

UNESCO Biospheres

The Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) is an intergovernmental scientific programme launched in 1971 by UNESCO which aims to establish a scientific basis for the improvement of relationships between people and their environments.

MAB's work engages fully with the international development agenda - specially with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Post 2015 Development Agenda - and addresses challenges linked to scientific, environmental, societal and development issues in diverse ecosystems; from mountain regions to marine, coastal and island areas; from tropical forests to drylands and urban areas. MAB combines the natural and social sciences, economics and education to improve human livelihoods and the equitable sharing of benefits, and to safeguard natural and managed ecosystems, thus promoting innovative approaches to economic development that are socially and culturally appropriate, and environmentally sustainable.

There are over 600 Biospheres worldwide and two in Scotland: Galloway and Southern Ayrshire (designated in 2012) and Wester Ross (designated in 2016). Both Biospheres extend to just over 5000km² in area and together are home to over 100k people (95k Galloway and Southern Ayrshire; 8k Wester Ross).

The Scottish approach to Biospheres is to build capacity to help support and develop remote communities. Biosphere staff act as facilitators to promote initiatives such as:

- Environmental events
- Green labelling
- Arts festivals
- Flood research
- International Dark Sky Places and National Plant Monitoring Scheme in Galloway and Southern Ayrshire
- Marine Tourism Scoping Study and Marine Litter Working Group in Wester Ross.

Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere currently receives funding of £50k p/a from local authorities and £10k p/a from Scottish Natural Heritage.

Both Biospheres participate in an EU-funded project "Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism" (known as SHAPE). This project aims to enable communities, businesses and organisations to develop innovative approaches to eco-tourism initiatives which preserve, manage and create economic value from local assets.