with the work.

Kerry County Council

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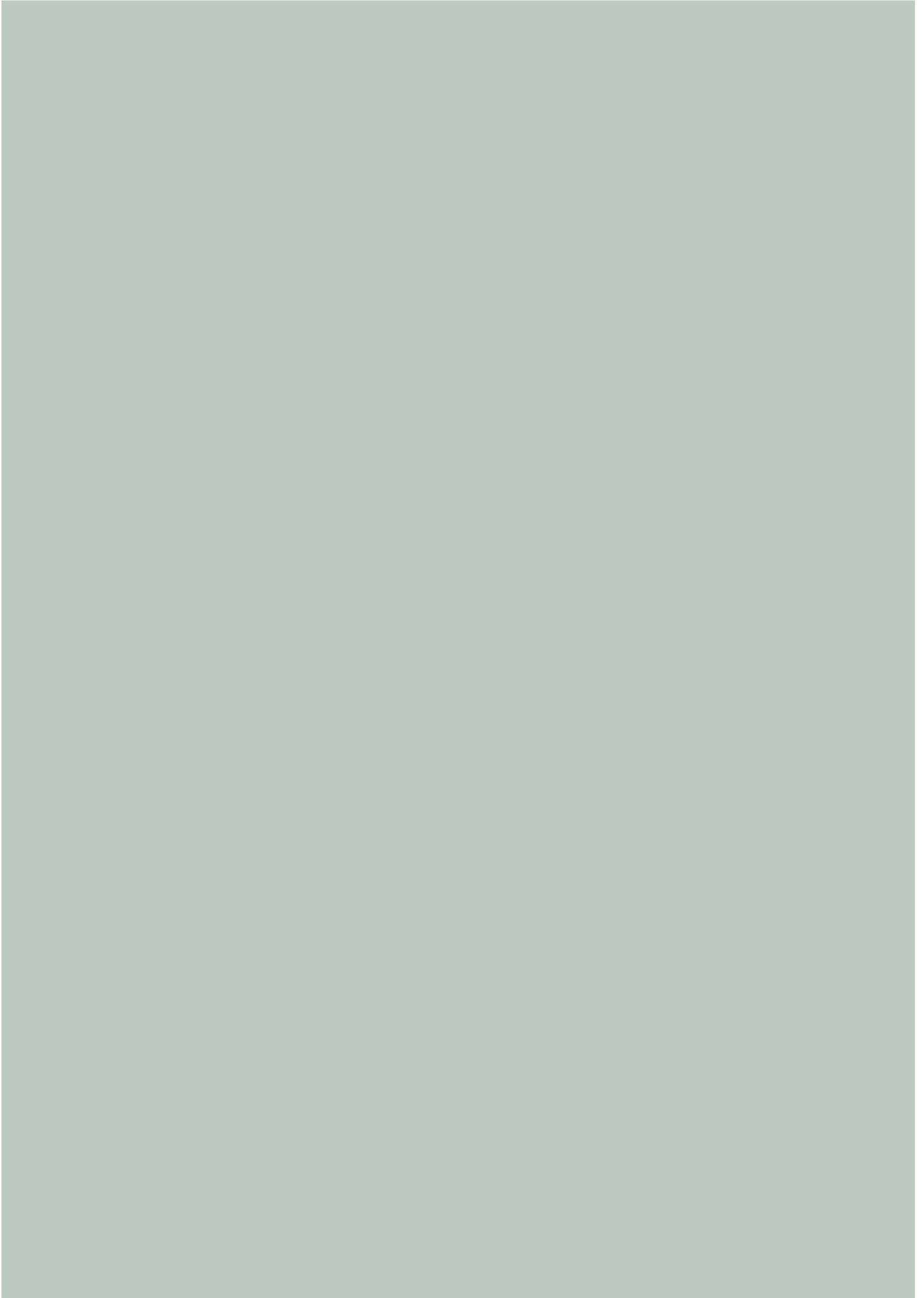
Media and Communications

We are very grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Michael Kelly, who brought our project to life through the documentary and project photography and thank all our additional local photographers; Manuela dei Grandi, Bláthnaid O'Toole and Mick Whelan.

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Podcast – Will It Stay Fine?

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