



TRANSECTS

Transitions in Energy for Coastal Communities
over Time and Space

FROM OIL CAPITAL TO ENERGY HUB: JUST TRANSITIONS IN THE NORTH EAST OF SCOTLAND

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North East of Scotland has undergone shifts in its maritime and coastal economy, transitioning from long-standing fishing, whaling and shipping industries to the rapid rise of North Sea oil and gas in the 1970s, and now toward offshore renewables and related low-carbon developments. These transitions have reshaped governance, employment, land use and community identity across Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and nearby coastal towns. Each phase has brought significant investment and opportunity but also produced uneven benefits, socio-economic disruption, and pressures on housing, infrastructure and local services [1]. Contemporary just transition debates in the North East are therefore shaped by historical dependence on distant industries, recurrent volatility in the regional economy, and limited local influence over major energy decisions [2].

JUSTICE THEMES IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND'S TRANSITIONS

1. Governance and Decision-Making

Governance arrangements in the North East have historically prioritised national objectives over regional needs. During the oil boom, planning and regulatory powers remained largely centralised, with the UK Government adopting a market-led approach and local authorities constrained to a facilitative role. No dedicated regional mechanisms were established to retain oil wealth, resulting in significant economic leakage and limited tools to manage long-term volatility [3].

Since the early 2000s, after the oil and gas production peaked, the governance of the energy sector in the North East of Scotland has been shaped by the twin challenges of managing oil and gas decline and steering a transition toward renewables. While national and regional actors have introduced new frameworks and funding streams, governance responses have often been fragmented, reactive, and uneven in addressing social and economic impacts of the changing industry.

2. Economic and Workforce Transitions

The arrival of oil created substantial employment growth, reversing previous population decline and raising regional wages. However, these gains were unevenly distributed, with traditional industries such as fishing, food processing and manufacturing declining due to rising costs, labour displacement and competition for workers [2, 4]. Repeated oil price slumps exposed the region to economic instability, undermining workforce security and limiting long-term planning.

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The shift toward offshore wind and low-carbon industries offers new possibilities but faces similar challenges. Many roles remain short-term or externally contracted, and pathways for transitioning oil and gas workers into renewables are constrained by skills mismatches, precarious contracts and limited certainty over project pipelines. Local supply-chain capture remains inconsistent, with substantial capital expenditure flowing out of the region [5].

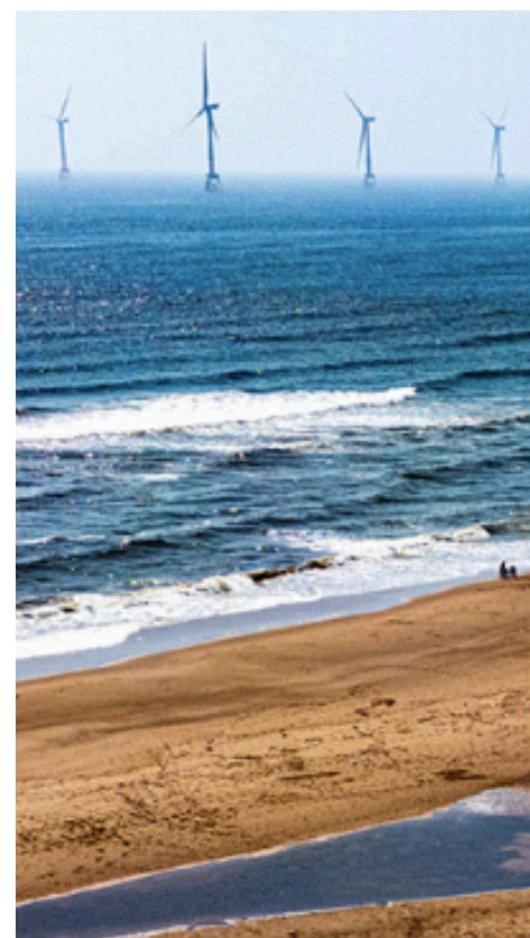
3. Community Identity and Social Cohesion

Community identity in the North East has long been shaped by its coastal heritage, fishing culture and strong social networks centred on harbours and maritime work. The oil boom transformed the region, bringing rapid urban expansion, demographic change and pressure on housing and public services. These shifts altered everyday life, local cohesion and perceptions of fairness in ways that continue to resonate [6].

Ongoing transition toward offshore renewables introduces further change to seascapes, port areas and working patterns. Concerns about marine access for fisheries, landscape impacts, job stability and future economic direction influence how communities understand and evaluate the region's transition. As in past phases, justice is interpreted not only through economic outcomes but through continuity of identity, sense of place and respect for coastal cultures.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A JUST TRANSITION IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

- **Strengthen place-based, proactive governance** by shifting from historically reactive, centralised decision-making to anticipatory regional planning that aligns national transition goals with the specific needs of North East coastal communities — ensuring local authorities and communities have meaningful influence over the pace, location, and social impacts of change.
- **Retain more economic value locally** by developing robust local-content frameworks, strengthening port infrastructure, and supporting supply-chain development so that offshore renewables, hydrogen, and decommissioning projects generate long-term, regionally anchored employment and investment rather than continuing patterns of outward value flow.
- **Support a fair workforce transition** through targeted reskilling, clearer training pathways, and stronger job security mechanisms for oil and gas workers—addressing existing skills mismatches and ensuring that emerging industries offer stable, high-quality jobs that keep young people and families in coastal communities.
- **Enhance community capacity, participation, and social licence** by resourcing community bodies, integrating social impact assessment into offshore planning, and establishing fair coexistence and compensation mechanisms (especially with fisheries), helping build trust and ensure that transition processes are shaped with coastal communities rather than imposed on them.



[Read the full report here](#)

References

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