

Written evidence submitted by Portree Area Community Trust

I am writing in my capacity as chairman of Portree Area Community Trust (PACT) to comment on the Scottish Affairs Committee's open consultation on the operation of the Crown Estate (CE) in Scotland. PACT is one of the two groups to sign local management agreements with the CE in January 2013, and we would like to express our views as a Trust on the benefits of collaboration with the CE and some wider points on the CE's role in managing the foreshore in Scotland.

PACT was incorporated in May 2007 as the Portree Area Community Company. PACT's key objectives are to stimulate and coordinate the economic, cultural and environmental regeneration of the Portree area in response to community-identified priorities. The key and major such priority for PACT is the regeneration of the Portree Harbour area. As it stands, the latter has been identified to have a number of key deficiencies which are both curtailing potential socio-economic benefits for Portree itself but also the wider Skye community and, indeed, the Highlands and Islands Area.

The main deficiencies are, inter alia: the lack of a sheltered area from the prevailing south-westerly wind generating a real need for the construction of an appropriate breakwater which would protect moorings, provide a better all weather environment for both commercial and leisure users of the harbour, such as trawlers and fish farmers, sailors and other boat users along with providing the RNLi a sheltered area to build a purpose built boat house; the original pier structure was built alongside the historic Telford Quay (circa 1819) in the 1960's and is a long established facility and little investment has been undertaken in the pier since then and it is no longer regarded as fit for purpose by any of the users. (for example, there are no basic facilities such as toilets and showers for visitors and locals; insufficient berthing, slipway facilities, parking and loading areas; inadequate on-shore storage and working space for working boats and no marine engineering services; the current harbour access is a cul-de sac with limited parking and turning which inhibits any potential harbour growth; Portree is only one of two remaining Scottish ports that has no onshore RNLi station to allow fast access to a lifeboat); furthermore, BP no longer land fuels at the pier and this now comes into Portree by road tanker which has considerable socio economic costs not least the damage that is being done to the Telford quay and the pier area has to be closed to other users when deliveries are being made. Because of access issues the pier also has to be closed to users when Ocean going ships moor in Portree bay.

Highland Council acknowledges the deficiencies of the current pier structure and the existing access and have included harbor development and a new access road in The West Highlands and Islands Local Development Plan. The vision for Portree in the West Highland and Island Local Plan is described as a "burgeoning sub-regional centre", but it is clear that the lack of facilities and poor infrastructure in the harbour area are hindering this objective in a number of key ways. For example, Portree faces a continuing downturn in fishing opportunities (both fish farmers and the fishing fleet) due to increasing legislation, a lack of incentive for young people to enter the industry and a history of underinvestment and neglect of harbour facilities. Tourism is fast becoming the mainstay of the local economy and it is therefore highly reliant on incoming visitors. Improved marine infrastructure will encourage more visitors to the island and the village, helping to support existing business, establishing opportunities for new ventures in fishing, aquaculture and water-based activities such as tours and sailing and to create new training and employment opportunities in marine related activities.

Additionally, it is well known that that a substantial proportion of tourist expenditure comes from leisure, retail and impulse buying. To generate the right conditions for such buying, UK marketing experience indicates the need to create 'Destination Complexes'; i.e. localities containing a concentration of retail, catering and services products with overall attractiveness and interest to create stay times of 2-3 hours at least. Only Portree offers this potential but this would require the regeneration of the harbour area, which is central to the whole of Portree, in addition to the existing centres of interest, namely Wentworth Street and the Square. Todd Associates have calculated that the net increase in visitor expenditure as a result of creating such a tourist destination centre by regeneration of the harbour would be in the region of £6m (in today's money) per annum and this would generate 130 direct and indirect jobs throughout the island.

Leisure sailing (that is non-industrial marine activity) is worth around £2bn to the UK economy, creates a total of 70,000 jobs in the UK and Scotland is considered one of the top 6 sailing destinations in the world. There is a large boating fraternity in continental Europe and it is estimated that there are 600,000 craft in Europe capable of sailing to Scotland and there is also the untapped North American market. We believe that the sailing conditions around the Hebrides are unrivalled in the world but at present the potential for marine tourism in the area has not yet been exploited. Skye with its iconic scenery, history, geology, wildlife and a malt whisky distillery would be bound to attract a large slice of this potential market. However, the success of such marine tourism will largely depend on provision of safe mooring, berthing and landing facilities of sea borne visitors. For example, we understand that the creation of 24 pontoons equates to an expenditure increase in the local community of £150,000. Since a marina of 150 pontoons would not be unrealistic as a longer term objective for Portree, that would generate approximately a further £1m per annum, with the consequent knock on effects for employment.

In summary, it is anticipated that future growth from marine leisure will come from: more 'home port' resident berths of Scottish boat owners; more 'home port' facilities for boat owners from outside Scotland; higher demand for visitor berthing facilities, especially from holiday-makers; more overnight berths for Scottish boat owners on short trips; demand for holiday boat charters; demand for sailing training courses.

Scotland's cruise industry has grown from approx 45,000 cruise passengers in 2000 to more than 240,000 in 2010. However, the number of cruise liners visiting Portree has stayed static over the last 10 years at 20 -30 per year. And indeed the quality of the liners visiting has decreased (for example, 'The World' liner visited some 10 years ago but has not returned). The head of harbours of the Highland Council has indicated to PACT that he has been reliably informed that if the Portree harbour area is properly refurbished on average there could be, on average, a liner coming to Portree every day of the year. In addition to the mooring charges for a liner, which are approx £4000, there would be a considerable increase in the expenditure for the community. For example, from a study conducted in Orkney it has been established that over 90% of passengers go ashore and the average spend in Kirkwall is £50. As well as passengers, approximately 38% of crew members come ashore and spend £23 in Kirkwall. Additionally, there is increase demand for coach hire and tourist guides etc.

In 2010, Sailing Tourism in Scotland designated Portree as a strategic port. Given the considerable deficiencies of the current harbour area and given the potentially huge benefits that a refurbishment process could bring to Portree and the wider community, how can the above-noted benefits be achieved? PACT has proposed the following three-phased regeneration for Portree harbour. This proposed regeneration has the support of all of the users of the harbour area and of local and national politicians.

The proposed development and regeneration of Portree harbour has been broken down into 3 distinct phases:

Phase 1. Construction of a Breakwater. This would involve the reclamation of land and the creation of a breakwater.

Phase 2. Pier Refurbishment, Marina and RNLI Boat House. Currently there are no basic facilities, such as toilets and showers, for any of the harbour users and the refurbished pier head would address this along with the creation of a laundry and other facilities such as storage and working space. An onshore Station for the RNLI; at present the Portree RNLI is the only station that has its boat on a swing mooring with the implications this has for safety. Creation of a marina through the installation of a pontoon system.

Phase 3 Linking Road and Deepwater Docking. An access road would need to be created around the lump and we are aware that the Highland Council already have plans in place for this. Deepwater

docking point for shallow draught ocean-going cruise liners and oil supply vessels. Reclamation of land for creation of marine engineering services and boat storage/ potential development.

Since becoming an active member of Pact in 2009, we as an organization have held many meetings with the Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and politicians and although there has been interest and support for our project we were unable to focus this support in terms of moving the process forward until the CE took an interest and without doubt the breakthrough in kick starting the harbour regeneration in Portree has been the involvement of the CE. The CE have been involved with the Portree Moorings association for some time and it was that connection that led the CE to meet with all the key bodies involved in Portree harbour in May 2012, namely the Portree Moorings association, PACT and the Portree Sailing club. Subsequent to that meeting the CE commissioned Jura consultants to prepare a business plan for the regeneration of the Portree harbour area and that plan was instrumental in assisting the Portree sailing club in obtaining significant funding from the Coastal Communities Fund to provide improved facilities for the sailing fraternity.

In taking the wider harbour regeneration project forward, members of the CE have held numerous meetings with Pact's harbour group and also with myself. In the summer of 2013 we successfully completed a seabed survey of Portree harbour to determine what can be done in terms of the creation of a breakwater. This survey would have been impossible without both the financial and knowledge based support of the Crown. At the moment PACT is working with the CE and other stakeholders to move to the next phase of obtaining funding for the breakwater part of the proposal.

Given the above backdrop, it is with some considerable disquiet and concern that we read the recommendations in the recent Select Committees briefing paper, viz: 'The CE's responsibilities for the seabed, the foreshore and other ancient rights in Scotland should therefore be devolved then decentralized as far as possible. Devolution to Holyrood should be conditional upon an agreement between the Secretary of State for Scotland and the Scottish Government on how such a scheme of subsidiary to local authority and local community levels should be implemented'

Clearly if the CE's responsibilities were to be devolved the agreement mentioned in the last sentence would be crucial. However, the present Scottish government has demonstrated very clearly that it, paradoxically, is against further devolution of powers to local authorities and has indeed strongly resisted such in terms of the funding of Councils. It is our concern that even if such an agreement could be reached the practicalities would be such that control would remain with Holyrood that mean that the whole issue of how the seabed around Scotland is used would become a political football rather being a new policy that benefited local trusts, such as our own.

However, even if such devolution of powers could be achieved it is our view that there remain significant problems with this approach. First, the devolution of such powers would have to be overseen by the various Councils. This would be inefficient since there would presumably be a replication of posts and positions across the various Councils and it would be interesting to know what the budgetary spend would have to be compared to the CE's current budget for managing the devolution of powers through its local management schemes. Second, the CE contains a huge knowledge base on harbour redevelopments and the running of marinas and associated infrastructure. How would this knowledge base be replicated and replaced in the new proposed set up? Thirdly, in our experience the CE is taking a Scotland/ UK wide approach to marine leisure and this surely is the way forward in unlocking the potential of a harbour such as that in Portree. It is unclear how the proposed devolved system would achieve this. Finally, and as noted above, although our local council has been supportive of our attempts to improve Portree harbour area we do not believe they can match the CE in terms of their financial and knowledge-based support. It is for these reasons that we strongly support the current devolution of the seabed to local groups, such as our own, through the Local Management Agreements initiated by the Crown Estate.

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