

**Peter McMurray**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**4<sup>th</sup> December 2018**

**Submission:**

## **Coastal and Marine National Parks: A Natural Progression for Ireland?**



Thinking about how we enjoy, protect, or derive economic and social benefits from the Marine environment and in anticipation of future needs this submission proposes the consideration of Coastal and Marine National Parks (CMNP) to be included in the Marine Planning Framework. The objective of this consideration is the protection of ecosystems, seascapes and landscapes of special importance and to provide areas for public use and appreciation.

Following on from the successes of the Great Western Greenway in Co. Mayo, the marketing of the Wild Atlantic Way and the recent expansion of Ballycroy National Park in the West of Ireland this submission aims to identify the need for a discussion on Coastal and Marine National Parks early in the planning process.

## **Justification: A Starting Point for Discussion**

A Coastal and Marine National Park (CMNP) could encourage further economic activity in a sustainable and diverse way. These benefits may be realised from a range of economies including tourism, renewable energy, fisheries and aquaculture by recognising, preserving and promoting the outstanding natural and cultural heritage of a place.

The key to all projects affecting a community is debate being carried out in a comprehensive and engaging way. This submission is a proposal for discussion and research into one of Ireland's biggest assets, the marine and coastal areas, to encourage sustainability and diversification of rural areas.

## **The Potential Benefits of a Coastal and Marine National Park (CMNP)**

The economies of coastal communities have historically been fragile in rural Ireland. They are linked closely to the cultural and natural heritage. For coastal communities to survive and thrive it is important to highlight the assets of an area. Following on from the success of the Great Western Greenway and the marketing of the Wild Atlantic Way it is conceivable that a Coastal and Marine National Park will be proposed in the future. The economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits of a CMNP may highlight an opportunity for rural coastal areas of Ireland.

## **Rural Depopulation**

Increasing population within a place is vital to rural communities if they are to survive. This could be achieved by creating a tangible community asset. It is important to build on assets already established. A CMNP could provide a stable setting for the existing economies of the area and create new employment opportunities, therefore increasing the population of rural areas.

## **Promoting the Sustainable Economic and Social Development for Communities.**

Promoting and reinforcing the connections between the social, environmental, economic and cultural assets is of the utmost importance for rural areas. Tourism and Recreation are one of the only industries in the world where the goods and services are consumed at the site of production. For this very reason, local people are at an advantage to reap the benefits associated within the sector. A well planned, locally managed and responsible tourism and recreation asset such as a CMNP could be an excellent mechanism of channelling resources to rural areas.

The Céide Fields, the branding of the Greenway and the Wild Atlantic Way have helped promote education, activities, events and local attractions. UNESCO world heritage status is important to many sites around the world providing added tourism and status to an area. A CMNP could help in the same way as these successful projects. A CMNP could attract resources from government and the private sector and provide an opportunity to emulate the best practices of other Marine National Parks internationally.

### **Protecting the Natural Heritage, Landscape and Visual Amenity**

The connection between land and sea contains some of the finest parts of our natural and man-made heritage. The natural heritage includes the landscape, marine and coastal habitats and marine life. The human heritage is rich and varied including coastal and island communities. A CMNP could assist and promote the natural heritage and landscape of an area. It is possible that sustainable recreation management and development could be an important function.

### **Planning, Governance and Stewardship**

A CMNP could provide an environment of decision making through stewardship. A national park could provide a platform for the quicker resolution of conflicts between interests and provide a localised mechanism to monitor, regulate and enable. The communities involved may provide better long-term solutions for their own future.

### **Providing Enhanced Education and Training Opportunities Close to a Coastal and Marine National Park in Ireland**

To connect research into a Coastal and Marine National park with educational institutions is a logical and sustainable step. The involvement of educational institutions could increase the range of educational opportunities on offer or help sustain the educational opportunities currently available in rural areas.

## **Conclusion**

The National Marine Planning Framework baseline report highlights the need to identify future opportunities and constraints in the Marine environment. Thinking about how we enjoy, protect, or derive economic and social benefits from the Marine environment it is important to discuss the future possibility of Coastal and Marine National Parks before a planning framework is in place.

A **Coastal and Marine National Park** in Ireland, with the right approach and early planning could:

Enhance the care of an area of high natural and cultural heritage value.

Increase the enjoyment and understanding of one of Ireland's main assets.

Distribute local, social and economic benefits including higher quality jobs, diversified and robust businesses and stronger communities.

Provide for greater involvement of local people in decision making.

Promote innovation, good practice and more integrated approaches to sustainable development in the marine environment.

It is possible that, with planning and vision, a Coastal and Marine National Park could meet the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations.

