

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

DATE: 26th MAY 2016

Consultation on the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research Marine Protected Area Proposal



Scottish Environment LINK

This response was submitted via the Scottish Government's Citizen Space consultation hub on 26th May 2016 <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/marine-conservation/fair-isle-demonstration-and-research>

1. Do you support the designation of the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research MPA? Please explain.

Yes No

Yes, we strongly support the Demonstration and Research MPA. We believe that it offers an opportunity to put into effect the aspirations of the whole of the local community on Fair Isle for greater involvement in the protection of their local marine resource which they perceive to have been degraded over many years as a result of failures in fisheries management to no benefit to themselves. We believe that the D&R MPA will help to develop mechanisms and models for greater community involvement in MPA management that will be applicable in other parts of Scotland and will demonstrate some of the wider benefits of MPAs. The Fair Isle is the third largest seabird colony in the UK but several species have been in serious decline for the last 20 years. The D&R MPA will build on the expertise of the Fair Isle Bird Observatory to help elucidate the details and causes of the problems facing internationally important populations of seabirds.

The success of the proposed D&R MPA in meeting its overall aim:

To demonstrate, through research and dissemination, the effectiveness of a community-led partnership approach in achieving a programme of sustainable measures to help ensure that the marine environment is in a condition that benefits all stakeholders as fully as possible

depends crucially on the effectiveness of the proposed governance structures in implementing the appropriate management measures, potentially including fisheries management and no-take zones. If agreement cannot be reached on appropriate trial management measures, or resources are lacking for assessment and monitoring the success of the measures, the D&R MPA risks not meeting its objectives.

Success will also be largely dependent on the allocation of sufficient resources to ensure that the programme can be carried through. While some of the resourcing will be specific to the particular research topics addressed, the fundamental requirement will be provision of a project officer, without which it will be difficult to maintain continuity. It is hoped that resources will be identified at an early stage to allow a project officer to be appointed.

2. Do you agree that the proposal successfully meets the requirements of the Marine (Scotland) Act and MPA Selection Guidelines for designation? Please explain.

Yes No

Yes. An objective, independent assessment by ABPmer concluded that the proposal meets all of the criteria and we concur with this assessment.

3. Do you have a view on the review period that should be applied for consideration of the success of the designation to fulfil its aims and objectives. Please provide reasons for your preference.

12 years 18 years Other

We believe that the evaluation of management measures for marine ecosystems should be carried out over as long a time as possible because it may take several years for any effects to become apparent. The proposal details a timetable stretching over something in excess of 11 years and it would be prudent to allow 18 years.

The proposal calls for an initial three year 'gap analysis' then a seven year period trialling management measures. The removal of specific management measures between the initial and final application raises concerns over the potential difficulty in reaching agreement on appropriate measures. For this reason a first review should be held at

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around 4 years, specifically to check that the governance structures are being successful in implementing the measures which come out of the review, followed by reviews at longer intervals.

4. Do you have any comments on the socioeconomic assessment of the proposal? Please explain.

Yes No

The socio-economic assessment considered all apparent factors but was hampered by not having access to the management measures that will take effect in the MPA for the very good reason that they have not been decided yet, let alone implemented. However, were a full prohibition on mobile fishing gear within the MPA to be agreed as part of the demonstration and research work, the result would likely be of net benefit to the local economy. An assessment of management options for Scotland's inshore fisheries (GRID, 2015) concluded that a complete ban on mobile gear within three nautical miles of the coast of Shetland would bring significant economic benefits and result in higher employment locally. The different potential scenarios considered by GRID resulted in between 77 and 140 jobs being created, with even the least favourable model resulting in an additional 72 jobs. The analysis included a very conservative estimate of the General Public Non-user Value (GPNUV) of curtailing trawling that was averaged across Scotland. The Fair Isle Community has demonstrated through their unanimous and long-term support for an MPA that the local GPNUV on Fair Isle is extraordinarily high. It is therefore inevitable that if a socioeconomic study were to be conducted using a site-specific GPNUV, the net benefits of curtailing trawling would be very much higher than the average for Shetland as a whole. The proposed D&R MPA lies almost wholly within the three-nm zone so that, should it be the preferred management option arrived at by all stakeholders, simple protection measures prohibiting mobile gear from the waters surrounding Fair Isle would inevitably result in a substantial overall socio-economic benefit. LINK's Marine Group members note that currently no commercial fishing operates out of Fair Isle and that the socio-economic benefits for the community of Fair Isle may flow from increased tourism or other involvement in economic activity resulting from an improvement in the health of the local marine environment. It would be prudent to have an agreed methodology set up in advance of the implementation of any management measures to monitor the impacts on the local economy; for example to count and survey tourism visitors, track visitor 'spend' or document any development of marine-related produce (eg from a small-scale fishery) on Fair Isle.

5. Do you have any other comments relevant to this proposal? Please explain.

Yes No

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. This consultation response is supported by seven members of our Marine Group: Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, WWF Scotland and collectively represents almost half a million members.

The member organisations of Scottish Environment LINK would like to make their expertise available to assist with shaping the content of the research programme. Particular areas that they have highlighted as being important are achieving a better understanding of the relationship between sandeel fluctuations and seabird success in the northern isles, the trialling of no-take zones for crab and lobster fisheries to help support sustainable management of these species, and collecting better information on cetacean distribution in the region, possibly including through volunteer effort.

The Fair Isle D&R MPA proposal is unique in that it has unanimous approval from all members of the local community – something that is normally almost impossible to achieve for even the most benign proposal for change. Furthermore, calls for an MPA have been consistently articulated by the Fair Isle community since at least the mid-1990s. This demonstrates that the local sentiment is both profound and considered – not resulting from a recent whim or fashion. It is incumbent on us to take heed of this deeply held local feeling that the community wants better control of marine

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management. The Fair Isle Community is one of a growing number of coastal communities around Scotland that feel that their marine resources have been mismanaged. Unfortunately, the main mechanism that is available to them to submit third party proposals for MPAs – through a demonstration and research proposal - is cumbersome and time-consuming and likely to sap everything but the most dogged enthusiasm. Furthermore the regulatory hoops that the proposals are required to jump through are complex, onerous and requiring lengthy and detailed assessment. In short, the mechanism available is largely unsuitable to be developed by a non-specialist coastal community. It is to be hoped that the Scottish Government can come up with some better way of giving reality to the entirely reasonable aspirations of increasing numbers of their citizens in coastal areas for the conservation of the sea in the vicinity of their homes. Maybe the Fair Isle proposal will point the way to how this could be achieved.