

Roseanna Cunningham
Cabinet Secretary for
Environment, Climate Change
and Land Reform
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



Scottish Environment LINK
Dolphin House
4 Hunter Square
Edinburgh
EH1 1QW
T 0131 225 4345
E information@scotlink.org
W www.scotlink.org

14th December 2017

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

I am writing on behalf of the Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group regarding the four proposed nature conservation Marine Protected Areas (ncMPAs), identified by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 2014 for the protection of minke whale, Risso's dolphin and Basking shark, as well as sandeels and important marine habitats.

Acting upon the scientific advice of SNH in support of the designation of these four proposed ncMPAs - Sea of the Hebrides, North East Lewis, Shiant East Bank and Southern Trench - would enhance Scotland's credentials as a leader in marine conservation.

Our members therefore warmly welcomed the reassurances you provided during your speech at the Marine Conservation Society conference in Edinburgh in 2016 that a decision regarding the designation of these sites would be considered in 2017. We also welcome your clear and reiterated commitments to upholding Scotland's European environmental responsibilities.

Given the significance of the proposed ncMPAs, we continue to hope that taking a decision regarding their designation is still possible in 2017. It is for this reason that we noted with concern recent statements by Marine Scotland to the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee of the Scottish Parliament¹ that these sites will be taken forward in the financial year 2019-2020 due to capacity constraints.

There is strong scientific evidence for the designation of these sites, with SNH formal advice in July 2014 determining '*that all four MPA proposals should be designated*'². There is also strong public support, with 36,000 signatures calling for sites to protect whales and dolphins having been submitted to Richard Lochhead, then Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs Climate Change and Environment. The designation of these sites would provide much needed spatial protection for iconic mobile species, including world first MPAs for basking sharks and Risso's dolphin, further underlining the Scottish Government's commitment to marine conservation on the world stage. These proposed ncMPAs are also required, among others, toward completing Scotland's

¹ ECCLR Budget scrutiny session, 28th November. Official report:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11238&mode=pdf>

² http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/780.pdf

MPA network, and will help the Scottish Government achieve its international conservation commitments, such as those under the OSPAR Convention.

We would be grateful if you could consider these sites for progression as soon as possible.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Calum Duncan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Calum' and the last name 'Duncan' clearly distinguishable.

Calum Duncan,

Convener of the LINK Marine Group and Head of Conservation Scotland, Marine Conservation Society.