



Pairc Nàiseanta Eilean a' Cheò

Consultation Report 2024

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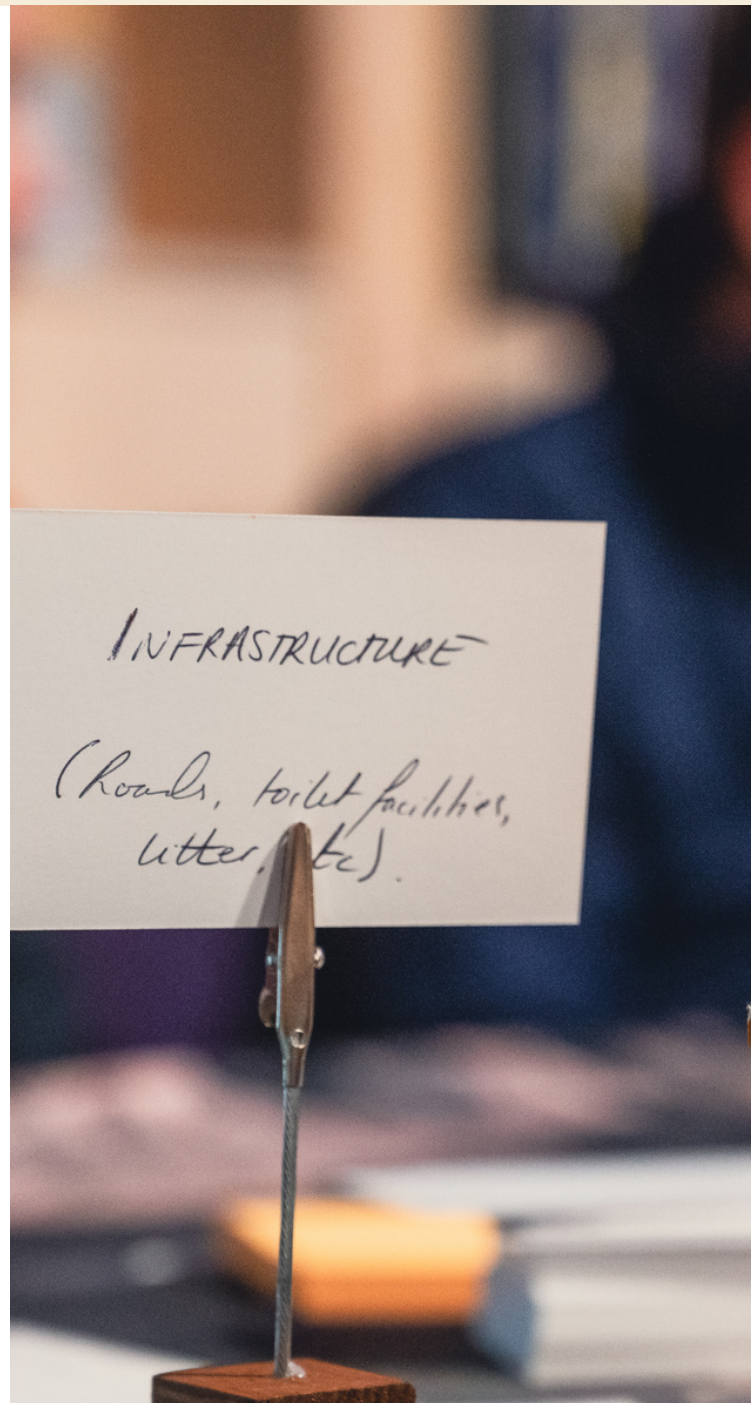
Overall project objective

The intention to explore the potential of Skye and Raasay having National Park Status or equivalent was listed under Skye and Raasay Futures (SARF) which was adopted by the Skye and Raasay Area Committee on 30 August 2021.

In the Autumn of 2023, the Scottish Government invited nominations from suitable areas with a commitment to create a new National Park in Scotland by 2026.

In November 2023, Skye, Raasay and Rona (Eilean a' Cheò, Highland Council Ward 10) was officially put forward as a potential area for this status and an expression of interest was submitted.

From December 2023 to February 2024, views were sought of residents living in our island communities as to what it might deliver for them. Community trusts & councils, crofting representatives, businesses, schools and a range of other groups were invited to contribute suggestions.





Priorities agreed

This report details the analysis of the community consultation.

Priorities of consultation

- Hold North/south public meetings. This was extended to include Dunvegan and Isle of Raasay.
- Attend meetings with all Skye and Raasay Development Trusts and Community Councils where possible.
- Co-ordinate engagement activity with appointed support - *Lateral North*
- Utilise work undertaken for local place plan – *Skye and Raasay Future*
- Present evidence of local feedback from meetings
- Identify and consult stakeholders – Businesses/landowners/organisations

What would be the advantages of a National Park?

Dè a ghabhas dheànadh?

It could:

- Develop and maintain improved infrastructure – including roads and housing – for our residents and visitors
- Promote Gaelic heritage and culture .. of the area
- Support crofting, agriculture and local produce
- Enhance the lives of local people by creating jobs and helping businesses
- Protect our fragile environment in the face of unprecedented visitor numbers and a challenging and changing climate

Add housing

USP is very important

Cycling + public transport

Increased capacity and funding for communities to manage themselves

Depopulation + ageing

what sustains people and communities

Too many bases?

Competing claims on funding: Balancing act

First meeting:

Broadford and Strath Community Company & Portree and Braes Community Trust

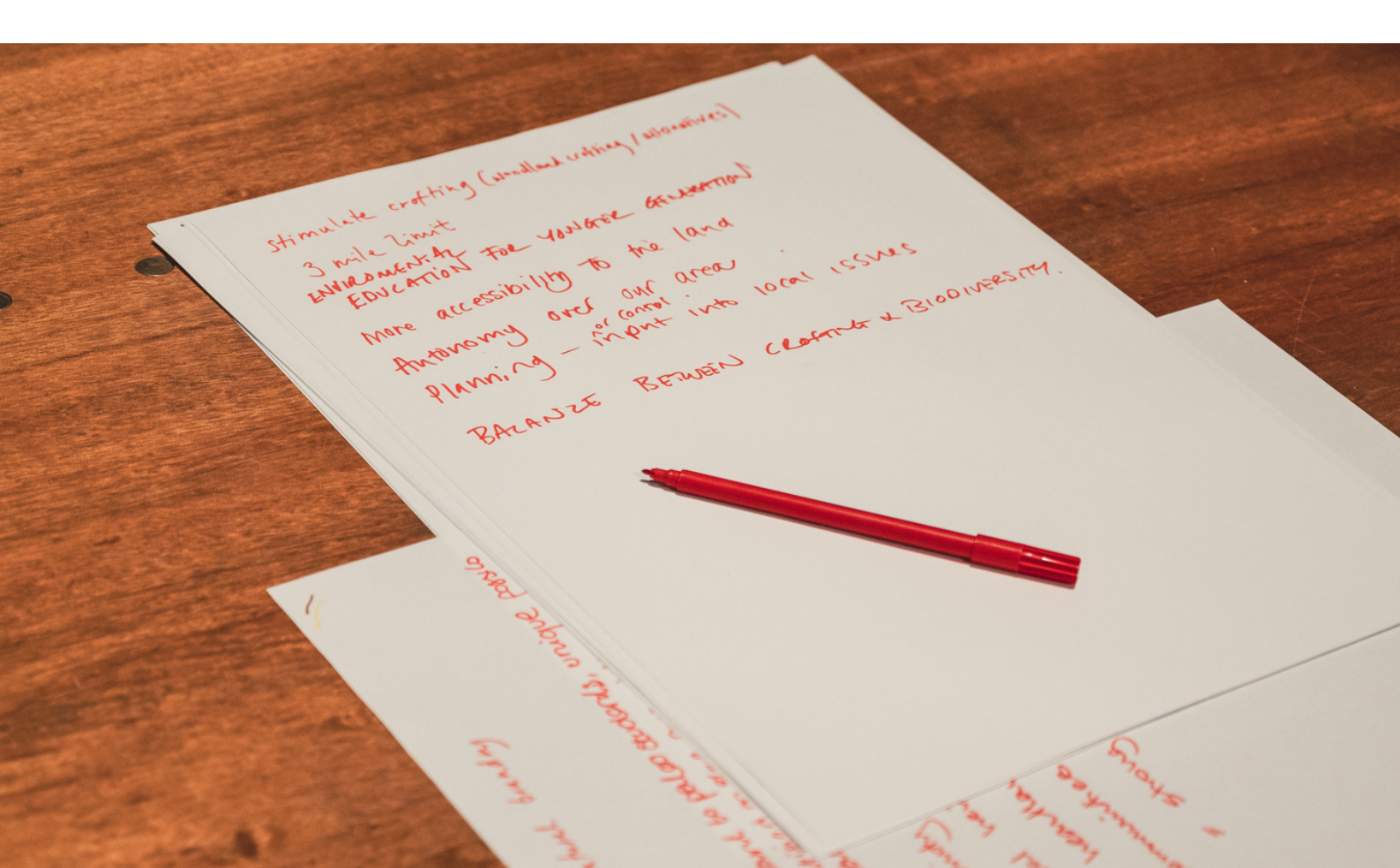
This initial meeting reviewed the criteria for any new national park and discussed how this may fit some of the areas main challenges. Attendees used an online program called Miro to share suggestions. It was discussed how the increased capacity and funding this status offers would enhance opportunities for communities to manage themselves.

Website launch in December

[Pàirc Nàiseanta Eilean a' Cheò – A National Park for Skye, Raasay and Rona? \(wordpress.com\)](#)

The website has seen significant traffic throughout the process and has had over 1,500 views from its launch in December 2023.

It should be noted that the Google Forms survey link which was embedded on the website has also been widely accessed directly via Facebook and WhatsApp.



Open meeting at Third Ridge, Portree

The first in-person meeting was held at Third Ridge in Portree. The Third Ridge is a relatively new venue which has recently promoted smaller scale community events.

Under the guidelines produced by Scottish Government, it was suggested an effort should be made to broaden discussions beyond established community groups. This was successful as this meeting brought together individuals on short term and seasonal contracts, outdoor guides along with people who work in land management and crofting.

Challenges around affordable housing and lack of well paid permanent jobs were clear at these meetings. Concerns were raised as to who would make the majority of the decisions under any future national park status.

Over 40 attended this meeting.



Public meetings in Sleat, Dunvegan, Portree and Raasay

This series of meetings were very well attended and received significant coverage in local and national press. Two members of staff from Lateral North also attended these encounters to explain more about the nomination process and the wider context.

An approximate tally indicated that more than 100 were at each gathering in Sleat, Dunvegan and Portree, along with over 20 in Raasay.

A large map in both Gaelic and English was produced to show the current designations the area has in place. There were also topics to interact with for younger audiences and families. Visitors were asked to suggest the main objectives a National Park could take on and there was great enthusiasm in these discussions. Concerns were raised over the timescale allotted to make a decision.

Some visitors were asked to complete a paper survey having spent time engaging with the subject.

From 73 completed surveys: Approximately 65% for a National Park, 15% undecided and 20% against



RESOUNDING NO!: A show of hands in opposition to the plans.

Crofters firmly opposed to national park

BY MICHAEL RUSSELL
michael.russell@whfp.com

At two public meetings held on Skye over the last week, up to 300 crofters and farmers gave a resounding rejection of plans to turn the island into a national park.

In Kilmuir hall last Thursday, at least 150 crofters, many of whom are members of the Scottish Crofting Federation, took part in a meeting organised by the Kilmuir Crofters Club. Of those present, just three were undecided about the proposal, while the remainder were opposed.

us, this is what the councillors are looking at, but nobody knows how much is in that pot. There is no figure.

"The Scottish Government are talking about 'at least' one new national park by 2026. If, say, there is £10 million in the pot, well that could be down to £5 million each if there are two new parks. This is money some people are chasing that they think is going to sort out the roads and everything else, but it's pie in the sky."

FUNDS

Hopefully, the Kilmuir meeting was an "eye-opener" for those supporting the park, said Mr

Cheviot and Blackface sheep on a croft at Struan and a farm at Claggan, near Dunvegan, pointed out that almost £6 million is being paid every year in wages for staff and directors who run the Cairngorms National Park Authority.

He added: "The way they have gone about it, it has been cobbled together, to be honest. I keep hearing how those driving this have spoken to various groups and they're very positive about this. But you've just had well over 100 crofters in Kilmuir and the same, and members of the public, in Portree, who can't see anything positive about it."

A Facebook page "Skye National Park No More"

BURDENS

Jake Sayles of the NFU told the *Free Press* that the "unanimous consensus" shown at Monday's meeting centred on concerns over the "increased burden" on planning and legislation and the threat posed to crofting/farming food production, land use and rural culture.

He added: "Concerns were also raised about the Scottish Government's consultation, information/length of period and the survey – ie it can be filled out by anyone and it's not necessary to give a name and address. So it is not necessarily people who actually live in the area completing the

Opposition from those working in Crofting and Farming

In late January, elected members were invited to a SAC Consulting event at Kilmuir Hall. These meetings are part of the Farm Advisory Service, funded by Scottish Government.

This gathering was extremely busy with over 100 present with the majority of these being Skye crofters and farmers. Strong views were shared by several individuals and a poll was requested under a show-of-hands very early in the meeting.

It was clear that those present were opposed to the discussion around National Park status.

Another meeting organised by NFU Mutual Portree branch was also advertised. This event was equally busy and the broad opposition from those involved in crofting and agriculture was reiterated.

Skye and Raasay Development Trusts and Community Councils

Further online and in person meetings were held the groups listed below:

(Specific meetings on National Park Status)

- Kyleakin Community Council
- Kylereia Community Council
- Struan Community Trust and Council
- Dunvegan Community Trust
- Uig Community Council
- Kilmuir Community Council
- Raasay Community Trust and Council
- Broadford Community Council

(As an item for discussion at regular meetings)

- Staffin Community Trust and Council
- Sconser Community Council

These meetings varied from interactive online workshops to summaries of discussions that had emerged on National park status. Broadly, these discussions were intended to inform attendees on the discussion and record feedback and suggestions. Several of these meetings became about distilling the debate and why particularly crofting communities were opposed to the status.

No votes were taken at these meetings.



Suggestions from community groups

These suggestions were formed from new Scottish Government guidance on a future National Park and discussed with several community groups.

There was an appetite for Skye and Raasay to have their own decision making body again, similar to the areas former district council.

Under the new guidance, the potential board of any future National Park may be:

- *20% directly elected as candidates serving terms*
- *40% local authority appointed from elected members and Skye community organisations such as trusts/community councils and may include an agriculture forum. All inhabitants serving terms.*
- *40% Scottish Government - with desire for all of these to live within any National Park or nearby.*

There was a clear will from community groups that 100% of any board would need to be democratically accountable and locally based.

Priorities of any future National Park:

- Better protection of cultural heritage - including crofting, promotion of local produce and Gaelic - improved infrastructure* and better visitor management.
- Housing was consistently brought up as an issue. An agreed strategy would need to be prioritised if any nomination were to proceed.
- For planning the approach would have to be sensibly and sensitively managed. The likely option would be for planning to remain within Highland Council and an NP would not intervene in housing or agriculture matters. Any new NP would allow renewables, unlike in the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond NPs.

*An NP can apply for specific infrastructure funding including roads directly to SG that is not currently available without a new status.

Google Form Survey

75%

against*

18%
for

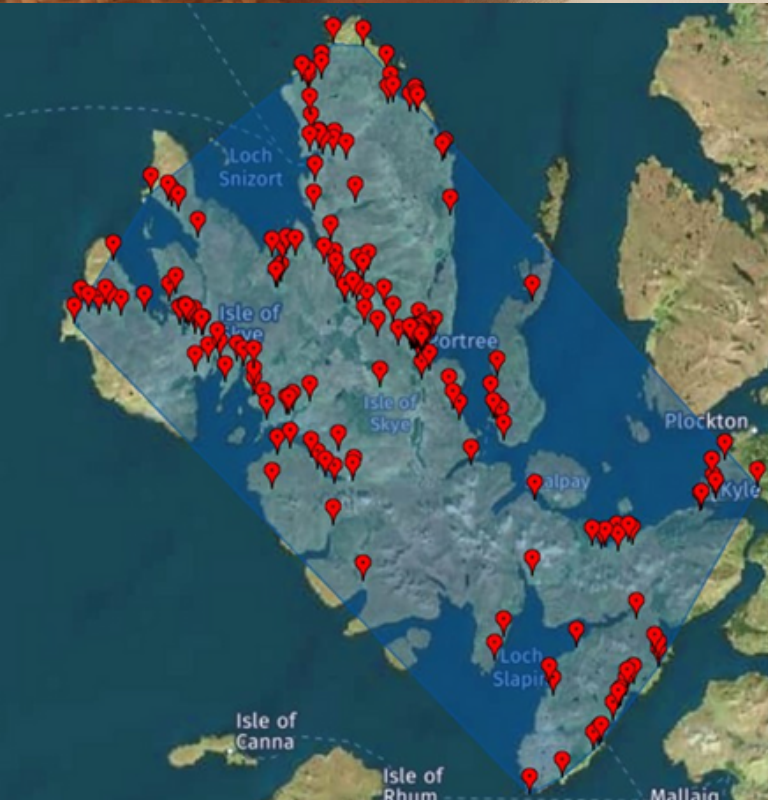
With support from Lateral North, a survey was made public in early January to collect opinions from individual residents on the proposed National Park status. This was shared widely and had a relatively high number of respondents, totaling **711 responses over six weeks**.

This was a useful tool to understand community feeling. It should be understood that out of the 711 around 100 of the postcodes returned on the survey were from outwith Skye and Raasay and around 10% appeared to be duplicates where people may have filled out the form more than once.

When this data was removed the response rate was around 75% against National Park status and 18% for.

The map (left) uses data submitted with post codes submitted from Skye and Raasay which indicate a good geographic spread of respondents from the area.

*After duplicates and outside area postcodes were removed





Google Forms Survey continued

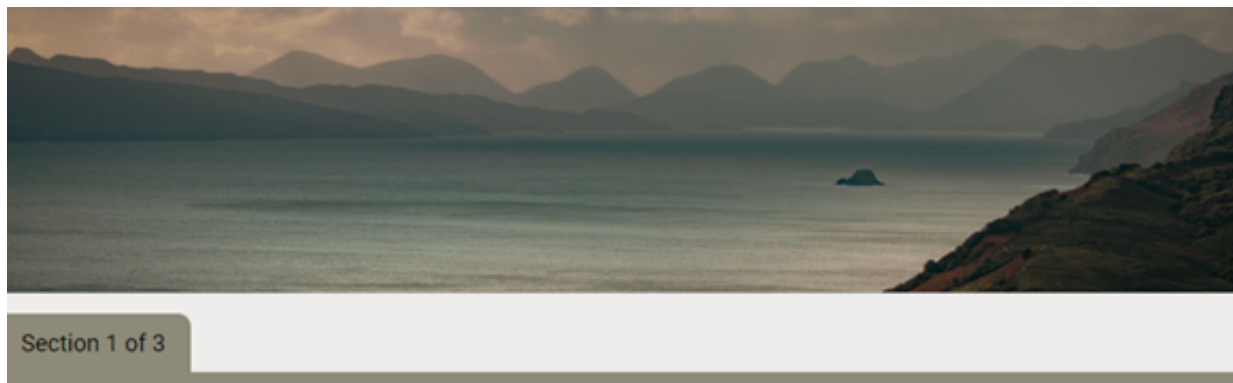
The online survey by Lateral North encouraged suggestions on the priorities of any new National Park. The most popular responses from the survey included:

- 28% Better protection of cultural heritage
- 28% Better tourism infrastructure

Other popular suggestions with over 20% suggested:

- Stronger community resilience
- More skilled jobs
- Great promotion of Gaelic

Many of these aspirations are laid out in the Skye and Lochlash Future Plan (2021).

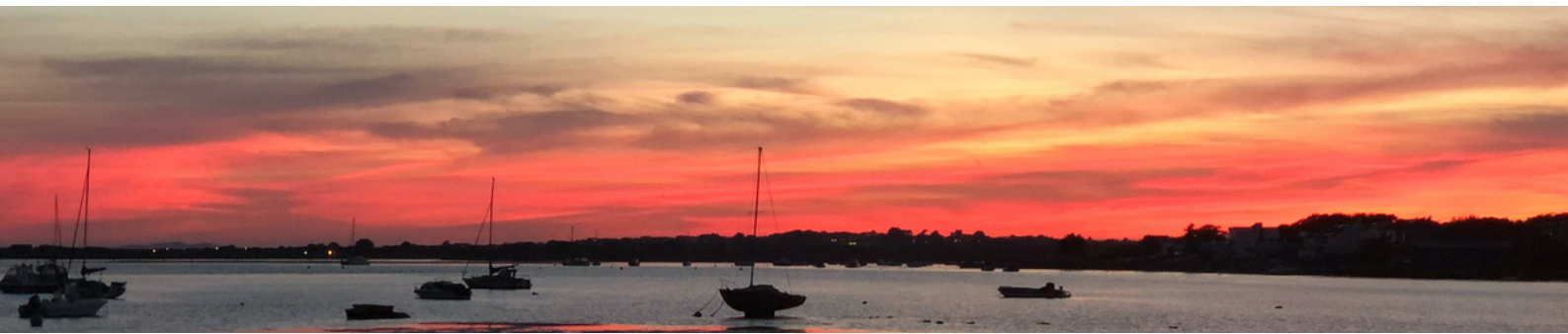


New National Park(s) - Skye and Raasay

The Scottish Government has committed to designating at least one new National Park in Scotland by the end of this parliamentary session in 2026. An open and public invitation for expressions of interest in new National Parks was launched in May 2023. Communities and organisations who wish to put their area forward for designation as a National Park were invited to develop and submit their 'nomination'. On 12 October 2023, Scottish Government launched the nomination process for new National Parks.

The broad selection criteria that will be used to help assess nominations for new National Parks are:

- outstanding national importance
- size, character and coherence
- meeting the special needs of the area
- strategic contribution
- visitor management and tourism
- local support



Minginish Community Council

Community Council members from this area organised their own poll and it is appropriate to include this in the report.

From the outset, our committee was given very little warning of this proposal (17th January) and felt it was almost impossible to consult properly with the residents of Minginish. However, we were approached by some residents asking if there was any news on the proposal and if there was anything we could do to stop it, all of these residents were against the proposal.

There was also a feeling among some residents that they perhaps didn't have enough information to make an informed decision even after attending the drop in sessions and meetings held around the island.

We held a community council meeting at the end of January and it was decided we should put a survey out to the community asking the simple question "Do you agree with Skye becoming a national park? YES or NO?"

The survey was posted on 30th January with a closing date of 10th February.

The result of the survey was as follows,

167 responses.

42 For.

125 Against.

75% NO and 25% YES.

We would therefore like to make it official that Minginish Community Council are against the proposal for Skye becoming a national park, this decision was unanimous among our 8 committee members before the survey was posted. After receiving the results of our survey, we feel a 75% vote against is valid reason for us to come to this conclusion.





Raasay Development Trust

The Scottish Government process and the short time frame to undertake the consultation on submitting a bid has not enabled us to assess the impact of National Park status on Raasay.

While we understand that there may be benefits to National Park status, there is concern and scepticism within our community as to the impact on traditional occupations such as crofting and fishing and we as an organisation have many unanswered questions. We are concerned that further consultation may not result in an option to retract the bid. This second stage of consultation will be after the bid has been submitted and when information is likely to come forward answering our many questions.

Without further detail, we will have to remain neutral at this point.



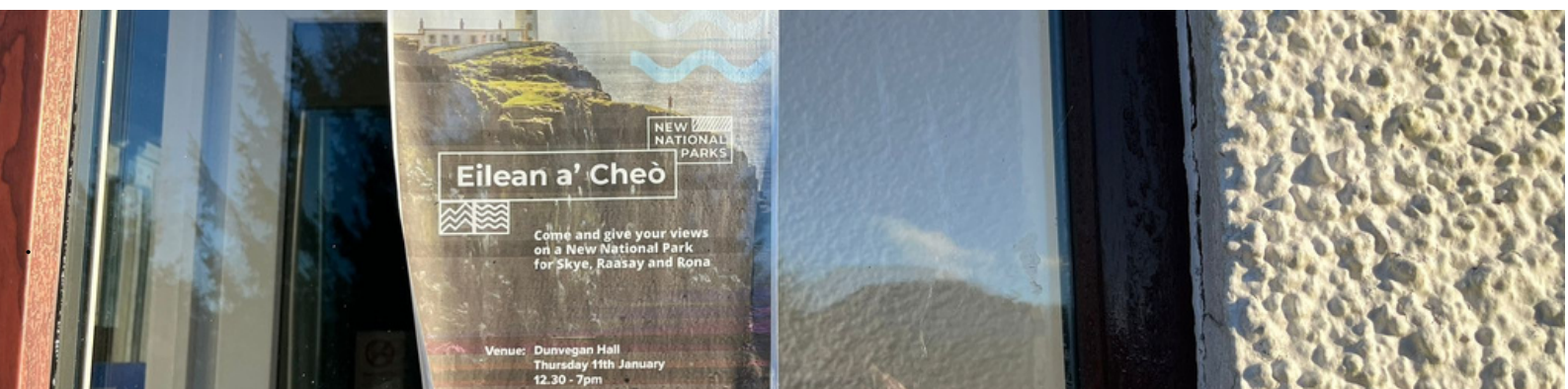


NFU Skye Survey

Over 440 responses, only 40% were Crofters or Farmers, the rest inhabitants of area but not involved in agriculture –81% of those against the proposal. It is likely that there is some duplication from the Google Survey.

Main concerns:

- *Increased burden/regulation and reduction in local powers.*
- *Unnecessary inequity created between those within the “park” and between those in park and outside them.*
- *Concerns around this impacting on the “just” transition Scottish Government is trying to adhere to.*
- *Concerns around reducing and losing the local culture held within our crofting and rural communities here – rather than protecting it or enhancing it.*
- *Concerns around other interests who aren't involved in land management setting agenda and imposing their will on agricultural communities.*
- *Removing hard won and fought protections for crofting (ie crofting commission legislation and protections)*
- *At a time where food production needs to be protected/supported and encouraged changing to a board driven decision making process creates huge uncertainty for future.*
- *Concerns around how it could actually solve issues like housing for local residents/affordable or otherwise.*
- *Concerns around Scottish Governments consultation process – short timescales, and severe lack of information provided.*
- *Concerns around actual benefits derived for land managers in area – still awaiting these facts from Scottish government from existing national parks.*





Representations against from groups representing agriculture, crofting townships, farms and sheep stock clubs

As reflected at the SAC meeting in Kilmuir and the NFU meeting in Portree, those involved in agriculture on Skye and Raasay are strongly opposed to National Park status. **There is a danger of a new NP becoming a divisive issue, both in our area and more widely across rural Scotland, where opposition to a new NP appears to be the consensus view among farmers and crofters.** The below issues are a selection of some of the views shared for this consultation:

- Perceived unwelcome new red tape and a new layer of governance
 - Additional workload having to meet environmental demands when the farming sector is already under multiple pressures
 - A perceived lack of accountability and responsiveness within the governance of any NP and its interaction with farmers, crofters and estates
 - A perceived lack of agricultural representation in how any NP would be run
- A general view is held that tight budgets would be better directed elsewhere, and food production should have higher priority. Rightly or wrongly, many in the rural community feel that nature restoration is the overriding focus of Scottish Government to the detriment of local culture and economy.

Letters of opposition have been received from the townships, farms and sheep stock clubs listed below:

- Brogaig
- Sartle
- Digg
- Glasphein
- Flodigarry
- Conon
- Ferrindonald
- Sleat General
- Teangue
- Woodside Farm
- Achnacloich
- Kilmuir, Dunvegan
- Meadle
- Scorr Farm
- Glenbrittle
- Carbostmore
- Talisker, including North Talisker
- Braes/Camustianavaig
- Ullnish
- Balgowan
- Struanmore
- Glen Claigan
- Totarder
- Ebst

Several other crofters and farmers have also got in touch and made their opposition clear without stating the township or group they represent.

Conclusions

The below questions are repeated from the Scottish Government nomination guidelines

Is there evidence of local community engagement and participation in developing this proposal?

Yes.

Is there evidence of local support for this proposal?

No. None of the polls beyond the first public consultation meetings produced a result that expressed a desire for National Park status for the area. Polls varied from 80% against National Park Status to 60% against. Support for this proposal is from a minority of residents.

Does the nomination reference any opposition to this proposal?

Yes. These are clearly expressed in this report with the strongest and most united opposition coming from those involved in crofting and farming.

Local community engagement and participation in the development of the proposal.

In the short time period of just over 10 weeks, Skye and Raasay has had a wide range of opportunities to engage with the discussion both in public meetings and online.

Conclusions:

Over the consultation period it has become clear that it would not be possible to properly and fairly address the serious concerns raised within the timescale allowed. Only through unhurried grassroots discussion with stakeholders and residents would the people of the area be able to consider the positive and perhaps downsides offered by any new status.

Legitimate concerns have been expressed by the majority of community groups that the process has been too rushed, leading to a feeling of that thorough communication has not taken place. In order for this situation to be rectified for any future consultation work that may have impacts on livelihoods, crofters, land managers and farmers should be engaged from the outset.

A key point raised (in this case articulated most clearly by Raasay CT) was a concern that if a nomination is submitted there is no clear option at the next stage to retract the bid should concerns not be properly addressed.

Thank you to Broadford and Strath Community Company, Portree and Braes Community Trust and Highland Council for facilitating this community consultation.

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