

MULL COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Summary of Community Feedback. MD-00012385/ MD-00012386 - MachairWind Offshore Wind Farm. 17/08/2026

Conclusion

Mull Community Council asked community members to write to us with views on the proposed Machair development. The dominant view expressed was strong opposition to the proposal, although a smaller number of contributors supported it or supported it conditionally.

Background

Mull Community Council (MCC) hosted the MachairWind Team at two of our monthly meetings and representatives from the campaign group Hebridean Horizon and Visit Mull and Iona at two subsequent meetings. MCC also had representation from Colonsay, Islay and Tiree community councils at one of those meetings. MCC have studied the application documents and noted objections from Iona Community Council, Visit Mull & Iona, Colonsay Community Council, Islay Community Council, Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust, National Trust for Scotland and the Iona Community, along with Tiree Community Council's submission. MCC posted calls for feedback on our social media platform and website on three occasions, along with links to the SPR application pack and the Hebridean Horizon website. This document is a summary of the feedback received.

To date, MCC have received emails from 34 people against and 9 in favour of the application. We have also been monitoring the online comments from residents in all areas of the island and visitors expressing mainly concerns about the application.

Most letters of objection stated support for the transition to renewable energy if a development was in the correct place with the correct impact assessments completed and the correct mitigation measures in place. Most objectors felt this proposal is too large, too close to land, and in the wrong location. Supporters argue that renewable energy infrastructure is necessary to address climate change and that all communities must accept some responsibility for future energy generation.

Concerns Raised

Compliance

- Many respondents state that the application fails to comply with the standards set by the following policies and act: The National Marine Plan requires decisions to rest on sound socio-economic evidence. The National Planning Framework (NPF4) Policy 4(a) withholds support from development whose type, location or scale makes its impact on the natural environment unacceptable. NPF4 Policy 7 requires development to protect and enhance historic assets and their settings, with significant adverse effects requiring clear justification and public benefits capable of outweighing that harm. The Islands (Scotland) Act 2018 legally mandates developers to account for island communities, requiring formal Island Communities Impact Assessments (ICIAs) to ensure that local socio-economic impacts are weighted correctly.

Impact on Landscape, Seascape, and Cultural Heritage

- The most common objection is that the development would industrialise iconic views around Mull, Iona and surrounding waters. These waters include the designated Loch na Keal National Scenic Area, which includes the Treshnish isles, Staffa and Ulva. The extreme height of the turbines, coupled with the large area of the WDA, and therefore wide angle of view on the horizon is seen as unacceptable to the majority of respondents.
- Many respondents argue that the area has exceptional cultural, historical, spiritual, and scenic value and that turbines of the proposed scale would fundamentally alter its character.
- Of particular concern is the reduction in harm stated in the EIA beyond 20km. As Mull and Iona are 21km from the WDA, the choice of this distance as the point of reduction in harm, although in keeping with policy, is seen as disingenuous. The change in visual impact in that kilometre will be almost imperceptible, which raises concerns about the emotional and social impact on island residents whose livelihoods and sense of place depend on the landscape, wildlife and tranquillity.
- Some supporters suggest the impact on the view has been overstated by objectors. One stated that in their opinion wind turbines are one of the most aesthetically pleasant forms of industrial landscape. Another considers them post-industrial, rather than industrial as many of the objectors claim and pointed out that the local landscape including deforested hills and local settlements, is largely man made.

Tourism and Local Economy

- Mull has a vibrant and diverse economy. The largest sector however is tourism, and many are concerned about impacts on nationally and internationally important tourism destinations in and around Mull. For example, many of the boat trips to Staffa, Treshnish isles and for whale watching operate from Mull. Visitors visit the islands many beaches, many of which have sight of the WDA. Iona draws great numbers of tourists annually and Mull's tourism economy benefits from visitors passing through or spending time here also. Argyll & Bute Council funds many of its lifeline, loss making piers from the landing fees collected at Craignure and Fionnphort. Many business owners involved in accommodation, wildlife tourism, outdoor recreation, and hospitality fear damage to visitor appeal.
- Several contributors argue that the Environmental Impact Assessment does not properly assess impacts on the communities most affected, especially the Ross of Mull and Iona, and instead dilutes the effect by considering Mull as a whole. There is particular concern that the tourism assessment treats attractions as if they simply continue to exist, without recognising that the quality of the visitor experience may be changed by turbines, aviation lighting and construction activity. Many questioned whether tourism impacts have been adequately assessed for Mull and Iona specifically. The socio- economic impact has been assessed based on national data, rather than on local knowledge and wish to see a dedicated impact assessment conducted in the form of inquiry sessions.
- Fishing and marine-based livelihoods are mentioned as potential economic risks, particularly where respondents believe construction, seabed disturbance or exclusion zones could affect fishing grounds. However, fishermen consulted locally expressed limited concern about effects on fishing grounds.
- Some supporters felt the impact is overstated and visitors will not be put off by turbines on the horizon, as they have not been elsewhere in the UK.

Wildlife and Environmental Effects

- Concerns focused on marine mammals and cetaceans, particularly the impacts of construction noise. Whale watching trips and the small cruise ship sectors are booming here. These vessels have been reporting enhanced numbers of cetaceans to the west of Mull in recent years, including the return of humpback whales. Basking sharks, porpoise and dolphins are also regularly seen in the area. While it is accepted the operational phase of the windfarm may not be an issue, the years of construction are likely to discourage many species from entering the area and may indeed cause harm to them. The Sea of the Hebrides MPA is in close proximity to the WDA, which caused concern to some respondents.
- The objection raised by the Mull based Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust (HWDT) caused concern to many. HWDT's main concern is that impacts on whales, dolphins and porpoises have not been assessed or mitigated robustly enough, especially given nearby protected areas for harbour porpoise and minke whale. Underwater noise from pile driving is the biggest issue. Modelling shows that a 10 dB noise reduction could greatly reduce injury/disturbance risk, so HWDT argues noise abatement should be a committed primary mitigation measure, not optional. They state that the EIA relies too heavily on assumed mitigation effectiveness, including Marine Mammal Observers, Passive Acoustic Monitoring and Acoustic Deterrent Devices, without enough evidence that these measures will work at the predicted spatial scale or for all species. HWDT say final significance conclusions are not consistently supported by the evidence, because some moderate or major adverse effects appear to be reduced through professional judgement rather than revised quantitative analysis. The assessment should better reflect how marine mammals actually use the region, including site fidelity, seasonal habitat use, cumulative disturbance, repeated exposure and vulnerable local populations. HWDT recommends stronger commitments to noise reduction, revised significance conclusions, project-specific monitoring, adaptive management and more evidence-based mitigation before impacts are judged acceptable.
- Bird populations and migration routes were frequently raised by objectors. Corncrake have been missed from the EIA entirely and are an important species to the area. Local knowledge suggests the migration path would be through the WDA and the species are known to have limited mobility in flight. The guillemot special area on the Colonsay cliffs is of particular concern as they are known to avoid wind farms and may be displaced. Concerns were raised for the wellbeing of other species, such as sea eagle, puffin, razorbill, cormorant, hen harrier and shag which all nest nearby, and gannet that fish in the area.
- Marine ecosystems and long-term seabed impacts from construction works are a common concern with residents. One respondent questioned the quoted volume of spoil and asked where it would be dumped. This has the potential to spread the impact beyond the WDA.
- Supporters of the project generally accept that environmental impacts need careful assessment and mitigation.

Lighting and Dark Skies

- Multiple respondents highlighted concerns about aviation and marine lighting on turbines. The application suggests aircraft activated lights could be fitted, but it is not clear that this would be insisted on. Marine lighting would likely need to be fixed, so visible from dusk to dawn.
- Many argued that night-time lighting would damage the area's dark skies, tranquillity, and visitor experience. The EIA states the effect would be moderate and significant in the south-east corner of Mull.

Community Benefits and Fairness

- Many questioned whether Mull would receive meaningful community benefits from the project. The fact that community benefits cannot be stated at the time of application was a red flag to many. It was suggested that Mull was unlikely to host any shore facilities and would therefore not qualify for meaningful benefits. Some thought any benefits received would be unlikely to outweigh the risks to the economy. Some commented there was an imbalance between local impact and corporate profits and if the community received cheaper electricity, it would go some way to offsetting the impacts. It was widely believed there would be limited, if any, job opportunities locally.
- Concerns were raised that profits would largely benefit overseas corporate owners rather than local island communities, echoing wider Scottish concerns about wind farm wealth leaving the country.
- Supporters welcomed the promise of apprenticeships which could bring much needed jobs for young people. Objectors suggested these jobs would be spread throughout mainland Argyll and if the development went ahead, should be filled from the islands directly affected. They also felt any other community benefits should be weighted towards the communities most exposed to the development.
- Supporters thought that meaningful community benefits could be realised. One stated the project could deliver strong local benefits by developing onshore community energy resources, low-cost local tariffs, shore-power infrastructure, and training opportunities. One respondent said SPR should work with Community Energy Scotland and draw on funding such as the National Wealth Fund to support community-owned energy infrastructure serving transport, fisheries, tourism, and wind farm operations. It was suggested that the use of Loch Lathaich as a vessel base could bring many jobs to the island. It is widely believed that Mull must diversify away from tourism to some extent. This will create year-round work and sustainable communities. Another respondent stated any community benefits should be administered by local community groups and not the local council.

Network Constraints

- Many commented that the current distribution network is incapable of coping with all the electricity currently produced by Scotland's windfarms and that supply exceeds demand. The constraint payments paid to windfarm operators angered many respondents. They state this directly affects all our energy bills. They argue that building more windfarms before the national grid is brought up to the required standard to transmit excess energy to where it is required, while claiming it benefits consumers, is disingenuous.
- A supporter remarked that claims read online, were erroneous, as by the time the windfarm is online, the network will be improved, and demand will be much higher, they also claim that constraint payments were misunderstood.

Consultation and Public Awareness

- A recurring theme amongst objectors was the belief that many residents do not fully appreciate the scale of the proposal due to community consultations only being held in the Ross of Mull and not throughout the island. Visit Mull and Iona felt this disregarded the island wide, economically interdependent nature of the tourism offer.
- Several respondents criticised consultations as inadequate, biased, or framed in a way that implied the project was inevitable.