

BACKGROUND PAPER D: PROFILES OF THE LONG-LIST OF POSSIBLE AREAS

D1 This annex contain profiles of the following areas

- Solway
- Clyde
- Argyll Islands and Coast
- Lochaber and South Skye
- Wester Ross and North Skye
- North Uist, Sound of Harris, Harris and South Lewis
- South Uist, Sound of Barra and Barra
- Orkney
- Shetland (including Fair Isle)
- Moray Firth

These areas are illustrated in Annex 1 of the main report.

D2 The profiles follow a common format

- Description of possible area
- Transport Links
- Key Statistics
- Overview of the key aspects of the natural heritage, cultural heritage and recreational use of the area
- Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment work, including social and economic profile and activities, current initiatives and specific issues and opportunities

These profiles build on the work undertaken during Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the assessment process, with additional information drawn from social and economic data extracted from a Scottish Coastal Social and Economic Scoping Study (Scottish Executive, 2002). Some of the material on the cultural heritage was provided by Historic Scotland.

D3 Drawing together these profiles has been challenging, notably because of the unevenness in the availability of data between areas. The specific information we had on social and economic areas was also broad brush in nature and was collated in 2002. Rather than providing a totally comprehensive description of each of the possible areas, these profiles therefore provide a quick overview of the key aspects and the specific issues and opportunities for each area that we considered to be of particular relevance to the National Park assessment process.

SOLWAY

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
<p>The area comprises the north side of the Solway Firth from Caerlaverock to the Mull of Galloway with possible extensions eastwards to the English border at the river Sark and westwards around the Mull of Galloway to Corsewall Point. The main settlements in the area are the towns of Dumfries and Stranraer with smaller centres of population at Kirkcudbright and Newton Stewart and further east at Annan.</p>		<p>Main access to the area is via the A75/M74. The A77 and A76 connect the area to the north and smaller roads connect the A75 to communities along the coast. Just outside the proposed area, Cairnryan is the principal ferry port linking Britain and Northern Ireland. The A75 Euro route and a rail-link from Glasgow terminate at Stranraer. Dumfries is connected to Glasgow via the Nith valley line.</p>	Population	8,088 - 18,809
			Area	2072- 3330km ²
			Area of land	355- 765 km ²
			Area of sea	1717 -2564 km ²
			Local Authority	Dumfries and Galloway
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	<p>The area contains a large diversity of coastal habitats and species and is the only in place in Scotland where all of the native amphibians and reptiles found in Scotland occur together. Some 20% of the coastline is designated as part of the Natura 2000 Network. The tidal regime exposes one of the largest continuous areas of intertidal habitat in Britain and represents one third of Scotland's extent of these habitats. These provide important feeding ground for wintering wildfowl and waders, notably the entire Svalbard barnacle goose population, which in turn is a key focus for the NNR at Caerlaverock. Further west the coastline becomes more rocky, with cliffs topped with maritime heath and grassland and several raised beaches. With all the rivers emptying south into the Solway sandflats and saltmarshes have developed in a series of estuaries and bays, notably at Wigtown, Gatehouse of Fleet, Kirkcudbright and the Rough Firth. The long coasts of the Rhins and Machars peninsulas include the raised beaches along the shores of Luce Bay, rugged headlands (including the southern most point in Scotland at the Mull of Galloway), small sandy bays and inlets. On the exposed west coast of the Rhins, the high cliffs provide nesting habitat for many seabirds, with the southernmost gannetry on the west coast on the Scare Rocks in the mouth of Luce Bay. At the head of Luce Bay, Torrs Warren contains the largest system of dynamic and actively building sand dunes in the southwest. Luce Bay is also important for its botanical and ornithological interest and its range of subtidal habitats such as sublittoral sands and gravels. The warmer waters of the gulf stream carry unusual marine species to the Solway coast such as sunfish and an up welling of nutrient rich water off the Rhins of Galloway and Machars supports rich tide swept communities of sponges and hydroids on rocky reefs and boulders. Basking sharks are frequent visitors this area.</p>			
Landscape	<p>Nearly 50% of the coastline is designated for its outstanding landscapes, including NSAs at East Stewartry, the Nith Estuary and Fleet Valley. The scenic qualities of the area are the product of the interplay between the sea and sandflats contrasting with the rugged inland hills, the bays enclosed by headlands and the distant views to Cumbria and the Isle of Man. Inland the drumlin (low hill) landscape is dominated by small scale mixed farming interspersed with gorsy knolls, drystone dykes, areas of forestry, natural woodland and small villages. These managed landscapes provide further contrast with the open character of sand and mud flats of the estuaries and the extensive seascapes of the Rhinns. The few large settlements are located around the coast – some are historic and planned (e.g. Whithorn associated with early Christianity) while others have arisen as ribbon development. A variety of building styles are evident. Working ports and harbours, such as Kirkcudbright, Isle of Whithorn and Portpatrick add to local distinctiveness, while others like Drummorie and Garlieston have declined and need refurbishment. Coastal communities have had to develop new purposes, with Wigtown becoming the Scottish book town and Kirkcudbright an artists' town, building on a long association with the Scottish Colourists group of painters in particular. The presence of several large estate houses and gardens, castles, churches, monuments</p>			

	and ancient remains provide evidence of long established settlement and periods of past prosperity in the area. Some of these have become major visitor destinations, for example the Royal Botanic Gardens at Logan and Caerlaverock castle.
Cultural Heritage	This area has traditionally been an important gateway from Scotland to Ireland, and much of its early historic interest reflects this role. Mesolithic boats were believed to be in frequent use, and the crossing from Scotland to Ireland would have been a place of intensive activity. The area contains significant remains of human occupation dating from the prehistoric period to the present day – of particular note are the dune systems to the west of Glen Luce. The coastal area contains important medieval burghs and castles, while the intertidal zone contains the remains of relatively recent and much older fish traps – some dating to the Mesolithic period. The story of Saint Ninian and the early Christianity of this area is explored in the museum at Whithorn and associations with John Paul Jones (founder of the American navy) at the museum at Arbigland. The majority of more recent shipping losses have occurred close to harbour entrances (e.g. Kirkcudbright which grew as a coal port in the 18 th century) and around headlands (Mull of Galloway, Burrow Head and Little Ross). Many of the wrecks located close inshore may be well broken up. There is also some WWII interest in Wigtown Bay, where the Mulberry Harbour was tested.
Enjoyment & Recreation	The coast provides a significant attraction to visitors and residents alike, with recreational activities ranging from picnicking and sunbathing through to coastal walking, shore and boat based sea angling, scuba diving, sea kayaking and sailing. The area has some spectacular coastal walks, some of which like those in the NSAs are being enhanced with interpretation. Birdwatching and coastal wildfowling are popular particularly at the many nature reserves such as the Caerlaverock NNR, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust Centre, the RSPB managed centres at Mersehead and Mull of Galloway and the LNR at Wigtown Bay. Caravan parks, for example at Sandyhills, Southernness, Carrick and Sandhead, also attract many visitors. Harbours at Kippford, Kirkcudbright, Portpatrick, Isle of Whithorn, Port Logan and Stranraer are used extensively by sailing craft and Sandgreen is also used by speedboats and water-skiers. The main activity periods are spring and summer, though autumn and winter is a peak time for spectacular bird-watching and for wildfowling. Access is generally good, though there are restrictions to the public on the MOD ranges at Luce Bay and south of Kirkcudbright. Gretna, Annan, Caerlaverock, Southernness, Sandyhills and the Rough Firth, Brighthouse Bay and Kirkcudbright Bay are the main centres for informal beach-based recreation. The Southern Upland Way long distance footpath starts at Portpatrick. Seasonal and year round ranger services operate throughout the area, notably at Wigtown Bay, Rockcliffe and the Mull of Galloway – the latter helping to manage the 60,000 visitors to the area each year.
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>There is a relatively low household income in this area (more households have an income of £10k per annum less than the average for Scotland's coastal areas). Employment is generally in crafts, trades and manual work. Population is set to decline (2 to 2.5% between 2002-06, then 7% between 2002-16). With a higher than average proportion of retired people, unemployment is lower than average despite declining economic activity. The economy of the area is heavily reliant on agriculture (sheep and cattle and arable crops to provide feed for the livestock) but a higher than average proportion of enterprises are also involved in fishing, restaurants and tourism. The growing dependence on the former was illustrated during the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak.</p> <p>The principal inshore fisheries currently practised include dredging for cockles, scallops and brown shrimp. There is also a significant hand-based cockle fishery. Most other commercial fishing activity in this area out of ports at Drummole, Port William, Kirkcudbright and Isle of Whithorn involves potting for lobsters and crabs, with scallop dredging further offshore into the Irish sea and limited trawling in Luce Bay. Salmon and sea trout are caught by rod and line in the rivers and in the estuary using stakenets and the ancient practice of Haaf netting which is unique to the Solway. There is a growing interest in the possibilities of aquaculture, particularly for shellfish.</p>

<p>Current Initiatives</p>	<p>The wider Solway Firth (including the English side of the Firth) is managed by the Solway Firth Partnership. This has recently initiated the preparation of an aquaculture strategy. A Solway fisheries group and an area advisory group for the cross Border river basin management plan are being established. The area would also be contained within the Solway Inshore Fisheries Group.</p> <p>The Council published the first stage of a shoreline management plan in 2005 setting out a broad policy basis for coastal works. A major HLF funded landscape partnership project called "Sulwath Connections" has cleared stage 1 of the application process and anticipates making its stage 2 bid by December 2006. This focuses on projects the Solway coast and rivers.</p> <p>A particular focus on developing facilities along the coast is currently driven by the NSA programme. This has enabled communities to agree the strategies and associated action plans and promote their own projects, including interpreted viewpoints, visitor facilities, design guidance for new development, a community volunteer network and school projects that have raised awareness of the NSAs.</p>
<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>Development pressures on the coast are generally restricted to holiday parks, housing development and visitor facilities. There are MOD facilities at Luce Bay and at Dundrennan, near Kirkcudbright. One of the UK's first large offshore windfarms will shortly be developed at Robin Rigg, 9 km south of Kirkcudbright, and other proposals are possible.</p> <p>There is potential to enhance the diversity of farmland and coastal habitats and landscapes and to better maintain the rich maritime natural heritage. Particular opportunities include improving riparian and freshwater habitat, the restoration of fish populations such as the sparring, the preparation of a coastal landscape plans building on those in existence for the three NSAs, and the promotion of the use of the natural heritage as a cornerstone of sustainable rural development. The uniquely grazed merse could be used to promote saltmarsh lamb. Demolition waste and other piecemeal coastal defence works to combat coastal erosion in places has despoiled the coastline in some areas. Climate change is expected to place pressure on some coastal habitats like the extensive grazed merse.</p> <p>The mudflats of the Solway produce large numbers of cockles and mussels. Commercial extraction of cockles in the past has resulted in damage to merse and mud and some disturbance to feeding of roosting birds. However an attempt to address this issue is now being made through the application for a Regulating Order to be managed by the Solway Shellfish Management Association. The potential for shellfish aquaculture is just beginning to be explored. Sea trout catches along the Solway rivers have seen an improvement during the 1990s, while salmon are declining due to a variety of causes, including pollution, overfishing at sea and damage to spawning areas. The decline has been less marked than other west coast rivers and the designation of the River Bladnoch as an SAC for Salmon underlines the continuing importance of the spring run here.</p> <p>The area is readily accessible from the central Scotland and is also relatively close to the major conurbations of NW and NE England. The potential tourism benefits of through traffic to and from Northern Ireland and traffic on the M74 remains largely untapped. The coast is very indented and a Heritage Trail is marked from the M74 which links coastal towns between Gretna and Stranraer, but getting more people to turn off to explore this coast would help the short break market. The area is well used for recreational tourism, but there remains potential to increase this in many areas, and notably for marine based activity. Current projects are likely to result in significant increases in the access infrastructure both around settlements, in forests and along the coasts and this will have significant benefits for tourism. Recent studies in this area have shown that the character of tourism is changing towards ecotourism, wildlife tourism and improved visitor facilities based on the natural heritage such as the Mull of Galloway tearoom and the NSA discovery centre at Colvend have encouraged this.</p>

FIRTH OF CLYDE

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area comprises the Firth of Clyde (south of a line from Toward Point to Wemyss Bay outward to Johnstone's point to Bennane Head – including Ailsa Craig, Arran and Kilbrannan Sound) with possible extensions to the inner Clyde, Loch Fyne, and out to the Mull of Kintyre and Corsewall Point. The coastal population of the area is mainly concentrated on the east Clyde Coast. Other settlements are general small and scattered.	Road and rail access to the area is generally good, particularly on the east Clyde coast. It is served by Glasgow and Prestwick airports. There are ferry routes from Troon to Belfast, Ardrossan to Brodick, Tarbert to Lochranza, Tarbert to Portavadie, Claonaig to Lochranza, Gourock to Dunoon, Skelmorlie to Rothesay, Largs to Great Cumbrae and Ardenraive to Bute.	Population	20,015 – 22, 860	
		Area	3185 – 5026 km ²	
		Area of land	692 - 836 km ²	
		Area of sea	2493 – 4190 km ²	
		Local Authority	Argyll and Bute, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, South Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	The area contains a diversity of nature conservation interests, though its outstanding national importance is perhaps less overall than some of the other areas, particularly for marine biodiversity. Some 2% of the coast is designated as part of the Natura 2000 network. The coast from Gourock to the mouth of Loch Ryan is characterised extensive coastal development interspersed by areas of intertidal mud and sand flats, and by extensive sand dune systems such as those at Troon, Ardeer, Prestwick and Turnberry, some of which have extensively modified by golf course development. Further west most of the coast is rocky shore which is important for common and grey seals, and for birds such as the cormorant and eider. Occasional isolated islands also provide undisturbed habitat for breeding terns and other seabirds. The greatest concentrations of breeding seabirds occur on the cliffs of Ailsa Craig, famous for its huge gannet colony and the recent return of breeding puffins, but seabirds also breed on other cliffs and regularly fish throughout the area. Within the inner firth, there are extensive intertidal mudflats, sands and shingles, interspersed with smaller areas of coastal grassland and saltmarsh. These intertidal areas support nationally and internationally important numbers of wintering wildfowl and waders, particularly redshank. Loch Fyne is an example of a typical Scottish sea loch and is recognised as a Marine Consultation Area due to its unusually dense populations of the rare anemone <i>Pachycerianthus multiplicatus</i> . In the Clyde, the character of the sea bed communities is more akin to the Irish Sea than to the rest of the West Coast of Scotland. Notably, Kilbrannan Sound is one of the deepest areas of seabed on the UK continental shelf. Basking sharks appear in significant numbers in Ayrshire coastal waters during the summer, while common and grey seals occur throughout the tidal reaches of the river Clyde and the wider areas.			
Landscape	26% of the coastline is designated for its outstanding landscapes, including NSAs on North Arran and the Kyles of Bute. The landscape in this area is divided into 3 quite distinct parts. The inner Firth of Clyde and upper east coast is very much influenced by people and industry. In the north west of the area human impact is reduced but still apparent in the mosaic of farmland and small settlements, commercial forestry plantations, the designed landscapes of the historic country houses and the presence of fish farms. The sea lochs here penetrate deep into the land mass but they are narrow and the hills often high, providing a more intimate and isolated experience and reducing the coastal influence on the landscape. Finally, the area opens up further south and the landscape is dominated by open sea punctuated by the rugged peaks of Arran and the Ailsa Craig. These are both iconic features and very much part of the seascape of the Clyde			
Cultural Heritage	The area has a very rich prehistoric heritage. Of particular significant are the Mesolithic camp sites found around the raised beaches of Ayrshire, the defended settlements (forts and duns) of the Iron Age situated around the coasts of Kintyre and Arran, and the marine			

	<p>crannogs of the inner Firth of Clyde. In addition, some sections of Kintyre and Arran coasts have good examples of crofting landscapes, while the inner Clyde and the wider Clyde coastline are renowned for their buildings and structures associated with the merchantile trade and ship-building industry, and the recreation and tourism respectively. At Machrie Water on Arran the richness of the archaeology and history is worthy of special regard and protection. Paddle steamer wrecks (the Iona, the Champion and the Princess of Wales) have been discovered in the area and some large intact wrecks (the Akka, the Wallachia and the wrecks of Ailsa Craig are important intact examples of coastal and ocean going merchant vessels) are popular with divers. Information on the Clyde's important ship-building and trading heritage is provided by museums in Glasgow (museum of Transport and the Tall Ship at Glenlee) and at the Scottish Maritime Museum at Irvine.</p>
Enjoyment & Recreation	<p>The Clyde is of major importance for marine recreation, with the National Sailing Centre based at Millport on Cumbrae and several sailing clubs located throughout the area. Ease of access from Glasgow, Kilmarnock and Ayr, along with the quality of the sailing, makes the coastal waters popular for yachting and windsurfing, and the sinuous Argyll coastline provides interesting kayaking and scuba diving. The Crinan Canal is a resource of UK importance as, without this facility, small craft would need to attempt the hazardous passage around the Mull of Kintyre to reach the waters of Argyll. The distinctive mountains of Arran provide climbing and hill walking with extensive views of the Clyde, while a new coastal footpath provides for a more intimate coastal experience, especially attractive to wildlife enthusiasts. Elsewhere, other coastal paths, commercial conifer forests provide access for walking, mountain biking and other informal recreation. The island of Bute is a popular venue for those involved in less energetic forms of recreation such as enjoying the scenery and the culture of the area, while the NTS properties at Brodick Castle on Arran and Culzean Castle attract significant numbers of visitors each year.</p>
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>The very significant population of the Clyde area is declining slightly above the Scottish average (-3.3 to -4.4% between 2002-16) with a relatively high proportion of over 65s (retired people) and low proportion of 18-24 year olds. There is a relatively low household income in this area (more households have an income of less than £10k per annum than the average for Scotland's coastal areas) and there are some significant areas of deprivation on the East Clyde coast at Ballantae, Barr and Irvine. While significant difference exist between different areas on the Clyde, overall there is a lower than average economic activity rate and drop in unemployment claimants. There is a higher proportion of employment in crafts, trades and manual work, a typical mix of enterprise for Scottish coastal areas but hotel restaurants and tourism business concentrated in key places for tourism such as Arran and Kintrye.</p> <p>The Firth of Clyde has long supported an inshore fishing industry, and the principal fishery is currently the Norway lobster (Nephrops), with scallops also being important. There are smaller fisheries for crabs, lobsters and various bivalves including razor fish. Salmon farming is practised in Loch Fyne, Loch Striven, Loch Riddon and the east coast of the Kintyre peninsula.</p> <p>Parts of the Clyde are important for shipping, with the main shipping traffic is connected with the Hunterson terminal, ferry traffic and the ports at Cairnryan Stranraer, Ayr and Troon. The UK submarine fleet based at HM Naval Base, Clyde Faslane (Gare Loch) and Coulpport (Loch Long).</p>
Current Initiatives	<p>The Firth of Clyde is managed by the Clyde Forum and is one of the Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative pilot areas. The area is also part of the Irish Sea Pilot Project. A Coastal Zone Management Plan is currently being prepared for Loch Fyne. Though the core of the area resides in one area river basin advisory group, the larger area potentially straddles three.</p>

	<p>The University Marine Biological Station is based at Millport on Great Cumbrae, and as one of the oldest marine stations in Europe illustrates the long tradition of marine biological study in the area.</p> <p>This area would be contained within the Clyde Inshore Fisheries Group.</p>
<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>Administrative arrangements for the area are complex. The maximum area has potentially 5 local authorities within it and is also covered by four structure plan teams. Both HIE and SE networks straddle the area, and it includes several individual LECs and tourist hub areas. The larger area would come very close to the existing Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park and the practical implications of this would need to be considered further.</p> <p>The large coastal populations of Ayrshire and the inner Clyde mean that there are significant pressures for coastal development. As a result, the coast in these parts of the area is intensively managed with associated coastal protection measures having had a damaging impact on habitats and natural dynamics and processes. Predicted sea level rise may increase the need for coastal protection in some places, though it may also strengthen the case for retaining currently undeveloped coast, offering opportunities for recreational access and ecological management.</p> <p>Generally, coastal water quality is good and the current improvement programme for improving sewage and waste water treatment for smaller communities will continue this trend. The Clyde is the one major river system in Scotland where the salmon population is increasing, repopulating stretches of river which had previously been too heavily polluted for the species. Nevertheless, local point and diffuse sources of pollution have led to several bathing beaches failing to meet satisfactory standards in recent years e.g. at Irvine, Saltcoats and Ayr South. Overall, the invertebrate fauna has become more diverse as water quality has improved, but, paradoxically, some internationally important bird species such as the redshanks have declined, perhaps due to more “natural” levels of organic loading on the system.</p> <p>There has been a decline in fish catch – both pelagic and demersal - over the last two decades. There is some conflict between static and mobile gear fishermen in some parts of the Clyde and a proposal for a no- take zone has recently been made by the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST). Some of the issues raised by these examples will in part be addressed through the SSMEI pilot and the Coastal Zone Management Plan for Loch Fyne, both of which are looking to develop forms of voluntary marine spatial plans.</p> <p>The area is very popular for marine recreation, and new facilities such as marinas are continuing to be established. With imagination and effort, there is considerable scope to broaden the use of this area for both coastal and marine recreation, and to expand the first hand experience of the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Clyde to the populations of the more socially deprived parts of Glasgow. The Clyde resorts of Dunoon, Largs, Millport, Rothesay and Brodick have all undergone decline in recent years, and require further investment and new facilities to develop their potential for outdoor-based tourism.</p>

Argyll Coast and Islands

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
<p>The area comprises Coll, Tiree, South and West Mull, The Firth of Lorn, Seil and South to Loch Caolisport and west to Jura and Colonsay. Possible extensions could take in the rest of Mull, the sound of Mull and Loch Sunart, Loch Linnhe (upto the Corran Ferry) and Islay. Settlements are generally small, scattered and coastal, though Bowmore and Tobermory are within the larger area and the larger gateway towns of Oban and Lochgilphead are just outside.</p>		<p>Main access is via the A83 and the A816 to the south and the A85 to the north. A train service connects Oban with Glasgow. Ferries connect Oban with Craignure on Mull, Coll and Tiree and Colonsay year round and Islay in the Summer. There are also ferry services between Port Askaig and Colonsay, Port Askaig to Jura, from Lochaline to Fishnish and from Kilchoan to Tobermory. There are daily flights from Glasgow to Tiree and Islay. An air service between Oban, Coll, Tiree and Colonsay will start in 2007.</p>	Population	4,057 – 11,763
			Area	7050 – 12,138 km ²
			Area of land	1111-2904 km ²
			Area of sea	5940- 9234 km ²
			Local Authority	Argyll and Bute
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	<p>The extensive coastline of this area contains an outstanding range of important marine and coastal habitats and species. Some 8% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. The coastal habitats on the islands include beaches, sand dunes and areas of machair, together with rich grasslands and West Atlantic Oak and Hazel woods. There is extensive saltmarsh and mire habitat at the head of Loch Crinan and Loch Scridain and limited areas at the head of other sea lochs. Much of the coast is rocky shore with smaller islands favoured by common and grey seals. Otters are abundant, as are coastal birds such as divers, wintering waders, fulmar, storm petrel, guillemot, puffin and eider, and raptors including golden eagle, hen harrier and white tailed sea eagle. Tiree, Coll and Islay support half of the UK breeding corncrake population. Important marine features include the tidal rapids of Loch Sween and Sunart, the canyons and the pinnacle at the heart of the Corryvreckan and the swept rocky habitats of the Firth of Lorn and Treshnish. Loch Feochan supports a nationally rare habitat, beds of the free-floating seaweed <i>Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi</i> while the Sound of Iona and Loch Sween are of particular importance for their maerl and native oyster beds. Harbour porpoise, minke whales and other cetaceans are common in the area and the outlying islands such as Coll and Tiree are often visited by basking sharks and occasionally by leatherback turtles. A substantial part of the area is internationally important for its geological interest including the basaltic formations that make up the West Coast of Mull and islands of Staffa and Treshnish. The diverse sites on the Ross of Mull also contain a large spectrum of Scotland's geological history.</p>			
Landscape	<p>Nearly 57% of the coastline is designated for its outstanding landscapes, including NSAs at Loch na Keal, Lismore, Scarba, Lunga and the Garvellachs, Knapdale and Jura. The combination of land and sea, the views across open water, the movement of waves and tidal currents interspersed by rocky skerries and the quality of light, are all important characteristics of these landscapes. Each of the islands has its own special character: low rolling moors, sand, mudflats and wide sandy beaches on Islay; remote moorland and hills of Jura; cliffs and mountains on Mull; and the sandy beaches and machair on Coll and Tiree. On the mainland coast, the landscape is generally smaller in scale and more intimate with a patchwork of enclosed fields associated with crofts and farms, and commercial forestry separated by sea lochs including Loch Sween and Caolisport.</p>			
Cultural Heritage	<p>The impact of early Celtic people remains strong in the archaeology, place names and patterns of settlement. Of particular note are defended settlements (forts, duns and brochs) of Iron Age and later date, and the Mesolithic campsites. The Argyll coast has, in the past, had strong connections with Ireland: firstly, through the foundation of the Scottish kingdom of Dalriada; secondly, as a</p>			

	<p>consequence of the establishment by St Columba of the abbey on Iona, and the area is host to a wide range of sites associated with the development of the Celtic Church. The importance of the area in the medieval period is revealed by the number of coastal castles and this continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the construction of numerous mansion houses. Many of the latter now service the tourist industry, which developed in the nineteenth century, and is focused on the hub at Oban. Some stretches of the coast include good examples of crofting landscapes, small harbours, fish traps and bothies. At Kilmartin, the richness of the archaeology and history creates important historic landscapes worthy of special regard and protection. On Eileach an Naoimh the most southerly of the Garvellachs there is the remains of a monastery and the beehive cells used by the monks for private meditation. Lighthouses at Fladda, Dubh Artach and Skerryvore are a reminder of the important seafaring history of the area. There are museums in Oban, Tobermory, Tiree and Port Charlotte, Islay which explore the maritime past of the area. Underwater, there is potential for Mesolithic sites and early shipping remains relating to the sea routes of the Kingdom of Dalriada and the Lord of the Isles. The Sound of Mull has a particularly well preserved collection of wrecked merchant vessels for the 19th and 20th century while three of the 17th century wrecks here are designated under the Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 (Mingary Castle, Duart Point wreck, HMS Dartmouth).</p>
<p>Enjoyment & Recreation</p>	<p>The indented Argyll coastline, its many islands and associated marine features make it nationally popular for sea kayaking, sailing and scuba diving – the latter focused on the wrecks in the Sound of Mull and the underwater cliffs and pinnacles of the Firth of Lorn. Facilities for divers include a large diving centre in Oban and a number of charter boats available for hire. There are numerous marinas such as Croabh Haven and Ardfern and moorings available. The Crinan Canal is a resource of UK importance as, without this facility, small craft would need to attempt the hazardous passage around the Mull of Kintyre. Tiree has established an international reputation for surfing. There are over 20 fulltime wildlife tour businesses based on Mull with over half boat based and centred on cetacean, seal and sea bird watching. Hill walking, climbing, mountain biking, fell running and sea and freshwater angling are also popular. More leisurely recreation is focused on enjoying the quality and the variety of the landscape and the distinctive history, culture and wildlife of the area. The high level of geological interest attracts specialists and student groups for field studies. Sport stalking occurs at a modest level on Mull as does snipe and wildfowl shooting on Tiree, Coll and Islay.</p>
<p>Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment</p>	
<p>Social and economic profile</p>	<p>The coastal population of the west coast as a whole is expected to decline by 2.6% between 2006 and 2016. There is also a very low level of young people (18-24) and a higher proportion of older (65+) residents compared to the Scottish average. Unemployment is generally higher than average (although this dropped by 35.9% in the period between December 1999 and February 2002), though there are significant social and economic differences within the area with for example unemployment in Mull higher than that in nearby towns such as Oban. There are fewer lower income and proportionately more middle-income households. Retail, hotels and restaurants make up the highest proportion of enterprises followed by agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture. Distilling is a major feature on Islay and Jura. Crofting forms a significant land use on Tiree, Ross of Mull, Colonsay and Islay.</p> <p>Fishing makes an important contribution to the local economy of many communities, with larger numbers of vessels also operating from Oban, Tobermory and Fionnphort. The main fisheries are Nephrops and scallop, with crabs, lobsters and crawfish also important. Diving for shellfish and hand picking of cockles, mussels and winkles is increasing. Aquaculture within the area is at present dominated by salmon farming, with a smaller number of cod, halibut, sea trout and freshwater trout farms. There is also an extensive shellfish sector producing mussels and Pacific oysters. Landings of fish have again declined in recent years.</p> <p>Tourism is very important. The educational and research potential of the natural heritage has also been recognised, and to cater for the many formal and informal groups, visitor centres and laboratory facilities have been established – such as the Scottish Sea Life and</p>

	<p>Marine Sanctuary at Barcaldine, the Scottish Association for Marine Science Laboratory at Dunstaffnage and the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust at Tobermory.</p> <p>Pressure for coastal development can be significant, though it is generally concentrated in existing settlements or other developed parts of the coast. The Firth of Lorn and Sound of Mull are well used by ferries and other shipping accessing the super quarry at Glensanda and the industry at Corpach.</p>
Current Initiatives	<p>There are Management Forums for the Firth of Lorn and Loch Sunart SACs co-ordinated by Argyll and Bute and Highland Council respectively. A coastal zone management plan is currently being prepared for Lochs Etive and Sunart. The Sound of Mull has been selected as a Scottish Sustainable Marine Environment Initiative pilot. Two inshore fisheries groups will cover the area – South West and the Small Isles and Mull.</p> <p>Many communities in the area are actively leading their own development organisations including the Mull and Iona Community Trust, Tiree Development Partnership, Initiative at the Edge on Coll, Jura and Colonsay and the Islay Development Company. Together with the Nadair Trust, these initiatives aspire to build capacity amongst the communities to improve facilities, foster sustainable development and improve democratic decision making in, and for, their communities. There is significant public agency involvement both via funding and specialist advice.</p>
Issues and Opportunities	<p>Recreational activity has grown significantly in recent years, and a more planned approach to these activities could help address emerging issues and provide further opportunities for development. Tourism pressures are heavy in certain places such as Ellanbeich on the Isle of Seil, Tobermory on Mull and Iona and Staffa and it is likely that the natural heritage would benefit from some visitor management in these areas. Other locations such as Loch Craignish, Kilmartin Glen, Crinan and Loch Sween are less visited and have the potential to accommodate many more visitors. Wildlife watching has increased the length of the tourist season in some areas (e.g. birdwatching on Islay and Mull) but the industry would benefit from further facilities to encourage tourists to visit all year round, stay in the area for longer and have more reason to spend more within the local economy.</p> <p>There has been some conflict between the wildlife tours boat operators and fish farming in the area and this could be resolved though more strategic planning of aquaculture development aided by projects such as the Coastal Framework Plans. The potential impact of scallop dredging on reefs in the Firth of Lorn SAC is being addressed by Scottish Ministers and through the SAC Management Plan. More effort is also needed to reverse the deterioration in the water quality of marine and freshwater ecosystems, particular for shellfish farming in the area. This could include the further development of ICZM and improved freshwater catchment management.</p> <p>The current decline and loss of low intensive cattle based livestock systems on the islands has significant implications for the natural heritage of the area. A Park could help to articulate and justify creative solutions to this issue including the development of the links between a quality environment, sustainable land management, quality food products and the tourism market.</p> <p>Declining population and economic activity on outlying islands is a major issue which a Park could help address. Aspiring young entrepreneurial enthusiasm exists but the potential is blocked by affordability of housing. A key bottleneck involves the high demand for new housing at both ends of the affordability market as well as the siting of new housing across widely disbursed settlements on sensitive coastal habitats and landscapes. This requires more strategic planning particularly to maintain settlement patterns, essential services (e.g. water) and efficient and regular transport (roads and ferries).</p>

Lochaber and South Skye

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area comprises Ardnamurchan, the Small Isles, the South Skye Coast and the Sound of Sleat. The main settlement in this area is Mallaig. Possible extensions southwards could take in Loch Sunart and the Sound of Mull.		Main access to the area is via the A830 from Fort William and the A861 and A884. A train service connects Mallaig with Fort William and Glasgow. Ferries run from Mallaig to Armadale on Skye and to the Small Isles.	Population	1,859 – 5,575
			Area	9203 – 3468 km ²
			Area of land	468 - 1550 km ²
			Area of sea	3000- 7654 km ²
			Local Authority	Highland and Argyll and Bute
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	The area contains a range of important marine and coastal habitats and species. Some 5% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. Hard rock cliffs and slopes are the most frequent coastal habitats in the area, though Loch Moidart contains one of the largest expanses of intertidal mudflats and sandflats in western Scotland. There are exposed coasts on the islands but the mainland coasts are very sheltered by Skye and the Small Isles, and therefore do not display the expected maritime influences in their vegetation. A wide range of marine habitats is present including some of the deepest underwater cliffs in Britain. Tidal ranges, a mixture of substrates and water depth also combine to provide good conditions for kelp forests, modiolus beds and flame shell beds. The Sound of Arisaig supports some of the most extensive beds of the coralline seaweed maerl in the UK, with very rich associated communities that include several rare and scarce species. Sheltered parts of Lochs Sunart and Ailort support the nationally rare free-floating seaweed <i>Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi</i> with Scotland's largest bed found in Loch Duich. These waters are also important for fish, with the sea lochs and inshore waters being nursery areas for many of the main commercial species such as saithe, cod, plaice, sprat and herring. Common and grey seals occur widely, while whale and dolphin species, such as minke whale and harbour porpoise are also seen frequently. Otters are common around the whole coast with designated sites at Loch Sunart, Rum and the south of Skye. Basking sharks and leatherback turtles are also seen occasionally. Inshore waters are an important wintering area for all three diver species. As well as high densities of golden eagle the area supports a high proportion of the British white tailed sea eagle population. Breeding waders include: golden plover, snipe, dunlin, and greenshank. The islands are best known for their range of seabirds, Rum has the largest Manx shearwater colony in Britain, a fifth of the world's population, nesting in burrows above 450m in its southern peaks and Auks breed around many coasts.			
Landscape	Nearly 67% of the coastline is designated for its outstanding landscapes, including NSAs at the Cuillin Hills, Knoydart, Morar, Moidart and Ardnamurchan and The Small Isles. Sea, lochs and mountains dominate the scenery of this area with open visibility, wide and distant views, quality of light, and tidal movements all adding to the landscape experience. Skye's Black Cuillin, Rum Cuillin and the hills of Eigg provide a distant backdrop to many views while travelling by sea through this area. On the mainland coast, the experience can be smaller scale and more intimate with a patchwork of enclosed fields associated with crofts and farms, and commercial forestry covering the rolling hills. But with long sea lochs such as Loch Sunart, Nevis and Hourn penetrating eastwards into the mountainous interior, the influence of the coast remain strong. Most buildings and settlements sit comfortably in the landscape with more urban development only in the larger planned town of Mallaig.			
Cultural Heritage	There has been little archaeological survey in much of the area but what has been done suggests considerable potential for the survival of remains of human settlement. Mesolithic finds on Rum provide evidence for wide spread movement by boat between the Small Isles in this period and it has been suggested that prehistoric remains to be discovered in shallow, submerged cave systems and			

	<p>ledges around Skye. The importance of the area in the medieval period is revealed by the number of coastal castles and this continued into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the construction of several mansion houses, most notably Kinloch Castle on Rum. Mallaig was a planned fishing settlement built at the beginning of the 20th century with the coming of the railway. Its history can be explored at the Museum at Mallaig. There are a number of popular diving wrecks in the area. The majority of shipping losses occurred close to harbours but wrecks are likely to be broken up due to exposed conditions. Sites have been identified associated with the Lord of the Isles, medieval use (small harbours, fish traps, bothies), the Highland clearances, fishing (including a disused basking shark fishing station on Soay), merchant trading and wartime use. The aquarium 'Mallaig Marine World' provides up-close encounters with local marine life.</p>
Enjoyment & Recreation	<p>The scenery and wildlife attracts large numbers of visitors to this area every year. Coastal and hill walking, rock and winter climbing, ski touring, caving, parascending, mountain biking, fell running and mountain marathons are the main activities, with sailing, sea kayaking and sea and freshwater angling also popular, particularly in the summer months. In many areas, the sea lochs with their rich wildlife and clear water attract divers. More leisurely recreation is focused on enjoying the quality and the variety of the landscape, the distinctive history, culture and wildlife of the area. Sport stalking occurs at a modest level throughout the area. In order to cater for the large influx of visitors (particularly in the non winter months) many facilities have now been provided. A network of paths and trails exist and are well used, and a number of initiatives are currently underway to further enhance access provision across the area. There are visitor centres and museums, based on the natural, historical and cultural heritage at Ardnamurchan, Camasachoirce, Loch Sunart, Glenborrodale, Glenfinnan, Sanna Bay, Arisaig, Mallaig and Portree and Forest Enterprise provide recreational opportunities in a number of forests. Land-based wildlife tours are run from various locations and several operators operate from Arisaig, Mallaig, Armadale and Elgol. Marinas or boating centres have been developed at several localities. Commercial sea kayak courses and expeditions are run from Sleat and many of the larger outdoor pursuits establishments. The Highland Council, the NTS, JMT, SWT, RSPB and Forest Enterprise provide ranger / wardening services in a number of locations (e.g. Arisaig, Sunart, Isle of Eigg and Knoydart) In order to accommodate the many types of visitor there are campsites, bunkhouses and chalets as well as B&Bs and local hotels. The educational and research potential of the natural heritage has also been recognised, and to cater for the many formal and informal groups, field centres and laboratory facilities have been established (Broadford, Rum and the Glen More Centre in Ardnamurchan). Visitor and recreational information is available various forms, including road or trailside interpretative boards and local newspapers (De Tha Dol, Teachd an Tir and West Word).</p>
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>Coastal population of the west coast as a whole is expected to decline by 2.6% between 2006 and 2016. There is also a very low level of young people (18-24) and a higher proportion of older (65+) residents compared to the Scottish average. Unemployment is generally higher than average (although this dropped by 35.9% in the period Dec 1999 to Feb 2002), though there are significant social and economic differences within the area with for example unemployment in Skye is higher than that in larger West coast towns such as Fort William. There are fewer lower income and proportionately more middle-income households. Retail, hotels and restaurants make up the highest proportion of enterprises followed by agriculture, forestry and fisheries.</p> <p>Tourism is now the most significant economic activity on the area. Agriculture is still important, particularly crofting, which is also a key element of social cohesion. Other important economic sectors are forestry and salmon and shellfish farming.</p> <p>The main fishery is Nephrops and scallops, though crabs and lobsters are important and there is also a winter pelagic fishery for sprat. Harvesting of winkles is common throughout the area. The main port is at Mallaig, though smaller boats operate from numerous smaller</p>

	<p>harbours and anchorages throughout the area. Aquaculture has developed extensively over the past three decades. The rivers have supported a number of important salmon and trout fisheries of high economic value, however these have declined in recent years, and in some rivers stocks are now at a critically low level.</p>
Current Initiatives	<p>The area is part of the Small Isles and Mull Inshore Fisheries group and straddles two river basin advisory groups. All of this area would be contained within the proposed Highland Regulating Order.</p> <p>There is a Management Strategy for Sound of Arisaig SAC and management schemes in development for Loch Sunart SAC and Lochs Duich, Long & Alsh SAC. The Highland Council have developed Aquaculture Framework Plans for Loch Sunart, Loch Nevis and Loch Hourn. The Sunart oakwoods Initiative is an award winning partnership working to promote sustainable management of the natural heritage e.g. restoration and expansion of oakwoods and improve access and interpretation of the Initiative area (Ardgour, Morven, Ardnamurchan & Moidart). The Lochaber Geopark Association has recently started the process for acquiring Geo Park status.</p>
Issues and Opportunities	<p>Declining population and economic activity throughout the area is a major issue which a Park could help address by seeking to promote tourism in the area based on its special qualities. Wider diversification of its economic base could also be encouraged by promoting the growth of other new businesses which can make good use of the existing skills and infrastructure available.</p> <p>A Park could also help address key issues such as the lack of affordable housing and could also support the traditional farming practices which are closely linked to the natural heritage of the area.</p> <p>In recent years there has been a significant investment in transport infrastructure, with both the jetties on the small isles and also A830 being upgraded. Caledonian McBrayne has also increased the frequency and capacity of ferry services. Both Arisaig and Mallaig have the capacity to cater for any growth in tourist numbers. Opportunities also exist to enhance facilities for sailing (e.g. moorings and marinas) and scuba diving in the area. There is also scope to improve access to some parts of the coast, to increase the number and quality of coastal paths and improve interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage of the area.</p> <p>The nearby Fort William area is already promoted on its reputation as the “Outdoor Capital of the UK”, and there is some further potential to extend this concept to the coast. In developing this potential, care would be needed to ensure that the special quality of remoteness that places like Ardnamurchan and Knoydart currently have.</p> <p>The Park could also assist the implementation of Area Management Agreements for the better co-ordination of sea lice treatments in connected water bodies to improve control and reduce impacts on wild salmonids.</p>

Wester Ross and North Skye

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
This area comprises the Wester Ross and the Summer Isles, with possible extensions southwards to Applecross, the North Skye coast and Raasay. The main settlements are the towns of Ullapool, and potentially Kyle of Lochalsh and Portree.	Main access to the area is via the A87, A835, A832, A890 and A896. Skye is connected to the mainland by bridge and ferries run from Ullapool to Stornoway. A train service runs from Kyle of Lochalsh to Inverness.	Population	3,977 – 8,412	
		Area	2742 – 3946 km ²	
		Area of land	425 – 971 km ²	
		Area of sea	2317- 2976 km ²	
		Local Authority	Highland	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	This area contains a range of important marine habitats and species. Some 2% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. The coastal habitats of this area are dominated by hard rock cliffs while soft sediment coastal habitats such as saltmarsh, beaches and sand dunes occur only locally. The coastal cliffs and islands are home to seabird colonies including auks, fulmar, shag and kittiwake. Many islands are used by wintering and breeding geese while inshore waters are an important wintering area for all three diver species. Eagles and sea eagles are present, especially along the Skye Coast. Many of the sea lochs have a rich flora and fauna, with Loch Torridon and Loch Carron of specific importance for their shallow lagoons, maerl beds, eel grass and diverse faunal communities on the tidal narrows. Several sheltered bays within the area support the nationally rare free floating seaweed <i>Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi</i> . Inshore waters range down to 100m to 200m, while at 300 the Inner Sound between Raasay and the mainland is the deepest trench on the British continental shelf. There are a variety of substrates including bedrock, gravel, sand and mud, all resulting in a wide range of habitats such as kelp forests, modiolus beds and maerl beds. Shellfish such as prawns, scallops and crabs, are common and these waters are also important for as nursery areas for many of the main commercial species such as saithe, cod, plaice, sprat and herring. Common and grey seals occur widely and at least one pod of bottlenosed dolphins are possibly resident in this area. Basking sharks and minke whales are also seen regularly at areas of up welling such as the northern tip of Skye. Other whale and dolphin species are also present, and more unusual marine vertebrates seen occasionally include leatherback turtles. Otters are widespread around the coast.			
Landscape	Nearly 63% of the coastline of the area is designated for its outstanding landscapes, including NSAs at Assynt-Coigach, Wester Ross, The Cuillin Hills and Trotternish. The distinctive coastal character of the landscapes result from the combination of exposed promontories, indented coastlines, sheltered bays and long steep sided sea lochs which penetrate the main land. Inland the landscape comprises cnoc and lochan (small hills and lochans) backed by high mountains and ridges. Crofting and fishing settlements are concentrated along the coast and, with the system of fields running above and below the houses and steadings highlight the strong relationship between these communities and the coastal and marine natural heritage. To the north, the 20 islands which comprise the Summer Islands are an important scenic asset.			
Cultural Heritage	Sites associated with the Lord of the Isles, medieval use (small harbours, fish traps, bothies), the Vikings (coin Hoards and place names) the Highland clearances, fishing, merchant trading and wartime use have been identified. There is evidence of Mesolithic settlers at Applecross, and also later prehistoric settlement and landuse. There is potential for prehistoric remains to be discovered in shallow, submerged cave systems and ledges around Skye. There are popular diving wrecks in the area including the wreck of the Port Napier in Loch Alsh which may be visited by the public aboard the tourism craft the Seaprobe Atlantis. The majority of shipping losses occurred close to harbours but wrecks are likely to be broken up due to exposed conditions, the wreck of the Port Napier demonstrates the level of preservation that could be expected in sheltered conditions however. Museums at Portree and Gairloch			

	contain exhibitions on aspects of the marine historic environment.
Enjoyment & Recreation	The area has some of the most extensive and remote country in Europe, with both coastal and hinterland areas being identified as important areas of wildland. The combination of sea, loch and land offers a very diverse range of activities; hill walking, rock and winter climbing, caving, ski touring, cycling, parascending, trekking, walking, sightseeing, shooting, fishing, sea angling, sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and canoeing. The coastal waters provide sheltered sea lochs and bays for anchorage and there are various marinas, moorings and yacht clubs in the area. There are many islands to draw the sailor, diver, fisherman, kayaker and naturalist, most notably the Summer Isles. Recently improved transport routes have provided increased accessibility to and within the area, with the majority of active visitors are hill walkers and climbers. In order to cater for the large influx of visitors (particularly in the non winter months) many facilities have been provided. A network of low ground and coastal paths and trails is well used, there are visitor centres and specialist adventure training centres and museums based on the natural, historical and cultural heritage. Numerous land based and water based wildlife tours have been established. There are Ranger Services for Skye and Lochalsh and Wester Ross (Highland council) and Balmacara/Kintail (NTS) and a variety of accommodation is available. Ullapool is a thriving ferry and fishing port and one of the most popular tourist destinations on the west coast during the season. Portree and Gairloch are also important tourist hot spots.
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>Coastal population of the west coast as a whole is expected to decline by 2.6% between 2006 and 2016. There is also a very low level of young people (18-24) and a higher proportion of older (65+) residents compared to the Scottish average. Unemployment is generally higher than average (although this dropped by 35.9% in the period between December 1999 to February 2002, though there are significant social and economic differences within the area with for example unemployment in Skye is higher than in Ullapool. There are fewer lower income and proportionately more middle-income households. Retail, hotels and restaurants make up the highest proportion of enterprises followed by agriculture, forestry and fisheries.</p> <p>Settlements are concentrated along the coast and elsewhere the population is thinly spread and shared by the few inland townships and the farmed glens where soils are richer. Industry is limited to fishing, aquaculture, forestry and tourism. Together with outdoor recreation, the latter is the largest employer and contributor to local income.</p> <p>The main fisheries are for Nephrops and scallops, though crabs and lobsters are also important. Landings of mackerel and herring are not as important as in the past. The main ports are at Ullapool and Kyle of Lochalsh, though numerous smaller boats operate from harbours and anchorages throughout the area.</p> <p>Two submarine ranges/exercise areas are located in the Inner Sound and are operated from the Kyle of Lochalsh and a shore base near Applecross.</p>
Current Initiatives	<p>The area is administered by a single local authority but straddles 2 LEC and tourist hub areas. There is a Management Forum for the Lochs Duich Long and Alsh SAC and an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Plan has been prepared by Highland Council for the 'Two Brooms' area. Part of the area has acquired Geo Park status.</p> <p>Marine litter has been the subject of a local initiative and report through the Minch Project</p> <p>The Loch Torridon and Inner Sound Fishery Order is unique in Scotland in establishing separate areas for static and mobile areas in</p>

	<p>the Nephrops fishery. This order has been subject to assessment since 2001 regarding its impact on Nephrop stock and the wider environment and the results are due to be published this year. All of this area would be contained within the proposed Highland regulating Order and lies wholly within the North West Inshore Fisheries Group.</p>
<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>Declining population and economic activity throughout the area is a major issue which a Park could help address by seeking to promote tourism in the area based on its special qualities. Wider diversification of its economic base could also be encouraged by promoting the growth of other new businesses which can make good use of the existing skills and infrastructure available.</p> <p>A Park in this area could build upon the work carried out under the broad Torridon initiative, a partnership that has facilitated the assessment of the Fishery order and promoted awareness of the importance of the marine environment. Related to this, the Torridon Nephrops management group have introduced a voluntary code of practice in the Nephrops creel fishery which, amongst other things, has implemented conservation measures such as escape gaps and limits on the amount of gear used. These efforts have earned the local fishermen a Marine Stewardship Council accreditation, potentially adding value to their produce.</p> <p>The Park could also assist the implementation of Area Management Agreements for the better co-ordination of sea lice treatments in connected water bodies to improve control and reduce impacts on wild salmonids.</p> <p>There is potential to sensitively expand recreational use and tourism in the area based on its special qualities, with facilities for sailing (e.g. moorings and marinas), and divers, the number, quality and condition of coastal paths and the provision of information seen as priorities.</p>

North Uist, Sound of Harris, Harris and South Lewis

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area comprises South Lewis, Harris, the Sound of Harris and North Uist including Loch Maddy and the Monarch Isles, with possible extension to include the Shiant Isles. Population is centred on small crofting townships. Lochmaddy is the only larger settlement in the area, though Stornoway would also act as a key gateway.	Access to this area of the Western Isles by ferry from Uig (Skye) to Tarbert and Lochmaddy and Ullapool to Stornoway. Ferry services also link Otternish to Leverburgh. Flights link Stornoway with Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness	Population	4,057 – 4,655	
		Area	7050 – 12138 km ²	
		Area of land	1111-2904 km ²	
		Area of sea	5940- 9234 km ²	
		Local Authority	Western isles	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	This area contains a distinctive range of important marine habitats and species. Some 5% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. Intertidal sandflat communities of worms and molluscs, sandy beaches with dunes and machair, sheltered and exposed rocky coasts, saline lagoons and reefs are all present. Loch nam Madadh (Loch Maddy) and the extensive system of freshwater lochs and lochans in the North Uist hinterland which drain into it is worthy of particular note, being the most extensive and diverse saline lagoon system in Europe. The spectacular offshore islands have distinct maritime vegetation, include cliffs and ledges which are important for breeding seabirds, wintering geese, breeding grey seals and geology. Puffins, gannets, guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars, skuas and gulls are common while nocturnal petrels and shearwaters are also present. The Monach Isles are the exception, with sandy hills reaching only 19m at their highest point. Fulmars nest at the mouth of rabbit burrows in the dunes and there are large numbers of black guillemots in the boulders and rocks of the storm beaches. Important populations of barnacle geese gather in winter on the Monachs and the Shiants, where they graze on the maritime grassland and machair kept short by sheep. Marine mammals are common but have favoured localities at different times of year. In August, whales and dolphins come into shallower waters to feed on squid and spawning fish. Common seals are abundant all year round in the Sound of Harris, giving birth on rocky coasts and skerries (sgeirs) during the summer. Large numbers of grey seals collect in remote colonies to give birth in late autumn. Most colonies are formed on rocky exposed islands like Shillay, Coppay, Haskeir, and Gasker; but the largest colony in the Western Isles and the second largest in the world is found on the sandy beaches of the Monach isles. Otters are also numerous.			
Landscape	The South Lewis, Harris and North Uist NSA comprises nearly 40% of the area, with 67% of the coastline designated. This landscape is characterised by its strong contrast between the subdued topography of most of Lewis and the rugged hills of South Lewis and Harris which, viewed from the north, rise suddenly out of an expanse of blanket bog. Cnoc-and-lochan and rocky indented coast and islets dominate the east coast of Harris and wide sandy, machair beaches contained between rocky headlands dominate the west coast. The beaches are characterised by views across the vividly coloured inshore waters to islands and the North Harris mountains. The rocky headlands that separate the bays have been sculpted by the oceans with geos and stacks. At the heart of the NSA area, the islands in the Sound of Harris provide a strong visual link between South Harris and North Uist.			
Cultural Heritage	The Western Isles are closely associated with the Lord of the Isles, fishing and merchant trading. In the 16 th century the Western Isles was a regular stop off for trading vessels travelling to Europe and the East Indies, and the wreck of the East Indiaman Adelaar dates from this period. The other notable wreck is the Politician which provided the inspiration for the film, Whiskey Galore, though it is likely that further wrecks will be discovered in the future due to the exposed and treacherous nature of the coasts here. There are Neolithic sites at Callanish and near Carloway there is a burial ground on Scarp and a cairn at Meilein. There are likely to be Neolithic and			

	<p>Mesolithic sites on the coast underwater and potentially archaeologically significant peat beds have recently been identified offshore. A marked concentration of prehistoric, early medieval and post-medieval settlement sites is situated in the coastal zone. Of particular note amongst the rich range of sites are unenclosed and defended settlements (forts, duns and brochs) of later prehistoric date. The machair is particularly rich in archaeological remains and the alkaline shell-sand preserves the vestiges of old land surfaces of many periods, as well as a range of artefacts that do not normally survive in Scotland's predominately acid soils. Some sections of the coastal fringe include good examples of crofting landscapes. There are also various aspects of medieval highland life visible on the coast such as small harbours, fish traps, bothies and a whaling station, together with evidence of the Highland Clearances. The Western Isles as a whole remains the heartland of Gaelic speaking and culture.</p>
Enjoyment & Recreation	<p>Arrangements for recreational activities are fairly informal and there is open access to the hills and coast for outdoor activities. There are few formal recreational facilities except for several small scale outdoor centres, boat charters, angling, car parks, and some view points or picnic areas. A series of way marked walks and leaflets have been developed throughout the Western Isles, and people can also use the old paths that linked townships. These have probably been used for many generations by the local population but may not be obvious to the casual visitor. There are popular beaches at the Sound of Taransay and Gallan Head. Sailing is popular particularly at East Loch Tarbert, Loch Seaforth and around the Shiant Isles. Sea angling is popular, with the area hosting the European sea angling championships in recent years. Scuba diving, surfing and sea kayaking are all growing in popularity around the coast. Angling for salmon, trout and sea trout attracts many regular and repeat visitors.</p>
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>In common with the rest of the population of the Western Isles, the area has a significantly declining population –17.4% between 2002 and 2016 and there is a higher than average of people over the age of 65. The area is close to the Scottish average for economic activity and the majority of industries are manufacturing followed by agriculture fisheries and food. There has been a fall in unemployment in the area recently (1999-2002) to 23.8%. Hotels and restaurants represent a significant though not dominant proportion of the enterprises.</p> <p>Fishing continues to make a valuable contribution to the economy of the Western Isles Commercial fishing by local boats centres mainly on shellfish (lobsters, prawns, crabs, velvet crabs) although there are a small number which take fish or scallops. Often these small local boats fish for prawns on the sheltered east coast of the Western Isles during the winter months returning in the summer months to the west coast to places like Heisker (the Monach Isles) for lobsters and fish. Cockles are collected on various strands in the area. Cast seaweed is collected from the beaches and there is a disused seaweed processing factory at Keose, Lewis.</p> <p>Aquaculture is common in the sheltered sea lochs and bays such as East Loch Roag, West Loch Roag, West Loch Tarbert and on the east coast from Loch Shell to Renish Point.</p> <p>Tourists visit the Western Isles from all over the world to take advantage of the scenery and enjoy the beaches and opportunities for specialist outdoor activities such as kayaking and surfing. Charter boats from Berneray and West Loch Tarbert take tourists to St Kilda and the Flannan Isles. Charter boats often stop off in the Western Isles on their way from the mainland to St Kilda.</p>
Current Initiatives	<p>The <i>nan Eilean Siar</i> inshore fisheries group covers this area. Loch Maddy is managed by a SAC Management Scheme and Area Management Agreements exist between the fish farm companies and the Fisheries Trusts from Loch Shell to Renish Point.</p>

<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>Aquaculture development has had some impact on water quality and detracted from some of the more remote lochs in this area, and efforts here could be made to better plan for and manage the industry alongside other land and sea-uses in future.</p> <p>Development pressure is low, though the current development of several proposals for onshore renewables is causing some concern. Again a more planned approach would help here, though this is best addressed at the level of the Western Isles. The potential for offshore wave energy in the area is high – the resource being recognised as one of the best in the world. Oil exploration is still in its early days, but there may be future opportunities.</p> <p>Declining population and economic activity throughout the area is an important issue which a Park could help address. It is relatively expensive to visit the Western Isles but wildlife tourism has been growing recently and if visitor and recreational facilities were improved and expanded and the area were promoted through the CMNP there could be benefits to the economy of the area.</p>
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South Uist, Sound of Barra and Barra

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area is made up of the south west coast of South Uist, the Sound of Barra, Barra and the islands to the south. Population is centred on small crofting townships located close to the coast, the two largest being Lochboisdale and Castlebay.	Main access to the area is by ferry from Oban to Lochboisdale and Castlebay and by plane from Barra to Glasgow.	Population	2, 090	
		Area	1988 km ²	
		Area of land	162 km ²	
		Area of sea	1826 km ²	
		Local Authority	Western Isles	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	This area contains a distinctive range of important marine habitats and species. Just under 2% of the areas is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. The islands of Barra, Mingulay and Berneray are largely covered by maritime grassland, with some machair and heath. They have a range of designations for geology, breeding grey seals, wintering geese and breeding seabirds. Together with the adjacent stacks they provide an abundance of cliffs and ledges for a diverse assemblage of breeding auks and gulls. In summer the islands are particularly spectacular with huge whirling masses of puffins, gannets, guillemots, razorbills, kittiwakes, fulmars, skuas and gulls which feed in the highly productive waters of the south Minch. The South Uist coastline and Isle of Eoligarry comprises sand dunes, cultivated machair and croftland, together with small areas of wetland and rough pasture. This combination of cultivation, including hayfields with damp grassland and marsh, provides habitat that supports a breeding population of Corncrake <i>Crex crex</i> of European importance. Otters are numerous along the coastline. The inshore waters are notable for their tidal rapids and support maerl, <i>Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackaii</i> and seagrass. Marine mammals are common throughout this area but have favoured localities during different times of year. In August, whales and dolphins come into shallower waters to feed on squid and spawning fish. There is thought to be a resident school of bottlenose dolphins in the Sound of Barra. Common seals are abundant all year round, giving birth on the rocky coasts and skerries (sgeirs) during the summer.			
Landscape	The South Uist Machair NSA comprises nearly 7% of the area, with 13% of the coastline designated. The low lying machair landscape of South Uist dominates the northern part of this area. To the south, the landscape become more strongly maritime in character with a chain of rocky islands rising suddenly out of open sea. The hills of South Uist and Sheabhal on Barra provide an important backdrop to the more low-lying areas and sea. The strong connection between the people and the natural heritage is evident in the small crofting settlements which hug the coast.			
Cultural Heritage	The Western Isles are closely associated with the Lord of the Isles, fishing and merchant trading. In the 16 th century the Western Isles was a regular stop off for trading vessels travelling to Europe and the East Indies, and the wreck of the East Indiaman Adelaar dates from this period. The other notable wreck is the Politician which provided the inspiration for the film, Whiskey Galore, though it is likely that further wrecks will be discovered in the future due to the exposed and treacherous nature of the coasts here. There are likely to be Neolithic and Mesolithic sites on the coast underwater and potentially archaeologically significant peat beds have recently been identified offshore. A marked concentration of prehistoric, early medieval and post-medieval settlement sites is situated in the coastal zone. Of particular note amongst the rich range of sites are unenclosed and defended settlements (forts, duns and brochs) of later prehistoric date. The machair is particularly rich in archaeological remains and the alkaline shell-sand preserves the vestiges of old land surfaces of many periods, as well as a range of artefacts that do not normally survive in Scotland's predominately acid soils. Some sections of the coastal fringe include good examples of crofting landscapes. There are also various aspects of medieval highland life visible on the coast such as small harbours, fish traps and bothies, together with evidence of the Highland Clearances. The Western			

	Isles as a whole remains the heartland of Gaelic speaking and culture.
Enjoyment & Recreation	Recreational activities are informally practiced and there is open access to the moorland and coast for outdoor activities. There are few formal recreational facilities except for several small scale outdoor centres, car parks, boat charters, angling, and some view points or picnic areas. A series of way marked walks and leaflets have been developed throughout the Western Isles, and people can also use the old hill paths. The majority of coastal routes are very unobtrusive, and follow sheep or deer tracks or old cairns. These have probably been used for many generations by the local population but may not be obvious to the casual visitor. This part of the Western Isles is popular with adventure sportsmen. The stacks of Mingulay attract climbers, surfing is popular on the north coast of Barra, sailing yachts often visit Castlebay and the area around Berneray, Mingulay, Pabbay, Sandray is popular with sea kayakers. The beaches on the coast from Vatersay to Castlebay are popular for more relaxed activities such as walking.
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>In common with the rest of the population of the Western Isles, the area has a significantly declining population –17.4% between 2002 and 2016 and there is a higher than average of people over the age of 65. The area is close to the Scottish average for economic activity and the majority of industries are manufacturing followed by agriculture fisheries and food. There has been a fall in unemployment in the area recently (1999-2002) to 23.8%. Hotels and restaurants represent a significant though not dominant proportion of the enterprises.</p> <p>Fishing continues to make a valuable contribution to the economy of the Western Isles. The main fishery practiced by local boats is based on shellfish (Nephrops, lobsters, crabs, velvet crabs) although there are a small number which also take fish or scallops. Often the small local boats fish for prawns on the sheltered east coast of the Western Isles during the winter months returning in the summer months to the west coast to places like Heisker (the Monach Isles) for lobsters. There is a long standing cockle fishery on Traigh Mhor.</p> <p>Tourists visit the Western Isles from all over the world to take advantage of the scenery and enjoy the beaches and opportunities for specialist outdoor activities such as kayaking and surfing. Charter boats often stop off in this area on their way from the mainland to St Kilda. Tourist charter boats to the southern islands and St Kilda sail from Castlebay in Barra.</p>
Current Initiatives	The <i>nan Eilean Siar</i> inshore fisheries group covers this area.
Issues and Opportunities	<p>There is a need for enhancement of machair, which is generally seen as declining because of changing agricultural practices and coastal erosion.</p> <p>Development pressure is very low. The potential for offshore wave energy in the area is high – the resource being recognised as one of the best in the world. Oil exploration is still in its early days, but there may be future opportunities.</p> <p>Declining population and economic activity throughout the area is an important issue which a Park could help address. It is relatively expensive to visit the Western Isles but wildlife tourism has been growing recently and if visitor and recreational facilities were improved and expanded and the area were promoted through the CMNP there could be benefits to the economy of the area.</p>

Orkney Islands and Pentland Firth

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area is made up of the 70 islands of the Orkney archipelago, with possible extensions to include the Pentland Firth and north mainland coast between Spean and Duncansby. Main settlements are Kirkwall, Stromness and Scabster.	Main access to the area is by ferry from the mainland. Flights link Kirkwall with Glasgow, Edinburgh and Inverness. An inter island plane service exists	Population	19, 245 – 21, 400	
		Area	5185 – 5813 km ²	
		Area of land	1013 – 1067 km ²	
		Area of sea	4173 – 4746 km ²	
		Local Authority	Orkney Islands, Highland	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	Orkney is important for its wide range of coastal and marine habitats, and is home to nationally and internationally important populations of birds and marine mammals. Some 5% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. Maritime grassland is the commonest coastal habitat covering nearly half of the coastline. The area is also important for its maritime heath with particularly fine examples occurring on Orkney's west mainland, Papa Westray, Westray, Rousay, and Sandside Head near Rey. Also present are two plants which occur only in Scotland, the Scottish Primrose, found on cliffs among maritime heath and stabilised (grey) dunes, and an eyebright, found in short grassland close to the coast. Oysterplant has its British stronghold in Orkney and the long rocky coastline is important for cliff communities supporting species such as Scots lovage. The seas locally provide a range of environments from the extremely exposed rock faces and reefs of the outer coast to the sheltered, muddy conditions in some inshore waters and lagoons, such as the Loch of Stenness. A variety of plant and animal communities are present, including unusual mixtures of temperate and northern species. The shallow rocky seabed around Orkney supports some of the most extensive areas of underwater kelp forest in Scotland. Elsewhere sedimentary habitats support rich communities of burrowing animals, such as lugworms and cockles, and also some large beds of eelgrass which is important for juvenile fish and provides food for seafowl. Sand also covers extensive areas of seabed offshore where it is particularly important for sandeels, an important food source for seabirds and mammals. In more tide-swept conditions, sand is often replaced by extensive beds of maerl. Internationally important seabird communities include auks (guillemot, puffin, razorbill and black guillemot), fulmar, shag, Arctic tern and kittiwake, along with several large colonies of storm petrel. In winter, there are also important coastal populations of long-tailed duck and great northern diver. Internationally and nationally important populations of shorebird such as turnstone, purple sandpiper and ringed plover find sustenance from the invertebrate population that thrives on the beach accumulations of rotting kelp. Marine mammals include otters, cetaceans and seals, including some 38% of the British grey seal and 25% of the common seal population. Leatherback turtle are also recorded.			
Landscape	Some 6% of the area and 19% of the coastline is designated for its landscape importance, including the Hoy and West Mainland NSA. The distinctive landscape of Orkney results from characteristic combinations of bedrock, landform, vegetation and in many areas successive human activity over thousands of years. Many of its landscapes are of historical importance – most notably the World Heritage Site surrounding the Ring of Brodgar, Maes Howe and Skara Brae on the west of the mainland. The sea is never far away and is intimately interwoven with the land. In particular, the rocky shoreline of much of the west coast combine with the changing elements of sea, sky and weather to create a wild and constantly changing seascape.			
Cultural Heritage	Orkney is internationally renowned for its wealth of archaeological sites from the first farmers of the Neolithic period to the remains of WWII defences. Harbours at Stromness and Kirkwall provide a base for at least 15 charter boats that welcome some 3,500 divers to Orkney annually to dive the iconic wrecks of the German High seas fleet scattered in Scapa Flow. Non diving access is provided by			

	ROV enterprises, internet access and the Scapa Flow Visitor Centre at Lyness. As well as the Scapa Flow German Fleet wrecks, important features include the Block Ships which prevented access to Scapa Flow and the wrecks of the HMS Van Guard and Royal Oak (war graves protected under the Protection of Military Remains Act). It is probable that some components of Neolithic and Mesolithic archaeology survive in waters down to 20m around Orkney, and a number of sites have been identified that require further expert investigation. Also, from the 16 th century the Orkney Islands were a stop off point for vessels travelling from Scandinavia across the Atlantic. The exposed geos and skerries off the Northern Isles may be littered with wrecks in varying degrees of preservation.
Enjoyment & Recreation	Orkney's remarkable combination of natural and cultural heritage is an essential element in its tourism industry which, in turn, contributes significantly to the area's economy. Coastal areas are the main focus for tourists and residents alike. The beaches and more rugged coastal areas, with their large seabird colonies and seals are popular attractions. The lack of way marking and relevant literature on paths however, inhibits access to beaches and cliff tops by casual users. The enclosed, agricultural land often acts as a barrier to easy access. There are few path networks around settlements, and little provision for recreational cycling off the area's roads. Organised boat trips to view wildlife and landscapes are available for visitors. Countryside Rangers provide a programme of visitor services on Hoy, the World Heritage Site, Eday and Sanday. Recreational sailing is a popular activity and both scuba diving and angling feature significantly in the Orkney economy. The cliffs of Hoy and to a lesser extent mainland Orkney provide testing routes for rock climbers, while some windsurfing and kayaking also takes place.
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>Orkney has a population of 20,000. A higher proportion of the population is aged between 35 and 54 and the population is expected to decline significantly by -10.3% in the period 2002-2016. There is some deprivation on the islands. Household residence is lower than average. Orkney experienced a 21.2% fall in unemployment between 1999 and 2002 but a higher proportion of households than average earn less than 10k per annum. Half of all the enterprises in Orkney are involved in agriculture or fisheries.</p> <p>Fishing makes a significant contribution to the culture and economy and has considerable interactions with the natural heritage. The inshore fleet is comprised of small vessels and employs trawling, dredging, hydraulic dredging and collection by hand to target shellfish such as crabs, lobster, scallops and razorfish. Marine fish farming in Orkney producing Atlantic salmon and more recently sea trout and halibut has increased dramatically over the last 10 years, to the extent that many inshore waters now contain some form of fish farm development. The shellfish farming sector has also expanded.</p> <p>Flotta is an internationally important oil terminal, and is looking to develop as a hub for container ships. The Pentland Firth, separating Orkney and Caithness, is a major shipping lane and regarded as one of the most dangerous and unpredictable stretches of water around the UK. It also has very significant potential for offshore wave power.</p>
Current initiatives	This area lies wholly within the Orkney inshore fisheries group, though it will be part of a Northern Isles advisory group with Shetland.
Issues and Opportunities	<p>Most visitors confine themselves to the major sites on the mainland and there is scope for increasing tourism activity and income on Hoy and the North Isles especially.</p> <p>There is some scope for improving access and the number of walking and biking trails. The wrecks of Scapa Flow are under some threat from diver tourism including continuous stripping of artefacts and there is some evidence for damage by fishing vessels. At the</p>

	<p>same time, the diving in the area provides an opportunity to increase understanding more generally of the marine environment.</p> <p>The fisheries of the area would probably benefit from more strategic management and this would have positive knock-on effects for the natural heritage.</p> <p>In some parts of the coast, sand extraction has sometimes damaged fragile dune systems and these require long-term management.</p>
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Shetland (including Fair Isle)

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area comprises the whole of the Shetland Islands including Fair Isle. The main centre of population is Lerwick.		Transport links are via ferry to Orkney, Aberdeen, Norway and Faroe or via plane to Orkney, Wick, Inverness, Aberdeen and Edinburgh	Population	69 – 21,988
			Area	556 – 13,902 km ²
			Area of land	7.9 – 1469 km ²
			Area of sea	548 – 12, 433 km ²
		Local Authority	Shetland Isles	
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	Shetland is one of the regions of greatest relative importance in Scotland for marine habitats, birds and marine mammals. Under 2% of the area is designated as part of European Natura 2000 Network. There are National Nature Reserves at Noss, Hermaness and Keen of Hamar. Shetland's complex coastline with its characteristic voes provides a range of coastal environments from extremely exposed rock faces and reefs of the outer coast to sheltered muddy conditions at the heads of some of the longer voes and the many shallow coastal lagoons. A variety of plant and animal communities are present, including unusual mixtures of temperate and northern species and also unusual offshore species. The subtidal zone is often extended by the combination of large waves and high humidity, and this has allowed kelp forests to grow at greater depths than other areas of Scotland. The relatively small tidal range also adds to the distinctive nature of Shetland's coast. Eelgrass beds are similarly restricted to sheltered areas including The Vadills and the head of Whiteness Voe. Sea pen communities have also been found in some of the more sheltered voes and the rare unattached form of Egg wrack is found in the Vadills. Deeper waters are dotted with horse mussels which in places form reefs, a feature that is relatively rare in Britain. In more tide-swept conditions, such as Bluemull Sound, sand is often replaced by maerl beds. Sand covers extensive areas offshore where it is particularly important for sandeels, an important food source for seabirds, seals and cetaceans. Breeding seabirds in Shetland represent a tenth of the British total, with over 22 species. This includes rare species such as Leach's petrel and great skua. Breeding sites around Hermaness, Foula, Sumburgh Head and Noss provide outstanding opportunities for the public to view these and other bird species such as puffins and gannets. Voes provide shelter for significant numbers of wintering migrants such as great northern diver, long-tailed duck and Slavonian grebe. A wide range of cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) is frequently seen in waters around Shetland. Both common and grey seals are relatively common while coastal areas provide habitat for one of the largest and densest otter populations in Europe.			
Landscape	The Shetland Islands Area NSA includes the coast at Hermaness, Fethaland, Eshaness, Muckle Roe, South West Mainland, Foula and Fair Isle, covering some 3% of the area and 24% of the coastline. The landscape of the area is strongly maritime in character with the elements of sea, sky and weather combining to create a constantly changing tableau. For visitors the experience of near 24 hour daylight in summer, or the 'simmer dim' as it is known locally, add another dimension to their experience of the Shetland landscape. The coast is marked by many features, often on a grand scale, including cliffs, stacks, arches, geos and islands, alternating with more sheltered and softer voes. The important geomorphological history of Shetland has left a legacy of rare and interesting soft landforms such as spits, ayres and tombolos. The complex of small islands, headlands and inlets around Weisdale and Burra produce a landscape that is smaller in scale and more diverse than most other parts of Shetland. Crofting settlements cluster on pockets of precious agricultural land in more sheltered locations, mainly around the coast, creating a landscape distinct from the moorland that dominates the interior.			
Cultural	Highly sophisticated structures were built on the present shoreline of Shetland between 7000 and 2000 years BC. Some of the best-			

Heritage	known coastal sites include the well-preserved broch on Mousa and the settlements of Jarlshof. The recently discovered and excavated site at Scatness in the south mainland displays evidence of settlement over thousands of years and offers visitors an opportunity to appreciate the interaction of successive cultures with their environment. Shetland is of outstanding importance for the range of foreshore sites of all ages, the potential for submerged prehistory and wrecks of the East Indiamen trade ships. There is an extensive wreck history including these vessels, others from the Dutch herring trade and more recent merchant and warships.
Enjoyment & Recreation	There is a wide range of recreational activity, including active outdoor pursuits and informal enjoyment of the countryside. Few parts of Shetland are closed to responsible visitors, with way-marked routes and paths with gates or stiles increasing in number. A network of bods (camping barns) offers accommodation, and wild camping is tolerated. The coasts and seas are the focus of many recreational visits by tourists and residents alike; the beaches and more rugged cliffs, with their seabird colonies, are popular sites. Shetland has a strong sea-going culture and many residents own their own boats, which are used for fishing and short trips around the coast. Diving, sailing, yowl rowing, windsurfing, sea angling, and sea kayaking are also popular pastimes. Over 400 visiting yachts are recorded in Lerwick Harbour each year and the port is also the venue for international races. Sail training ships often visit the islands and Shetland also has its own renovated sail training vessel The Swan. In recent years the market for specialist wildlife tours has expanded significantly. Shetland has one of the highest number of marinas per head of population in Scotland and has numerous boating clubs which each hold their own regattas. The islands are visited by nearly 50 cruise boats each year which bring over 20,000 visitors from all over the world.
Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment	
Social and economic profile	<p>The population of Shetland is currently fairly stable at approximately 22 000, although it is predicted to decline by 3.7% between 2006-16. One third of enterprises are in agriculture or fisheries with another third in retail, hotels and restaurants. Household income is comparatively high, with a high proportion of professional workers and below average unemployment. When compared to other coastal areas in Scotland, a higher than average proportion of households have an income of more than £30k. Deprivation is relatively low with a far smaller proportion of households in Shetland earning less than 10k. More recent figures suggest that the cost of living may be higher than the Orkney and the Western Isles.</p> <p>Commercial fishing, aquaculture and fish processing, together with the oil industry based at Sullom Voe, currently dominate the economy, with fisheries and aquaculture related developments currently contributing half of Shetlands economy output. Over half of the total Scottish production of farmed salmon and mussels comes from Shetland. Agriculture and crofting is the main land use, providing significant local income and employment, as well as being of great cultural importance. Tourism based on Shetland's historical and natural assets also makes an important and growing contribution to the local economy.</p> <p>The North Atlantic Fisheries College, part of the UHI network, is based in Scalloway and provides a variety of maritime training courses as well as undertaking innovative research particularly on fisheries.</p>
Current Initiatives	Waters out to 12nm are covered by the Zetland County Council Act 1974 which gives Shetland Isles Council responsibility for issuing works licences for physical development of the seabed (except within Lerwick Harbour where works licences are issued by Lerwick Port Authority). Partly because of this, Shetland has been chosen as a pilot area for the SSMEI. Shetland Amenity Trust run a ranger service which covers the North Isles and mainland of Shetland, with separate ranger services established on Fair Isle and Foula. Shetland has recently started the process for acquiring Geo Park status.

	<p>The whole area is covered by the Shetland inshore fisheries group and the Shetland Shellfish Regulating Order which is administered by the Shetland Shellfish Management Organisation.</p>
<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>On the coast, agricultural intensification and simplification has led to diminished diversity and quality of landscapes, habitats and species. Higher levels of development that do not fit into existing coastal settlement patterns have also contributed to the loss of local character and sense of place. High levels of aquaculture related development in previously undeveloped coastal waters have also had landscape impacts. A more planned approach would help here, and this is one objective of the SSMEI pilot project.</p> <p>Parts of Shetland's marine environment is extensively used by a range of activities, including fishing, aquaculture, oil and gas development and shipping. This high level of development in some areas has led to many conflicts between different users of the maritime and coastal area. Wider changes in marine ecosystems also seem to be taking place, particularly in the distribution/abundance of prey species (mainly sandeels), leading to effects on predator species such as great skuas and consequent effects on other species. This is a particular concern for communities such as Fair Isle which depend on the visitor income generated by bird watchers. The SSMEI pilot will attempt to co-ordinate these activities better, though part of this project is focused on having a better understanding of the issues through improved GIS facilities rather than an active management role. An existing regulatory order is already in place and this combined with the inshore fisheries group could also provide a platform for addressing fishing related issues.</p> <p>Given the long-term decline in the oil and fishing industries and associated support services in Shetland, the Council is actively looking to develop other traditional industries and tourism, both of which are highly dependent on the natural and cultural heritage of the area. Sustainable tourism has become an important part of this strategy and is a growth industry in Shetland. Ecotours now run to Fair Isle, Foula, Noss, Muckle Roe and Muckle Flugga but there is scope for further sensitive development.</p> <p>The experience of the ZCC in Shetland has given the community experience and some confidence in direct management of marine resources. This is reflected in the local voluntary agreement between fishermen and conservationists over sandeel fishing, in the first Shellfish Regulating Order in Scotland being granted in Shetland and also in current aspirations for greater local control of marine resources. Some communities in Shetland, notably Fair Isle, are very positive about managing marine resources sustainably and for long-term economic and social benefit, and see a Park as providing a mechanism for this.</p>

Moray Firth

Overview		Transport Links	Key statistics	
The area comprises the Moray Firth, from Brora in Sutherland to Fraserburgh in Aberdeenshire, with possible extensions to Noss Head in Caithness. The main centres of population are Inverness, Nairn and Fraserburgh.		The main access points to the area are via the main roads the A9, the A82 the A832 and the A96. There is an airport at Inverness and parts of the coast are served by the Inverness to Aberdeen and the Inverness to Wick rail lines.	Population	35, 402 – 41, 505
			Area	3233 – 4049 km ²
			Area of land	465 – 519 km ²
			Area of sea	2768 – 3531 km ²
			Local Authority	Highland, Moray and Aberdeenshire
Key aspects of the natural and cultural heritage				
Nature Conservation	The area contains a large diversity of coastal habitats and species. Some 40% of the area is designated as part of the Natura 2000 Network. To the west, the large firths of Beaully, Cromarty and Dornoch extend the marine influence deep into the coastal plain. These inner firths consist of extensive tidal sand and mudflats fringed, in parts, by saltmarsh. These areas are rich in marine invertebrates and plant species, such as nationally scarce eelgrasses, providing important food and shelter to large and internationally important populations of migratory and resident wildfowl and waders. During the winter months, large numbers of long-tailed duck, common and velvet scoters, as well as divers, auks and shags congregate in the Firth. Much of the coastline is undeveloped. Culbin is the best example in the UK of a shingle spit virtually undisturbed by human activity while Morrich More supports the best example of juniper on sand dunes. Rare coastal plants such as oysterplant occur locally, and the bare sandstone cliffs reveal geological processes and contain important fossil records. The marine environment provide a home to one of only three known resident populations of bottlenose dolphins to be found in UK waters. Common seals and grey seals are also common while harbour porpoise, white-beaked dolphins, minke whales, pilot whales and killer whales can also be seen, especially in the outer firth. Otters are also widely distributed along the coast, and the waters of the Moray Firth are an important foraging area for the osprey that breed in the hinterland.			
Landscape	Some 9% of the area and 38% of the coastline is designated for its outstanding landscape importance, including the Dornoch Firth (NSA). Along the south shore of the Moray Firth the landscape rises from broad sweeps of sand and shingle to a lowland agricultural landscape and then to higher hills and moorland. In the west the Firths give a rhythmic, repetitive sequence of firth, ness and rolling farmland while the northern coastal plain is much narrower, with uplands dominating the horizon. The larger rivers are important features of the landscape, often emphasised by riparian woodland. The dominance of broad firths and low-lying coastal farmland lends expansiveness to the landscape, distantly framed by uplands to the north, west and south. Settlements skirt the Moray Firth providing a significant contribution to the landscape. Farmhouses and steadings are scattered throughout and new residential development is commonplace, both in the countryside and associated with larger settlements. Inverness and its hinterland is one of the fastest growing areas in Scotland. There is a degree of industrial growth around some settlements with large developments forming prominent features. Some developments, such as the Kessock Bridge, present strong statements in the landscape, and, together with the intensively worked farmland, create a high degree of human activity in the landscape.			
Cultural Heritage	There are a significant number of archaeological sites on the coast and in the intertidal zone of the Moray Firth area, most notably in the area between Nigg to the south and Tarbat Ness. These include Mesolithic and Neolithic deposits and sites, to crannogs and major forts of the Iron Age and first millennium AD (such as Burghhead and Cullykhan). The sand dunes at Culbin Sands are rich in archaeological material, including fish-traps. The Black Isle and Nigg Peninsula have strong connections with early Christianity, while Fort George is an example of a 18 th century military architecture, still in operation as a fort . There are also significant remains of WWII			

	<p>defences, particularly pill boxes and anti-tank blocks, and also wooden anti-glider defences in the nature reserve at Findhorn Bay. Valentine tanks used in top secret D Day landing trials can also be visited here. There are well preserved and accessible wrecks in the area (Royal Naval submarine Tantivy, merchant coastal steam ship San Tiburcio and the Clyde built Auxiliary Patrol yacht Verona). There have been further shipping losses close to harbour entrances (Macduff, Inverness, Cromarty, Fraserburgh) but relatively few wrecks have been discovered despite growing diving activity. There is potential for increasing knowledge through recreational diving groups with the skills to cope with the exposed conditions. The lighthouse museum at Fraserburgh celebrates the role of lighthouses in north eastern Scotland in particular Kinnaird Head.</p>
<p>Enjoyment & Recreation</p>	<p>The area is important for outdoor recreation and tourism. Land-based activities include walking, cycling and orienteering. Many paths along headlands, beaches and the coastline are well signposted, often provide interpretation and are well used by residents and visitors particularly those close to settlements. The Moray Coast Trail provides walking access to the fishing towns and the harbours of the Moray Coast. There is a partial coastal path and circular routes around many of the coastal settlements on the East Moray coast in Aberdeenshire. Forested areas provide good opportunities for off-road cycling, orienteering and horse riding for example at Culbin. Rock climbing is undertaken along some coastal cliff sites such as at Cummington, near Burghead. Some of the best known golf courses in Scotland are located in the Moray Firth area, for example at Royal Dornoch and Nairn. Wildlife-watching is increasingly popular and there are a number of Council, Community, RSPB and FCS interpretation sites and locations on the Moray Firth. Access to the sea is good due to the large numbers of harbours, ports and marinas in the area for example at Fraserburgh, Macduff, Buckie, Lossiemouth and Burghead. There are 10 accredited wildlife cruise boat operators, eight sailing clubs and about 460 yachts and dinghies based in the Moray Firth. Other marine recreational activities include wind-surfing, surfing, power boating and water-skiing. Informal beach recreation focuses on the easily accessible sandy beaches (such as Dornich and Embo, Nairn, Findhorn, Roseisle, Lossiemouth, Cullen, Sunnyside, Sandend, Boyndie, Roseheartly and Hopeman, Tain, Rosemarkie Shandwick, Dornoch, Embo, Littleferry, Brora). Boating and canoeing are popular. There is an annual raft race held in Lossiemouth Harbour involving the villages and towns of the inner Moray Firth and a traditional boat festival held in Portsoy. Sea angling is enjoyed, particularly in Cullykhan Bay and Boyne Bay. Scuba diving takes place, notably at Roseheartly and Tarbat Ness.</p>
<p>Factors of particular relevance to SNH's assessment</p>	
<p>Social and economic profile</p>	<p>The wider coastal area supports a population of some 200,000 people. It has a comparatively low proportion of retired people and the population is decreasing (-2% between 2006-16) in line with the Scottish average. The area has experienced a comparatively low fall in unemployment, and there are some areas of significant deprivation in Blackness, parts of Alness, Nairn and Invergordon, Helmsdale and Buckie. A lower proportion of households than average earn either less than 10k or more than 30k per annum. The enterprise profile is skewed by Inverness, but agriculture, forestry and fisheries are locally important elsewhere.</p> <p>Fishing has long been an important activity in the area, though the nature of fishing activity and the associated communities it supports continues to change. A small number of larger fishing vessels are based at harbours around the Firth, with main fisheries including Nephrops and scallops and creeling for crab and lobster. Cockles continue to be collected from sandflats in the Firths and at Culbin Sands and Findhorn Bay and there is a large commercial mussel fishery at Tain. Macduff remains an important harbour, especially for fishing boat construction.</p> <p>Eco-tourism is a major growth industry in the area providing facilities for local people and the many visitors (including cruise liners which stop off at Invergordon) that are attracted to the Moray Firth by its coastal scenery, birds and dolphins. There are 10 accredited wildlife watching tours available from Portmahomack to Banff. The marine aquarium in Macduff which focuses on the sea life of the</p>

	<p>Moray Firth is a popular attraction for both local and visitors.</p> <p>A large proportion of the total population of the northwest Highlands lives in this area and built development is a key influence on the natural heritage within the Moray Firth, whether it be associated with the numerous and expanding settlements or with the oil and associated shipping and port industries. Distilleries also comprise a significant source of revenue. This area is likely to continue to be the focus of development in the highlands and therefore there will be continued pressure to reclaim land from the sea for transport infrastructure, industry or landfill. An offshore windfarm demonstration project is currently being established 25km off the Caithness coast and this may lead to other renewable energy developments in future.</p>
<p>Current Initiatives</p>	<p>The Moray Firth Partnership (MFP) helps to take forward a number of major projects on fisheries, community, education and conservation. The Moray Firth Seal Management Plan is a unique and innovative approach developed by local District Salmon Fishery Boards to marry the interests of salmon fishermen and seal conservation. The Moray Firth SAC Management Group provides an overview of management activities in the Firth and it is responsible for implementing the actions in the Moray Firth Management Scheme. The first managed realignment project in Scotland took place at Nigg Bay in the Cromarty Firth - this work provides a valuable demonstration about what is possible using this technique. This area lies within the Moray Firth inshore fisheries group and straddles two river basin area advisory group boundaries. Part of the areas is contained within the proposed Highland Regulating Order.</p> <p>The University of Aberdeen Lighthouse Field Station have studied the bottlenose dolphins and seals in the Moray Firth since 1989, with the dolphins being one of the best studied populations in the world. The Cetacean Research and Rescue Centre are also involved in gathering information on the cetaceans species found in the Firth. The Dolphin Space Programme is an accreditation scheme for wildlife watching in the Firth and it integrates responsible wildlife watching with interpretation and research programmes.</p>
<p>Issues and Opportunities</p>	<p>Approximately 15% of the area carries national or international designations, which aim to protect valuable and vulnerable habitats and species. Many such sites could be used more proactively to demonstrate the economic benefits of conservation, such as tourism. Water quality in the marine environment has been affected by discharges from coastal settlements and industries. Marine litter can have a significant impact on the aesthetic quality of the coastal zone, its use for recreation and for marine wildlife. In localised areas, habitats have been lost to coastal development.</p> <p>Fishing remains an important activity in the area, and sensitive management is required to achieve economic returns, healthy fish stocks and conservation. The Moray Firth SAC Management Scheme and Moray Firth Review will give a more rounded view of the impacts of fishing on the natural heritage and these initiatives will provide an important input to the work of the inshore fisheries group.</p> <p>A more planned and managed approach to outdoor recreation could help to open up further opportunities for access while the development of new coastal trails and the promotion of climbing and kayaking could relieve pressures on existing honeypot areas. A number of issues also merit further attention, including unauthorised quad and trail bike users on the sands at Culbin and conflicts between the different water users. There is scope to further develop the sensitive management of ecotourism based on coastal and marine habitats and species of the area.</p> <p>Establishing a Park in the Moray Firth could build on the work already carried out by the existing Moray Firth Partnership and provide longevity of funding and a further legislative basis for the implementation phase of this project.</p>