



**An assessment of the perception of the Caithness region
created by media and online sources.**

For the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority



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1. RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Work is underway to stimulate the growth of new business in the Caithness area of the North Highlands, partly to compensate for the future loss of jobs as a result of the decommissioning of the Dounreay nuclear site. Dounreay – the second largest of such sites in the UK – is undergoing a programme of work to put the site into a passively safe condition by 2036. If the new business initiative is to succeed it will be vital to promote inward investment and attract existing businesses to move into the area. Therefore the external perception of what it is like to live and work in Caithness will be of critical importance.

Of the various ways in which perceptions of the area are created, the media and the Internet are perhaps the most powerful influences. This report therefore comprises analyses of the most relevant coverage of the Caithness region emanating from various media and Internet sources.

The report takes into account the availability, authority and accuracy of the source. The report is written in the context that it is vital that perceptions are known prior to attempting to encourage businesses to move into the area.

2. METHODOLOGY

Media

National and Regional Press

Through the use of a media database, sources from the national and regional press were analysed to find articles of relevance to Caithness.

The content, authority and readership of the source were borne in mind in order to conclude whether positive, neutral or negative perceptions would be created by the coverage.

The report examines perceptions in a number of areas and indicates where a negative perception is likely to have been created. This qualitative analysis forms the bulk of the methodology and is designed to give a fresh, independent view of perceptions of the region.

Sources were viewed with the consideration that the region's location, lifestyle opportunities, existing and new business opportunities are integral to attracting new people to the area. The qualitative analysis attempts to define likely perceptions surrounding these themes.

Furthermore a quantitative analysis of the sources was carried out, examining comparative levels of positive, neutral and negative portrayal. This supplements the qualitative analysis and provides a benchmark for any future engagement which interested parties may wish to have with the media.

The timescale of analysis of each source varied depending on the frequency and relevance of articles.

Local Press

Due to the likely constraints on perception-formers obtaining hard copies of local newspapers, an analysis was made using the online services offered by relevant news groups.

Relevant websites were viewed and probable perceptions analysed in order to demonstrate how these online news services portray the region.

Internet sources

Internet sources were investigated by examining:

- a) perceptions created from sources revealed via a search engine
- b) perceptions created from selected sources relevant to the region.

a) Search engine: Google

Method (a) used the Google Internet search engine, which has become the first port of call for people seeking information through the Internet:

"Google is the first place most people go to find information on the web - for some it's often the only place." [Joint Information Systems Committee, September 2005]

Search results were analysed and perceptions were assessed, derived and explained both qualitatively and quantitatively. The purpose of this analysis was to determine how useful the most commonly used Internet search engine would be to people considering engaging in business in the area and whether such a search would lead to relevant results which enhanced the browser's positive perceptions of the region.

b) Analysis of selected sources

Method (b) consisted of an analysis of key websites pertaining to the report objectives and the Caithness region, with perception analysis arranged under the following themes:

- Business and regeneration-related sources

- Political sources
- Community sources
- Tourism/Environment sources

This analysis was designed to indicate whether key websites offered a positive or negative perception of the Caithness region and whether browsers would view the area as a region in which businesses or industries could be created or developed.

Segregation of nuclear-related coverage

Given that nuclear-related media articles might prejudice a balanced look at perceptions of the Caithness area, these items were separated for the quantitative analysis, as the graphics in this report demonstrate.

The report is intended to demonstrate that people hold perceptions created by previous activity in the nuclear sector, but that this sector has changed dramatically with decommissioning and this process has affected the perceptions of this region.

Nonetheless, it is intrinsic to the objective of this report that the non nuclear-related perceptions of Caithness are chiefly emphasised in order to indicate whether people might wish to live, invest or do business in the area.

3. MEDIA ANALYSIS

Perceptions from the National Press

Note - Eponymous industries:

Caithness Stone and Caithness Cheese feature prominently in the press, though these serve chiefly to advertise the name of the region and coverage does not reveal a perception of the physical and social region under investigation.

Caithness Glass also acts as an ambassador industry for the region, though the business has now moved away from the Caithness region itself. The receivership of the Wick branch of the business was only documented significantly in the regional press. Hence in this section this industry only affects the perception of the region by advertising its name.

i. Politics, Geography and Infrastructure

Sources created the following perceptions:

While local MP John Thurso's name appears frequently in the press, politically this distant locality is dominated by the regional government of the Highlands. Caithness is an area of rugged hills and vast empty spaces and the nature of the geography of the Highlands enhances its regional political identity. The Highland region has been a recipient of record levels of investment through the Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) network and is home to a broad range of successful energy production sources. The Highland region's population enjoys a comparatively high Westminster representation compared with England, however Caithness also boasts an MSP drowned by complaints from constituents concerning the local economy and unemployment.

There is a well-publicised transport infrastructure though some of this publicity might be designed to promote tourism and therefore conceal the infrastructural backwardness of such a remote and geographically diverse area. Thurso can be reached by a 13 hour rail journey from London.

It is possible to fly to the area and Wick airport provides a growing, but relatively expensive air hub. The Scottish Parliament is active in its attempts to improve the service between Edinburgh and Wick. Caithness is also a departure point for the Orkneys, although ferry services are somewhat basic.

In this, the most sparsely populated area in the European Union, driving is an expensive necessity due to fuel prices. Such is the isolation that this area has been described as "Mamba" land [Miles and Miles of Bugger All] and continues to experience a population decline. There are advantages and disadvantages to living in an area providing such solitude. The weather is cold and wet and sea temperatures are unwelcoming.

ii. Industry

Sources created the following perceptions:

Caithness has been and is still reliant on Dounreay as its main economic provider, and increased wind turbine capabilities could serve to transform Dounreay to the energy capital of Britain.

Aside from nuclear-related industry, the major industrial development has been the AGM battery plant established in Thurso in 1998 by AEA Technology, bringing employment and more HIE investment to the area. The project – to produce Lithium batteries – apparently received a mixed local reception, though acts as an example of an international coalition bringing new business to the area.

The second major business development is Norfrost's adaptable industries, based in Castletown. The company makes small "chest freezers" in the summer, but switches to a new range of tumble dryers in the winter.

In 1994 a technological boom in the region ended, but was followed by a major expansion in the Scottish telecoms network. A major BT call centre has re-located to Thurso and it is likely that more companies will follow this practice, given the space available in which to develop. The booming construction industry which continues alongside quarrying is hampered by a lack of building workers. Rumours have been circulating that Caithness might make a better servicing base for oil companies than the islands to the north.

It is evident, however, that unemployment is a major cause for concern and that the situation is worse than statisticians tend to suggest, for example, given the number of early retirements in the region. Considerable losses of manufacturing jobs since 1998 combined with the receivership of an iconic textile mill in 2000 also demonstrate that industry is limited and the workforce under-nourished.

iii. Housing and Public Services

Sources created the following perceptions:

This is certainly an area where intrepid house buyers could prosper. The "untapped housing market" is able to provide accommodation for new residents, although in reality there are a number of problems in this sector. A series of "Is it worth it?" *Sunday Times* articles indicate that for all the beauty and peacefulness of the region, properties were often cheap, rickety cottages requiring considerable renovation prior to becoming inhabitable. There is however, plenty of very cheap property to complement a number of heritage-rich residences.

Yet this does not dovetail neatly with the living arrangements for existing residents. There are a growing number of second homes, retirement homes and holiday homes and the Scots are being priced out by English newcomers. Moreover, the popularity of the region rests moreover with retirees or occasional visitors rather

than with people seeking to do business. Farmland is relatively cheap and therefore a good prospect for people further south seeking to sell up and farm in the north.

Although the UHI Millennium Institute has a campus in Thurso, education in the area is poor, with a lack of good teachers and schools. There are few trained social workers and poor hospital services – the recent closure of maternity services means that new mothers may have to travel to Inverness to give birth and in 2003 Caithness became a dentist-free zone.

iv. Tourism, Leisure and Environment

Sources created the following perceptions:

It is undoubtedly a scenic region with numerous current and future tourist venture opportunities. On numerous occasions Caithness features on lists of the “Top 50 places to visit in the world” compiled by UK newspapers. It also regularly appears as a “Top 50 honeymoon site”. Castles are abundant and there are numerous touring sites, plenty of accommodation and wedding locations – some of which have been used for celebrity marriages. The Royal family are fond of the region and both the late Queen Mother and Prince Charles have actively promoted the area and its heritage.

Castles are complemented by old residential buildings and archaeological sites. Additional attractions include the Highland Games, Hogmanay celebrations and the Northlands Festival, which is culturally more similar to a Nordic affair, than to a Scottish or British cultural event.

There are a number of beaches of a world-class standard and Thurso is an up and coming surfing destination. Despite cold sea temperatures and the visual presence of waste from Dounreay in the sea, Thurso has obtained a unique status as “surfing Mecca”, with a surf school and international contests. This is extremely well-publicised and though surfing in cold weather and water is unattractive to all but the most die-hard surfers, the activity is sufficiently unique to raise the profile of the area significantly.

Popular leisure pursuits include sea and river fishing (including shark fishing) and golf (Royal Dornoch course).

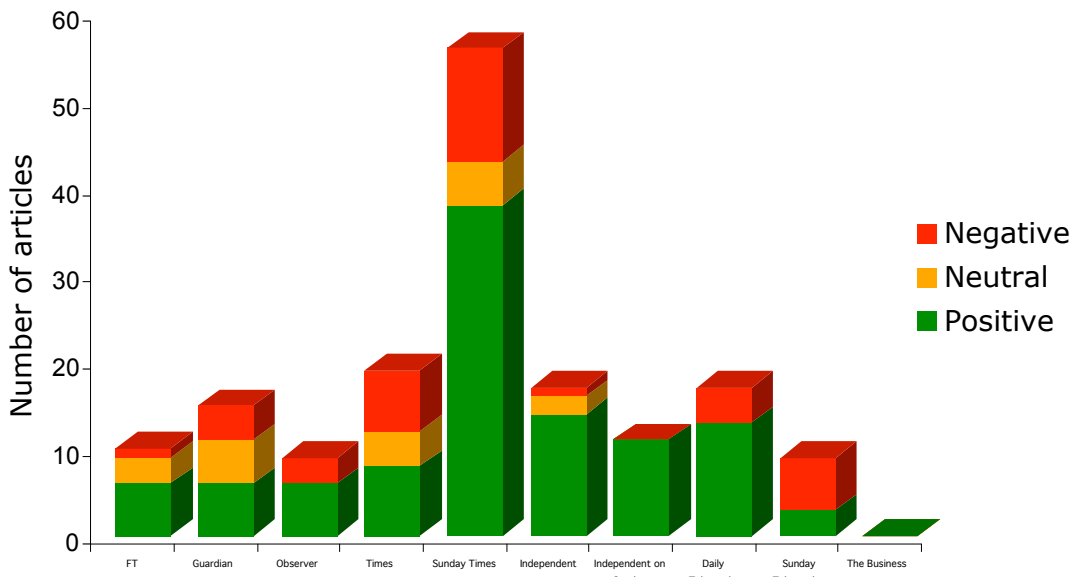
A small population and vast terrain offer an environment which is unique to live in. Flora and fauna are popular attractions, including bird watching and marine life, though the biodiversity of the low-industry region has come under threat, resulting in significant protest. While a retreat for conservationists, there are nonetheless reminders of the effects of what little industry there is and the appeal of surfing is undermined by the “Shitpipe”, emanating from the Dounreay plant. Prince Charles acts as a figurehead in opposing proposed wind farms, which would be an asset to the region’s energy infrastructure.

v. Quality of Life

Sources created the following perceptions:

The slow pace and calm lifestyle offered by the area, combined with aesthetic beauty sound appealing, but in reality there are issues which undermine these advantages. Sporadic drug seizures are widely reported though, overall, crime is very infrequent. Caithness is a good place in this respect to raise children, though dwindling public services and radiation paranoia counteract this.

National press (10 years) - non nuclear



vi. 'Nuclear Caithness'

Sources created the following perceptions:

A variety of concerns over the risks associated with nuclear activity indicate that this is an undesirable place to work and live. The Dounreay plant legacy does offer a secure decommissioning industry, providing a guaranteed employment source in the near future. A national Government agency – the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority – was created to oversee the lengthy decommissioning procedure. An economy dependent on this one industry will have to mature. Suggestions on how this might be achieved are almost non-existent given the lack of urgency.

Decommissioning is necessary and Government policy is to accelerate this clean-up: an operation that remains fraught with risk. On a site with a history of proven and suspected safety problems, the receipt of high-risk material from Georgia and suggestions of Dounreay as a major terrorist target do not bode well for the area. The contamination of workers (2000) and discovery of radioactive particles on the

beach near the plant suggest that the region is at a considerable risk from nuclear activity.

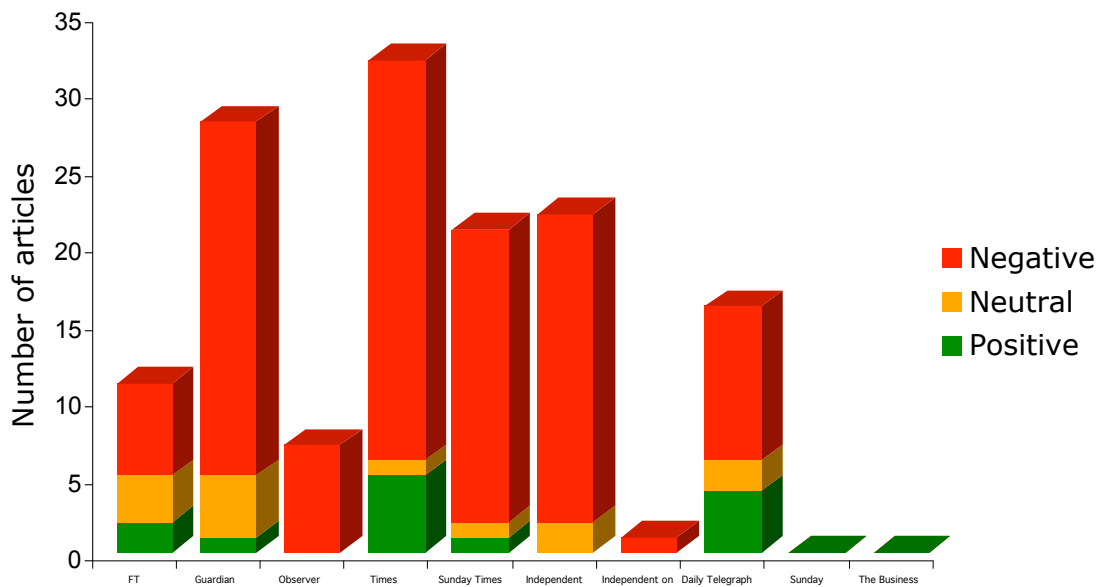
There have been investigations into the links between nuclear plants and cancer clusters (1996) and the suggested link with child cancers (2005).

[The link need not be proven to affect the national perception of the area.]

A major local landowner has been sufficiently concerned by the emission of radioactive material that he has sued the Dounreay plant. Tourists may be at risk from radioactive particles and golf courses have been forced to close due to the risk.

Dounreay was formerly a popular beach, though ruined aesthetically by the erection of the plant. The waters may contain “nuclear nasties” causing meningitis, ear and kidney infections. The plant is an eye-sore on the coastline and although an integral part of the present economy, it is a deterrent to individuals hearing a range of stories over recent decades up to the present on the potential horror which could stem from mismanagement of nuclear material.

National press (10 years) - nuclear related



Perceptions from the Regional Press

The Regional Press reiterates much of the coverage devoted to Caithness by the UK national press. Sources report more widely on local issues such as the closure and re-opening of the Caithness hospital in Wick, emphasizing the eventual success of the campaign, which was less celebrated by the UK national press, presumably as it has to appeal to a larger readership. There are a number of differences in the perceptions created which are outlined below rather than recurrent themes.

i. Politics, Geography and Infrastructure

The remote area of Caithness has abysmal weather and, in winter, this can erode infrastructure. The populace have something of an island mentality, due to the time taken to travel to other areas of Scotland. Yet the transport infrastructure of the region is improving. This emanates from the assistance provided by the Scottish Government and also from increased consumer demand.

Members of the Scottish Parliament have been campaigning for airlines to provide a subsidy for Scottish residents' air travel. Travel by air continues to increase, which is essential given the poor rail system in the Caithness region.

There is also a suggestion of a subsidised route to Orkney. The Caithness transport infrastructure serves both tourists and residents, on the whole at the same prices, and this could change in the future. There is substantial support for a tunnel to Orkney, which would replace the ageing ferry service. This is indicative of the general consensus for reform of the region's transport infrastructure and the cohesive approach to this aspect of local transport regeneration.

ii. Energy and Industry

Coupled with the transport infrastructure is an emphasis on the need to improve the utilities infrastructure of Caithness and the rest of the Highland region. There is likely to be a proliferation of wind farms, and experiments on tidal and wave power may come to fruition. Clearly there are problems in energy supply in this region and there is no clear short-term solution. Electricity may have to be imported from Iceland, which could be expensive.

The decommissioning of the Dounreay power plant is a lengthy process, but in the meantime preparations for a new Caithness nuclear power plant might be made, reinvigorating the area with employment opportunities and skilled workers. Dounreay may also become a base for breaking up North Sea oil rigs.

There is a new water filter plant at Wick and the Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise organization is a useful point of call for setting up new business in the area. This is an area with the potential to grow economically and commercially, although for every positive hope – the AEA Technology battery factory for example – there seems to be an example of a failing business operation: jobs have been lost

through the receivership of the Caithness glass operation in Wick and the sale of Norfrost.

There is an illegal fossil trade which is attracting attention from the authorities.

While there are undoubtedly other areas in Scotland to bring new business to, Caithness has business-support structures in place and other benefits to re-locating to the region.

iii. Housing and Public Services

There are plenty of properties available in the area, although much of the property is aimed at tourists.

The people of Caithness care about their public services and campaigns to avoid the closure of the maternity unit at the Caithness hospital in Wick have achieved notoriety. This success is important as it is the only public maternity unit in the area, the next nearest being Inverness.

The education services are adequate though for such a small population, but Caithness is unlikely to develop any notable schools or higher education facilities.

iv. Tourism, Leisure and Environment

There is a lively sporting calendar focusing on football and rugby clubs and teams from Caithness compete throughout Scotland. Fishing is the most popular of the more relaxed sports present in Caithness and this is attractive to tourists. The fishing industry feeds into the hospitality industry, which provides a few notable centres of cuisine for local diners or tourists.

The castles of the Caithness region are extremely impressive and this is an area with a heritage of substantial interest. The Northlands festival is a popular fair through which the region emphasizes its Nordic roots.

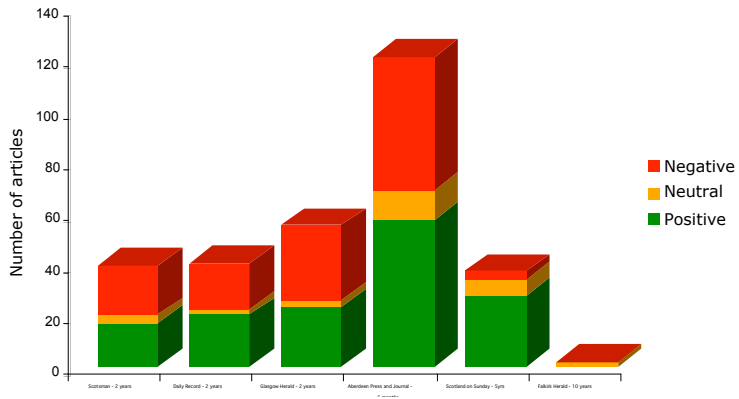
v. Quality of Life

Caithness is peaceful area in which residents enjoy much freedom.

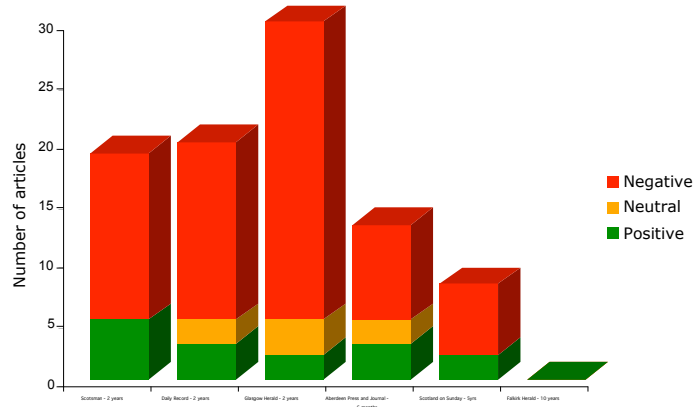
vi. 'Nuclear Caithness'

A legacy of fear over the safety of nuclear material still pervades in this area, and an increased number of security personnel at nuclear sites gives cause for concern. New jobs would be created by a new nuclear power station, though this project is so far only a suggestion and nuclear plants are unwanted necessities rather than features which improve a region.

Regional press - non nuclear



Regional press - nuclear related



Perceptions from the Local Media

Local news online services provided largely irrelevant information, but gave some indication of what perceptions might be formed by viewing these sources. Perceptions are formed by up to date information as archived material is not accessible.

Sources created the following perceptions:

- Caithness is a scenic area and its natural beauty is often praised by residents and visitors.
- A thriving community within this area enjoys significant community spirit. The *Northern Scot* was awarded 'Scotland and BT Newspaper of the Year' for its role as a campaigner for the local community.
- There are sports leagues and small-scale local entertainment and leisure possibilities.
- Gossip-style coverage indicates the local events and incidents which are irrelevant and peripheral to almost anybody who does not live in the location.
- There are few jobs advertised – in comparison with the size of the population of Caithness – though clearly there are communities in which property and cars are traded regularly.
- Successful community and media campaigning and lobbying helped prevent the closure of maternity unit facilities in Caithness hospital in Wick.
- There are transport infrastructure problems, although one major road scheme has been successful.

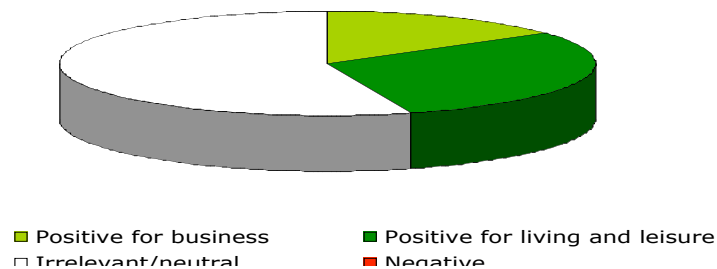
4. ONLINE ANALYSIS

Analysis of search engine results

The following statistical analysis of the top one hundred Google search results for the search term "Caithness" indicates that a large amount of irrelevant information is released via the search engine. This information varies from local crafts advertising to online booksellers and various maps from different time periods.

An experienced online browser will be used to these sorts of results, thus minimising the effect of these random results. Nonetheless the effect of positive perceptions of Caithness created by business and lifestyle-related sites is undermined by the quantity of results appearing to browsers forming perceptions of business and living opportunities in the region.

Top 100 google results searching for "Caithness"



Relevant search results provide a very positive impression of the area, in terms of promoting business and ensuring that inhabitants have access to leisure opportunities. There is no mention of the Dounreay nuclear plant or any of the safety fears and waste issues which are conveyed so prominently in the press. This is also true for a search of the top one hundred results under the search term "Thurso".

The only obvious nuclear-related result is the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) which provides a very appealing and balanced portrayal of the Caithness area. Also appearing several times in the search results is the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network, which suggests that with structured investment in place this region is able to grow and receive business and infrastructural support from various organisations. The Caithness Business Index and Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise indicate that there is already a substantial business infrastructure in the region and that there are various supportive avenues which browsers could go down in order to consider how their business operations might be assisted.

Yet while it seems Caithness is a well-supported and growing business area, there are twice as many results for leisure and lifestyle attractions in the area. Rock

climbing, golfing, trout angling and walking opportunities provide a substantial accompaniment to the potential business-support structures available.

There is evidently a thriving tourist industry, both in terms of outdoor activities and accommodation. Some of the property sites inform on the property industry for serious buyers, rather than holidaymakers. In terms of other living and lifestyle-related perceptions, the presence of a Citizens Advice Bureau and the successful retention of the maternity unit at Caithness hospital in Wick after a five year campaign are positive perception-formers. There is no indication of the public services problems highlighted in the national press, in fact, these are advertised in a good light by key sites such as www.caithness.org, a source which features in section (b) of the online analysis.

Other partly relevant sites include political election results and the CaithnessFM homepage.

The vast majority of irrelevant sites create neutral perception, as these would swiftly be passed over by experienced searchers.

Results featuring erroneous geographical and demographic information are common, though genealogy is the most common of the topics which is largely irrelevant to the report. Archaeological dig photos and projects make frequent appearances, meanwhile advertisements for solicitors and offers from Internet auction site eBay and bookseller, Amazon, add bulk to the search results.

Results with religious connotations are considered to be irrelevant to the ideal positive results of this study, though the presence of the Caithness branch of the Quaker Church or the Scottish Episcopal Church could enhance a positive perception of the region.

Internet searches convey the common perception that the area is remote and sparsely populated which provides both peacefulness and quality of life, but also reminds the observer that hospital trips to Inverness or Aberdeen would be necessary in some cases of emergency.

Selected Online Sources

The principal website pertaining to Caithness is www.caithness.org, which portrays the region as an area which invites a high quality of life:

"Wild and windswept it may be, as the most northerly part of Britain's mainland, but Caithness makes a superb case for itself as Britain's most welcoming region, thanks to this sparkling website." – Sunday Times, 30th December 2001

This site and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network (www.hie.co.uk) indicate that a range of pre-existing business networks serve to support entrepreneurialism and the establishment of new businesses in the area. These sites provide an extremely positive perception of the area and are attractive to

interested parties. It is evident that people coming to the area to establish new business will be entering thriving, welcoming communities, complemented by significant tourism capabilities.

Business and regeneration-related sources

Sources create the following perceptions:

Caithness is a great place in which to live and work. The area's economy is driven by the UKAEA Dounreay plant and by the fishing industry, though there are now a number of key industry sectors in Caithness: construction, retail, leisure, manufacturing, tourism, professional, transport.

The major employers are UKAEA Dounreay, Norfrost, BT Manpower and Caithness Glass. Employment centres are situated near the coast and there is a substantial business park in Wick.

The geography and demography of the region allows freedom and space in which to live and is therefore a great place to raise a family. Viking cultural influences make the area somewhat more exotic than other parts of Scotland. There is a mature road network, train services, and one international airport in an area half the size of Wales.

Outside of work there are numerous leisure activities to pursue.

There is a great deal of advice available on starting, growing and developing a business and a significant amount of commercial and financial assistance provided by regional development organisations, the Scottish Executive and the European Commission. This is an area where opportunities abound, ideas and entrepreneurialism encouraged and expertise is readily available on how to set up or improve a business. Business information is shared in a comprehensive and organised fashion on key websites.

As Caithness and Sutherland Enterprise (a Local Enterprise Company of the HIE) emphasises, the regeneration of Caithness is about unlocking its potential, seizing on existing abilities and attracting new businesses. The HIE, Caithness Business and the international-focused Scottish Development International are dedicated to this latter point.

The area of the UKAEA website which informs on the area surrounding Dounreay, emphasises the quality of life, advantages for newcomers in housing and community warmth and the success stories of re-located employees.

Political sources

Sources reveal that:

The Scottish Executive recognises that it is important to increase economic productivity levels for a sustained period. Integral to this are policies which aim to create a business environment which actively encourages innovation, entrepreneurialism and high skill levels, helping to encourage the creation, growth and transformation of businesses.

The twice yearly Convention of Highlands and Islands seeks to identify ways in which the Highlands and Islands region is different from the rest of Scotland and this area is strongly supported by a Government focused on meeting the differing and diverse needs of these areas.

The HIE is chiefly concerned with supporting business needs and growth in Caithness and the Executive devolves power and funding to this agency.

Inverness is the economic engine of the area, according to the Highland Council, though the Highland and Islands Enterprise initiative is greatly assisting the spread of new business ventures to the rest of the Highland region.

Caithness businesses can lobby Westminster through their MP, John Thurso. As President of the Tourism Society, businesses in this sector might benefit from his position and commitment to the hospitality and tourism industry. He is also a supporter of the local manufacturing industry.

John Thurso reveals that fishing and farming form the backbone of the region's economy, though both industries are in trouble. Nuclear decommissioning, the oil industry, chest freezers and popular music production are all assets to the region's economy. Air travel has become more and more easy with developments at Wick and Inverness airport supported by the MP.

Community sources

The dominant perception conveyed by www.caithness.org is of the quality and extent of community spirit in the region. The site has been singled out by the national press and regularly achieves a high rate of hits.

Sources create the following perceptions:

There are community clubs and activities and also an online community. Communities benefit from the entertainment offered in the region and from tourism.

There is a varied list of industry sectors offering a variety of jobs, though there is plenty of scope for new business opportunities. New business opportunities are enhanced by the vibrancy of communities and the benefits of living in such a

peaceful and beautiful area.

Business and community news is easy to access on the Internet and there is a wealth of well-organised information and facts on business, transport, employment and study and local services. Community-oriented websites also offer significant advertising opportunities.

Tourism/Environment sources

Sources create the following perceptions:

Caithness is a fairly wild region with some small urban centres at Wick, Thurso and Dunbeath. A spectacular coastline is complemented by the moorland which covers most of the region.

Accommodation is cheap, with a number of tourist and leisure activities such as: birdwatching, surfing and windsurfing, archaeology, the Northlands Festival, mythology, heritage, the relics of industries which formerly drove the local economy such as flagstone making. There is also opportunity to view marine life – whales, seals, dolphins – which is not visible in most of the UK.

Thurso is a quaint, amenable town, with the most northerly train station in the country. There is a very poor internal transport infrastructure however within Caithness. Wick Airport has become more and more important and is now one of the town's chief economic assets, along with the capacity to act as a base for offshore supply vessels. Near Thurso, the Dounreay nuclear plant continues to input significantly into the economy through the lengthy decommissioning process.

Dunnett Head is a major tourist attraction, meanwhile John O'Groats is a boring tourist trap, but nonetheless a viable commercial asset.

Caithness has much to offer the tourist, but it is also a "stepping stone" or "Gateway to Orkney" and the local economy is far from secure.

5. KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The media has expressed an interest in job losses incurred by the decommissioning of Dounreay but the general consensus is that decommissioning is a lengthy process which will ensure jobs in the medium term.

The national media has been rife with factual and speculative stories on the dangers of nuclear waste and the effect of the plant on the local environment. The acceleration of decommissioning and the establishment of the NDA was welcomed, though the reliance on Dounreay to date suggests that there is a substantial void to fill in the region's industry.

Aside from dismal perceptions created by nuclear-related coverage in the UK national and regional Scottish press, other negative perceptions are less cause for concern, although may deter potential new business.

The main observations from which perceptions may be formed are:

- Positive developments in industry – AEA Technology, BT Call Centre etc – marred by other closures and reports of unemployment and little evidence that businesses are taking up opportunities suggested by positive sources
- Poor transport infrastructure making some progress
- Cheap property but no clear guidance for potential investors
- Possible creation of unsightly wind farms
- Remoteness and sparseness of population
- Pace of life: slow, calm, free
- Successful campaign to ensure future of hospital maternity wing, although this highlights vulnerability of health services
- Poor weather.

But there is potential:

Caithness' two principal online assets are www.caithness.org and the website of the Highlands and Islands Enterprise network. Browsers are channeled towards these sites. Both create positive perceptions of the area in terms of business support, quality of life and its enormous potential.

The Internet is not, on the whole, negative about Caithness, but determined browsers can always find out what is bad about the region or seek further information on negative stories in the press.

The potential of Caithness as a business destination is recognised by Internet sources concerned with regeneration and communities. At the same time there is enormous potential to make further use of the Internet as a tool to enhance perceptions of the area, promote new business and counter the effect of the inevitable negative stories in the press.

Local media sources have online outlets though these are minimal and could be developed to promote the area rather than focus primarily on very locally-orientated stories.

Caithness is an attractive region, popular with tourists, second home-owners and heritage-seekers. The area's reputation as a cold-weather surfing destination adds a unique touch to the region and increases the perception of Caithness as a tourist destination.

While the overall impression Caithness from the media and Internet is not dominated by negative perceptions there can be no doubt that much more could be done to promote the business and residential opportunities of the area.

6. APPENDIX

1. MEDIA SOURCES

UK National press

- The Business
- Financial Times
- The Times
- The Guardian
- The Independent
- Daily Telegraph
- Sunday Times
- Observer
- Sunday Telegraph
- Independent on Sunday

Regional (Scottish) press

- Scotsman
- Scotland on Sunday
- Glasgow Herald
- Aberdeen Press & Journal
- Daily Record
- Falkirk Herald

Local press

Online services provided by:

- The Highland News
- The North Star - [All published online by the Highland News Group]
- Lochaber News

- Caithness Courier
- John O’Groat Journal- [Published together online]

- Northern Scot

2. ONLINE SOURCES

- **Business and regeneration-related sources**

www.scottish-enterprise.co.uk

www.hie.co.uk (Highlands and Islands Enterprise network)

www.hipp.org.uk (Highlands and Islands Partnership Programme)

www.caithness-business.co.uk

www.scottishdevelopmentinternational.com

- **Political sources**

www.scotland.gov.uk (Scottish Executive)

www.highland.gov.uk (Highland Council)

www.johnthurso.org (John Thurso MP, Liberal Democrat MP for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross and Party Spokesperson on Scotland)

- **Community sources**

www.caithness.org

www.thisisnorthscotland.co.uk

www.hi-ways.org

- **Tourism/Environment sources**

www.scotland-index.co.uk

www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk

www.travelscotland.co.uk

www.wildcaithness.org

www.dunbeath.co.uk (Dunbeath Estate)