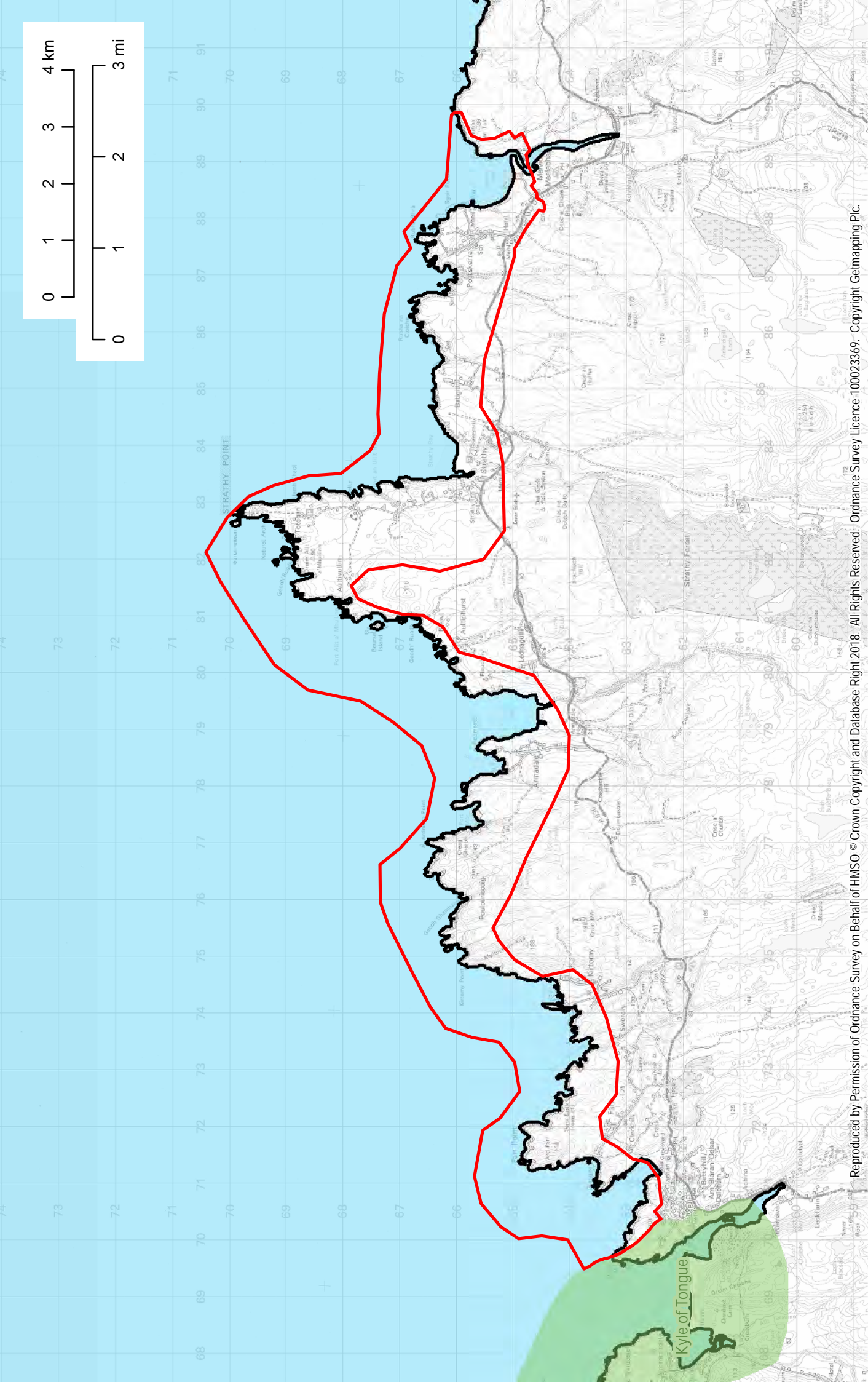


VOLUME 4: APPENDIX V1-6.2: CITATION FOR SPECIAL LANDSCAPE AREA 03. FARR BAY, STRATHY AND PORSKERRA



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SLA Ref. number/Name	03. Farr Bay, Strathy and Portskerra
Location and Extent	REFER TO MAP 3. This area extends along the north coast of Sutherland from Bettyhill in the west to Melvich in the east and includes moorland and crofting areas.
Area	47km ² (4680ha).
Overview	This area is characterised by its dramatic, deeply indented coastline of rocky headlands and sheltered bays, backed by a colourful and diverse mosaic of moorland and crofting landscapes. Big skies, combined with the ever-changing effects of the northern coastal light, create the impression of great space and dynamism. Fine weather allows impressive and extensive views, including northwards across the sea to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head.

Key Landscape and Visual Characteristics

- Deeply-indented coastline characterised by a repetitive rhythm of alternating rocky headlands and sheltered bays, closely related to the underlying geological structure.¹
- Impressive assemblage of hard/rocky coastal landforms including cliffs, headlands, stacks, arches, caves and ravines.
- Fine sandy beaches in the largest and most sheltered bays which form foci that contrast in colour, form and texture to the rocky coastal cliffs.
- Elevated areas on the intervening high ground between the bays close to the sea provide expansive views both along the coast and out to sea, contrasting with a more enclosed, intimate visual character within the major bays. Views south to the inland mountains are a notable feature of this stretch of coast.
- The large scale of the landscape, combined with often rapidly changing weather and the distinctive coastal light, creates dynamic and dramatic visual effects.
- The immediate coastline is often not visible from the adjacent inland areas due to convex nature of slopes and the vertical cliffs which screen views. Consequently views tend to focus upon the waters of the Pentland Firth with its strong tides and currents which are clearly visible from many locations.
- Patterns of land cover and settlement within crofting areas form a complex mosaic with moorland areas, although occurring predominantly as linear strips or isolated patches, closely associated with physical conditions including soil type and topography. Crofting and farming is largely confined to the slopes around the bays and their subtle field patterns contrast with the simple vegetation backcloth of the inland hills.
- The moorland landscapes, with rolling slopes and hills and a characteristic combination of convex slopes and simple vegetation cover with rocky outcrops, become noticeably more open and sweeping in character moving eastwards towards Caithness.
- Abandoned and ruined buildings occur in places, partly a reflection of the harsh, uncompromising nature of the exposed coastal landscape. These form distinctive visual elements, together with the harbours and jetties which occur at regular intervals along the coast, and evoke a sense of history.
- Trees and scrub are rare, mainly restricted to crofts and settlements or in steeper glens.

¹ The broadly east-west line of the coast here cuts sharply across the regional “strike” of the Moinian complex giving a particularly fine example of a “discordant coastline”, where differential erosion of the narrow bands of harder and softer rocks corresponds very closely to the intricate physical features.

Special Qualities

Dramatically Intricate Coastline and Forceful Sea

- This is a distinctive stretch of rocky coastline which is typically viewed from the cliff tops and enclosed sandy beaches or from the sea by passing vessels. It is deeply eroded by the sea to form a complex assemblage of headlands, cliffs, promontories, stacks, arches, caves and ravines which combine to form unique features along the coastal edge.
- This coast can be an awe-inspiring, particularly during extreme weather or heavy oceanic swells. Access to the cliffs and coast line is readily available and allows opportunities to experience the sea's force and scale at close proximity.
- By contrast the sandy bays which alternate with the harsher cliffs and headlands provide a more focussed and tranquil setting due to their low lying location and the shelter afforded by flanking cliffs.
- The lighthouse at Strathy is a popular attraction to visitors and is approached via the minor road which serves the string of crofts and houses along the eastern side of the promontory.
- Traditional netting stations now largely abandoned elsewhere in Highland are still notable around Strathy Point whilst the sheltered harbour at Portskerra is still well-used by local fishermen.

Moorland and Crofting Mosaic

- Rolling landforms trending towards the coast and opening out over bays provide a distinctive contrast of sequential views and experience of the landscape - enclosed or exposed, framed or open, intimate or expansive.
- There is a rich tapestry of moorland and crofting settlements with the pattern of buildings and various land cover creating a diverse mix of colour, texture, and form.

Big Skies and Extensive Views

- There is a distinct perception and experience of immense space and dynamism, strongly influenced by the combination of big skies, and the distinctive coastal light, and the constantly changing influence of the weather. Fine conditions allow impressive and extensive views to Orkney and along the coast to Cape Wrath and Dunnet Head while in contrast poor weather restricts views and highlights the sense of remoteness of the landscape. The buildings and structures at Dounreay form prominent features in views from Strathy Point.

Historical Dimension

- The remains of Borge Castle situated on a natural promontory with a defensive bank built across the neck and with some ramparts and some masonry from the keep walls still visible, is one of the few surviving medieval (c.16th-17th century) defended promontory forts in this part of the north coast.

Sensitivity to change

- Development on or near the exposed cliff top landscape could interrupt the linear nature and open views or compromise the intricate nature of the coast.
- Infrastructure within and around existing settlements (e.g. street lighting, kerbs, signs, pavements) could individually erode their inherently rural character and collectively have a widespread impact on the area.
- Visitor facilities, other than very low-key elements, within sheltered bays could erode the existing tranquillity and sense of remoteness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tall vertical structures or large-scale buildings could be visible in views along the coast and could be inappropriate in scale in relation to the domestic scale of existing buildings and settlements. ▪ Marine developments could affect existing views from the coastal cliffs to an uninterrupted expanse of sea below.
Potential for landscape enhancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Underground overhead lines where these intrude on views from the road to the coast. ▪ Relocate incongruous structures and tracks (even those outwith the SLA) where these impinge on views along the coast.
Other designations/ interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Highland Clearances of the 19th century had a great impact on this area. Many crofters were cleared from infamous Strathnaver including 20 who were sent to Strathy along with 18 others from elsewhere increasing the original crofting population of 4 to 42. The harsh way of life became too much for some and in desperation they set out for a new life overseas leaving the area sparsely populated as it remains today with ruins and abandoned buildings serving as poignant reminders. ▪ Many of the beaches provide good surfing locations where the power of the Atlantic rollers can be experienced. ▪ Important views to mountains within the Kyle of Tongue NSA to the south. ▪ The 30km+ Strathy Coast SSSI falls within this SLA and is designated for a range of features including the notable sandy beaches backed by dune systems and the intervening cliffs and headlands topped by extensive coastal heaths. A smaller section of coast centred on Strathy Point is also designated as SAC for its sea cliff vegetation. ▪ Distinctive ecological conditions associated with areas of sandy soils and extreme climatic conditions allow unusual assemblages of species, which include the rare Scottish primrose, also readily visible at Strathy Point.
Landscape Character	<p>The Landscape Character Types found in this area are described in: Stanton, C. 1998. Caithness and Sutherland landscape character assessment. <u>Scottish Natural Heritage Review</u> No 103.</p> <p><i>All Landscape Character Assessments can be found on the Scottish Natural Heritage website at www.snh.org.uk</i></p>