

# A Marine National Park What Now?

Regular contributor Calum Duncan teams up with Becky Boyd of the Joint Marine Programme to provide an insight into progress with the proposed Coastal and Maritime National Park ...



RECENTLY, THERE has been much press coverage about the proposed Coastal and Marine National Park (CMNP) to be designated by 2008. As divers, I am sure these developments are of great interest but you may well be wondering what one is and what it could do.

## *What's in a name?*

The Park will be a multiple-use area in which conservation will be encouraged alongside sustainable levels of fishing, aquaculture, forestry, recreation and tourism. The Marine Conservation Society, the Joint Marine Programme (Scottish Wildlife Trust collaborating with WWF-Scotland) and other environment groups are supportive of the concept, provided the eventual Park Plan includes measures to safeguard natural heritage features (species, habitats and landscapes).

On March 31 this year, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) advised that the site to be chosen ought to be one of a potential five - Solway Firth; 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.

Whichever area is finally chosen during 2006, environment groups believe a Park offers an opportunity to its coastal communities to shape their long-term future if it is well-designed. A public consultation is expected this summer to allow a broader range of views to be heard both on the location of the Park and on the powers and functions of the National Park Authority.

## *The Problem*

We all depend on a healthy natural environment - declines in fish stocks, in the quality of the landscape or in wildlife populations can quickly lead to loss of local income. The sea no longer provides the abundance it once did, traditional livelihoods like fishing have declined

and young people continue to leave coastal villages.

We have treated the seas as a 'free-for-all' resulting in a 'tragedy of the commons'. There is currently no proper accountable forward planning system that enables us to protect the resources we rely on from irreversible damage.

## *The Opportunity*

Scotland's coastal and marine natural heritage is world-class, with over 8,000 higher marine species, a wide variety of marine habitats, and internationally important features, including 45% of all seabirds breeding in the EU and 24 species of whale and dolphin. Commercial fish stocks, aquaculture and coastal and wildlife tourism all rely on healthy seas.

While we would like to see a Marine Act for Scotland to deliver a better future for all our seas, a properly managed Park could help secure long-term livelihoods for local communities, benefit sealife and provide an excellent showcase of best practice for one area, lessons from which could be used elsewhere.

## **For example**

- more money for rural areas, both directly from government and through product marketing, eg premiums for fishing produce, and tourism opportunities. The existing National Parks have had over £30m of government investment since their inception;
- A strong local voice in decision-making and a more 'joined-up' planning system through the National Park Plan;
- Local responsibility and greater care for the special qualities of the area;
- More local, long-term employment

## *How to get the best possible Park*

We believe the Park should have:

- A strong National Park Plan that is a clear route map for meeting the Park aims;
- A strong National Park Authority with full planning powers on land and a lead

role in planning and co-ordinating activities at sea;

- Measures to ensure that the natural heritage of the Park is conserved and enhanced
- A spatial planning system for the sea within the Park;
- An action plan for involving local and national interests in the management of the Park;
- Clear links between Inshore Fisheries Plans and the National Park Plan
- Tools to influence activities like shipping that are reserved to Westminster;
- Independent review of how well the Park meets its aims;

## *Where next?*

SNH advice to Ministers offers some hope: "a Park should provide a model of how fisheries can be managed better to ensure that biodiversity as well as the livelihoods of coastal fishermen can be sustained." However, it also raises questions about whether some aspirations can be met. For example, there is no assurance that the Park Authority would have full Planning functions: SNH favours a Park Authority that would simply 'enable' planning, rather than having any managerial, consultative or regulatory role, at least in the early years of the Park.

Another question-mark is whether the Park Authority will have any real influence over fisheries or aquaculture management beyond an advisory role. It would be an opportunity lost if the aspirations of the Park are diluted to such an extent that conservation continues its unequal struggle against commercial concerns.

All will stand or fall, it seems, on the strength of the Park Plan and the beliefs of those involved in administration. We hope you continue to make your voices heard during the consultation in support of 'healthy, abundant and productive seas'.

**“Natural resources are the basis of all economics”  
Nic Wheeler, Chief Executive, Pembroke Coast National Park**



Photos (clockwise from top): ‘crab and fuzzy balls’ - a well-managed Park should also help safeguard underwater life - Calum Duncan/MCS; fishing boats - Calum Duncan/MCS; ‘ocean power’ marine spatial planning would enable environmentally sensitive deployment of renewables technology - credit Ocean Power Delivery; basking shark - Gavin Parsons.

Other page: ‘crab’ a well-run Coastal and Marine National Park could provide ‘added-value’ to locally-caught shellfish - Peter Richardson/MCS

For further information contact Calum Duncan, MCS Scottish Officer on 0131 226 6360 or Becky Boyd, Joint Marine Programme Officer, Scotland on 01463 714 746. The SNH advice can be seen at [www.snh.org.uk/strategy/CMNP/sr-adnp01.asp](http://www.snh.org.uk/strategy/CMNP/sr-adnp01.asp)

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