



# Highlands & Islands ENTERPRISE

Sandy Cumming CBE Chief Executive  
direct telephone 01463 244204  
direct fax 01463 244351  
e-mail [sandy.cumming@hient.co.uk](mailto:sandy.cumming@hient.co.uk)

HIE 2004/04955

6 December 2006

Nikki Milne  
The Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs  
Department  
Marine Management Division  
Area GH93  
Victoria Quay  
EDINBURGH  
EH6 6QQ

Dear Nikki,

## COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Thank you for the opportunity for Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to comment on the Scottish Executive's intentions to deliver a coastal and marine National Park for Scotland by late 2008. As the strategic development agency for the Highlands and Islands we naturally have considerable interest in this proposal and in its location, role and governance. We wish to ensure that any such proposal will sustain our outstanding cultural and natural heritage assets, but also ensure long term socio-economic benefits for some of our most fragile rural communities.

### HIE Strategic Context

HIE has clearly stated its intentions to make the Highlands and Islands a smart, successful region that will rival any rural region in the world. Our strategy for delivering on this has been laid out within Smart Successful Highland and Islands launched in June 2005.

Within this we identify the key work of the network in:

- Strengthening Communities
- Business Growth and Research
- Developing Skills and
- Global Connections

To focus our work we have identified a range of key contributors that will deliver on our ambitious vision. Population and Place are crucial and these will be delivered by the Network through investment, influence, innovation and internationalism. One of our key priorities is strengthening the communities of the area and within this we have identified 3 objectives which will guide us in our response to this proposal. These are: creating community assets; building



capacity and leadership and enhancing natural and cultural heritage. All of these objectives and priorities are central to the concept of a coastal and marine National Park.

### **General Principles**

HIE considers that a National Park can bring benefits to the preferred area. We believe, however, that these have not yet been demonstrated to communities and interests in the area. The process of delivering a Park has to promote these benefits and through this build support. This will take time and resources that cannot be accommodated within the proposed timescale. Experience, from the establishment of the two existing Parks in Scotland, shows that this work is essential for building consensus and capacity within the communities and businesses involved. This is even more vital within the proposed area where the individual communities have less connectivity and more complexity than perhaps any other part of Scotland that could be considered for such a proposal. Getting this wrong would not only fail to deliver a coastal and marine National Park but could risk the establishment of any future Parks in Scotland for a generation.

HIE wishes to emphasise three general principles:

- ◆ HIE supports the principle of a coastal and marine National Park for Scotland founded on the potential of the Park, through its fourth aim, to 'promote the sustainable social and economic development of the area's communities'
- ◆ We see such a Park as an accolade recognising outstanding heritage qualities, and that this can bring tourism and other benefits to coastal communities
- ◆ Such a Park should encourage sustainable economic activity, especially in relation to fisheries, aquaculture and renewable energy.

### **Fundamental Conditions for our Support**

HIE is generally supportive of the principle of a Coastal and Marine National Park, but this support is conditional on the following:

1. The area favoured by the Executive includes many sensitive island communities. The Park should deliver HIE's aspirations for these island communities and businesses, as recently stated through the Convention of the Highlands and Islands. These are:
  - a growing population, with a higher proportion of economically-active people
  - increased job opportunities in a wider range of activities
  - further improvements in transport, notably access to/from mainland centres
  - easier availability of housing land and strong housing markets
  - enhancement of the islands' environmental and cultural contribution to Scottish life
  - overall, a climate of confidence in the future.

Without recognition of these aspirations then HIE consider the establishment of a Park would increase unacceptably the disadvantages currently experienced by our island communities and businesses.

2. The Park should help to deliver on some of the key objectives of Smart Successful Highlands and Islands. This would be assisted through addressing:
  - the promotion of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture
  - exploitation of wind, tidal and wave renewable energy production

- branding of products of the Park
  - attraction of tourists, especially those with a focus on wildlife, outdoor recreation and heritage.
3. The imposition of a higher standard of planning within a Park should not place an additional burden on the communities and businesses that was not present outwith the Park. Similar higher standards would be expected in water treatment for any discharges into the marine part of such a Park. Both these issues would inevitably further disadvantage the communities and economy of the area.
  4. HIE considers that the establishment of such a Park is a very different situation to that experienced in the two terrestrial parks where clear preparatory stages were present. HIE recommends that such an interim stage is essential to lay the ground work for potentially establishing a full national park in the future.

### **Establishment Process**

Experience from the past, with the consultations on Popular Mountain Areas in 1990, and the long gestation period for the two existing Parks indicates the need for local agreement to establish such a Park. This agreement does not currently exist and time and resources are needed if the local communities and businesses are to be won over to recognise the benefits. The area favoured by the Executive is unique in its complexity and lack of internal connectivity. Most of the island communities involved have their main infrastructure links with the Mainland rather than with the other islands that would be contained within such a Park. This makes the consensus and capacity building process even more complex than that undertaken, for instance within the Caingorms. Additionally, both existing National Parks had incremental stages towards their final establishment which allowed for a gradual progress towards National Park status.

HIE has considerable experience in consensus and capacity building within communities. We would be happy to share this experience with the Executive as a guide to help with this process. We wish to ensure that establishing a Park is undertaken in a way that takes the host communities forward, recognising the benefits that a Park can bring to them.

The consultation poses a number of detailed questions on issues relating to the establishment of a coastal and marine National Park. HIE considers that the above matters are so fundamental to the success of such a proposal that detailed responses to the questions would be premature at this stage.

### **Conclusion**

HIE maintains its support in principle for a coastal and marine National Park for Scotland. We have serious concerns that it must be seen to make a tangible contribution to the social and economic development of the communities involved and that it should assist in meeting our aspirations for island communities.

The proposal has been poorly received to date and this places a clear impediment on the delivery of an inclusive and effective National Park. HIE would wish to see a significant effort to demonstrate community support for this proposal. On this basis, we consider that the timescale identified for establishing a Park is unrealistic. The absence of any shadow or quasi national park predecessor in the proposed area further reinforces the need for extra effort and innovative approaches to gaining support for taking a Park forward in the future.

I hope you find these comments helpful. Should you require to discuss this further please contact Bill Taylor, Senior Heritage Manager on 01463 244267 or email [bill.taylor@hient.co.uk](mailto:bill.taylor@hient.co.uk).

Yours sincerely  
S. Taylor