

Scotland aims for first marine park

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Scotland could have its first Coastal and Marine National Park by 2008 under plans made public today.

Environment and Rural Development Minister Ross Finnie announced a two stage process to create the first park of its kind in the UK.

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) will now undertake work to identify where and how a Coastal and Marine National Park could be established.

Mr Finnie said:

"Scotland's coastline and seas are a valuable natural, cultural and economic resource.

"We are committed to better managing that resource in the interests of our communities and the wide range of important species the seas and coasts support.

"Taking care of our coasts and marine environment will help to boost jobs too.

"While there are marine nature reserves elsewhere in the world. I am clear that our approach is about people too. As with our terrestrial national parks we will include local communities to secure the sustainable economic and social development of the park area.

"We will shortly be publishing a Marine Strategy and Scotland's first coastal and marine national park is just one important strand in the work we are doing to establish a coherent approach to managing Scotland's coastal and marine environments.

"I have now asked SNH to begin work to identify a park that will promote access to, and enjoyment and understanding of our rich coastline and marine environment."

A coastal and marine park would have the same broad purpose as terrestrial national parks.

¥ conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area

¥ promote the sustainable use of natural resources

¥ promote access, enjoyment and understand

¥ promote the sustainable economic and social development of local communities

SNH will be invited to undertake a scoping and feasibility study into the future creation of a Coastal and Marine National Park.

They will be asked to work closely with stakeholder interests and to report to Ministers in early 2006 with an initial assessment of potential candidate areas. This will be followed by full consultation with all stakeholder interests before final decisions are made.

The process of designating a Coastal and Marine National Park will be overseen by a new outcome-focused stakeholder group, chaired by Mr Finnie.

The consultation on Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment was launched in May 2004. This sought views on the better long-term management of the seas and coastline.

Responses to the consultation will be published this summer.