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Nikki Milne
Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department
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Edinburgh
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Dear Ms Milne

Consultation on Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park

Response from The Marine Biological Association of the UK

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on proposals for a Scottish Coastal and Marine National Park.

The Marine Biological Association is a Learned Society established in 1884. The MBA has over 1000 members and runs The Laboratory in Plymouth where 60 staff work. MBA members have been at the forefront of providing scientific information to support marine environmental protection, management and education and much of the information that underpins decision-making about marine environmental protection has come from work undertaken at The Laboratory.

The proposal for a Coastal and Marine National Park is a natural extension of the concept of National Parks into the sea and we support sustainable developments that improve the opportunity of the public to enjoy the coastal region and its marine wildlife. Our interest in and advice on the proposal for a park is based on ensuring that science, including suitable survey and knowledge of ecosystem structure and functioning, is utilised in the identification of areas and their management to protect biodiversity. At the heart of our interest is a knowledge, based on research, that parts of the marine environment are fragile and that that the wildlife conservation measures which would accompany management of a national park can benefit Scotland's marine natural heritage.

We agree, based on survey data that we have analysed and personal knowledge of relevant areas, that the Argyll islands and coast together with Ardnamurchan, the Small Isles to the south Skye coast offer not only a high level of accessibility and tourist infrastructure but also some key features of marine biodiversity. That biodiversity is already a reason for tourism and a well-managed Coastal and Marine National Park should ensure the maintenance and, in some cases, restoration of that biodiversity. We are aware that some features of marine natural heritage importance that were present in the 1980's have been reduced in abundance and extent, most likely as a result of unsustainable or destructive fisheries practices. Although there has been little scientific study of impacts, local knowledge is compelling and we urge the use of scientific information on sensitivity to identify areas with fragile and important features for special protection. We are also aware that survey data that can identify where those special features are is incomplete and feel that managing an area will require further survey work undertaken to standards that are compatible with those of the Marine Nature Conservation Review surveys undertaken between 1987 and 1998.



We will draw attention to two relevant projects undertaken recently by the MBA that could inform management. Recent work for WWF-UK has shown that locations within the preferred area for a first Coastal and Marine National Park scored highly for several of the measures developed to identify marine biodiversity hotspots (see www.wwf.org.uk/marineact for an account of marine biodiversity hotspots and results for locations in Scotland). In another project, undertaken for JNCC and partners, we co-ordinated the identification of species and biotopes that would be considered Nationally Important Marine Feature (NIMF), including species and habitats (available from www.ukbap.org.uk). Those species and habitats, many of which occur in the preferred area for a park, are often charismatic and attractive to the public but easily destroyed by human activities, especially use of mobile fishing gear. More generally, the MBA hosts the Marine Life Information Network (MarLIN: www.marlin.ac.uk) which provides information to identify which are sensitive species and habitats and recently completed a review of the structure and functioning of marine ecosystems from an environmental protection and management perspective (Report to English Nature): both resources can inform management and the spatial planning that will be apart of that management. We hope that the availability of the information that we have mentioned, coupled with survey work to identify the locations for such species and biotopes occur, will be used to inform management of an area to the benefit of biodiversity thus increasing public enjoyment.

We are aware of successes of marine parks in Europe, especially the Mediterranean, in both protecting marine life and boosting tourism and suggest that Scotland could look to Spain and Italy especially for models as well as those cited in the Consultation.

We hope that the proposals for a Coastal and Marine National Park in Scotland will go ahead and that they will have, at their core, measures to ensure the protection of marine biodiversity.

Yours sincerely

Professor Stephen Hawkins
Director

Dr Keith Hiscock
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