



BLUE MARINE
FOUNDATION

NATIONAL MARINE PARKS

A Vision for British Seas: Supplementary Report

SCOTLAND

Argyll Coast and Islands



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blue Marine Foundation 'BLUE' is outlining a Vision for National Marine Parks in British Seas. Research and interviews with people from across the country have shown that the concept of a Marine Park means different things to different people. BLUE is sharing a vision to start a conversation about the idea. This report explores where and how it could work for Scotland.

Our experience from supporting the emergence of Plymouth Sound National Marine Park in Devon, which was voluntarily declared in 2019, has provided the incentive to explore whether National Marine Park status is of interest in other parts of the country. The BLUE conference in 2018 called 'Marine Parks: bringing it all back home' explored with a wide range of people whether this global idea could work for Britain. It triggered further support and consideration of the vision and the publication of BLUE's report 'National Marine Parks: A Vision for British Seas' in 2021.

This supplementary report provides insights into the past consideration and future possibilities for National Marine Parks in Scotland. The context is different due to legal provision in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 to include the sea, although so far Scotland only has two National Parks and neither extends into the sea. This report highlights where Coastal and Marine National Parks for Scotland have been considered, focusing on the Argyll region on the west coast. The background, current position and people's perspectives on future barriers and opportunities are presented.

The report finds that there are significant opportunities to establish National Marine Parks in Scotland. The legal framework includes provision for the sea and there are active campaigns for more National Parks which could extend to the coastal and marine environment. Momentum through national and local community leadership is essential to realise the potential benefits from the vision.

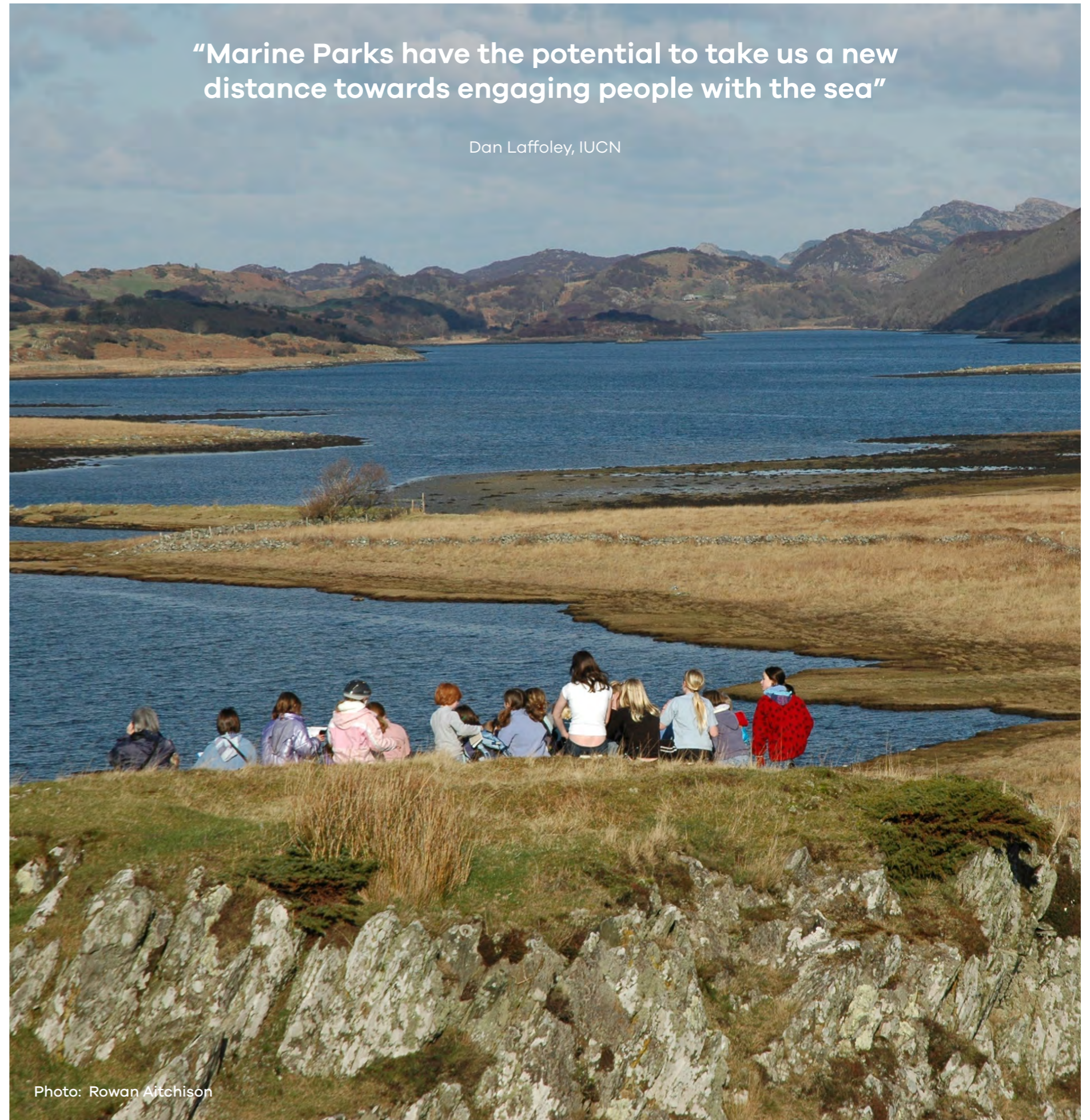
"A Marine Park could really tell the story about our marine life - it could mimic something that people recognise from National Parks on land"

Annabel Lawrence, University of the Highlands and Islands



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“Marine Parks have the potential to take us a new distance towards engaging people with the sea”

Dan Laffoley, IUCN

Photo: Rowan Aitchison

1. INTRODUCTION

Scotland has two National Parks and a range of coastal and marine designations. There are no coastal or marine parks, but the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000¹ includes provision to apply the National Park designation into the sea providing there is satisfactory consultation with those who 'live, work or carry on business in the area'. Interest has been shown for coastal and marine areas, particularly on the west coast. The legal framework for National Parks in Scotland is different to England and Wales where the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949)² has the primary purpose of conserving and promoting understanding and enjoyment of the natural environment. The National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 has additional aims that focus on sustainable use of natural resources and sustainable social and economic development of communities.

The first coastal and marine National Park for Scotland was considered over a decade ago in 2006-07. The Scottish Executive led a national consultation with advice from Scottish Natural Heritage and discovered that 72% of individuals and organisations supported the idea in principle³. The Scottish Executive saw benefits mainly in terms of better planning of the coast and sea, better environmental management, better/increased tourism and improved understanding of natural and cultural heritage. Opposition from some fishing groups and other businesses were expressed about the potential removal of local decision-making, further

bureaucracy and restrictions on development. Of five candidate sites short-listed, the most supported area was Argyll Coast and Islands. In 2017 Argyll and Bute Council consulted on the prospect of a Coastal and Marine National Park. Responses were mostly supportive, but there was a decision not to include it in their Local Development Plan in the absence of leadership from the Scottish Government. Since 2019 the area has been promoted as the UK's first 'Hope Spot' by local communities and backed by the global alliance Mission Blue.

This report illustrates the background to consideration of National Marine Park (NMP) status in Scotland and a range of current views about its' potential, with a particular focus on the Argyll Coast and Islands area on the west coast. It is based on a desk-review of reports published around the national consultation in 2006-07; the Argyll and Bute Council consultation in 2017; and interviews in 2020 with people involved in current initiatives. A series of recommendations are given about how coastal and marine national park conversations could emerge again.

This report should be read in conjunction with Blue Marine Foundation's main report 'National Marine Parks: A Vision for British Seas.'⁴ It shows why BLUE believe that there is value in the idea of promoting National Marine Parks - to improve connections between people and the sea - and illustrates the appetite across Britain to further this conversation.

“International experience suggests that a coastal and marine National Park could provide a model of how fisheries can be managed better to ensure that biodiversity as well as the livelihoods of fishermen can be sustained”

Scottish Natural Heritage (2006)⁵



2. SCOTLAND'S FIRST COASTAL AND MARINE NATIONAL PARK

Background

In 2004 Scottish Ministers announced their intention to develop a proposal for Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park. In 2006 the Scottish Government launched a 'Consultation on proposals to establish Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park'. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) was asked to provide advice to the Minister and following the consultation, their report 'SNH Advice on Coastal and Marine National Parks' showed support in principle from many stakeholders. It concluded that *"a National Park can make an important contribution alongside the wider suite of initiatives that are under development for our coastal and marine environment" but that "support from local communities and other stakeholders is essential to bringing any proposal forward"*⁵.

In 2007 the Scottish Executive produced a summary of the 940 consultation responses. There was overall support from individuals and organisations across most interest groups that participated and in all candidate regions: 72% of respondents signalled support in principle for the establishment of a Coastal and Marine National Park, with 10% of respondents expressing opposition and 17% unsure. The levels of support had increased since 2004 when 50% supported, 18% opposed and 32% were unsure⁶.

Scottish Environment Link (SEL) was supportive in their response to the consultation in Jan 2007⁷. They recommended a strong National Park Plan and Authority with responsibility for access, full planning powers on land and a lead role in planning and co-ordinating activities at sea, together with an action plan for involving local and national interests. They saw a key role for the National Park concept in long-term stewardship, simplifying some of the existing regulatory arrangements and developing a more balanced

approach, in particular providing a mechanism to co-ordinate fishing effort with other activities. However, reservations and opposition were expressed from some fishing groups and other businesses about further bureaucracy, the potential removal of local decision-making and restrictions on further development. The added value, above what could be realised through other mechanisms, was also queried.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) proposed next steps to further consideration and consultation on more specific proposals for the legislative and policy framework based on the process outlined in the National Park (Scotland) Act 2000. The benefits of a Park were seen mainly in terms of better planning of the coast and sea, better environmental management, better/increased tourism and improved understanding of natural and cultural heritage. In delimiting the boundaries of a Park, general support was expressed for setting the seaward limit of 12nm and including nearby coastal communities within the landward boundary. It was notable that more support was expressed by individuals than organisations. Momentum was lost when attention turned towards preparation and implementation of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010⁸.

Potential Locations

A long list of potential locations were identified by SNH based on natural and cultural heritage values, character, coherence and the special needs of an area as defined in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. They added criteria around the accessibility of the population and contribution to socio-economic development of communities. Their process of short-listing led to five candidate sites:

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

SNH consulted widely at that time with over 350 stakeholders, convened a national stakeholder group and held two national seminars. Specific expressions of interest were received from Argyll and Bute Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and the Fair Isle community. At that time, the most appropriate location for Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park was considered to be 'the combination of the Argyll Islands and Coast and the Ardnamurchan, Small Isles and South Skye Coast'⁶. Proposals for a way forward at that time included more detailed consultation, shortlisting 2-3 areas to *"focus evidenced proposals and develop local engagement; commissioning rigorous, independent economic and regulatory impact of designation to local business, controls on local fishing activity, and the ability of local infrastructure to support an increase in tourism"*⁶. The intention was to allow for a period of reflection, enabling proposals to flow from other initiatives.

Current Position

Based on interviews conducted in 2020, it was suggested that in order to progress any vision for National Marine Parks, further consideration at the national level would require political courage, stronger governance and legislative backing. At the local level there would need to be strong community engagement to allay any fears about imposing a National Park on communities. It could have scope if it were well resourced, properly facilitated and offer compensation or alternative livelihood opportunities (e.g. for fishermen), with social/regeneration and authentic tourism objectives at its heart. A range of existing community-led initiatives could provide a platform for engagement.

BLUE's Vision for National Marine Parks in British seas⁴ includes an assessment of existing coastal and marine designation density combined with coastal population density (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). It is based on the assertion that many people don't recognise or are confused by so many designations and a simpler approach is needed to strengthen and restore people's connection with the sea.

"Marine Parks have great potential in Scotland. A review of possible sites for Scotland's first Coastal/Marine National Park in 2006-07, which I chaired for SNH identified front-runners in western Scotland. Political will is necessary, as is having vocal support from communities in the area(s) chosen"

Hugh Raven, Chair, Highlands & Islands Environment Foundation

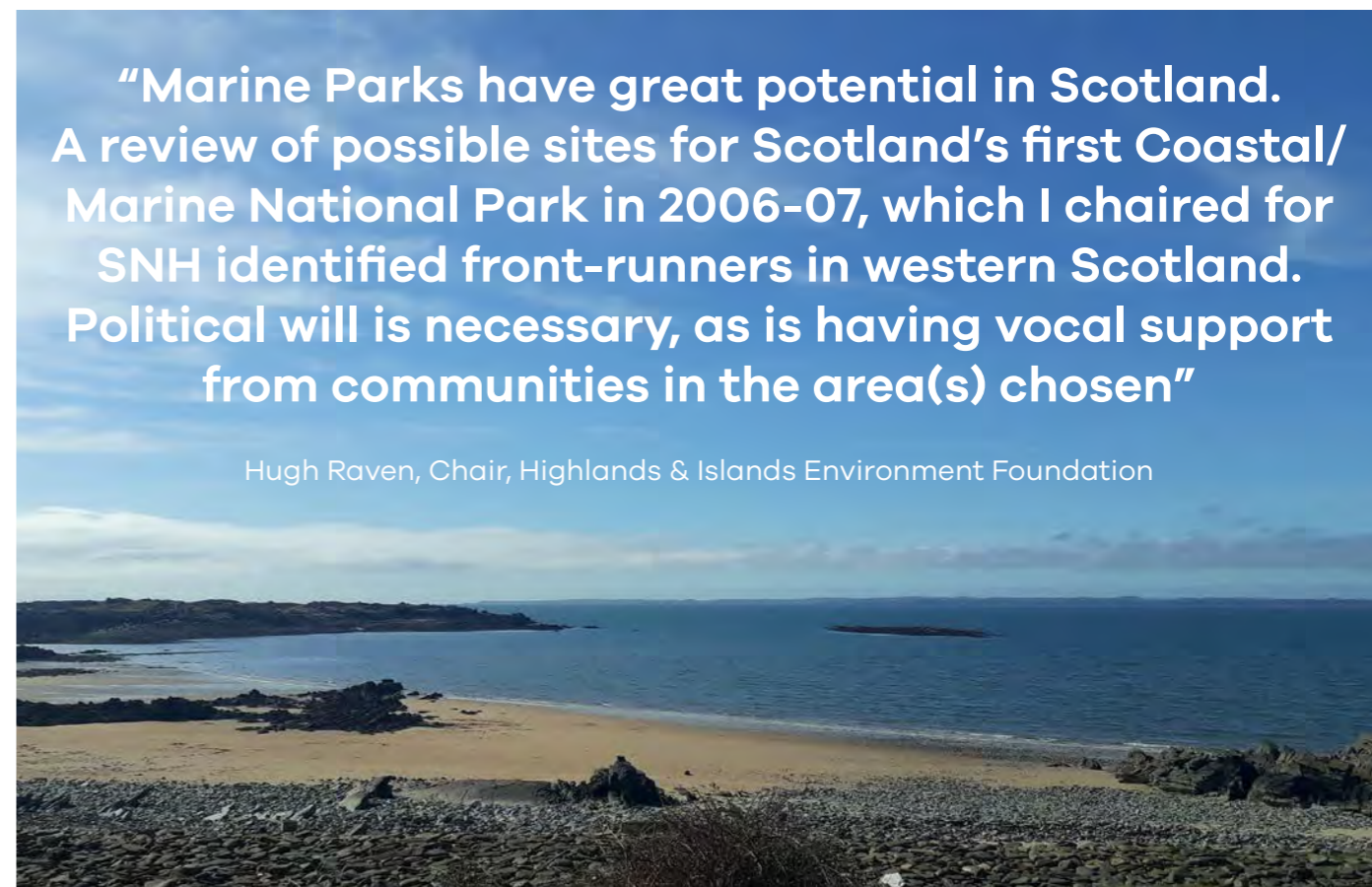


Figure 1: Coastal and Marine Designations in Scotland

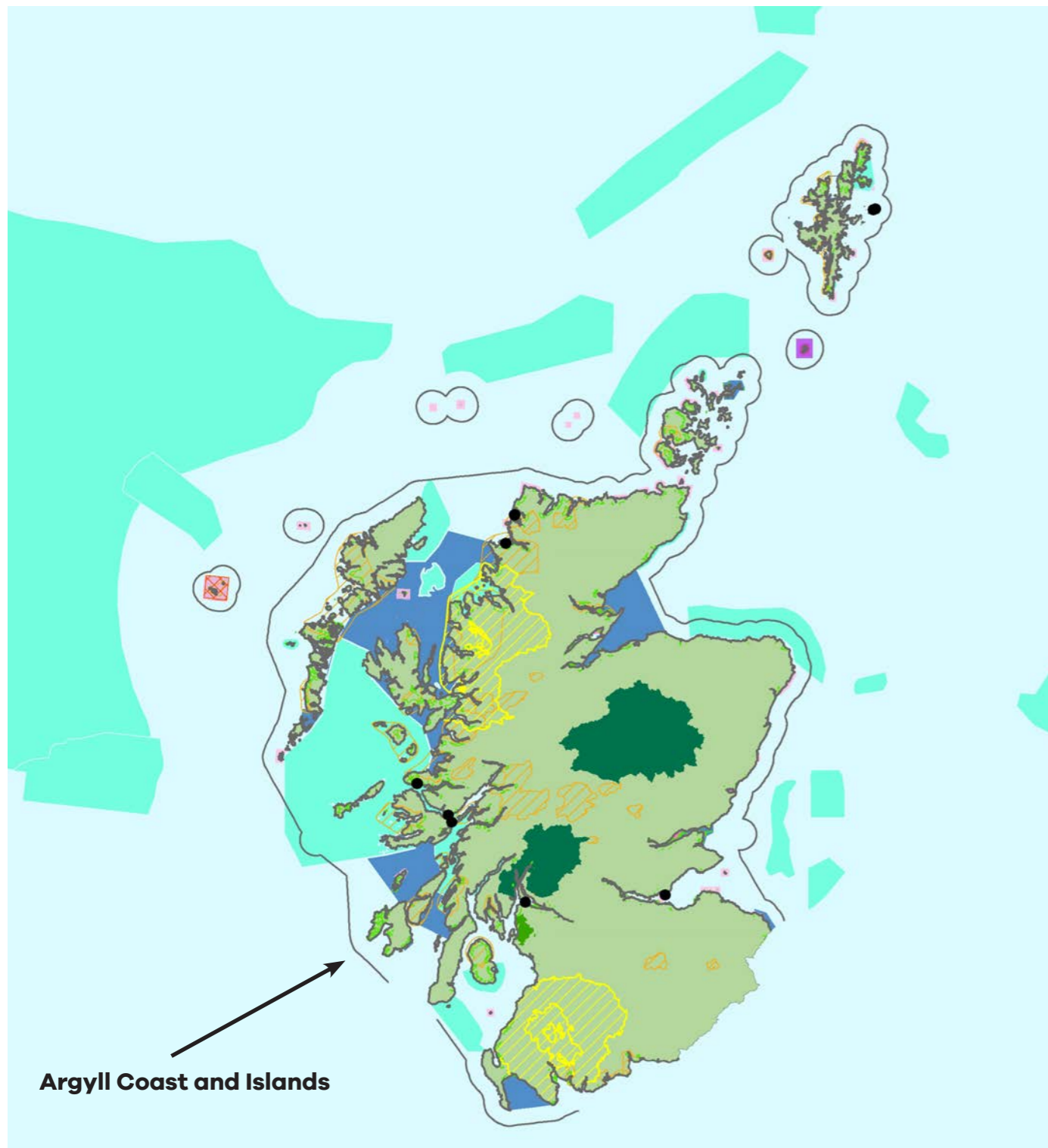
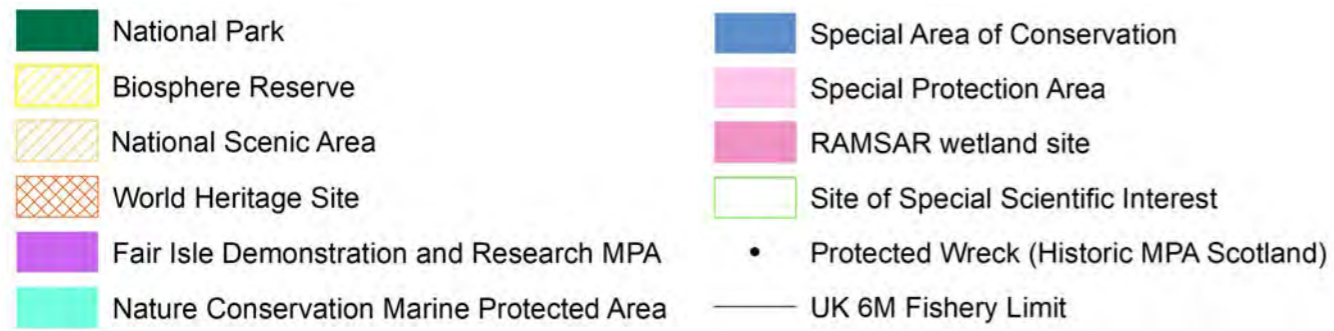
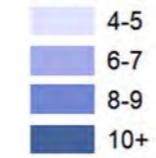
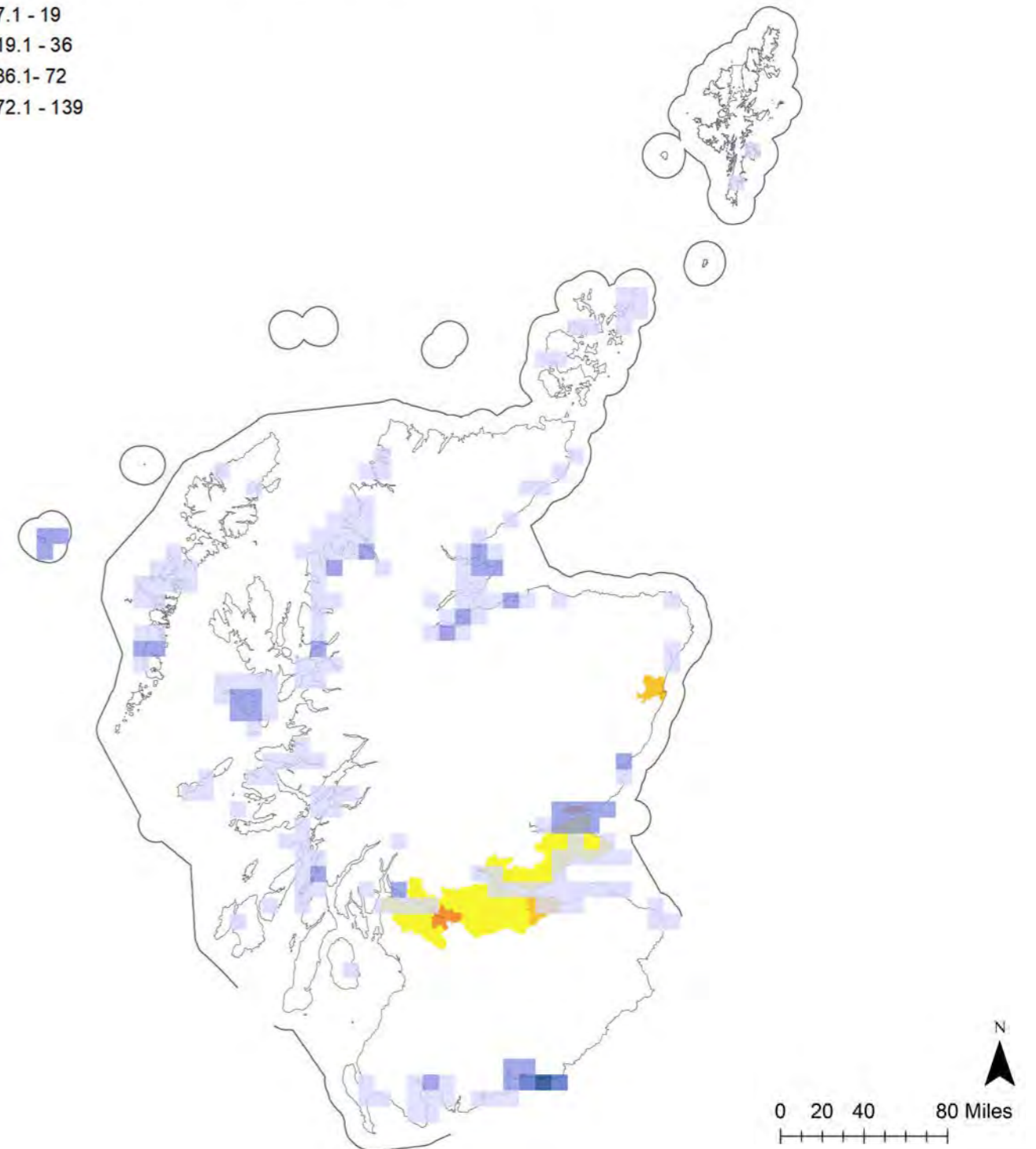


Figure 2: Heat map of designation and population density

Marine designation density (up to 3km from the coastline)



Population Density (persons per hectare, by Local Authority)



3. ARGYLL COAST AND ISLANDS

Background

The region off the Argyll coast has the second highest marine biodiversity in Scotland, after St. Kilda, with protected areas for marine wildlife, landscape and heritage, as shown in Figure 3. The Argyll Coast and Islands area is highly designated with a large part of the area within the Inner Hebrides and Minches Special Area of Conservation. Other specially protected areas include those on and around Islay, Colonsay, Mull, Tiree and the Treshnish Isles. More recently, Marine Protected Areas have been designated in Loch Sween for maerl beds, native oysters and other biodiversity features; and Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura for common skate and the globally endangered flapper skate. There are also proposals to designate an area for basking shark and minke whale. In addition, 'Wild Land' areas of coastline are recognised for their landscape value and have special protection in planning decisions. Around 80% of the region's 88,000 residents live within 1km of the coast. There are 3000 miles of coastline and 23 inhabited islands which currently attract around 1 million annual visitors. Frequent ferry and train connections provide fast links between the rural communities of this beautiful wild area and the central belt of Scotland. Leaders in marine science research are based at the Scottish Association for Marine Science in Oban.

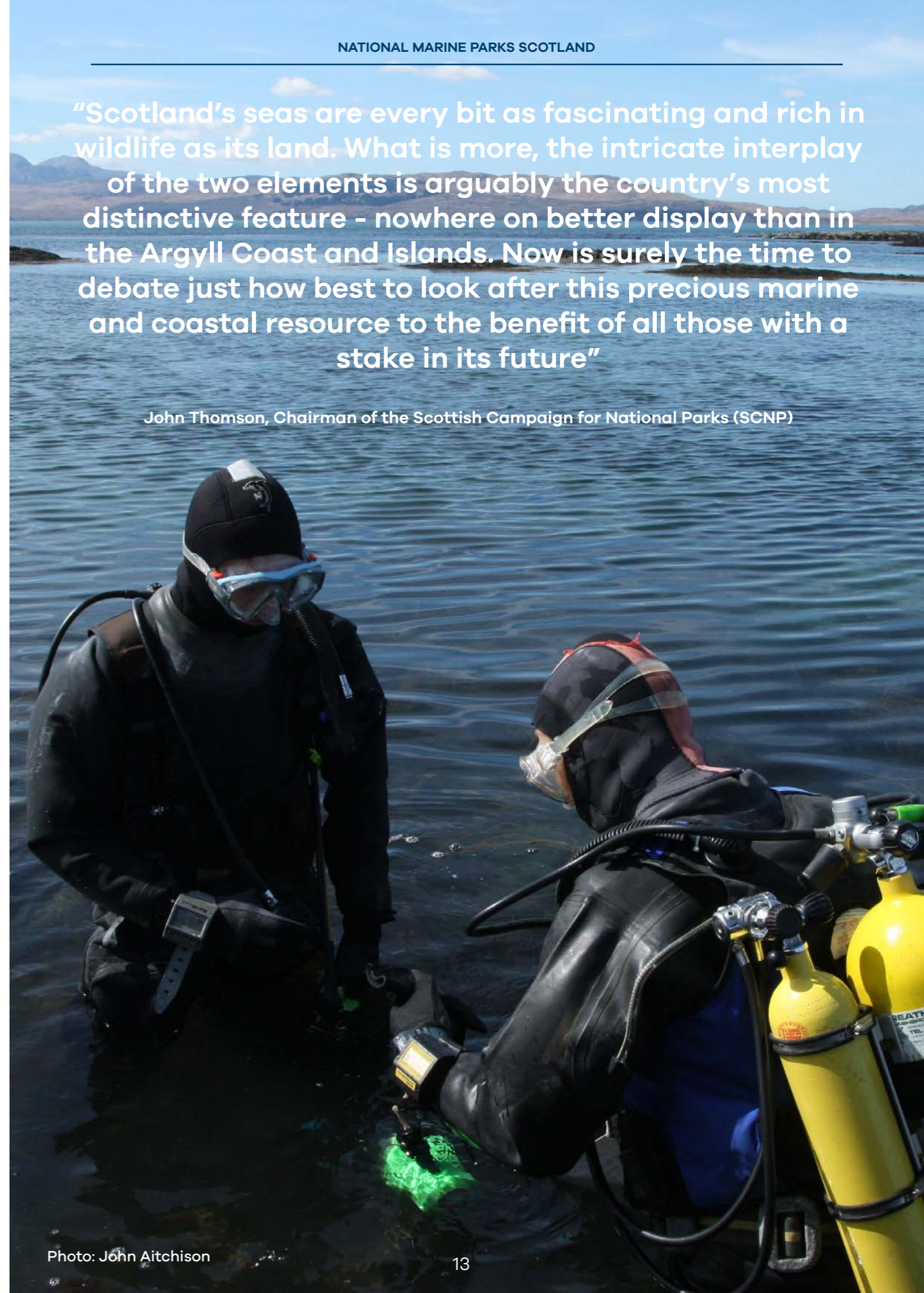
Scottish Natural Heritage⁵ identified Argyll Coast and Islands as one of the areas with the highest potential for a Coastal and Marine National Park, partly as it has greatest accessibility from the central belt (population) for travelling time by road (see Figure 2). In the responses to the Scottish Executive consultation (2006)³ "31% of individual responses and 18% of respondent organisations, were from consultees located in or near the Argyll islands and coast candidate location"⁶ which was almost twice the total number of responses from the next two most represented candidate regions combined. The case put forward by Argyll and Bute Council

was largely based on the assistance which a Park could give to the social and economic development of their more remote and fragile coastal communities. "*Argyll and Bute's thinking is most developed at present, with suggestions made in terms of an area and also the detailed arrangements for the Park Authority*"⁵. However, fishing interests in the north and west of Scotland were reported to be openly against the concept, even though the SNH Stakeholder Group expressed broad support for fisheries management within a Park to be taken forward through the local inshore fisheries management groups, supported by a Park Authority. In their summary of responses to the consultation, the Scottish Executive reported that around 70% of individuals and over 50% of organisations in the Argyll region expressed support for a Coastal and Marine National Park where there was "*overwhelming support from residents located in or near the Firth of Clyde candidate region, including Glasgow, for designation of the Argyll Islands and Coast*"⁶.

In 2017, Argyll and Bute Council consulted on the idea of an Argyll and Islands Coastal and Marine National Park as part of a Main Issues Report in preparation for revisions to the Local Development Plan. They suggested that if the Scottish Government instigated a review of National Parks, they would actively seek to fully appraise the option. They proposed a National Park under the auspices of the existing Council who would retain the town and country planning function. Its aims were envisaged to secure social and economic development of communities including fishing, agriculture, aquaculture and tourism whilst providing a focus for encouraging recognition, promoting outdoor recreation, education and the generation of new commercial and tourism opportunities. However, the proposal was not progressed further and there is no mention of it in the current Local Development Plan.

"Scotland's seas are every bit as fascinating and rich in wildlife as its land. What is more, the intricate interplay of the two elements is arguably the country's most distinctive feature - nowhere on better display than in the Argyll Coast and Islands. Now is surely the time to debate just how best to look after this precious marine and coastal resource to the benefit of all those with a stake in its future"

John Thomson, Chairman of the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP)



Current Position

In 2020 Argyll and Bute Council offered an update on their position: *“Following the main issues report we did an analysis of consultation replies...which were fairly evenly balanced regarding the proposed national park. There was reservation expressed in terms of the economic impact such a park might have on the existing commercial marine based activity that happens within the area, i.e. fishing, aquaculture etc. At the same time there was support in terms of the potential tourism benefits. We discussed the representations with our elected members at a special workshop session. The elected members took the view they did not want the next Local Development Plan to make a strong positive statement in terms of a future national park. Accordingly the Local Development Plan 2 does not contain such a statement. This of course does not prevent the Council from engaging in any future discussions should Scottish Government wish to instigate them”*⁹. Further contact with the Council led to obtaining the full consultation response data which offered a wide range of views, but there were no formal minutes from the workshop(s) which influenced the decision to not include it in the Local Development Plan¹⁰.

Further explanation was provided by the Council: *“Argyll and Bute has a significant*

*tourism industry, high level of environmental designations and a considerable marine resource. It was considered that there had been a number of changes in terms of the economy in Argyll and Bute and other environmental issues that warranted a revisit of the issues raised in the 2006 SNH Report “Advice on Coastal and Marine National Parks” which had identified Argyll Islands and Coast as a prime candidate. In addition, the Scottish Parliament had recently debated the issue of a review of the National Parks. It was recognised, however, that the Local Development Plan has no ability to deliver such a Park as this rests with the Scottish Government and would be informed by any future consultation”*¹¹.

In summary, Argyll and Bute Council expressed interest in pursuing recommendations from the national consultation in 2006-07, but ten years later in their 2017 consultation, received a mixed reaction from their constituents and political leaders. In the absence of direction by the Scottish Government it is unlikely to gain further leadership from within the Council in the near future. Part of the area under discussion is within the Highlands Council jurisdiction so a joint approach would be required.

Perspectives

In 2020, BLUE interviewed a small number of people who are actively involved in local community initiatives to support marine conservation, social enterprise and wildlife tourism in the Argyll Coast and Islands area. Their perspectives on the idea of a National Marine Park, indicated that:

- capacity would be needed to facilitate conversations between interests at the local and national levels
- political support would be needed
- issues over compliance and enforcement would need to be resolved
- the difference between existing designations and a marine park would need to be clear to all.

Many of these perspectives are reflected in the report by Blue Marine Foundation (BLUE) ‘National Marine Parks: A Vision for British Seas’, in particular a full response to the last point on why NMP status would be different to existing designations. The BLUE vision is for an ‘umbrella’ status which would help to simplify and communicate the value of areas with high designation density and/or proximity to populations who would benefit from greater

access to and awareness of the marine environment and seascape.

In recent years, momentum has been built through community associations with increasing interest in the marine environment, which could provide opportunities for considering National Marine Park status. However, interviewees suggested that the Scottish Government would need to reconcile fisheries and conservation interests centrally (e.g. through proper compensation schemes). Community leaders and key influencers could have the power to facilitate discussion, but greater enabling capacity is needed for this to happen. There are potential similarities and opportunities for sharing insights between the objectives of the Hope Spot and the Plymouth National Marine Park model with its branding, marketing campaign and restoration objectives.



Hope Spot and Community Enterprise

Launched in 2019, Argyll Coast and Islands is the only Hope Spot in the UK¹². With over 120 world-wide, Hope Spots are a global initiative led by Mission Blue and Dr Sylvia Earle to recognise special places identified as critical to the health of the ocean and championed by local conservationists. Mission Blue reviews Hope Spot applications from communities around the world and approves those that meet specific scientific and conservation criteria. It is supported by Scotland’s Coastal Communities Network (CCN), a community member network facilitated by Fauna and Flora International. CCN represents nascent conservation-focused communities around Scotland’s coast and creates opportunities for such communities to talk to one another and to politicians and Government.¹³ The Argyll Coast & Islands Hope Spot provides an alternative vision for the area which is focused on fully understanding and protecting local marine biodiversity. It seeks to offer more resilient local lifestyles through, for example, sustainable marine tourism, health and well-being opportunities; local restaurants and fish merchants sourcing seafood sustainably; and authentic experiences for visitors, involving locals.

The Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS)¹⁴ is one of several community associations which champion the Hope Spot. It aims to raise awareness of the marine environment and encourage community

involvement in its protection, preservation and sustainability. It came together following designation of Loch Sunart and the Sound of Mull as Marine Protected Areas and runs local events such as beach surveys and school demonstrations. Argyll Coast and Islands region is also supported by the Highlands and Islands Enterprise¹⁵ who promote social enterprise, for example through local Community Trusts, which are an important part of the economy.

National Marine Park status could help to mobilise the wider public and enable the local community to provide checks and balances on how the sea is utilised for local revenue generation. The Hope Spot and other community-driven initiatives suggest there are strong foundations for exploring the potential role of National Marine Park status in this area.

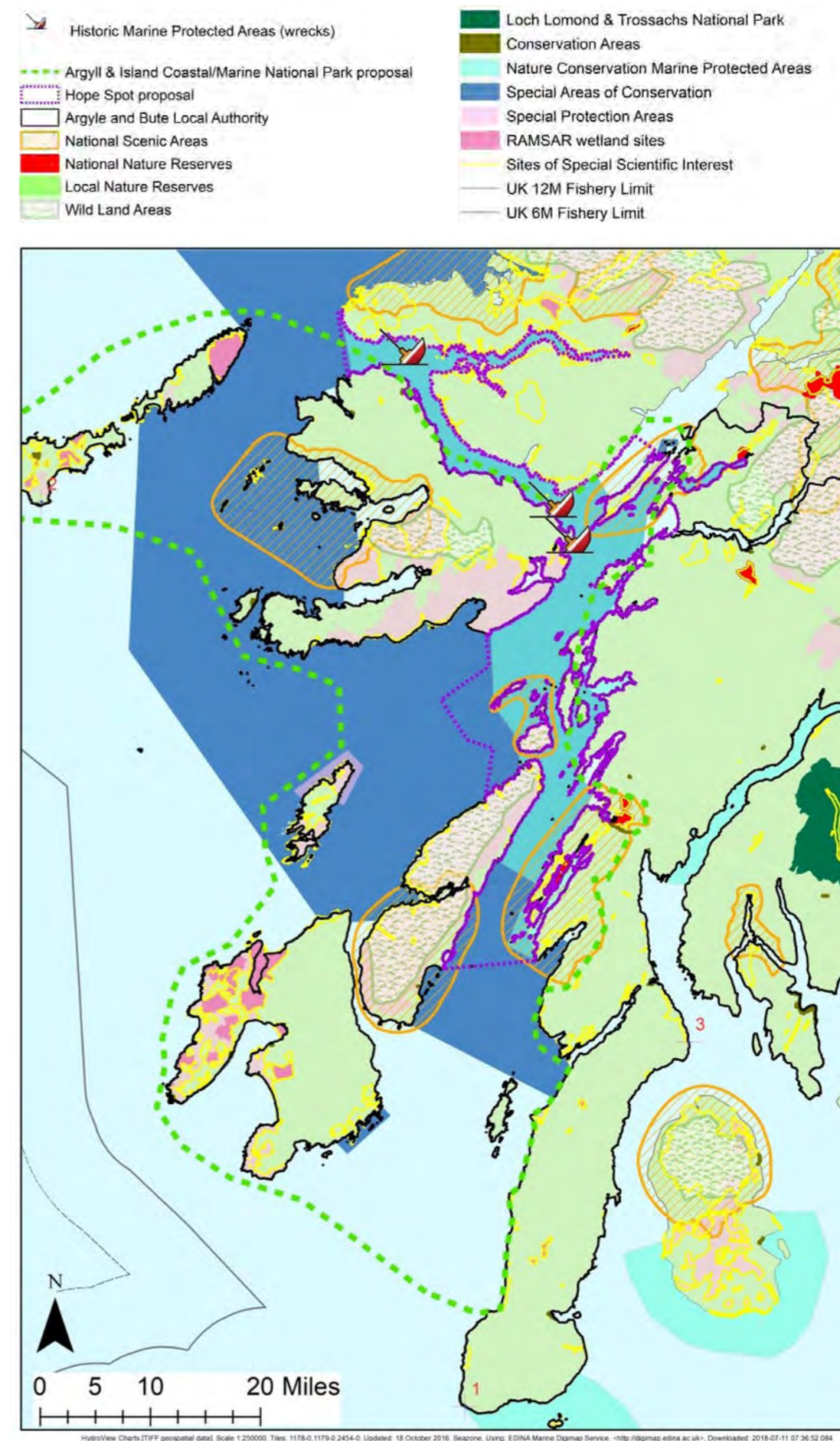
“The Scottish Campaign for National Parks have acknowledged that Argyll Coast & Islands is an obvious place for consideration”

John Aitchison, Friends of the Sound of Jura.

“A possible way forward could be through organisations like the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds – a local response – attracting funding for research, investigation and diversification of responsible, community-led and authentic tourism in a low-key way to promote the coast”

James Hilder, Director, Sunart Community Company

Figure 3 : Argyll Coast and Islands: coastal and marine designations



4. OTHER INITIATIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section offers a perspective on how other initiatives currently underway could offer links to a vision for National Marine Parks (NMP). A range of local, regional and national initiatives across Scotland could provide new opportunities for furthering conversation about NMP status.

- The **Scottish Campaign for National Parks**¹⁶ and **The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland** continue to actively promote the benefits that more terrestrial, coastal and marine National Parks would bring to Scotland. As a result of their efforts four out of five of the main political parties contesting the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections committed themselves to creating more National Parks in their manifestos.
- Many of Scotland's **National Scenic Areas (NSAs)** include areas of the sea. Within the Argyll Coast and Islands area there are five NSAs. The potential significance of this marine component of these designations and their status is worthy of further exploration.
- **Scotland's Environment Strategy (2020)**¹⁸ creates an overarching framework for strategies and plans on the environment and climate change. A State of Nature Scotland Report in 2019 highlighted the pressures on nature. The Environment Strategy aims to provide an overarching framework to bring strategies and plans together and identify new strategic priorities and opportunities to protect and restore Scotland's nature, with 'flourishing biodiversity and clean and healthy air, water, seas and soils' and help ensure a planet fit for future generations.
- The Scottish **Marine Tourism Strategy – Giant Strides 2020-2025**¹⁹ suggests significant opportunities for sustainable tourism from which branding around NMP status could be welcomed.
- The Scottish Government's new **Future of Fisheries Management Strategy 2020 to 2030**²⁰ sets a vision for Scotland to deliver responsible and sustainable fisheries management, recognising that the marine environment is a national asset to be managed and preserved for the benefit of future generations. The overarching principle is to manage fisheries through an ecosystem approach. Associated with this, a **Blue Economy Action Plan**²¹ involves a programme of collaborative projects across the public sector to strengthen marine industries, in particular renewable energy, fisheries and aquaculture, and support coastal communities. It includes aims to protect carbon habitats.
- The **Scottish Crown Estate Act (2019)**²² enabled transfer of the management functions of the Scottish Crown Estate to others, including a local authority, Scottish harbour authority or a community organisation. The Act gives community groups the right to manage and receive rental income which could support local sustainable business initiatives. An example of how this could be utilised to support community management of a sustainable native oyster fishery is being explored by the Morven Community Development Trust²³.
- The designation of **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)** together with the marine planning process has been the main focus of Marine Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) (re-branded NatureScot in 2019) over the past decade. Non-statutory management plans for MPAs are being developed through the MARPAMM project²⁴ within marine regions of Scotland (Shetlands, Hebrides & Argyll). Led by SNH/NatureScot, the project is looking at community and business attitudes to the sea, the perceived

value of MPAs and cumulative effects in the context of conservation objectives. They are hoping that MPAs are something people could brand themselves. There is potential for conversations about National Marine Park status to build on this work.

- A few years after consultation for Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park, the Scottish Marine Act (2010) was passed and Scotland produced a national Marine Plan in 2015. Marine planning in Scotland is to be implemented through regional marine plans facilitated by Regional

Marine Planning Partnerships²⁵. During the consultation for Scotland's first coastal and marine National Park, SNH suggested "a National Park Authority... focus initially on planning and enabling practical work to be delivered." Marine plans have since taken priority over any marine park proposals, but it was recognised by SNH that "Following the preparation of a Park Plan, further consideration should be given to any regulatory powers that the Authority may need. In this way, the concept of a coastal and marine National Park can grow incrementally, having built consensus



Photo: John Aitchison

and good will” (Scottish Natural Heritage 2007). SNH suggested that a National Park Plan should develop into a working spatial planning system. Regional Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) are being rolled out and evolving to fulfil these functions, but the governance arrangements are yet to be finalised.

- The **Scottish Coastal Forum** has supported a range of coastal partnership initiatives to champion sustainable development at the local level, such as the Firth of Clyde Forum (which provided a platform for evolving the Clyde Marine Planning Partnership), the Solway Firth Partnership (which may provide a platform for the evolution of marine planning in Dumfries and Galloway), the Moray Firth Partnership and the Forth Estuary Forum. These partnerships originated from SNH’s Focus on Firths initiative²⁶ in the 1990s, but continue to provide a platform for the evolution of marine planning and could support communication over a vision for National Marine Park status.
- Lessons need to be applied from previous efforts, including how to build consensus amongst marine interests. Examples include efforts to establish a Marine National Nature Reserve in Loch Sween, the designation and management of the Firth of Lorn SAC and experience with fisheries and the protected area in Lamlash Bay on Arran.

Marine Park status needs to evolve within the context of other initiatives that are working towards future planning and management of the sea. The roll-out of Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) may enable new facilitation and management effort which could change the current narrative beyond existing conflicts of interest. Both the MPPs and MPA management plans are being considered advisory by Marine Scotland at the present time, but there is potential to build towards a regionally empowered governance body for planning and/or a Park. Scotland’s experience from the first two National Parks provide examples of how the planning and governance could evolve, whilst this vision for National Marine Parks proposes starting conversations at the local level in coastal communities.

The Value of National Parks

New National Marine Parks could be exemplars of sustainability, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

The economic value generated by Scotland’s two existing National Parks is £720 million, over fifty times the £14 million invested in them by the Scottish Government per year²⁷. In 2019, Cairngorms National Park generated £309 million and Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park £411 million²⁸.

The Galloway National Park Association believe that a new National Park could provide significant stimulus to the local economy. They estimate it could attract at least 250,000 to 500,000 new visits and £30 to £60 million per year of additional spending. It could help to support or create 700 to 1400 jobs including small businesses attracted to the area with tourism and the environment, including lifestyle businesses with people working from home²⁹.

The Scottish Government has recently increased its budget towards National Parks in 2020-2021 by over 20%. This recognises the importance of visitor management and shows how central as well as local commitment to this vision may be achievable³⁰.

The value of National Parks to our environment, society and economy is well recognised. National landscapes cover almost a quarter of England, providing health and well-being through outdoor space, cultural value and employment opportunities as well as ecosystem benefits^{31,32}. The ten National Parks in England have been shown to contribute to the economy with 90 million visitors each year spending as much as £4 billion and 22,500 businesses employing 140,000 people^{33,34}. In Wales, three National Parks cover 20% of the land surface, bringing an estimated 12 million visitors per year, and over half a billion pounds into the Welsh economy. The socioeconomic benefits of National Parks have been proven, nature-based tourism is growing and the value of blue health benefits from spending time by the sea are becoming evident³⁵⁻³⁸. National Parks show how working landscapes can be areas in which people live and work in harmony. There is potential for similar principles and practices to be applied to the seascape.

“The coastline and inshore waters of Galloway are an integral part of the experience of anyone living in or visiting the area. This vision could help us to explore with the local communities how their value could be recognised and conserved”

Robert Lucas, Chairman, Galloway National Park Association

“There are a number of keen and enthusiastic people who could take this forward, but the enabling work, good leadership, facilitation and/or a forum needs to be led by someone neutral”

John Aitchison, Chair, Friends of the Sound of Jura.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on a review of publicly available documents and interviews conducted in 2020, the following recommendations were identified to further explore the potential for National Marine Park status in Scotland.

National

The Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland are invited to further the conversation about a future vision for National Marine Parks. Blue Marine Foundation's research and reports offer insights and perspectives from across Britain including Scotland, which are worthy of further consideration. The Scottish Coastal Communities Network (CCN) is an existing base for enabling conversations within communities to explore levels of interest in National Marine Park status.

Argyll is one of the two Scottish regions involved in the MarPAMM project. It would be helpful to engage further with this work and its recommendations as a potential basis for considering the feasibility of National Marine Park status.

Scottish Government leadership is needed to drive a long term national policy which would reconcile the needs of marine conservation and fisheries interests. Tourism and environmental incentives could make the National Marine Park concept viable, which could include compensation and or new opportunities for fishing communities. Research, involving fishermen, of relevant fisheries management experience elsewhere, could be helpful to identify locally sustainable solutions. The National Park (Scotland) Act 2000 Section 31 ensures that fishing interests have the opportunity to input effectively into the statutory process.

Existing National Parks in Scotland have central government funding. Recognising continuing pressures on public expenditure and the revenue funding for ongoing management is important. However, existing National Parks are assisting with visitor provision and management and there are increasing opportunities for sustainable 'blue' finance such as for carbon storage and nature restoration projects. Innovative vision driven from the local or regional level could provide the means to support future socio-economic needs and opportunities. This is being explored for Plymouth National Marine Park and may offer insights for elsewhere.

Local

Local buy-in is essential to the National Marine Park concept. Building capacity within communities to address issues where there is some common ground would be a good way of changing the narrative (which in some cases has been dominated by tensions between the fishing and conservation sectors). Pressing issues which affect some coastal communities including pollution from fish farming, depopulation and school closures, could be a good place to start exploring opportunities around National Marine Park status. Branding sustainable seafood and marketing sustainable tourism may offer new opportunities. Identifying good leadership and key influencers are important, as are timing and creating the capacity to support a 'bottom-up' approach.

Community-based charities such as CAOLAS (the Community Association of Lochs and Sounds) are helpful examples of how the wider public are engaging in existing Marine Protected Areas and building alternative livelihoods. There

are several local/regional initiatives highlighted in this report that could significantly help build trust and direction towards National Marine Park status. However, they need the capacity to invest more time and effort because at present these roles are voluntary and limited.

Demonstration projects such as supporting native oyster fisheries and communities harnessing stewardship rights through Crown Estate devolution have significant potential. If proposals came from within the fishing community, people are more likely to support them.

The Argyll Coast and Islands Hope Spot could provide the basis for a National Marine Park model. It has the enabling capacity emerging from communities who are interested in the marine environment and raising awareness of its value.

The role and needs of Local Authorities such as Argyll and Bute Council, together with other local bodies, requires further exploration. There is a need to consider what support they would need to progress and enable leadership at the local and political level. Aligning with the Enterprise Agencies could be helpful, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

In south-west Scotland, the Galloway National Park Association is pursuing National Park status and has considered a marine component. There is scope for further conversation about this vision to extend existing National Parks into the sea and specifically in Galloway, in relation to the role of the Solway Firth Partnership in development of the Regional Marine Plan.

The timing for further conversation about National Marine Parks in Scotland needs to take heed of existing and developing Marine Plans and MPA designation processes to avoid complications and confusion within communities. However, within these and other initiatives, there are opportunities to re-introduce debate about National Marine Park status. The fundamental need to resolve conflict between sectors and ensure a fair, balanced approach to resource allocation could be resolved through the marine plan process if the consultation/facilitation process is managed well and fairly, building trust within communities. This could open new opportunities to consider National Marine Park status in some areas.

“Scotland’s coastal landscapes, seascapes and marine wildlife are world-class. As a long-standing supporter of Coastal and Marine National Parks in Scotland, I therefore welcome this important topic being revisited.

Complementary to regional marine planning and well-managed marine protected areas, a National Park provides an opportunity to cherish and enhance the particular socio-economic, cultural and natural heritage character that make Scotland’s coast and seas so special. To succeed, it will be vital to have local community support, energy and drive.”

Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation Scotland, Marine Conservation Society

6. CONCLUSION

A vision for National Marine Parks in Scotland has the benefit of building on a good evidence base from extensive consideration in 2006-07. Argyll Coast and Islands emerged as a frontrunner along with the area immediately to the north, for Scotland's first Coastal and Marine National Park. Argyll and Bute Council consulted more recently in 2017 on the idea. Initial responses indicated support, but following stakeholder engagement and in the absence of any direction from the Scottish Government, it was not included in the Local Development Plan.

National Marine Park status presents an opportunity to address disconnect between land and sea and tell the story about marine life to a wider audience. There is progress with terrestrial National Park proposals which could include coastal/marine elements (e.g. Galloway). For the marine environment the priority over the past decade has been implementation of the requirements of the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 for Marine Plans and Marine Protected Areas. As these are now falling into place there is an opportunity to resume discussion about coastal/marine national parks. There appears to be some community-led appetite which needs further political exploration at both the local and national levels.

Furthering awareness-raising work about the marine environment, supporting investment in facilitating community engagement and reconciling fisheries and conservation interests, would help to improve trust and develop constructive dialogue about the prospect of National Marine Parks. There are national and local initiatives underway, particularly around the Argyll region, which could provide the building blocks for coastal communities to engage in this vision. Leadership from the Scottish Government and capacity building at the local level, with political support at both levels, will be needed to help drive the process.

“Coastal communities have common ground and shared concerns such as de-population, school closures, pollution and the reducing demand for fish. We need NGOs and fishermen to work together, to help each other’s communities economically and environmentally, for the common good”

John Aitchison, Chair, Friends of the Sound of Jura.



7. NEXT STEPS

Blue Marine Foundation has launched a report 'Vision for National Marine Parks' in British Seas. The aim is to start new public conversations about the possibility of marine parks, to explore how our experience of National Parks on land could shape National Marine Parks at sea.

BLUE are proposing a National Marine Park development programme which starts from the 'bottom-up' with scope for exploring guidelines and a national framework. BLUE will seek conversations with coastal communities and others interested in the idea over the next three years. We seek to encourage local stewardship as well as national status for our marine environment.

BLUE are interested in working with national and local stakeholders across Scotland, in the locations identified in this report and further afield. The context for this vision is different than in England and Wales. In some ways there is more opportunity to progress the vision in Scotland due to the more recent National Parks legislation which provides a legal basis to include the sea in National Parks, plus active campaigning to build on the two parks designated so far. However, BLUE are proposing that the vision is explored through 'bottom-up' engagement and participation.

If you would like to take this conversation a step further, BLUE are ready to support local facilitators and networks to encourage debate. We are ready to use our expertise to attract additional investment in coastal communities interested in exploring National Marine Park status.

"We've been making the case for more National Parks in Scotland for over ten years, including for a coastal and marine National Park. It was disappointing that Argyll and Bute Council didn't take forward its 2017 National Park proposal, despite the support of the majority of those who responded to its consultation."

The covid crisis and climate emergency have both shown even more strongly how important it is to look after our finest landscapes and seascapes as best we can. So we welcome this constructive new report as a positive contribution to the debate over what the next steps should be."

John Mayhew, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS)

“One of our challenges is disconnect between land and sea - most people don’t know what’s going on under the surface of the sea. If it was a park, maybe people would connect more and this is the key to people becoming caring and engaging”

Annabel Lawrence, Argyll Hope Spot champion



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