

National Marine Planning Framework Consultation Draft - Press Release

West Cork Social Democrat TD, Holly Cairns and Councillor Ross O'Connell, have called for West Cork to become Ireland's first marine-based national park in a submission to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's consultation on the draft National Marine Planning Framework.

The document outlines the plan that will shape developments in Ireland's maritime sector for the next twenty years. Their submission emphasised support for coastal and island communities, the importance of sustainable fishing, protection for Kelp in Bantry Bay, and proposing West Cork as Ireland's first coastal national park.

Holly Cairns TD explained that:

'West Cork is an area which will be massively affected by this plan so it's important that the concerns of our communities were added to the Marine Planning Draft. It has good points on fisheries, sustainability, and greater coordination, but these need to be backed up by real authority and structures for the public to have their say. The Save Our Skibbereen and Bantry Bay Kelp campaigns have shown us that too often local groups are forced to take on large companies and state bodies - we should have a system that facilitates real participation.' we can't continue to rely on small groups of people to right these wrongs.

'Marine planning has lots of potential to help develop West Cork in an organised and sustainable way. We have incredible natural and social resources here from Allihies to Kinsale. We all know how the tourism industry has been devastated by Covid19, and to help the sector going forward, we suggested that West Cork become Ireland's first marine-based national park. We have the whole package on our peninsulas and islands: fantastic scenery, amazing biodiversity and rich natural and cultural heritage.'

Councillor Ross O'Connell added:

'Coastal and island communities should be at the heart of marine planning. We wanted a greater commitment to supporting families and jobs through sustainable models that used local knowledge. We made submissions on offshore renewable energy to ensure that wave energy, a nascent but rapidly developing technology with minimal environmental and visual impact, is given a chance to help meet our energy requirements in a way that won't affect tourism and other marine activities. The plan needs to be based on a coordinated approach that respects the experiences of the community.'

'We also put a strong focus on protecting native Kelp in Bantry Bay by revoking licenses for industrial scale harvesting. If we are to use this resource, it should be done in a sustainable way that benefits the people of Bantry and Beara. There has to be more public engagement and Environmental Impact Assessments before anything happens'

Full submission available here: <https://bit.ly/3d4jn4T>