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Gap of Dunloe Public Consultation,
Kerry County Council, Roads, Transportation and Marine,
Room 115, Áras an Chontae,
Rathass, Tralee,
Co. Kerry

29th January 2021

Re: public consultation on the future management of the Gap of Dunloe

Dear Sir/Madam

Mountaineering Ireland is the representative body for hillwalkers and climbers in Ireland. It is recognised as the National Governing Body for mountaineering, hillwalking, rambling and rockclimbing by both Sport Ireland and Sport Northern Ireland. Mountaineering Ireland has approximately 14,000 members drawn from all parts of the island of Ireland.

The Gap of Dunloe has held a very special attraction for Irish and international hillwalkers and climbers over many generations. In addition to its spectacular scenery, it provides access onto the MacGillycuddy's Reeks to the west, the Black Valley to the south and Purple and Tomies Mountains to the east. Probably the most celebrated ridge-walk in Ireland: the end-to-end MacGillycuddy's Reeks walk starts in the Gap close to Kate Kearney's Cottage. The Gap is also home to a large number of nationally important climbing crags and bouldering areas. The Gap and the mountains on either side are considered by many to be the natural home of Irish mountaineering.

Mountaineering Ireland is appreciative of the recreational access provided by landowners in the Gap of Dunloe. Traditionally there has been a very good relationship between Irish hillwalkers/climbers and local landowners, however a small number of localised access issues have arisen in recent years. Mountaineering Ireland believes that a management plan for the Gap should seek to address any underlying landowner concerns, which may be contributing to these localised issues. Such concerns may include, for example, inappropriate parking, blocking of access or general congestion during the summer months. It is noted that while the western side of the Gap is part of the MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Project (as established under Comhairle na Tuaithe), the eastern side is not. This may be a contributory factor in access issues on that side of the valley.

Mountaineering Ireland believes that the Gap of Dunloe is a place of unique and outstanding natural beauty, which is widely valued and enjoyed by locals, casual visitors and hillwalkers/climbers. The unique landscape of the Gap has been synonymous with Kerry (and Irish) tourism since the 19th century. It is noted also that the Gap is within a designated Special Area of Conservation (SAC), in which wildlife and habitat conservation

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is considered to be important on a European as well as on an Irish level. Mountaineering Ireland welcomes the work being carried out under the MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP Project to control the spread of rhododendron in the Gap, which will protect both biodiversity and landscape quality.

The existing winding road through the Gap has been captured in millions of postcards, paintings and photographs and has become part of the iconic character of the Gap. It is noted that the Gap of Dunloe, while it is adjacent to the Killarney National Park, is outside of the park boundary and so is not subject to the protections or management associated with a national park. Notwithstanding this, Mountaineering Ireland believes that proactive management of this unique landscape is necessary and appropriate going forward. Future management plans must address the preservation of the Gap's special character and heritage as well as the delivery of the SAC conservation objectives.

Mountaineering Ireland believes that traffic congestion in the Gap during the summer months has become a very significant problem. This congestion is impacting negatively on visitor experience, causing real nuisance for local communities, and is resulting in significant environmental pressures. Mountaineering Ireland believes that the solution to this problem should be based primarily on traffic management measures to reduce the flow of non-local traffic through the Gap during the summer months, rather than on road engineering.

Any traffic management plan must be subject to engagement with the residents of the Gap and the Black Valley, for whom the Gap is an important access route. Possible traffic management measures might include access restrictions for non-local traffic entering the Gap at certain times of the day, or a one way flow of non-local traffic, the provision of additional parking at the northern entrance to the Gap and parking restrictions within the Gap itself.

We note from the public consultation that "*Kerry County Council recognises the need to develop a sustainable approach to managing the Gap of Dunloe into the future.*" Mountaineering Ireland very much welcomes this approach and believes that sustainable, proactive management of this very special and unique place, in cooperation with local residents and relevant organisations, is essential.

Mountaineering Ireland appreciates the opportunity to comment on the future management of the Gap of Dunloe and would be happy, if the opportunity arises, to provide additional input or to engage in relation to any more detailed plans.

Yours sincerely

Helen Lawless
Access & Conservation Officer

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