



TRANSECTS

Transitions in Energy for Coastal Communities
over Time and Space

JUST TRANSITION AND COASTAL COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES OF ORKNEY, NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AND HUMBER ESTUARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Coastal and marine regions are central to the UK's shift from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon energy. These areas have long hosted extractive and energy-intensive industries, and now carry much of the burden of new marine energy transitions (METs), including offshore wind, tidal and wave energy, and carbon capture and storage. This rapid evidence assessment (REA) examines how just transition is understood in coastal contexts and identifies the main challenges and opportunities for fairer outcomes.

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

The REA synthesises findings from academic literature, historical sources, policy documents and grey literature, supported by expert guidance from a multidisciplinary steering group. It reviews 181 relevant sources to understand:

- How just transition is framed in coastal regions
- The impacts of past and current marine transitions
- Governance arrangements shaping decision-making
- Community priorities and vulnerabilities across three case study regions

COMMON THEMES ACROSS THE CASE STUDY REGIONS

Across Orkney, North East Scotland and the Humber Estuary, distinct maritime histories reveal recurring structural dynamics in how marine energy transitions are governed and experienced.

1. Centralised and reactive governance

METs have unfolded within governance systems that concentrate authority at national level. Leasing, licensing and strategic decisions have largely prioritised national economic and industrial objectives, while coastal authorities and communities manage many of the long-term social and economic consequences. Opportunities for meaningful local influence have been limited, and coordination is often short-term and project-based rather than anticipatory. This embedded centralisation and fragmentation constrains local agency and weakens procedural fairness across successive transitions.

2. Transitions are cumulative, not isolated

METs are layered onto earlier cycles of maritime expansion and decline – from kelp and herring to oil and gas, and now renewables. Each boom-bust cycle has left



economic and social legacies that shape present vulnerabilities. These cycles are not solely economic: repeated restructuring erodes community cohesion, weakens shared identity, and unsettles long-standing cultural ties to the sea. For places once defined by strong collective identities – such as fishing communities or the “the Oil Capital of Europe” – transition involves not only labour market adjustment but the loss or redefinition of shared identity and purpose.

3. Value flows outward while impacts remain local

Coastal regions have repeatedly hosted nationally significant marine industries, absorbing environmental, social and economic disruption. Yet ownership, revenue capture and strategic control have typically accrued at national scale or to corporate actors, while communities contend with both the benefits and the burdens of change. Across cases, mechanisms for retaining value locally have been limited, uneven or time-bound, resulting in persistent challenges in translating marine development into sustained local prosperity.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR MORE JUST TRANSITIONS

Addressing these shared challenges requires governance that is more place-responsive, coordinated and fair.

1. Move from reactive to anticipatory, place-based planning

Plan marine energy with explicit recognition of cumulative transition histories and local conditions. Anticipatory approaches can reduce boom–bust effects and avoid layering new pressures onto existing inequalities.

2. Strengthen cross-scale coordination and local agency

Establish more durable structures - including well-resourced, formalised bridging organisations - that connect local knowledge with national strategy. Stronger coordination across governance levels can reduce fragmentation and improve meaningful local influence.

3. Embed clearer and more consistent local value retention

Community benefit and value-sharing should be transparent, predictable and embedded within governance frameworks rather than negotiated case-by-case. Greater consistency would help ensure coastal regions retain a fairer share of long-term value.

4. Invest in long-term community capacity and leadership

Sustained support for local skills, leadership and organisational capacity is essential to enable equitable participation and allow communities to shape transition pathways aligned with local priorities.



Read the full report here



Read the
Orkney
summary here



Read the **North
East Scotland**
summary here



Read the
Humber
summary here

