**THE PROSPECT OF AN HPMA AROUND TIREE AND COLL:**

**Statement from Tiree Community Council**

**and Tiree Community Development Trust**

It is not an exaggeration to say that the designation of the waters used by the Tiree fishing fleet – from Skerryvore to the Cairns of Coll – as a Highly Protected Marine Area (HPMA) poses an existential threat to the Tiree community.

The island's population at the 2011 Census had declined to 653, a 15% fall over the previous 10 years. This is perilously close to being non-viable. Our secondary school roll is now 30, and an increasing number of young people are choosing to transfer to Oban to complete their education. Social capital has been hollowed out and many voluntary committees are under strength. The Tiree community is hanging on by its fingertips.

Tiree, known as the 'Hawaii of the North', is internationally famous for its water sports and marine wildlife tourism. If HPMA rules are interpreted strictly, these would be restricted. Future developments that hold out the prospect of a more sustainable future for the island – developments such as the construction of a breakwater to protect the island’s exposed harbour, a fixed link to Coll, shellfish aquaculture or seaweed farming – would become almost impossible.

Tiree has been a centre of fishing since Viking times, becoming a commercial exporter of fish in the 1840s. Fishing remains one of the three legs that supports the island's economy, along with tourism and crofting.

The island’s small harbour received a major upgrade in 2020, thanks to a £1.1 million investment from the Scottish Government, HIE and the Tiree Community Development Trust. From two boats in 1995, the local fleet is now nine strong providing 20 full time jobs. The annual catch of crab and lobster has a value of around £1,000,000. A quarter of the children in P4 and below (14 out of 59) come from fishing families. It has been a real success story.

The Tiree current fleet uses fixed-line creels, which have little impact on the sea bed beyond the prey species.

The most crucial point is this: Milton harbour is shallow, tidal and relatively unprotected. This means that the largest boats that can berth there safely are less than 10 m in length. These are day boats. They simply cannot steam off to new fishing grounds if there are local restrictions. If the Tiree fleet cannot work local waters, there will be no fishing boats, no fishermen, and no fishing families. It is a binary choice.

Even partial designation would have the same effect. The Tiree fishermen need the whole area to take advantage of shelter as weather systems sweep over the island, and to work the ground less intensively and more sustainably.

Tiree Community Council and Tiree Community Development Trust have no comment to make about the concept of HPMAs. But we will strongly oppose the creation of an HPMA around Tiree and Coll. It would be the end of our community.

Tiree Community Development Trust

Tiree Community Council

14 March 2023