



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01431

Name of petitioner

Nicholas John Riddiford on behalf of Fair Isle Community

Petition title

Marine Protected Area for Fair Isle

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to implement a condition of the Council of Europe Diploma to Fair Isle by designating Fair Isle waters as a Marine Protected Area.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

1989: concern over declining marine resources in Fair Isle waters raised at a quarterly Fair Isle community meeting.

1989-1995: initial studies done of Fair Isle marine values and efforts begun to draw attention to the issue.

1995: efforts formalised in the Fair Isle Marine Environment & Tourism Initiative (FIMETI) – an initiative led by the Fair Isle Community in partnership with Fair Isle Bird Observatory and The National Trust for Scotland.

1997: FIMETI publishes *Safeguarding Our Heritage* as a blueprint for sustainable management of Fair Isle's marine resource.

1999-2001: isle takes project lead in EU/Norwegian Government Northern Periphery Programme demonstration project on sustainable use of environmental and cultural resources. Outcomes included: a series of booklets, sustainable shellfish study, eco-tourism initiatives, community workshops with Scandinavian partners, Trans-national children's projects.

Late 1990s: FIMETI organises Fair Isle Marine Partnership as a first attempt to engage all stakeholders in sustainable marine management planning.

Late 1990s-early 2000s: series of workshops on the isle with Scottish Natural Heritage, attended by entire island expressing their views, concerns and aspirations.

Late 1990s-mid 2000s: FIMETI one of eight members of the Scottish Executive's Scottish Coastal Forum.

Throughout: considered responses to a welter of government consultations on marine issues including Marine Parks, Marine Bill, etc., all the time emphasising the socio-economic relevance of marine resources for small coastal communities beyond the narrow perception of fish and oil as the only marine economic resources.

2007-present: membership of the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative (Shetland) and Shetland Marine Spatial Plan advisory group.

2009: production of draft Fair Isle Marine Spatial Plan as adjunct to Shetland MSP.

2009: Chair of the Fair Isle Committee and Community Association, Fiona Mitchell, presents the Fair Isle case to Parliament in Edinburgh.

2010: production of concise but comprehensive Fair Isle Marine Action Plan.

2011: production of proposal for a Marine Protected Area for Fair Isle Waters, presented to Scottish Government's Marine Scotland in December 2011.

October 2011 & March 2012: participation in stakeholder workshops organised by Marine Scotland to identify Nature Conservation MPAs.

The Fair Isle community has been 100% committed and engaged in every marine development it could identify over the last 15 years or more; and done everything it can to engage with national government, local government, government representatives and officers, other agencies and stakeholders.

Yet objectives for sustainable management of our marine resource, set in 1995, have not been achieved. The Scottish Marine Bill opens up a new opportunity for us. The Fair Isle community voted unanimously for a petition to stress our case and to support 1) the Council of Europe condition, 2) the proposal to Marine Scotland.

A note on the marine bill and the Marine Scotland MPA process. An integral component of the Scottish Marine Bill is the establishment of a Marine Protected Area network in Scottish waters, compliant with similar initiatives in other European coastal states.

Marine Scotland is leading this process, aided by Scottish Natural Heritage in identifying potential sites. The process also allows third parties to propose sites and the Fair Isle community has done just that. The Fair Isle proposal follows Marine Scotland guidelines and includes appendices detailing the many values, environmental, economic and cultural, which makes Fair Isle in the eyes of the community an ideal site for incorporating the Nature Conservation and the Dissemination and Research elements of the planned MPA network. The proposal is available at:

http://www.fairisle.org.uk/FIMETI/Reports/MPA/FAIR_ISLE_MPA_Proposal_Parts%20I&2_smaller.pdf

The proposal has been accepted for consideration by Marine Scotland and Fair Isle representatives are attending stakeholder workshops, both at the national level with Marine Scotland and at the regional level through the Shetland Marine Spatial Plan Advisory Group in which the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative is a member. The isle is as engaged as it can be in the preparation process.

The MPA process is a welcome step forward and the isle is delighted to be participating. However, the MPA focus is on a narrow suite of priority nature conservation marine features and this forms the basis of the recommendations to be made to Scottish Ministers. Fair Isle has many of these features but there is no absolute guarantee that it will qualify on those terms. The isle remains concerned, therefore, that it may miss out. Fair Isle cannot risk losing this opportunity as lack of action will have a detrimental impact on the socio-economic well-being of the community – an issue recognised at Committee of Ministers level by the Council of Europe.

Petition background information

The Council of Europe Diploma

“The European Diploma of Protected Areas is a prestigious international award granted since 1965 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to natural and semi-natural areas and landscapes of exceptional European importance for the preservation of biological, geological and landscape diversity and managed in an exemplary way.”

(http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/nature/diploma/default_en.asp)

There are stringent qualifying requirements and the number of European Diploma sites is just 70. Five of these are in the UK of which two in Scotland:- Beinn Eighe and Fair

Isle. Diploma designation involves an initial evaluation undertaken by the Council of Europe's Group of Specialists. A further evaluation follows every five years and is conducted by independent scientists on behalf of the Council of Europe. Renewal of the Diploma depends on their recommendations. Fair Isle has held the Diploma continuously since 1985.

The renewal reports are accompanied by a series of pointers towards maintenance or enhancement of the site. These are presented in the form of resolutions. However, if the Council of Europe's Group of Specialists considers that the resolutions are not being met it raises the level of the issue to a condition. Renewal reports are signed off by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers representing all participating states. Whereas resolutions are for guidance, failure to meet a condition risks the loss of the Diploma at the next renewal. Following the 2010 Fair Isle renewal, the Committee of Ministers placed the following condition on further renewal:

"In recognition of the internationally important seabird colonies and associated marine environment currently experiencing severe pressure, the United Kingdom and Scottish Governments should use the powers invested in them through the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 to establish the protected marine area which has been called for in successive diploma renewals. A new protected marine area should be in conformity with the Fair Isle Marine Action Plan."

Without action to meet this condition, Fair Isle risks losing the Diploma at the next renewal in 2015. The community is proud of its Diploma status as a measure of its good husbandry of its environment, but it also brings major social and economic benefits to the isle, as its natural and cultural values attract visitors from many countries. This brings added value not just to Fair Isle but to Shetland and Scotland as a whole; as does the prestige the Diploma brings to the nation. Fair Isle would like to think that Scotland, too, is proud of its Diploma sites and committed to seeing them maintained. The community is acting now to highlight this condition and to ensure that Scotland does not see Fair Isle stripped of its prestigious Diploma award.

The petition

- The community chose to limit the petition to Fair Isle residents.
- Every adult on the isle signed.
- Children were initially excluded but several expressed the wish to sign, and thus were allowed. A healthy marine environment is, after all, their birthright.
- Consensus and unanimity are surely mandates for political recognition. Yet the isle has made its case over and over without success. No wonder, then, that the isle feels disenfranchised and is turning to the Petitions Committee.
- Further information, including the MPA proposal, the Fair Isle Marine Action Plan, various FIMETI newsletters and the publication Safeguarding Our Heritage can be accessed through the FIMETI website www.fimeti.org.uk

OVERALL RATIONALE

Our community prospects depend on a simple equation superb natural resources + a flow of visitors = socio economic stability. A healthy marine environment is vital for the long-term well-being of the island community and for Scotland.

Council of Europe Diploma sites demonstrate good stewardship and high environmental values which bring prestige to the nation and should not be lost through default.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01431>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

NO

How many signatures have you collected so far?

61

Closing date for collecting signatures online

N/A

Comments to stimulate online discussion