



Marine Group Briefing: Scottish Parliamentary Election (May 2016)

Scotland is a maritime nation. Our seas are the source of much of Scotland's health and wealth, but they are ecologically fragile and need careful stewardship. Members of [Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group](#) contend that the importance of our marine environment is still under-valued and receives insufficient budgetary and political attention to realise the benefits that would flow from the improvement of Scotland's 'marine health.'

As a coalition of environmental organisations actively involved in Scottish marine conservation and policy, we have identified actions that should be integral to the work of the next Scottish Government over the next four years. Support for these actions across the party political spectrum is required to protect and enhance Scotland's marine environment for the delivery of the public good.

Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group priorities for the future implementation of marine legislation in the fifth Scottish Parliament (2016-2020):

1. **A fully resourced marine monitoring strategy**
2. **A fully-resourced partnership approach to the management of Scottish marine conservation designations and marine planning**
3. **Implementing marine management measures that secure ecosystem recovery**
4. **Wider fisheries management reform**

The next Scottish Government must ensure that the progressive governance foundations established by the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 are properly implemented, namely: duties to enhance the health of the sea, establish an integrated and ecosystem-based marine planning system and complete a network of well-managed marine protected areas.

Continued declines in iconic sea life species and marine habitats over the coming years are likely unless we adopt an effective approach to marine governance. The increasing human use of our seas and coastal areas – activity that current scientific research is struggling to keep up with – poses risks that require careful, often precautionary, management and planning. In particular, the next Scottish Government will have to further build its relationships with marine users and interests to foster a culture of compliance as well as embracing community involvement in local marine management. Existing and developing nature conservation management must be integrated with effective and ecosystem-based Regional Marine Plans.

For Scotland to improve its marine health and secure the benefits that flow from environmental recovery, the most important task of the Scottish Government formed by the 5th Scottish Parliament is to establish:

- **A fully resourced marine monitoring strategy**, that ensures the effective management and implementation of Scotland's developing Marine Protected Areas network and emerging marine planning system. Scientific, evidenced-based decision-making and compliance should be at the core of this strategy, to enable Scotland to comply with its legal requirement to have all its seas achieve Good Environmental Status by 2020.

This policy also appears in Scottish Environment LINK's manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections, '[Six Steps to Sustainability](#).'

Alongside such a marine monitoring strategy, other key environmental priorities over the course of the next Scottish Parliamentary term are to:

- Enable a fully-resourced partnership approach to the management of Scottish marine conservation designations and marine planning by **securing and protecting adequate budgets for Marine Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage**, improving co-ordination of access to funding through a robust implementation strategy and enabling Scottish communities to participate fully in decision-making;
- Champion **real marine conservation measures** that secure ecosystem recovery by identifying opportunities for marine ecosystem enhancement and monitoring to demonstrate the benefits for both the environment and its users;
- Ensure that MPAs and marine plans work together with **wider fisheries management reform for the greater good of Scotland's seas**. This includes protecting inshore fish nursery grounds and sensitive habitats from bottom-towed fishing, committing more resources to fisheries compliance and Inshore Fisheries Groups, and exploring innovative and participatory ways to resolve local issues, such as fishing gear conflict.

The next Scottish Government will have the challenging European target of Good Environmental Status to help achieve for the Scottish contribution to UK waters, as well as the implementation of the reformed Common Fisheries Policy, delivery of the full suite of well-managed marine protected areas and Regional Marine Plans.

Resourcing is becoming increasingly scarce for marine science and conservation; we are seeing cuts to Marine Scotland and SNH's budgets and staff teams with an expectation to deliver the same amount of work, and marine science is becoming a lower priority for research councils. Many local authorities currently lack the funding and expertise to deliver Regional Marine Plan objectives. More investment is therefore needed in **participatory governance and budgeting** to ensure collaborative, cross-stakeholder input and support for government- and community-led management proposals.

There is a growing recognition of Scotland's maritime identity and marine issues within coastal communities and civic society as a whole. There is a significant opportunity to increase the profile of marine protected areas and take advantage of their potential benefits for Scotland's economy – improved fish stocks, boosting marine tourism and greater resilience to climate change. Meeting these challenges requires firm political commitment.

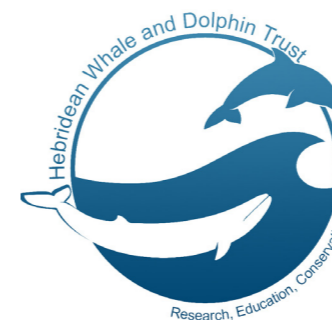
Many of our domestic, UK and international marine conservation objectives, if achieved, will also contribute to a number of other government policy objectives. For example:

- marine protected areas can fight climate change, by safeguarding carbon capture and storage habitats, such as deep-sea habitats, kelp forests, maerl beds and seagrass beds;
- effective marine planning will increase confidence for sustainable development of renewable energy and contribute to decarbonising our economy
- progressive management of our inshore fisheries can deliver significant socio-economic benefits and help to underpin the sustainability of our rural and coastal communities
- safeguarding our natural environment has health benefits: emerging evidence shows that living in or spending time in areas of natural beauty, particularly coastal areas, enhance human health and well-being

The effective implementation of our Scottish and UK marine legislation will ensure a long-term ecosystem approach to sustainable development at sea safeguarding and enhancing Scotland's incredible marine biodiversity, supporting coastal communities and helping create and secure livelihoods and demonstrating a world-leading example of marine management.

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

This briefing is supported by the members of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group:



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