

Coastal confusion reigns over Déise's geography



Waterford's Copper Coast, which Fáilte Ireland claims isn't 'wild' enough to warrant inclusion on the Wild Atlantic Way.

CONFUSION continues to surround Waterford's geography, as calls have once again been made in support of the county's inclusion on the Wild Atlantic Way.

The high profile tourism initiative, which runs from Donegal's Inishowen Peninsula to Kinsale in County Cork, has been cited as contributing significantly to increased tourist numbers in certain areas of Ireland this year.

However, Waterford's exclusion has attracted the wrath of locals as was first reported in The Munster Express in July.

Adding further fuel to the debate, the Irish Marine Institute (IMI) last week stated that Waterford was not on the Atlantic.

"To the south, the Atlantic is separated from the Irish Sea by the Celtic Sea," the IMI told the Irish Independent. Its understanding is that "the Atlantic Ocean ends where the Celtic Sea begins".

However, when contacted by local tour operator Jim Falconer earlier this summer, the Ordnance Survey Office in the Phoenix Park and the Coast Guard Search and Rescue at Waterford Airport both confirmed that Waterford borders the Atlantic Ocean.

Responding to calls on RTÉ Radio One last week in support of Waterford's addition to the Wild Atlantic Way, Paul Keeley of Fáilte Ireland stated that the Copper Coast was "not wild" and could not trump the west coast which he said was a "rugged, wild landscape".

Jim Falconer said Mr Keeley's comments were "an example of Fáilte Ireland's ignorance" and "a gratuitous insult to Waterford people".

"During the storms in February, some of the highest waves in Ireland were filmed in Tramore and shown all over the world," he said.

"It's typical of us here in Waterford to take things lying down and to take whatever crumbs are thrown our way. If Waterford Crystal was located in Dublin, Cork or Galway the funds would have been found to keep it alive," he contended.

A high profile marketing campaign is being used to promote the Wild Atlantic Way, including a six-part ITV television series fronted by Christine Bleakley which is due to air next Spring.

"Waterford taxpayers are indirectly telling people to bypass Waterford. We're paying for this advertising," claimed Mr Falconer.

A recent survey of hotels by the Sunday Independent found visitor numbers in Donegal alone were up by between 20 and 40 per cent this summer on 2013.

One hotelier in the area reported visitor numbers from continental Europe up 40 per cent on last year.

Meanwhile, an extra 200,000 visitors came to the Sligo region alone between January and May in 2014 compared to the same time last year.

Fáilte Ireland has stated that a similar "unifying tourism proposition" is planned for the South East in 2015 which would highlight the area's heritage such as Waterford's Viking Triangle and Kilkenny's Medieval Mile.

"If they have something special for the south east, it should have been launched at the same time as the Wild Atlantic Way," said Mr Falconer.

He said the omission of Waterford City from a high profile Tourism Ireland map earlier this year was another example of the "total negativity" shown towards Waterford.

In a further boost to the Wild Atlantic Way, the initiative was recently praised by Conde Nast Traveller - considered by many to be the world's 'travel bible'.

The publication said the route was "set to join the prestigious list of the world's best car journeys".

Jim Falconer is now calling for a committee comprised of local business people and any other interested parties to be formed in order to ensure Waterford is included on the Wild Atlantic Way.

"We must right this wrong," he said.