

Lyndsey Dodds

Celtic Seas Partnership Project Manager, WWF

NERC PhD and POST Fellowship launch influential career in sustainable use of the seas

Lyndsey works for WWF as Project Manager for the Celtic Seas Partnership (a €4 million project funded under the European Commission LIFE+ scheme) which aims to find a way to manage marine activities in the Celtic Sea more sustainably. Her NERC-funded PhD and POST Fellowship combined to give her an understanding of both the science of the oceans and the workings of government, which has enabled her to make a major impact on marine policy and ensure that sustainable use of our seas is written into law. “I think what made a real difference to me getting the WWF job was having a mixture of scientific background and policy experience,” she says.



Lyndsey studied for a NERC-funded PhD at the Scottish Association for Marine Science (SAMS) near Oban, between 2003 and 2007. She focused on deep sea corals that live around 1000m below sea level, and how they deal with changes in their environment. This is important because our oceans are becoming more acidic as they absorb increasing amounts of the carbon dioxide that is emitted when we burn fossil fuels, and this will have a big impact on these corals.

The highlight of her project was travelling out to the sea around Mingulay in the Outer Hebrides to collect coral samples, but she also enjoyed working on a new and exciting area of research. “Pretty much everything I did, it was the first time it had been done” she says.

Lyndsey’s desire to make a difference led her to apply for a NERC-funded POST Fellowship. This allowed her to spend five months working at the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, writing a briefing for ministers on deep sea industries. “The reason I was interested in the fellowship was that, although I had enjoyed my PhD, I wasn’t sure I wanted to continue in research, so the fellowship was a way of trying out a different side of things,” she explains. “I wanted to work on things that are connected to real life and make a difference to people.”

Lyndsey enjoyed the experience of being in parliament and potentially influencing MPs. “It was brilliant!” she says. “The most enjoyable thing was just being there, right in Westminster, and feeling like you were at the centre of power. But also knowing that you’re potentially influencing MPs and Lords by presenting the information you think they really need to know about.”

Because she enjoyed her POST Fellowship, Lyndsey decided to look for a policy-based job, and secured a position as Marine Policy Officer at WWF in 2007. After two years in this post, she moved to the PISCES (Partnerships Involving Stakeholders in the Celtic Sea Ecosystem) project, first as a Policy Officer and later as Project Manager. This project finished at the end of 2012 and has been succeeded by the Celtic Seas Partnership project, which Lyndsey is managing.

Whilst working as a Marine Policy Officer, Lyndsey had major impacts on the Marine Bill, which became the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. She lobbied for the strongest possible obligations to designate marine protected areas, and pushed for the marine planning system that was being introduced to apply to all UK waters, increasing the likelihood of sustainable development.

The PISCES project, which Lyndsey recently managed, also had significant effects on the marine environment and the economy, by involving sea users (including industries such as fishing, tourism and marine renewables) in European marine policy. The project increased sea users' awareness and understanding of the European Marine Strategy Framework Directive, making them more likely to comply with it. This has environmental benefits for marine ecosystems and long-term cost savings for governments in implementing these laws.

Lyndsey's PhD gave her a good grounding in marine science and skills in writing, both of which are essential in her job. She also developed the confidence to be self-sufficient and take charge of her own work. "These skills are especially useful now that I'm a project manager," she says, "Because that's essentially what you are when you're a PhD student: you're managing your own project." Her POST Fellowship added to this an insight into the workings of parliament and how to influence government legislation.

The connections Lyndsey made during her PhD and POST Fellowship have proved invaluable. She drew on parliamentary contacts when working on the Marine Bill, and still works with researchers at SAMS. "The marine world is quite small," she says.