

McGuire Z (Zoe)

From: nick.riddiford@lineone.net
Sent: 01 December 2006 12:02
To: Milne NJ (Nikki)
Cc: fcmitchell@btinternet.com; ianbest@btinternet.com
Subject: A National Coastal & Marine Park for Scotland



SNH advice to management Fair ...*****

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Dear Nikki,

A National Coastal & Marine Park for Scotland

I believe I am very close to the deadline for submitting comments on the above issue.

As time is short, I have chosen to submit some comments already made to Andrew Bachell, SNH because they address issues of vital importance to the Fair Isle community whilst at the same time reflecting a number of the issues raised in the consultation process.

I draw your attention in particular to Appendix 1 of the attached file, which forms the basis of my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Riddiford
Chairman, Fair Isle Committee and Community Association Coordinator, Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative

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Andrew Bachell
Director of Strategy & Operations (East)
SNH
1st October 2006

Nick Riddiford
Coordinator, FIMETI
Schoolton
Fair Isle ZE2 9JU

Dear Dr Bachell,

Long-list of possible areas for CMNPs: SNH assessment for Fair Isle

I was recently sent a copy of the publication *SNH advice on coastal and marine National Parks: Advice to Scottish Ministers*, and a covering letter from yourself. I have studied the publication thoroughly.

As I read through, I was persuaded that the document was well argued and was also cognisant of the Fair Isle situation. I read with satisfaction comments such as:

- Fair Isle being assessed at stage 3 despite its small size “because of the long-standing support for a Park by the local community” (Ch 4, para 12);
-though not emerging as a strong candidate, “this does not mean that the conservation management of Fair Isle and its inshore waters could not be improved, or is not deserving of greater effort..” (Ch 4, para 25); and
- “Fair Isle... [and other] such places could merit further consideration as a new form of locally led management initiative” (Ch 4, para 26).

I was then both dismayed and shocked to arrive at *Table 5 – Stage 3 scorings of each of the long-list of possible areas* to find that Fair Isle had been rated as *Low* (the lowest category) for seven of the eight issues assessed, and only *Medium* for the eighth.

The reason that the community has been pressing, as a single united voice, for 18 years is precisely because we all fear the enormous damage that a failing marine environment would do to the long-term well-being of the community. We are not environmentalists (other than any other responsible citizen of this country). We are doing it simply because we recognise that the health of the environment and of our community are intrinsically linked and we must, more than most, safeguard all our resources for our community to thrive.

Table 5 of the “advice to ministers” is a gross misrepresentation and does our community an injustice and a disservice. By grossly underestimating our situation and concerns, it severely damages all this community’s efforts – particularly as readers of the document are more likely to refer to a summary chart than to the more reasonable, and thus contradictory, text that goes before. I fear that once again the issue will tumble down the priority list and we must continue to put up with platitudes playing lip service to “the great job this small community is doing” whilst seeing no change in the current unacceptable *status quo*.

Appended to this letter, you will find a re-worked Table 5 for Fair Isle in which I re-evaluate the chart from a Fair Isle perspective. I hope it will help to offset some of the damage that the current misrepresentation will do.

I live in a vibrant, far-sighted, caring community which has identified the glaring, urgent need for sustainable management of our marine resource, and the involvement of our community in managing it. I cannot, therefore, let Table 5 go unchallenged. To re-dress the balance as much as I can, I shall be circulating copies of this letter and its appendix as widely as possible. I would be very happy for you or any others reading it to do the same.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 1 Re-evaluation of Table 5, a Fair Isle viewpoint

Based on 18 years of working with the Fair Isle community on this hugely important part of our environmental and cultural heritage, I offer a re-evaluation from the island perspective, as follows:

| Issue | SNH Stage 3 scoring | Fair Isle re-evaluation |
|---|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Is the natural and cultural heritage under threat? | LOW | HIGH |
| 2) What is the scale/significance of recreational visitor pressures? | LOW | LOW |
| 3) What is the scale/significance of development and land-sea use pressures? | LOW | HIGH (sea use pressures) |
| 4) What is the potential to enhance the natural and cultural heritage? | LOW | HIGH |
| 5) What is the potential to enhance enjoyment & recreation? | LOW | MEDIUM |
| 6) How significant are the conflicts and interactions between development and land-sea uses? | LOW | HIGH |
| 7) To what extent would the more integrated approach of a Park provide for better management? | LOW | POTENTIALLY HIGH |
| 8) How dependent is the economy on the use of the natural resources and heritage of the area? | MEDIUM | HIGH |

You will see that there is a large discrepancy between the two evaluations. One reason for this is, despite **repeated requests from the isle and repeated promises from the SNH evaluator, the isle received no visit** or other opportunity for detailed face to face consultation at the community level (other than an SNH Shetland officers' visit, and they stressed that we had to make all the running!).

In support of the re-evaluation, I have drawn up a point by point commentary (see below). Please note that this is only a brief summary of the most important issues. The many other Fair Isle maritime qualities that contribute to the natural and cultural environment of Scotland, and the environmental, social and economic values which are integral to the long-term viability of this island, are set out in the document *Safeguarding Our Heritage – the Fair Isle marine resource: a community proposal for its sustainable management* (Riddiford, 1998. Fair Isle Community Association, Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust, & The National Trust for Scotland, Fair Isle & Inverness). This document not only describes Fair Isle's maritime values but puts forward a blueprint proposal for sustainable management. It has been widely distributed, including to yourself. The matters pertaining in 1998 still pertain now. I will happily make more copies of this document available to anyone who requests it (write to nick.riddiford@lineone.net).

Reasoning behind the Fair Isle re-evaluation

1) Is the natural and cultural heritage under threat? *SNH assessment LOW; Fair Isle re-assessment HIGH*

Fair Isle has internationally important seabird populations, yet the Special Protection Area for Birds intended to maintain and enhance their populations is restricted to the cliffs and moorland where they breed. Virtually all the seabird populations have suffered a long succession of poor to disastrous breeding seasons and population levels are beginning to fall. The sea, where the birds feed and from which they provision their chicks, is not protected. By excluding this essential habitat for local breeders, the SPA is not achieving its conservation objectives, and thus is failing in its obligations as laid down in the European Directive.

Fair Isle is a maritime community with a long and well researched cultural history, skilfully interpreted at the island's George Waterston Memorial Centre & Museum. It has a history of important coastal and submarine archaeological sites. The important terrestrial ones are designated and thus protected, but as with the birds, there is no provision for protection of offshore sites.

Fair Isle's natural history interest is not restricted to birds. Riddiford (1998) lists a whole series of other notable wildlife features of national and international significance.

The people of Fair Isle are part of the natural and cultural heritage, and feel under threat at a longer time scale, if nothing is done to address the issue of sustainable resource management for the marine resource.

Fair Isle has held the Diploma of the Council of Europe since 1985. In consecutive renewals, the Council of Europe has reiterated the natural and cultural importance of Fair Isle and the urgent need to safeguard its marine environment through a series of measures. The Council of Ministers, in signing the renewal documents, clearly recognises that Fair Isle's maritime natural and cultural heritage is under threat. The Fair Isle community has the right to ask why Scotland/UK, as an integral member of the Council of Europe has not acted upon this.

- 2) What is the scale/significance of recreational visitor pressures? *SNH assessment LOW; Fair Isle re-assessment LOW*

A high proportion of visits to the isle or by folk using its waters would be described as recreational. However, it is the experience of the island that these folk are generally both respectful to and appreciative of our high quality cultural and natural environment. Hence I have no argument with the SNH assessment of *low*.

- 3) What is the scale/significance of development and land-sea use pressures?

Development is not currently an issue for the isle, but "sea use" is...and has been for more than a century. The booklet *Fishing Traditions of Fair Isle* (Perring, 2003. Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative, Fair Isle) owes its existence to a series of diaries kept by Fair Islanders which gives clear evidence of the unsustainable plundering of fish stocks from Fair Isle waters throughout the 20th century. It is a tale of stock after stock disappearing and boats shifting their attention to the next most commercially valuable stock thereafter. Advances in technology meant that bigger, faster commercial boats could steam to Fair Isle waters and return their catch fresh to market. Stocks which previously had sustained a subsistence fishing community on the isle were swept away (illegally!); and without the intervention of George Waterston and The National Trust for Scotland, and the determination of the community to "re-invent" itself economically, Fair Isle could have gone the way of St Kilda. The final straw for the island's fish stocks came with the repeal of the Herring Fisheries (Scotland) act in 1984 which for the previous 101 years had made trawling in inshore waters illegal. They came, they took and it is now a rare sight to see trawlers around the isle. The isle still has large fish stocks, massive shoals of commercial fish. Unfortunately, these are predominantly juveniles and the islanders get angry as they see masses of pre-commercial sized fish hoovered up and then returned as by-catch...with the huge wasteful mortality that entails.

- 4) What is the potential to enhance the natural and cultural heritage?

There is immense potential for enhancing both. Fair Isle Bird Observatory is a field station of world-wide fame and acclaim. It has both field staff and a ranger. It not only draws together vital information on the natural heritage (including being the most important station, in range of species and suites of data, of the UK government's Seabird Monitoring Scheme, which acts as a litmus for the health of our seas), but it also integrates visitors to the island and residents alike into its activities.

The isle community also offers high quality knowledge on a range of natural and cultural subjects; and indeed, this has been tapped through the organisation, by FIBO, of "island insights" weeks and other communal events open to all - in which islanders are engaged to lead or perform.

There is also a high level of artisanal skills and products on the isle, many of them reflecting Fair Isle's maritime traditions.

5) What is the potential to enhance enjoyment & recreation?

Apart from the activities described in point 4 above, one can cite music, art and literature. The isle has always had a strong tradition in those areas, and is currently enjoying a real boom with music CDs, poetry books, musical events and collaborations with other artists, musicians and writers happening on a very frequent basis.

There is also a lot of potential for a range of outdoor activities.

I do however acknowledge that size and characteristics inevitably place limitations on maritime recreational possibilities, so I have selected an evaluation of *Medium*.

6) How significant are the conflicts and interactions between development and land-sea uses?

The gradual erosion of fish stocks has been mentioned in point 3 above. The community has attempted to address this through engagement with all stakeholders and users of the local marine resource. This was done through the setting up of the Fair Isle Marine Partnership. FIMP was established specifically to promote discussion and seek agreement on management measures for Fair Isle waters. Meetings took place on a six-monthly basis from the late 1990s at the SNH office in Lerwick. The meetings were chaired by Anthony Bryant (NTS). Representatives attended from SNH (Lerwick), Shetland Islands Council, The Shetland Fishermen's Association, North Atlantic Fisheries College, FIBOT and the RSPB. Fiona Mitchell (then chair of the Fair Isle Community Association) and myself (representing FIMETI) attended from the isle. We came each time with proposals which initially were greeted with enthusiasm and apparent general support. However, each meeting appeared to follow the same pattern: two hours of positive discussion, but culminating with the SFA representative stating that the proposal was interesting but he could not see his members signing up to it.

As our visits to Shetland were costing myself and Fiona both time and money we saw no point in continuing such a barren process and there has not been a FIMP meeting for over 3 years. The message that we had to put back to the isle was that, despite our best endeavours, the community continued to have no say whatsoever in the management of its waters.

Another similar conflict has occurred over lobster fishing. In 2000-01 FIMETI undertook a study to ascertain a sustainable level of lobster fishing for the isle, and the sole island lobster fisherman keeps rigidly to the protocol derived from that study. Lobster fishing in Shetland is governed by the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation which issues licences to those who can demonstrate a track record of shell-fishing in Shetland Waters. The isle fisherman holds this licence, but so too does an Orkney boat which in a single visit exhausts the stock, leaving it a long time to recover. To fish unsustainably is not, in the eyes of the islanders, acceptable "management"!

We are now engaged in the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative as part of the SSMEI Shetland pilot study working-group. Conflict resolution is one of the themes of the Shetland study. Time has moved on and we may yet have the opportunity to make some progress in conflict resolution. However, the fact remains that this is still only a discussion topic and we need some sort of designation supported by a sustainable management system if we are to make any real progress in this area.

7) To what extent would the more integrated approach of a Park provide for better management?

I have entered *Potentially High* for this point because there is no doubt that a CMNP would *have the potential* to bring with it a sustainable management programme which would safeguard the very resources the community recognises as in urgent need of protection. However, a designation unaccompanied by the requisite management measures and the means to apply and enforce them would leave us (and our marine environment) no better off; not least because further pleas for sustainable management might risk being countered by "you have got your CMNP, why are you still complaining"!

8) How dependent is the economy on the use of the natural resources and heritage of the area?

Our community was declining alarmingly until George Waterston made the wise choice, in 1948, to establish a bird observatory on the isle. The community's well-being was further secured in 1954 when The National Trust for Scotland took responsibility for the isle, in recognition of its cultural as well as its natural values. The bird observatory continues to play a vital role in the economic as well as the social life of the isle. Without it, the island shop and transport links to the isle would be at serious risk; and visitors to the isle fuel the island economy (and social life) in many other ways too – of which purchase of the famous knitwear and other Fair Isle artisanal products are just one immediately recognisable example.

The comments which support my re-evaluation are relatively extensive, but could be much longer. They do, however, add detail to my assertions and ask serious questions about the value of Table 5 as it currently stands in the document. I hope that the table does not do us irreparable damage and that we will at long last see our aspirations and needs given the urgent priority they deserve.

Nick Riddiford
Chairman, Fair Isle Committee & Community Association
Coordinator, Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative

Footnote

Before finalising this letter I asked Fiona Mitchell, because of her active role in FIMETI, to comment on my letter. Her comments are succinct and relevant so, rather than incorporate them in my text, I choose to present them here in Fiona's own words (sent by email).

“Nick, I think you have covered most of the points. It should be stressed that the isle deserves the courtesy of a response. We could also say that we had thought SNH had an obligation to engage with communities... isn't consultation paramount to the process. We need this clarified. How can SNH legitimately present its findings if it has not researched or even consulted with the community? If I were the head of SNH I'd want to know why there is such conflicting evidence & question what staff have been doing or not doing in terms of presenting the case. Who is accountable?
Fiona (Mitchell)

PS Does SNH have a complaints procedure?

