

99% support for Scottish MPAs

A report published today reveals how Scottish Government plans to create a network of marine protected areas (MPAs) have received the popular backing of people from across Scotland. Campaigners now say there is a strong democratic duty, as well as urgent ecological need, to set up MPAs to help recover Scotland's damaged sealife.

Over 14,000 people responded to the public consultation on proposals for 33 new MPAs last summer, the vast majority of which indicated popular support for stronger protection of Scotland's sealife with a full network. Environmental charities are now urging the Scottish Government to take heed of public opinion and secure a network that will help the seas recover from centuries of over-exploitation. They argue that Scottish legislation passed by MSPs in 2010 places an overriding legal duty on Ministers to both protect and enhance Scotland's marine environment.

Calum Duncan, Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce and Scotland Programme Manager the Marine Conservation Society said: "The growing momentum of public support for Marine Protected Areas is clear. The Scottish public called for a network of effective MPAs, a requirement of the marine legislation they helped push for in the decade up to 2010. A network of MPAs that do what they say on the tin, adequately protect areas of sea, are being called for by the Scottish people to help recover the sea and contribute to a fair and just society. Scottish Ministers don't just have a legal duty to designate new MPAs, they now have a democratic mandate to do so, delivered by people from across Scotland."

Dr Richard Luxmoore, Senior Nature Conservation adviser for the National Trust for Scotland said: "The results of this public consultation clearly show that the overwhelming majority of the Scottish people strongly support MPAs and want to see improvements in the way we manage our seas. Our marine habitats have suffered the industrial legacy of damage to our seabed. This has had dire consequences for the diversity of our marine life – from the magnificent fan mussel to the humble sandeel, many species and habitats are well below historical levels of abundance. MPAs are desperately needed to reverse these sad declines."

Kara Brydson, Head of Marine Policy at RSPB Scotland said: "Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead said in May 2013 that he would 'listen closely to the views of Scotland in making final decisions.' He must now listen to the view of the vast majority of consultation respondents who want effective MPAs for Scotland and protection for other species currently excluded from the network, such as whales, dolphins, seabirds and other fragile seabed plants and animals."

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Notes/links for editors:

Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce - a coalition of environmental charities campaign to protect and recover Scotland's seas – and comprises the following eight organisations: Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust,

Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Scottish Wildlife Trust, WWF Scotland, Whale & Dolphin Conservation.

(<http://www.scotlink.org/public/work/taskforce.php?id=7>) The members campaign for Marine Protected Areas via www.savescottishseas.org

- The report analysing the public responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on proposals for a network of MPAs: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/04/4054/0>
- Responses to the Scottish Government consultation on proposals for a network of Marine Protected Areas are published here <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-consultation/>
- A map showing the locations of the proposed MPAs can be viewed here: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/scottish-marine-protected-area-network>
- SNH Commissioned Report no 547: highlights the advice given to the Scottish Government by its scientific advisors: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1959>
- A map showing the concerning and declining state of Scotland's seas can be found here: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/save-scottish-seas/recover/>
- Related information on MPAs can be found at www.savescottishseas.org/why-we-need-mpas and <http://www.savescottishseas.org/why-we-support-29-mpas>