



MARA

Trustees' Annual Report

17th March 2025 – 31st March 2026





MARA

SCO54063

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Charity Trustees

1. Miss Sarah J. Dolman



2. Dr Lindsay J. Porter OBE



3. Mr Ian Robins



4. Miss Claire Burgess



Objectives and activities

MARA was established to advance understanding and conservation of marine mammals in the Western Isles and wider Scottish waters, strengthening environmental protection through research, monitoring, education and outreach. The west coast of Scotland is critical for cetaceans. The Inner Hebrides and the Minches Special Area of Conservation, designated in 2018, is Europe's largest marine protected area for harbour porpoise, whilst the North-East Lewis Marine Protected Area, designated in 2020, protects Risso's dolphins. In 2024, the International Union for Conservation of Nature Marine Mammal Protected Areas Task Force recognised the 'Minches and Sea of the Hebrides' as an Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA), among the richest in the British Isles. Despite this, significant knowledge gaps remain for many species of marine mammal including population size, distribution, habitat use, health, and the impacts of threats such as bycatch, noise pollution and disturbance.

The organisation's purposes are:

- (a) The advancement of science through the research and monitoring of the distribution, abundance, habitat use and social structure of marine mammals and factors affecting their conservation, especially in the Western Isles and wider Scottish waters.
- (b) The promotion of heritage, arts, culture and science, through the themes of marine mammals, the marine environment and conservation.
- (c) The advancement of environmental protections and improvements for marine mammals and the marine environment, especially in the Western Isles and wider Scottish waters, and the promotion of conservation to the public.
- (d) The advancement of marine mammal welfare through research, education, collaboration, dissemination of information and promotion of both individual and species-level welfare.
- (e) The advancement of education and research relating to marine mammals and the marine environment, including, community engagement, school outreach programmes and volunteering opportunities within the Western Isles and wider Scottish waters.

Structure, governance and management

MARA is a single-tier Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). Our trustees make sure that the charity complies with our 'constitution'.



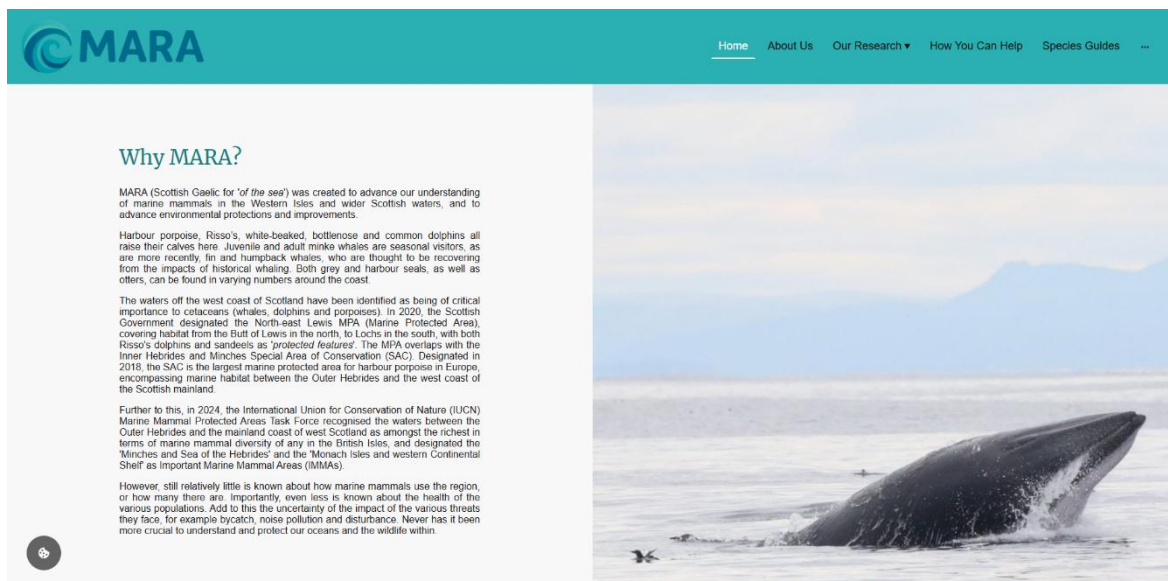
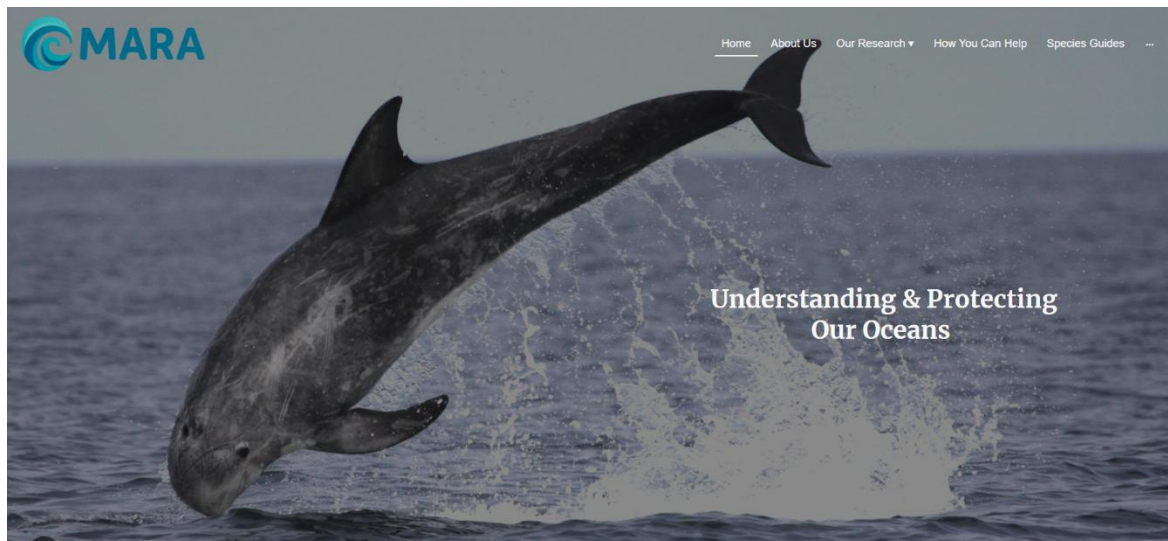
Our founding and current trustees bring a wealth of expertise and skills to the organisation. With a combined 60+ years of experience in cetacean research, policy & campaigning, as well as extensive management and HR skills, our trustees are the backbone of MARA.

Achievements and performance

The focus for our first year of operation was to create our identity, set up the logistics of the charity (e.g. – banking etc.) and establish an online presence – via a dedicated website and social media platforms.

Logo – our logo was created and delivered free of charge by Colin Harrison Designs, to whom we are very grateful.

Website – our website was created by our Executive Director, Nicola Hodgins and is run on a platform provided by IONOS. All costs associated with the website (domain name, hosting etc.) were donated by Nicola and we now have a website to be proud of - www.mara.scot



Socials – To ensure we could promote our work and reach a larger audience we created both a Facebook page [@mara.sc0t](#) (currently 98 followers) & an Instagram account [@mara_sc0t](#) (135 followers).

Bank Account – MARA now has a dedicated bank account with the Bank of Scotland. It is a charity account and therefore there are no associated costs.

Funding Applications – (1) NatureScot previously funded the Risso's monitoring surveys undertaken independently by MARA researchers from 2010 – 2025. They have expressed an interest in continuing this support directly through MARA and we will submit an application requesting funding for the 2026 – 2027 season; (2) We submitted an 'Expression of Interest' for funding to Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation (HIEF) for additional support for monitoring surveys in 2026 – 2027 and the purchase of a drone. We were subsequently invited to submit a full application; (3) We have created an excel sheet with potential funders for us to approach in Year 2 (and beyond) to secure funding to support our planned work moving forward.

Public Outreach – (1) Our Executive Director has been invited to Co-chair and present on our work at an ASCOBANS workshop '*Towards Meaningful Conservation for Risso's dolphins in the North Atlantic*' at the 37th annual conference of the European Cetacean Society Conference in Dundee, Scotland; (2) Our Executive Director has been invited to present on her recent report '*Quantification of the contemporary whaling and aquatic wild meat takes of all CMS Appendix I-listed cetaceans in all regions, and development of recommendations*' at the International Whaling Commissions (IWC) Scientific Committee meeting in Bled, Slovenia. Although note specific to MARA's current work, this is seen as a good opportunity to increase the visibility of MARA amongst other cetacean researchers and governments; and (3) Our Executive Director has been invited to present at various other fora (both local and national) during 2026, again serving to disseminate our work more widely and gain supporters/followers going forward.

As a result of this 'preparatory work' we feel well-placed to ramp up our presence – both in the field and online – and are looking forward to our second year of operation.

Financial review

No monies or financial donations were received during our first year of operation (17th March 2025 – 31st March 2026) and at year end, MARA had no funds in our dedicated bank account.

Future plans

Looking forward to 2026 – 2027 we will be growing our online presence, submitting funding applications, providing online and in-person talks and undertaking year-round monitoring surveys of Risso's dolphins within the waters off the Western Isles.

We also aim to incorporate the use of a drone into our research methodology and expand our work to include research on several other species of marine mammal, including bottlenose and common dolphins, as well as minke and fin whales. We intend to work with and support students to analyse some of the data that MARA currently holds.

Declaration

Signed on behalf of the charity trustees:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Dolman". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Sarah Dolman

Trustee

21st September 2026