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## People Too elects board members

### Fordyce Maxwell

*Rural Affairs Editor*

*AN ORGANISATION dedicated to putting people first and breaking "the bureaucratic stranglehold" of Scottish Natural Heritage on Scotland's rural areas held its first board meeting in Edinburgh this week.*

*People Too is the brainchild of Kirsty Macleod, a crofter's daughter from Coll, now partner with her husband David in the 8,000 acre Glen Gloy estate, Lochaber.*

*She was one of three directors of People Too elected by supporters this week. The others are Western Isles councillor Donald Manford of Barra and Ian Mitchell, author of Isles of the West, published three years ago as a systematic criticism of SNH's approach to island conservation and environment management.*

*Speaking after the first meeting and official launch of People Too, she said: "Scottish Natural Heritage has been in existence for 10 years now and its power base has grown enormously.*

*It now infiltrates almost every area and in a strange way it is anti-enterprise, anti-business and anti-people.*

*"For us the countryside is a place of business, a place to live but also to make a living. They seem to have a vision of some rural idyll. What we're attacking is its heavy-handed, patronising attitude when it comes to saying what can and can't be done."*

*She added: "We're pro-people who want to live and work in rural areas, take the ebb and flow of life, and make their own decisions. Instead so much is now being controlled by a number of bureaucratic organisations, but mainly SNH. It stifles enterprise with its narrow, control freak, approach."*

*One of the main complaints is the large, and increasing, area of Scotland under environmental designation such as Site of Special Scientific Interest and Environmentally Sensitive Area. These designations immediately restrict what farmers, crofters and landowners can do with their own land and People Too is a focus for complaints that they are usually applied without consultation.*

*Kirsty Macleod said: "They say they consult, but they don't. They come along and tell a landowner or a local community what is going to happen. What we would like to do is see SNH abolished as the way of doing things and its functions moved to the Scottish Executive."*

*She believes that People Too - the direct result of two meetings she organised in Perth last October and this February - will become the focus for rural disquiet about SNH's powers.*

*SNH has insisted several times recently that it has learned lessons and become more conciliatory and willing to listen and consult. Macleod said: "No, they haven't. They're just getting better at PR."*

*Ian Mitchell said: "It's not anti-SNH, we're anti the bureaucratic stranglehold on rural Scotland. It's the whole problem of having Edinburgh decide on local issues. Local people know best - what we're looking for is local devolution from Edinburgh's imperialism and quango culture. "*

*He will edit a quarterly magazine entitled Fresh Air for People Too which, he said, will give its readers - it will be mailed to MSPs among others - "the truth about what is going on in rural areas that they don't get now".*

*Ian Jardine, appointed as chief executive of SNH last month to succeed Roger Crofts, did his best to be conciliatory about the new organisation. He said: "Serving the interests of Scotland's rural communities is a noble cause and I hope that People Too are able to help them."*

*He said there is a serious debate to be had about the future of Scotland's natural heritage and SNH was "very willing" to be part of that.*

*But, he added, People Too had so far tended to focus on a few individual cases and often resorted to name calling and exaggeration in order to get media attention for its concerns.*