

# NOT COUL PRESS RELEASE

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## SCOTS PINE INVASION HOAX AND SNH MALIGNED

The Not Coul position on the ecological work for the Coul Golf development within Loch Fleet SSSI has worsened following public meetings in Dornoch and Embo. Incorrect information was put to two large but unknowing audiences. The Coul SSSI sector was claimed to be in bad condition and suffering from “massive amounts of invasive species”. That was then used to justify a golf course which would allow a future site management plan to cure all existing ills. Not Coul dune ecologists immediately recognized that all the ‘invasive’ species listed at the consultations are part of the normal mix of habitats on protected Scottish dunes.

The most amazing assertion by Coul Golf’s independent ecologist was an invasion by Scots pine. Interrogated, he would not put numbers to the Scots pine “invasion”, or state the heights. Not Coul then moved to a second ecologist, representing the developer’s lead environmental advisor STRI, from Bingley, Yorkshire. This long-established sports turf consultancy promotes itself as the “R&A’s experts” and have something to do with maintaining the ecological interest of all Open Golf Championship courses in the UK. Not Coul was told the invading Scots pine came from the felled plantation.

That was a jaw-dropping moment. The felled plantation was not Scots pine. It was Lodgepole Pine, a non-native species. Not Coul ecologists already know that the total of living pine trees in the SSSI at Coul is three (one Scots pine, two Lodgepoles). It looks like the ecologists working for Coul Golf struggle to identify Scots pine, Scotland’s iconic big tree, and cannot separate it from Lodgepole, and nor can they count the small numbers of pine trees accurately. There is no invasion. That’s a hoax.

The developer claimed in public that Scottish Natural Heritage is responsible for poor habitat condition at Coul due to its failure to operate a Management Plan. Not Coul understands that good management at Coul is impossible because it is being resisted by the landowner, one of the partners in the Coul Golf planning application. Any blame for current “unfavourable condition” must lie with the landowner. It is perverse that the proposed course has become his price for suddenly becoming a responsible custodian of a key part of Scotland’s natural heritage.

A habitat surveyor with three decades of experience objected strongly to claims that the recently-felled forestry area requires intervention to return it to dune habitat. Instead, the area is quickly recovering naturally but will be further disturbed for use as a dumping ground for dune heath turf stripped for golf. There is no developer’s information on the recovery to dune vegetation in that area.

Two large rooms of people at the consultations have been suckered by a number of very questionable environmental claims. SNH has been falsely accused of allowing mismanagement.

Not Coul now asks Scottish Natural Heritage and wildlife groups such as the RSPB and Scottish Wildlife Trust to check these assertions *extremely carefully*. This proposal cannot go forward founded on misinformation. Not Coul will continue to audit the Coul Golf Environmental Statement and it will publish its work, as it becomes properly refined. Not Coul is now focussed on the claim that a golf course will lead to a net biodiversity gain.

[END]

## Notes for Editors

Not Coul is an unincorporated group of local objectors to the proposed golf course scheme. It is well supported in both Embo and Dornoch. It draws on professional support from ecologists, ornithologists, golf specialists, planners and lawyers, as well as from the lifetime's experience of local people.

In response to the application, Not Coul is examining the entire Environmental Statement with care and in detail, and will publish its findings when they are prepared and verified.

## Not Coul's contact in working hours is

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