DCF ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026
SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

NESS SMITH, DORSET COAST FORUM CHAIR



Ness is an independent marine consultant with deep expertise in applying natural capital approaches to shape policy development, sustainable finance strategies, and marine management in the UK and internationally. She brings extensive experience in marine spatial planning and integrated marine management, with a particular focus on effective governance of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and delivering 'triple win' outcomes for biodiversity, climate resilience, and poverty alleviation. Ness also serves as a Research Fellow at the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute.

TONI POWELL, DORSET COAST FORUM COORDINATOR



Toni has worked in community, charity and fundraising sectors for 30 years, which alongside completing an MA in Environment & Development, has resulted in developing a range of skills and experiences. Toni joined as DCF Co-ordinator in 2021, and since then has raised necessary funds to support the team and their work and now delivered her 5th DCF Conference! Toni is a strong advocate of partnership working & engaging local communities in decision making, resulting in successful projects that benefit communities, environment & economies.

SESSION 1: ADAPTING TO CHANGE: PRACTICAL COASTAL RESILIENCE

HAMISH HALL, DIRECTOR, MOFFATT AND NICHOLL



Hamish is a Chartered Civil Engineer with 33 years' experience in flood and coastal management, harbour development, natural flood management and climate change adaptation. He has delivered a wide range of successful coastal projects for local authorities and private developers, including Dungeness foreshore management and the £30 million Weston-super-Mare sea defence scheme. Passionate about sustainable water management, Hamish is committed to creating resilient, effective solutions that maximise the benefits of living and working alongside rivers and the coast. Outside work, he enjoys watersports and leads a Sea Scout unit in Devon.

HANNAH JEFFERSON, HANNAH NEWTON & MARK BRETT, NATIONAL TRUST



Hannah Jefferson is the General Manager of West Dorset & Cranbourne Chase. She has a broad background of people management, customer service, visitor experience, operations & risk management, volunteer management, events and festivals experience with 14 years at the National Trust, and customer account & contracts management with Intel Corporation.



Hannah Newton is a Project Manager with experience delivering complex projects and programmes that benefit people, places, and the environment. She has led strategic change initiatives and built strong partnerships across the public and private sectors. Passionate about collaboration and sustainability, Hannah brings organisations and communities together to achieve shared goals. She holds a PhD in Atmospheric Chemistry, combining scientific expertise with practical project delivery and stakeholder engagement.



Mark Brett is a Project Manager with the National Trust, certified in project and risk management by the Project Management Institute. He has managed projects across horticulture, landscape, construction, coastal environments, and IT, with experience spanning the public and private sectors, including BP and The National Lottery. Mark formerly chaired the British Standards Institution committee that developed the Smart Parks guide (BS 9799) and served on the Landscape Institute's Advisory Council. He holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Landscape Architecture and a Master of Horticulture (MHort).

MATT SMITH, DORSET COAST FORUM PROJECT OFFICER



Matt joined the DCF team in March 2025. With an academic background in Geography (BSc) and Glaciology (MSc), he brings a wealth of expertise and passion to the team. Over 13 years in the field studies industry in Dorset and the Southwest, Matt honed his skills in engagement and communication. His efforts have fostered appreciation for the Dorset coast among diverse audiences and strengthened collaborations with various partners. Matt currently plays a key role in the Future Coast Charmouth project, helping to engage communities, stakeholders and partner organisations in conversations about long-term coastal change and adaptation. He has led the development of innovative engagement activities and events that support local people in understanding coastal risks, exploring future options and contributing to the creation of a shared vision for Charmouth's future coastline.

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SESSION 2: NATURE RECOVERY AND SUSTAINABLE SEAS

NEIL WATSON, PROJECT EXECUTIVE, ENVIRONMENT AGENCY



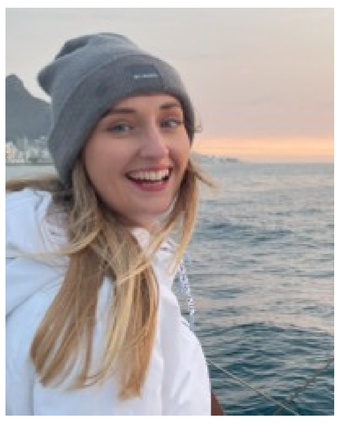
With more than 40 years' experience in flood and coastal erosion risk management, Neil has worked on the Dorset coast since 2000, helping deliver improvement schemes at numerous locations. He has championed partnership working and community engagement, with climate change adaptation and sea level rise central to his work. Neil enjoys the storms which help shape our coastline whilst recognising the effect they have on communities. More recently, Neil has focused on the Moors at Arne project, creating compensatory intertidal habitat within Poole Harbour.

MYA BAMBRICK, EVENTS AND EDUCATION OFFICER, BIRDS OF POOLE HARBOUR



Mya is an avid birder, conservationist, and presenter. Working for local conservation charity Birds of Poole Harbour, she leads their public events like safari cruises, developing numerous projects, such as the Young Birders Club, Conservation Careers talks, and the School Bird Boat project, and co-founding a new group, Women in Conservation Dorset. In her spare time she is a youth representative for the British Trust for Ornithology in Dorset and Sussex, organising events to inspire young people to discover nature and birding.

EMILY BULLED, COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT MANAGER, ASSOCIATION OF INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES (AIFCA)



Emily leads AIFCA's national communication and engagement programme, so that the value, profile and impact of IFCAs are better understood by government bodies, partners, stakeholders, and the public. Emily is also involved in a number of national programmes, such as supporting co-ordination of the Inshore and Small-Scale Fisheries Consortium, and contributing to the work of the Coastal Health programme, working to improve response to adverse coastal marine events. Emily's previous experience involves leading UK fisheries and conservation projects covering research, policy and engagement.

PIA BATEMAN, CEO & DR SARAH BIRCHENOUGH, DEPUTY CHIEF OFFICER, SOUTHERN INSHORE FISHERIES AND CONSERVATION AUTHORITY (IFCA)





Southern IFCA is one of 10 IFCAs in England, working to achieve a sustainable balance between environmental, social and economic priorities to ensure healthy seas, sustainable fisheries and a viable industry. Southern IFCA seek to champion prosperous inshore fisheries founded upon thriving marine environments, recognising the symbiotic relationship which exists when well managed inshore fisheries reap environmental and socioeconomic benefit, through partnership working and industry collaboration.

SESSION 3: CLIMATE ADAPTION WORKSHOP LEADS

KATIE DAWES, CLIMATE RESILIENCE OFFICER, DORSET COUNCIL



Katie leads the co-development of a countywide Climate Adaptation Strategy for Dorset. With a background in environmental communications and engagement, and more than a decade of experience in the renewable energy and low-carbon sectors, she is passionate about helping people, communities and organisations work together to tackle climate change and prepare for its impacts.

EWA IDZIKOWSKA, SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER, BCP COUNCIL

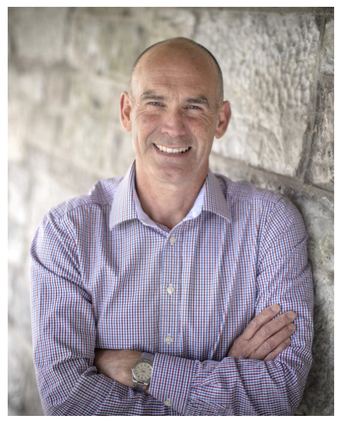


Ewa has a a passion for turning climate ambitions into practical action. She works across climate adaptation, community engagement, and green skills, helping to build partnerships that support a more resilient and sustainable future. Ewa is particularly interested in using data, collaboration, and clear communication to empower communities to respond to climate challenges.

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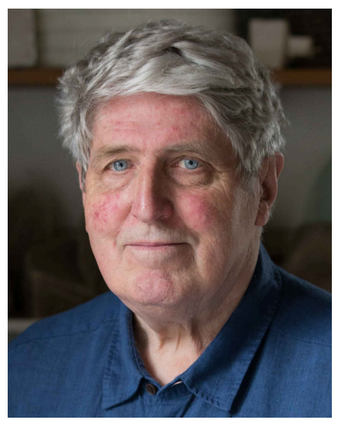
SESSION 4: COMMUNITIES, HERITAGE AND COASTAL IDENTITY

IAN SELBY, DIRECTOR, MORWIND LTD



Ian has been managing and facilitating natural resource, energy and infrastructure development (for example minerals, cables, pipelines, ports, coastal defence, renewable energy projects) around the UK and world for 4 decades. Ian combines an extensive network of relationships (government, regulators, academia and industry) with governance and development knowledge across the marine and coastal sectors. Ian has a PhD in marine geology and provides expert input on the sea bed, the physical environment, marine operations and reclamation.

JOHN MAINE, SCULPTOR



John Maine RA is a sculptor who has worked for many years with stone in various forms. His work is abstract but based closely on the natural composition of the material and is integrated with specific locations. After a collaborative period of work in Yamaguchi Prefecture, by the Sea of Japan in the 80s he has been involved in several coastal interventions, especially at Chiswell on the Isle of Portland, and in Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. He became a member of the team restoring the seafront at Weston super Mare with special attentions to details of the scheme.

RICHARD MCCONNELL, DIRECTOR, CONTEXT ONE HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY



Richard McConnell BA (Hons) MCIfA is Director of Context One Heritage and Archaeology, a Dorset-based archaeological consultancy he has run for nearly 30 years. He has led excavations and community engagement projects across Dorset and the wider South West, including major excavations in Weymouth in 2023 and 2026, which uncovered significant archaeological remains and drew strong public interest and engagement. Richard sits on the committee of CIfA's Community Archaeology Special Interest Group and is a trustee of the Dorset Archaeology and Heritage Forum. His talk looks at how the Weymouth excavations turned buried history into a shared community story

WILL BEHENNA, FOUNDER OF THE BEACH ACCESS PROJECT AND INCLUSIVE PADDLEBOARDING



As a full-time wheelchair user following a spinal injury nearly 40 years ago, Will is passionate about making beaches and blue space accessible for everyone. His vision to “enhance and improve beach and all blue space access to enable people with physical and mental health conditions and disabilities to play a meaningful and active role in beach life and blue space.” To fulfil this vision, he plans to make Dorset the inclusive blue space capital of the UK.

BEN HEATH, HEAD OF OPERATIONS, WEYMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL



Ben is part of the Senior Leadership Team at Weymouth Town Council delivering strategic planning and management across all operational areas to ensure continual service improvement. Ben’s professional background covers 13yrs in local authority, 12 years in further education and 3 years in the charity sector, this has enabled him to develop a strong set of leadership and delivery skills with a community focus looking to maximise social value outcomes wherever possible. He is recognised for his positive leadership style and proactive approach to delivering meaningful outcomes.

ALEX BROCKLESBY, PROJECT OFFICER & CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE LEAD, NATIONAL TRUST



Alex has spent the past 15 years working at the intersection of coasts, communities, health and nature. From coastal management and public health programmes to leading access and children/young people's work for the National Trust in Purbeck, Alex specialises in systems-wide change and asset-based approaches that build on the strengths already present within communities. Through Dorset's emerging inclusive blue space access programme, Alex co-leads work on community empowerment, partnership development and long-term systems change, exploring how lasting access to water can be created by working with communities rather than for them.