

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment organisations, with over 30 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society. This briefing is from LINK's Marine Task Force (MTF - members are detailed below).

Our vision for the Scottish marine environment is one of healthy, well-managed seas, where wildlife is flourishing, ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving, and coastal communities are sustained. Conserving our marine environment is important for its own sake, and is also one of the most efficient and effective ways to deliver a huge range of benefits to society - from culture to health, and not forgetting the billions of pounds generated by our seas every year. This paper therefore, suggests various measures to protect and enhance Scotland's marine environment which will also help deliver sustainable economic prosperity and social wellbeing now and for generations to come.

Creation of an ecologically coherent network of MPAs by 2012

MPAs are central to any strategy aimed at protecting and enhancing the biodiversity of our seas. By helping to deliver a healthy, balanced, productive marine environment, their many benefits can be felt right across society and throughout many sectors of the economy. The economic success of our tourism, fishing, recreation and aquaculture sectors are all dependent on a clean, healthy, abundant marine environment. A coherent network of MPAs is an essential tool in delivering this. In fact, Natural England have calculated that the benefits of a UK wide network of MPAs outweigh the costs by between 7 and 40 times.

By delivering an unequivocal commitment to designate an **ecologically coherent network of MPAs by 2012**, where sites are selected using our best available science and managed according to conservation needs, we can build on our growing reputation for ambitious environmental targets. Scotland benefits from some of the most biologically diverse waters in the world. An ecologically coherent network of MPAs, set in place by 2012, will maximise those benefits by helping to ensure our marine ecosystems are protected, connected and thriving, enabling marine industries and coastal communities to flourish now, and for generations to come.

Fighting Climate Change by Protecting Carbon Sinks in the Marine Environment

In order to meet Scotland's ambitious climate change targets, there is an increasing recognition that we need to manage and protect habitats which work as natural carbon sinks. Recently, the focus has been on terrestrial habitats, such as forests and peat lands, with little attention being paid to the ocean – one of the largest carbon sinks on the planet. Among other habitats, salt marshes, seagrass meadows and kelp forest, play an essential role in carbon fixation, and they may even have greater carbon management potential than their terrestrial counterparts. These habitats are under significant pressure from poor management, ocean acidification, warming temperatures and rising sea levels. **A specific commitment to protect and restore these habitats using the marine planning system, marine protected areas and fisheries management is urgently required.** These carbon saving measures should be counted and recognised in our system of carbon accounting, helping Scotland to achieve its climate change targets.

Supporting a vibrant marine renewable energy sector through investment in research

The marine environment is right at the forefront of the impacts of climate change. Rising sea temperatures have already caused shifts in plankton and commercial fish species, an increasingly acidic ocean poses risks for corals, crustacea and molluscs, while increased storminess and rising sea levels pose major threats to coastal habitats and communities. Our seas also offer huge opportunities in the fight against climate change, both as a natural carbon sink, and through harnessing its power for renewable energy. However, our understanding of

the environmental impacts of renewables devices is very limited. In order for this fledgling industry to reach its full potential in a sustainable manner, **baseline research on marine wildlife and the impacts of renewable technologies on the marine environment must be supported and publicly funded. Project level environmental assessments for novel technologies should also be financially supported.**

Not only will this help to secure the findings for wider use and reduce regulatory burdens on new technologies and pioneering companies, it will help us take advantage of the opportunities to enhance biodiversity and productivity through artificial reef effects and *de facto* marine reserves. A thriving, responsible renewable energy industry can reduce the causes of climate change and bring secure long-term jobs while safeguarding a diverse, productive sea. Publicly funded research will help us realise that potential, ensuring long-term sustainability of the sector.

Delivering Marine Planning by 2012

The progress of marine industries, including aquaculture and renewables continues apace. Through the development of national and regional marine plans, the new marine planning system will strategically guide all marine industries, helping them to develop within the limits of the natural environment. To ensure consistency and certainty for marine industries operating in inshore waters, **there must be a commitment to deliver the national marine plan and Scottish marine regions by 2012.** A further guarantee that **Scottish marine regions will cover waters surrounding the entire Scottish mainland and major island groups** will help industry, NGOs and coastal communities move forward with confidence that no area of Scotland's seas will be neglected through lack of strategic planning.

Development of a Marine Litter Strategy setting clear targets for reductions in marine litter by 2011

Despite various voluntary schemes, marine litter continues to blight Scotland's coastline. Charting Progress 2 recently found litter on every beach in the UK, and the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch surveys have shown the levels of plastic litter on our beaches has increased 121% since 1994. In Scotland, around 1,709 items of litter are found per kilometre of coastline with over 40% of that stemming from the general public. Embarrassingly, Scottish levels of sewage related debris are four times the UK average. Not only does this have a major impact on marine wildlife through entanglement and ingestion, it is detrimental to recreational and tourism interests, and presents a serious and costly risk to fishermen through lost catch and snagged nets.

Litter enters the marine environment from a wide range of sources and is easily transported by currents. **That is why Scotland desperately needs a wide ranging, comprehensive strategy, focused on eliminating inputs of litter to the marine environment and setting ambitious targets for the reduction of litter found in our seas and beaches by 2011.** Such a strategy will help us meet our commitments under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and deliver a clean, safe marine and coastal environment that Scotland can be proud of.

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