



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **POOR CONSULTATION ON MARINE PARK LEAVES UNANSWERED QUESTIONS**

The consultation process on Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park, which closes on 10th January, has been 'rushed, casual and shallow' the Scottish Crofting Foundation (SCF) has claimed. SCF Chairman Norman Leask said, "A couple of PR consultants appeared in places like supermarket car parks and invited people to be consulted on an apparently random basis. The 'consultation' consisted of a few 'tick-the-box' questions, and the consultants doing the job couldn't answer any questions about what they were consulting on. The whole process has been pretty poor and would need to be improved on if there is to be meaningful discussion about this issue."

The great majority of the candidate areas for the proposed Park are within the crofting counties and, in their consultation response, SCF expresses concern for its potential effects on the economy and cultural heritage of coastal crofting communities. "While sustainable management of the marine environment is in the interests of everyone –and there are already good examples of inshore fisheries management plans - there are serious implications for planning, housing and economic development should marine conservation interests override the social and economic needs of coastal communities," said Mr. Leask. "Without thriving crofting communities in such areas the natural heritage interest of the coastal zone will be lost; for example the internationally-important habitats created and maintained by traditional machair agriculture. Potential development constraints affecting housing, water supplies and sewerage will affect the ability of coastal, crofting communities to retain and attract economically active people and key workers. Integration of environmental and economic interests would have to be paramount in any National Park."

The SCF response goes on to call for the economic, social and environmental importance of crofting to be recognised in any National Park designation, perhaps by area-specific Land Management Contracts to help sustain the extensive grazing and cropping that have created the rich biodiversity and landscapes of

the candidate areas. The Foundation also highlights the need for the long-standing issue of tanker traffic in the Minches to be addressed in any park management plan.

On concerns for local democracy, SCF argues that a National Park must not be imposed against the wishes of the affected communities and that locally elected members must form a majority of any National Park Authority.

Ends.

**Notes for editors: -**

The Scottish Executive says it has a long term commitment to the creation of a Coastal and Marine National Park. The Candidate Areas are: -

Solway; Argyll Islands and Coast; Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and the South Skye Coast; North Skye Coast and Wester Ross; North Uist, Sound of Harris, Harris and South Lewis.

“Ministers agree that these are probably the strongest candidates in terms of the criteria set. Within this short list two areas in particular, Argyll Islands and Coast and Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and the South Skye Coast are identified as possible strongest all round candidates for Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park. A combination of these two areas (for example taking in Mull, Coll, Tiree, the Sound of Mull, Ardnamurchan, the Small Isles and the South Skye Coast) might also be a strong candidate. Shetland, Orkney, South Uist and Barra, and the Clyde and Moray Firths are the other five areas identified as possible candidates.” (SE website)

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**Notes to editors**

Picture can be found at: <http://www.croftingfoundation.co.uk/contact.shtml>