

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Scottish communities demand serious re-think of £1 billion Government project set to damage the Highlands and rural economy

Torridon, Ross-shire – 4 January 2024: The proposed Shared Rural Network (SRN) is a UK Government initiative supported by the mobile network operators.

It aims to provide 4G coverage to 95% of the geography (rather than population) of the UK. In the remote Scottish Highlands, this means installing hundreds of masts in places **where nobody lives** and wasting up to **£500 million** of taxpayers' money.

Many rural communities and businesses require better broadband. However, this poorly thought out connectivity strategy risks putting masts in all the wrong places and benefitting no-one.

Communities in the Scottish Highlands, together with walkers' groups, mountaineers and conservation groups, are united in calling for:

- a proper dialogue with communities to establish the needs of residents and businesses before the masts are instigated. This must include an analysis of what each mast is for and who (if anyone) will benefit
- a thorough cost benefit analysis for every mast proposed, including assessment of the damage to the environment and tourism in line with normal good practice
- to allow the Highland Council to be able properly to exercise its oversight responsibilities, an extension in the timelines for completion of the SRN project

Scotland's rural areas are renowned for their breathtaking landscapes, which attract tourists from around the world. The dramatic mountains, pristine lochs, and untouched wilderness are not only integral to local communities, they are also a significant driver of the region's economy through tourism and outdoor activities.

These areas are often cherished for their tranquillity, providing an escape from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Yet under UK Government plans, 25 metre masts and infrastructure will damage the natural harmony, remote glens and lochs will hum to the sound of generators, and peaceful footpaths will be turned into tracks for construction and maintenance.

The communities have today written to Rt. Hon. Julia Lopez MP, the UK Minister responsible for the SRN programme and await a response. See copy letter attached with full list of signatories.

For media enquiries please contact:

Zoe Hudson

Torridon Mast Action Group

07778 788436

z.hudson@qmul.ac.uk

Caroline Hamilton

Chair, Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council

07956 318332

chair@tkcc.scot

For examples of the Torrison landscapes set to be affected by the SRN proposals, see https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15eLy6fmFnf_rMYBuG6C_D6HW6WUmY-5M
All images are copyright of Rob Bruce and must be credited to Rob Bruce