

## Leading the road to recovery for Scotland's threatened marine life.

### Summary

Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group welcome the strides taken by Scottish Government to establish a world leading network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that is ecologically coherent and well-managed. As part of a wider approach to marine conservation, the MPA network is crucial to help halt and reverse the environmental decline in Scotland's seas and safeguard the many benefits they provide to our society.

Progress has been made but there is still more work to be done. The Scottish Government is due to deliver an MPA network progress report to Parliament in 2018. Priority actions for the Scottish Government will be:

1. Completing site designations, including the 15 proposed marine bird SPAs, and consultation on the four nature conservation MPAs.
2. Ensuring all sites are well-managed, most urgently that fisheries management measures are in place for the remaining inshore nature conservation MPAs and SACs.
3. Securing sufficient resources to ensure timely development of the MPA network, coupled with an effective MPA monitoring strategy that ensure ecosystem services and benefits are measured.

### CONTEXT

Scotland's Marine Atlas<sup>1</sup> documents the widespread environmental concerns and declines in coastal and offshore marine biodiversity and highlights the importance of a healthy marine ecosystem to Scottish communities, industries and the economy. A growing level of public awareness, reflected in the 4,758 public responses to our 'Don't Take the P' campaign highlights the value that people place on a healthy marine environment. Abundant scientific literature demonstrates how ecologically coherent Marine Protected Area (MPA) networks can help to recover depleted marine ecosystems and improve the flow of ecosystem services important for human health and well-being<sup>2</sup>. These include food provision, ecosystem resilience, climate regulation, carbon storage, flood protection, medicines, recreation, wildlife watching and cultural benefits. Well-managed MPAs can also provide secondary long-term direct benefits to fisheries through the recovery and increased resilience of key commercial fish and shellfish habitat, as demonstrated in the Lamlash Bay Community Marine Conservation Area, and increase opportunities for marine tourism.

Scotland and the UK are party to firm international commitments to **halt the loss and aid recovery of global marine biodiversity**. Through the OSPAR North East Atlantic Strategy and EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive the Scottish Government is required to develop an ecologically coherent network of MPAs, contributing to the shared goal of Good Environmental Status (GES) of European waters by 2020. The Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 and UK Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 require the Scottish Government to establish the MPA network, comprising nature conservation MPAs, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs), intertidal Sites of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and RAMSAR Sites to contribute to the 'protection and, where appropriate, enhancement of the health of Scotland's marine area'<sup>3</sup>.

### PROGRESS TOWARD AN ECOLOGICALLY COHERENT NETWORK OF MPAS

As the attached table shows progress has been made by the Scottish Government in developing Scotland's contribution to the UK MPA network, but more still needs to be done.

#### 1. Toward completing Scotland's MPA network

We welcome the additional SAC for harbour porpoise, the Loch Carron emergency MPA and consultations for 15 marine bird SPAs and support their designation. LINK is requesting the support of the ECCLR Committee with encouraging the Scottish Government to **progress the four nature conservation MPA proposals - Sea of the Hebrides MPA, Shiant East Bank MPA, North-East Lewis MPA and Southern Trench MPA** – for which there is sound scientific evidence, and SNH and JNCC provided formal advice in 2014, along with others identified at the Commissions EU Natura Seminar in 2016. This will help improve network coherence, most crucially for large mobile species. Thereafter, the MPA network report

<sup>1</sup> <http://77.68.107.10/MarineAtlas-Complete.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Potts, T et al. (2013) Do marine protected areas deliver flows of ecosystem services to support human welfare? Marine Policy

<sup>3</sup> Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 - [www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2010/5/contents)

due to Scottish Parliament in 2018 is an opportunity for the Committee to consider which further steps are required on network development and management.

## **2. Effectively Managing MPAs**

As site designation is delayed, so too is the ability to manage marine activities and related pressures in a coordinated way. The ECCLR Committee should build the review of the **second tranche of fisheries management measures for inshore nature conservation MPAs and SACs**, into its work plan for the coming year. It is important that management measures follow an ecosystem approach based on the best available scientific evidence, and are implemented urgently to ensure site conservation objectives are met and the health of Scotland's seas is improved. To reduce the risk of further environmental decline, the precautionary principle must be applied when managing potentially damaging activities where information is not available or confidence in the data is low<sup>4</sup>.

MPA management to date has understandably focused on the fisheries management needed to safeguard the most vulnerable marine MPAs. This second tranche is expected to focus on fisheries measures to protect mobile species, geodiversity features and further vulnerable habitats. The licensing and planning systems will therefore be needed to adequately protect MPAs from activities such as offshore developments, aquaculture and commercial wildlife watching. Salmon farming poses a particular threat to the health of many protected species and habitats, and there is an urgent need to review the impact of fish farms within MPAs.

## **3. Effectively Resourcing and Monitoring MPAs**

Compromising on investment in network development and monitoring risks stalling, or worse reversing, the good progress made to date in developing the MPA<sup>5</sup> network. We recognize the impressive amount of work done with comparatively limited resources for such a vast area of sea, and LINK members hope the Scottish Government will show its commitment to maintaining the standards of EU legislation by ensuring that **Government agencies working towards implementing a network of well-managed MPAs receive sufficient resourcing** to complete this task.

LINK welcomed the Scottish Government's announcement of a new MPA monitoring strategy. However, sufficient resourcing will be required to ensure it can be **rapidly implemented**. Monitoring is important as we need to understand whether MPA management measures are working as intended to achieve site conservation objectives and contribute to ecosystem recovery throughout Scotland's seas. LINK would also like to see the monitoring strategy used on an ongoing basis to inform an adaptive approach – so that if conservation objectives are not being met, management can be adapted accordingly. Additionally, monitoring should be expanded to capture the full range of direct and indirect benefits, including cultural and non-use (value of knowing something is there).

The MPA network, developed as part of a wider National Ecological Network (NEN)<sup>6</sup>, and alongside wider seas measures such as marine planning and reformed inshore fisheries management, is vital to help ensure Scotland is a world leader in marine conservation. LINK members are committed to engaging with the Scottish Government and other stakeholders as the MPA network is progressed.

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**For more information contact:** Emilie Devenport (Marine Policy and Engagement Officer) – [emilie@scotlink.org](mailto:emilie@scotlink.org) or Esther Brooker (Marine Policy Officer) – [esther@scotlink.org](mailto:esther@scotlink.org)

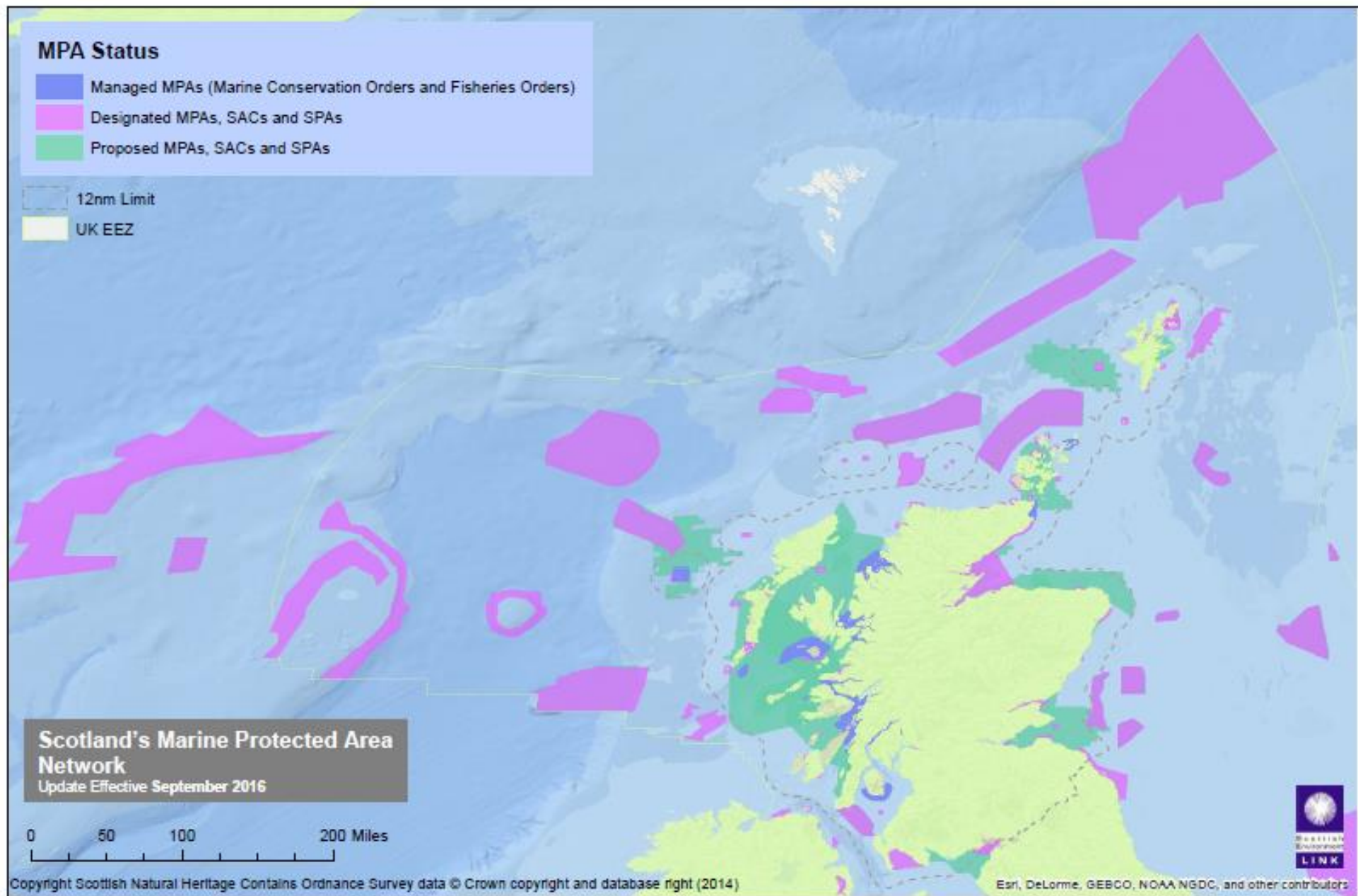
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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.savescottishseas.org/news/has-mpa-management-compromised-the-fate-of-the-common-skate/>

<sup>5</sup> David, A et al. (2017) Capacity shortfalls hinder the performance of marine protected areas globally. Nature

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/SEL\\_A-Roadmap-for-Adopting-a-National-Ecological-Network-in-Scotland.pdf](http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/SEL_A-Roadmap-for-Adopting-a-National-Ecological-Network-in-Scotland.pdf)

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\*This map reflects the MPA network as of September 2016 and does not include the Loch Carron Emergency MPA.

TARGET:

2018

# Progress towards Scotland's network of Marine Protected Areas

30 Nature Conservation MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Designations		Management*	
✓ +1	Emergency Designation	✓ ✓ 10	Measures in place
! +4	Proposed 2014, consultation outstanding	✓ 13	Awaiting European Commission Approval
		! 7	Outstanding

## POSSIBLE NETWORK GAPS

No current representation (SNH recognised): **burrowing anemone aggregations, heart cockle aggregations, European spiny lobster (full life cycle) and white-beaked dolphin**

No replication (SNH recognised): **Basking shark, common skate, native oyster beds and fan mussel aggregations**

Limited connectivity: **East coast reef habitats\*\***

Limited representivity: **continental slope habitats\*\***

47 SPECIAL AREAS OF CONSERVATION

Planned designations		Management*	
✓ +1	Harbour Porpoise candidate	✓ ✓ 25	Measures in place
		✓ 8	Awaiting European Commission Approval
		! 15	Outstanding

## POSSIBLE NETWORK GAPS

Not adequately represented: **Bottlenose Dolphin** (Sound of Barra, Moray Firth extension) **harbour porpoise** (Outer Moray Firth, North Channel and Outer Solway) and **harbour Seal** (offshore feeding areas) **Sea Lamprey and European River Lamprey**. **Submerged or partially submerged sea caves**.

### KEY

In place	✓ ✓
On track	✓
Outstanding	!

45 Estuarine and Coastal SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS

+ 15 Marine Bird SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS Proposed

## POSSIBLE NETWORK GAPS

Offshore feeding areas for seabirds informed by SPA sufficiency review.

61 Intertidal SITES OF SPECIFIC SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

## NEXT STEPS

- Designation of 4 proposed inshore ncMPAs
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Tranche: consultation on management measures for remaining ncMPA and SAC sites
- SEA consultation before SPA classifications, followed by the development and implementation of appropriate management
- Management measures for HP SAC

†Not including Historic MPA sites or Demonstration and Research MPA sites.

\*In reference to sites requiring fisheries management.

\*\*Lieberknecht, L. M., Mullier, T. W., and Ardron, J. A. (2014) Assessment of the ecological coherence of the UK's marine protected area network. A report prepared for Joint Links.