LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT REVIEW : SCOTLAND'S COAST.
Extracted from Scottish Natural Heritage Commissioned Report No. 103

In *An assessment of the sensitivity and capacity of the Scottish seascape in relation to windfarms* (SNH Commissioned Report 103, 2005) one of the preliminary study stages was a review of the landscape character assessments which provide comprehensive coverage of Scotland (SNH, 1996–1999). Eighteen of these Landscape Character Assessments (LCA) were reviewed – the ones covering our coast. The review formed the main resource for the descriptions of coastal and hinterland character. This summary (from Appendix C) follows below.

Overall, the LCAs define coastal types or areas, on the basis of the coastline’s characteristics. Generally, most LCAs only consider whether the coast is rocky or ‘hard’, forming cliffs, or whether it is soft, forming sandy beaches, often with dunes and other deposition features. This corresponds to the broad scale of working (1:50,000); more detailed characterisation was generally not feasible in these reports. There are notable exceptions to this:

- the **Caithness & Sutherland**, and **Skye & Lochalsh LCAs** : these assessments are more detailed. Some coastal character types are defined in their own right, based on significant coastal features, The coastal edges are strongly influenced by the hinterland, and to some extent marine views and aspect.

- the **Lochaber** and **Ross & Cromarty LCAs**: broadly follow the above pattern, but are less detailed;
- the **Fife LCA** also considers coastal (with some landscape ‘hinterland’ elements), intertidal and maritime components;
- the **Moray Firth LCA** to some extent more fully describes the relationship between land and sea, as well as the marine element – the so-called ‘seascape’ character
- the **Shetland LCA**, **Orkney LCA** and that for the **Western Isles** (island groups), where the majority of types defined about the coast, although little description is given of the character of the coast and relationship of land and sea.

There are differences in the level of detail and way in which the coast is described within these LCAs. Nevertheless they provide a useful starting point for any baseline study. Many similarities in the method of describing coastal character were found – all broadly following this broad typology of a ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ coast, but then considering different characteristics drawn from the hinterland character, and adjacent coastal landscape types or areas, as well as marine characteristics. The following is just a summary, please refer to the individual, relevant LCA as required.

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| Borders (SNH Review No. 112)  | 19. Coastal Farmland | Coldingham/Cockburnspath | ● Cliffs  
● Rolling farmland hinterland, cut by incised valleys |
|                                | 20. Coastal Pasture | Lamberton Moor | ● Cliffs  
● Varied knolly hinterland, coastal pasture  
● Exposed/rugged/open views |
|                                | 21 Coastal Moorland | Coldingham Moor | ● Expansive moorland plateau sloping steeply to cliffs  
● Dramatic open views/exposed/barren |
| Lothians (SNH Review No. 91)  | 23. Dunbar Plain | Dunbar to Port Seton | ● Undulating agricultural plain backed by Lammermuir Hills  
● Rounded headlands and cliffs to north enclose small sand and pebble beaches backed by grass-turfed dunes  
● Road and rail routes often highly visible as is cement works and Torness Power Station  
● Open views across sea |
|                                | 24. North Berwick Plain | Dunbar to Port Seton | ● Coastal plain extends well inland due to flat to gently undulating landform  
● North Berwick Law/Bass Rock important foci  
● Crags and low rocky outcrops form much of coastal edge and enclose sandy bays, backed by dunes – particularly extensive at Aberlady and Gullane  
● Arable land backs coast – historic golf courses and settlements. Major transport routes present but not generally intrusive  
● Views across the sea common in most of this type due to openness of plain |
|                                | 25. Musselburgh/ Prestonpans Fringe | | ● Backed by well-defined ridgeline and merges with urban area  
● Coastline of low rock platforms, small rocky headlands and sandy beaches  
● Semi-industrial character with Cockenzie Power Station, bings, pylons and transport routes visually dominant  
● Agricultural hinterland and continuous settlement along coast |
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| 26. Linlithgow/ Queensferry Farmlands | 11. Coastal Hills | 13 units around Fife coast | • Close association with coast but do not directly abut water – cliffs, Coastal Terrace or settlements generally form seaward edge  
• Predominantly open farmland with few trees  
• Extensive views across North Sea or Firths and to land beyond – inland views restricted by landform |
| **Fife (SNH Review No. 113)** | 12. Coastal Terrace (Raised Beaches) | 9 locations lying above the Coastal Flats and below Coastal Hills | • Flat or gently sloping landform  
• Heavily settled in parts eg St Andrews, Newburgh, Leuchars |
| 13. Coastal Cliffs | St Andrews, Kinkell Braes, Kittock’s Den, Buddo Ness and south of Kincraig | • Cliffs, cut by steep sided wooded dens  
• Absence of settlement although some ruins and historical features  
• Landward views generally confined |
| 14. Coastal Wooded | 3 locations on north coast at Braes Drybrae, near Newport on Tay, south of Balmerino and at Fisk. Also on the south coast at Castleback, Culross, from Torryburn to Limekilns and from Aberdour to Burntisland | • High steep wooded rounded braes  
• Narrow platforms of land at the foot of the braes, usually occupied by small linear traditional settlements  
• Views tend to be seawards where they are of a vast scale across the Firth of Forth |
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| Fife (continued)              | 15. Coastal Flats | 17 locations including 9 on the east coast of Fife, 2 on north coast and 6 on the south coast | • Flat, low-lying, open large scale exposed coastal landscapes at sea level – some created artificially  
• Intensively cultivated, arable fields or forestry  
• Variety of other land uses including industrial, golf courses and grasslands  
• Seaward and landward views across the flats themselves invariably extensive |
|                              | 16/17 Intertidal Mudflats and Other intertidal Shores | Located almost continuously around coast of Fife | • Natural landscape dominated by sea comprising intertidal mudflats, sands, shingle and rock between mean, high and low watermarks  
• Typically large scale and open, simple aspect  
• Views extensive in seaward direction |
|                              | 18/19 The North Sea and the Firths of Forth and Tay | Two major Firths to south and north. North Sea at St Andrews Bay from Tentsmuir Point to Fife Ness | • Large scale flat horizontal natural maritime landscape  
• Many prominent off-shore islands  
• Navigation and shipping artefacts on the water plus movement of these  
• Effects of lights reflecting on Firths at night  
• Views of famous bridges, extensive and distinctive views and clear sense of place  
• Clutter of industrial infrastructure particularly where made-ground juts out into Firth |
| Tayside (SNH Review No. 122) | 14 A. Coast with Sands | Broughty Ferry-Carnoustie South of Arbroath Lunan Bay Montrose | • Low sections of coast  
• Sand dunes inland/blown sand deposition  
• Golf courses/some settlement |
|                              | 14B. Coast with Cliffs | North of Carnoustie Arbroath – southern end of Lunan Bay Lunan Bay – Montrose | • Cliffs, arches, bays and rocky reefs  
• Headland castles/fishing villages  
• Productive farming up to cliff edge  
• Exposed |
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| South and Central (SNH Review No. 102) | 1. Formantine Links and Aberdeenshire Dunes | North of Aberdeen | • Extensive sands, beaches and dunes  
• Gorse/grass behind dunes, backed by flat farmland  
• Long expansive views along beaches and across sea  
• Some settlements |
| 2. Kincardine Cliffs | 30km coastline between Aberdeen and Inverbervie | • Steep cliffs, stacks and arches, raised beach platforms  
• Farmland extends to cliff edge  
• Fishing settlements  
• Expansive views/exposed |
| 3. Kincardine Links | South of Inverbervie | • Raised beaches backed by soft eroded and vegetated cliffs  
• Agricultural hinterland  
• Settlement – some new extensive building on cliff tops |
| Banff and Buchan (SNH Review No. 37) | Cliffs of the North and South-East Coasts | | • Cliffs, headlands, inlets occasional sandy bays and notable blow holes  
• Fishing villages at base of cliffs |
| | Dunes, Beaches from Fraserburgh to Peterhead | • Long sweeping beaches backed by dunes  
• Uninterrupted views  
• Loch of Strathbeg enclosed by dune system north of Rattray Head  
• Little settlement although St Fergus Gas Terminal present |
| Moray and Nairn (SNH Review No. 101) | Soft Coastal Shore | 3 areas | • Broad intertidal flats, dunes, marsh and spits and sandy beaches  
• Settlement including RAF Base |
| | Hard Coastal Shore | 2 areas | • Small coves, cliffs, pebble beaches  
• Farmland up to cliff edge  
• Views over Moray Firth to distant land  
• Settlements on headlands and in coves |
| | Coastal Forest | Hinterland to Soft Coastal Shore type | • Distinctive backdrop with forestry on dunes and gravel  
• Provides a feeling of remoteness and containment of views  
• Little settlement although sand & gravel extraction |
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<tr>
<td>Inner Moray Firth (SNH Review No. 90)</td>
<td>Open Firth</td>
<td>Outer Moray Firth</td>
<td>• Low-lying coastal ledge, sand/shingle beaches&lt;br&gt;• Panoramic views/lack of foci, opposite shoreline pale band</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enclosed Firth</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>Hard Coastal Shore</td>
<td>Portmahomack – Tarbet Ness South to the Sutors and Rosemarkie</td>
<td>• Raised beaches/cliffs&lt;br&gt;• Abrupt edge to farmland&lt;br&gt;• Greater area of sea visible as raised viewpoints&lt;br&gt;• Exposed</td>
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<td>Caithness and Sutherland (SNH Review No. 103)</td>
<td>High Cliffs and Sheltered Bays</td>
<td>North and north-east coast–extensive</td>
<td>• Long narrow exposed stretches of very high cliffs interrupted by bays at glen intersections&lt;br&gt;• Stacks, caves, pebbles and collapsed cliffs views directed along coast and out to sea focussing on islands, rigs or boats&lt;br&gt;• Backed by moorland or small farms/crofts. Road aligned parallel to coast&lt;br&gt;• Access and views to coast restricted due to cliffs</td>
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<td>Long Beaches, Dunes and Links</td>
<td>East Caithness/Sutherland</td>
<td>• Soft linear edge to sea&lt;br&gt;• Wide open space, extensive visibility&lt;br&gt;• Recreation/golf links/caravan parks&lt;br&gt;• May be backed by farmland or settlements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Kyles, Firths and Sea Lochs</td>
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<td>• Relatively well populated along shore&lt;br&gt;• Frequently offer views of mountainous interior and funnelled views to sea</td>
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<td>Coastal Shelf</td>
<td>East Coast</td>
<td>• Elevated platform, linear semi-enclosed by inland hills thus directing views out to sea&lt;br&gt;• Transport corridor/small settlements. Often farmed.</td>
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<td>Open Intensive Farmland</td>
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<td>• No specific coastline characteristics outlined in LCA for these types which abut the coast.</td>
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<td>Mixed Agriculture and settlement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dispersed Small Farms and Crofts</td>
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| Ross and Cromarty (SNH Review No. 119) | Enclosed Bay and Offshore Islands | Covers the entire coast of Wester Ross and islands | • Fingers of land, islands, sea and sky  
• Offshore islands site within or at edge of bays allowing some views to distant open sea  
• Indented coastline with sheltered rocky and sandy bays, exposed rocky promontories  
• Islands strong focal points within simple horizontal composition  
• Views from bays contained by headlands  
• Dead end roads to remote promontories although development with through roads aligning bays and cutting across headlands, settlement concentrated along coast and bays  
• Fish farms a feature within some sea lochs and bays |
| Fjord | | | • Narrow sea loch strongly contained wither side by steep vertical shore  
• Rugged Mountain massif often directly backs this type  
• Funneled views directed out to sea and often framed by mountains |
| Moorland | A variety of moorland types are identified in this LCA. Although they form the hinterland to the coast, the shoreline itself appears to fall with the 'Enclosed Bay and Offshore Islands' LCT | | |
| Cnocan | Occurring occasionally in Wester Ross (also in Western Isles) | | • Complex landform forming highly indented and undulating rocky knolls and dips  
• Intimate scale and often remote  
• Small islands create a fragmented coastline |
<p>| Rugged Mountain Massif | Occurs directly against the coast in parts of Wester Ross. In other areas, mountain massif further inland also influences views from coast | | |</p>
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| **Skye and Lochalsh** (SNH Review No. 71) | **Fjord**              | Only occurs in small areas such as Loch Hourn and Kylerhea               | ● Deep dark waters/narrow sided fjords contained by steep sided mountains  
● Land appears to sink into water due to steepness of slopes  
● Often inaccessible and remote  

| **Sounds and Narrows**       | Covers extensive areas of coast                                  | ● Linear spaces  
● Views dominated by sea and coastal edge  
● Settlement and activity concentrated along shoreline with crofting and roads  
● Tranquillity in narrow channels due to sheltered aspect  
● Tidal banding prominent on shore  
● Islands often present  
● Fish farming  

| **Off shore Islands**        | Found in sounds                                                 | ● Views of islands dominant feature; character of islands varies.  
● Visibility of island dependent on whether it is seen against land backdrop; and its location relative to mainland is important in terms of whether it is focal in views  

| **Moorland**                 | Various forms of moorland present                              | ● Stepped moorland on north west Skye forms cliffs; settlement and access routes utilise shelter of steps in moorland  
● Smooth moorland has a weakly defined coastal edge  
● Rocky Moorland forms indented coastal edge often with scattering of off shore islands  

| **Harbour Settlement**       | Associated with Sounds and Narrows LCT  
NB Linear Crofting LCT also associated with coast but no specific description given and only small areas defined | ● Shelter offered by Sounds and narrows attract harbour development  

| **Rugged Massif/ Sweeping Peaks** | These appear to abut coast; description focuses on characteristics of type only | (need to take account of presence of these types as hinterland to coast)  

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| **Lochaber**<br>(SNH Review No. 97) | Rugged Coastal Hills | ● Low rounded hills with relatively steep sides and rugged ice scoured rocky surface  
● Generally wild and inaccessible  
● Views of sea and island; hills descend either directly to the coast of via more gentle ‘Rocky Moorland’ | |
| Rocky Coastland | ● Low rounded rocky peninsulas heather covered/grazed  
● Incised coastal edge with off-shore rocky outcrops  
● Occasional white sandy beaches often backed by crofts or machair  
● Views of characteristic profiles of Small Isles | |
| Stepped Basalt/Crofted Basalt Coast | ● In places, dark basalt cliffs with stepped profile  
● Views across sounds and narrows emphasising dramatic cliff profiles of eroded stacks and arches  
● Small patchwork of fertile croft farmland backed by exposed basalt hills  
● Presence of sea and interceding beaches is a key component of views lending an exposed feel to the landscape | |
| **Argyll and the Firth of Clyde**<br>(SNH Review No. 78) | Coastal Plain | NB This LCA defines landscape types directly abutting the sea rather than type solely categorised on the basis of characteristics shoreline | ● Flat linear coastal plain  
● Pasture, transition to marsh, mudflats and beach |
| Rocky Mosaic | ● Rocky indented coast with off shore islands and small sandy bays  
● Raised beaches, cliffs and distinctive rounded knolls | |
<p>| Low Coastal Hills | ● Narrow sandy beaches at coast | |</p>
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| Argyll and the Firth of Clyde  | Coastal Parallel Ridges                           |                                                                          | ● Narrow rocky ridges which break down to form chain of rocky islands at coast  
● Horseshoe shaped narrow sandy bays and extensive mudflats                                                                 |
| (continued)                   | Rocky Moorland/ Boulder Moors                     |                                                                          | ● Steep cliffs  
● Rocky Bays with off-shore islands  
● Wild rugged landscape                                                                 |
|                                | Slate Islands                                     |                                                                          | ● Low coastal hills, distinctive dark ledges of slate jutting into the sea  
● Wedge shaped islands  
● Deeply indented coastline with peninsulas and chains of rocky off shore islands                                                                 |
|                                | Sand Dunes and Machair                           |                                                                          | ● Open windswept sand dunes in broad coastal bays  
● Golf courses/hotels                                                                                                           |
| Ayrshire (SNH Review No. 111) | Raised Beach Coast                               | Forms much of Ayrshire coastline and western coast of Arran              | ● Level shelf backed by steep, sometimes craggy escarpment  
● Mostly farmed, woodland on escarpment  
● Settlements, transport routes  
● Views of Arran and Ailsa Craig distinctive                                                                                      |
|                                | Lowland Coast                                     |                                                                          | ● Lowland wind blown sand, rounded bays with sandy beaches backed by dunes  
● Settled and heavily developed in areas                                                                                              |
<p>|                                | Coastal Fringe with Agriculture                   | Found on Great and Little Cumbrae and on Arran                          | ● Agricultural fringe backed by mountains and hills                                                                                                   |
|                                | Coastal Headlands                                 | Found on Arran – too detailed to be significant in capacity study        | N/A                                                                                                                                               |
|                                | Coastal Lowland Moor                              | Found on Arran – too detailed to be significant in capacity study        | N/A                                                                                                                                               |</p>
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| Dumfries and Galloway          | Coastal Flats                              | Found adjacent to river mouths in 3 areas – various sub-types | • Exposed, long views across coastal flats as they merge into waters of Solway  
• Coastal Plain (sub-type) comprises gently undulating pasture/major communications/ sparse settlement  
• Estuarine flats, sand and mud, salt marsh occasional dunes, hinterland of coastal moss and forestry |
|                               | Peninsula                                  | In western half of D+G                    | • Intimate sheltered bays with stony beaches or narrow shelf used as transport corridor, frequently inaccessible coastline  
• Mull of Galloway – steep cliffs up to 180m  
• Farmed, pasture or gorse moorland forms hinterland  
• Old forts and castles on rocky western coast  
• Coast and its influences not generally apparent beyond 1km on mainland |
|                               | Coastal Granite Uplands                    | Present in 3 locations                    | • Rugged granite hills rising steeply form coast to 100m altitude  
• Improved pasture/rough grazing, gorse and rocky outcrops, farms  
• Forested hill slopes, policy parkland  
• Exposed |
| Shetland Isles                 | Farmed and Settled Lowlands and Coast      | Covers much of coastline                  | • Scattered crofts, grazing land, gently sloping to flat landform  
• Open exposed landscapes  
• Views of outlying islands and fragmented coastline  
• NB many sub-types of this |
|                               | Coastal Edge                               |                                          | • Dramatic cliffs, stacks, arches and some sandy beaches  
• Backed by moorland/rough grazing |
<p>|                               | Farmed and Settled Voes and Sounds         |                                          |                                                                                                                       |</p>
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| Orkney (SNH Review No. 100)   | Cliff landscapes       | This is a particularly complex LCA with a number of LCTs lying on the coast – some of these are small and only significant types are therefore outlined in this review | • Predominantly found on Atlantic west coasts  
• Eroding coastal features, cliffs, stacks and caves with cliffs up to 200m  
• Rough grassland/moor to cliff edge |
|                               | Coastal Sand           |                                                                          | • Generally flat with sand deposition landforms and features  
• Wide sandy bays and dunes, backed by grassland  
• Archaeologically sensitive landscapes |
|                               | Holms and other Islands|                                                                          | • Holms: small rocky uninhabited islands  
‘Whaleback’ and ‘Ridgeback’ islands also identified |
|                               | Low island Pastures    |                                                                          | • Flat pastures – machair and links, allowing extensive views over sea  
• Exposed and open |
| Western Isles (SNH Review No. 92) | Knock and Lochan   | Mainly found on the east coast of Harris/Uists bays and off shore skerries | • Small knocks and depressions, fragmenting into coast, small rocky promontories  
• Small scale intimate landscape with filtered views to open sea |
|                               | Rocky Moor             | Found on western coasts in general                                       | • Views across sounds dotted with small islands to larger islands beyond and out to sea |
|                               | Mountain Massif        |                                                                          | • Deeply indented coast dominated by rocky headlands, sea cliffs and occasional caves |
|                               | Crofting               |                                                                          | • Parallel to coast, backing either sandy bays or rocky coasts (in case of sub types 2 or 3) |
|                               | Machair                | Found on western coasts                                                 | • Sweeping curves of coastal beaches, low headlands backed by dune systems protecting expansive machair grasslands  
• Views to open sea predominate, more varied in Harris where islands and mountain landscapes add diversity |