

Response from Iona Community council to the Proposal to create a Coastal and Marine National Park in the Argyll and the Islands area.

The community council's response to the proposal is based on views gathered at several public meetings on the island where the Marine National Park proposal was an agenda item for discussion. In addition members of the council consulted with local residents and other local bodies and visited one of the 'road shows' held on the Isle of Mull. It should be stated however that our ability to respond has been hampered by a lack of clarity or available information about exactly what the proposal would actually mean in real terms for the area on which it was applied. The lack of clear information was unfortunate and contributed to a general feeling of misgiving amongst local residents which might not otherwise have been present. This has in many cases probably tainted their natural response.

General discussion at the meetings indicated that the people who live in this area have a very high regard for their local environment in general and recognise its importance not just to them but to many people who live out with the area. It was also broadly acknowledged that a responsible custodianship of the area was very important but that a marine national park would not necessarily be the best method of ensuring this. It was felt by some that existing laws, designations or initiatives could be strengthened without creating something additional and new. In summary the verdict was one of 'not proven' rather than outright dismissal or acceptance.

The following are the key points raised as fears held by local residents that the proposed park might mean for their area that :-

- the proposal would lead to an increase in visitor numbers which the existing infrastructure would be overwhelmed by.
- the economic livelihood of inshore creel fishermen (and therefore all the support industries) would be adversely affected which would lead to loss of a major part of the local economy with serious implications.
- the proposal might lead to restriction of local 'wildlife tourism' operators whose businesses would be adversely affected.
- the proposal might lead to restrictions being applied to fish farms in the area which employ local residents.
- the proposal would add either a further tier of planning regulations to be negotiated for any local developments or building planning applications, or a replacement of the existing planning authority with a Park run body which would operate an even more restrictive regime than the already heavily designated area labours under.
- the proposal would lead to the Park authority having a right of veto over planning applications or other matters.

There was also a feeling that land use and agricultural decisions would be affected as any coastal fringe would in the case of Iona likely cover the entire island due to the overall small size of the island.

It was felt that if the Marine National Park was set up in the Argyll and Islands area that it should play a supportive, informative, enabling and advisory role rather than a governing and enforcing one.

It was also felt that considerable additional resources really required to be spent on the area, particularly on infrastructure but that much of National Parks additional resources might only end up going on administration.

It is the councils view that a meaningful 'consultation' can only be carried out when there is a concrete proposal indicating the location of the park and the responsibility and powers of the 'Park body', to respond to. When and if this comes to pass it is of vital importance that a just and adequate period is allowed for a measured response.

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