

Don't Take the P out of MPAs

Environment charities fear Scottish Government plans won't protect Scotland's ailing sea life

New proposals to manage fishing in Scotland's recently established Marine Protected Area (MPA) network could deny protection to some of Scotland's most precious sea areas, say a coalition of Scottish environmental charities. The campaigners are deeply concerned that potential new management measures for MPAs risk failing to protect and, crucially, recover the very sea life which the MPAs were set up to protect.

The proposals issued today by the Scottish Government outline a range of scenarios for 20 inshore MPAs [1], some of which would allow fishing methods such as scallop-dredging and bottom-trawling to continue to damage seabed habitats. This on-going damage to the seafloor has wider, knock-on impacts for our other marine life such as fish, seabirds and marine mammals, which move around, feeding and breeding in these important areas of our sea. The plans are now the subject of a three month long public consultation, as Scottish Government staff tour coastal communities throughout November and December. Environmental charities are now launching a joint campaign urging the people of Scotland to tell the Scottish Government: 'Don't take the P out of MPAs.'

Calum Duncan, Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce and Marine Conservation Society, Scotland Programme Manager said: "It's simple: if we properly protect our sea life, then the health of our seas will bounce back. For over 14 years we've pushed for a network of Marine Protected Areas to help do just that. These MPAs must offer ambitious protection from damaging activities, to help recover the extent of our damaged sea life, not just preserve the status quo. The many thousands that responded last year in support of the new MPAs expect nothing less. That's why we are telling the Scottish Government: "Don't take the P out of MPAs"."

Richard Luxmoore, Head of Conservation at National Trust for Scotland, said: "We are delighted to see these proposed measures to protect some of our most important marine sites, such as the St Kilda World Heritage Site. We have been calling for these for many years and it is wonderful to see them on table. However some of the options proposed for other MPAs fall far short of what we believe is necessary and we will be urging the government to adopt stronger protection."

Alex Kinninmonth, Scottish Wildlife Trust Living Seas Policy Officer said: "These MPAs need to be managed properly if we want to see our sea life recover. For years we have mismanaged our seas and this is a rare and urgent opportunity to actually do some large-scale environmental good that benefits wildlife and people in the long-term. Now's the time to create real MPAs that do what they say on the tin: protect our sea life."

Kara Brydson, Head of Marine Policy at RSPB Scotland, said: "If these MPAs are to be more than a symbolic gesture, the government must ensure the sites are properly managed. The very foundations of the MPA process require that decisions are based on science. The science tells us that to protect sea life in these MPAs many of the sites will have to ban activities which can cause significant damage. It's now the government's job to follow the scientific advice and ensure that MPAs do in fact protect our amazing sea life."

Sam Gardner, Head of Policy at WWF Scotland said: "We are not promoting a blanket ban of all fishing in MPAs, but we are calling for appropriate management of fisheries in MPAs where the species or habitat are likely to be threatened by the impact of certain fishing gear. Low-impact fisheries can and should

continue within MPAs as long as they don't compromise the conservation objectives of the MPA. We've campaigned long and hard for the effective protection of Scottish marine life. There is convincing evidence that our seas are not in good shape and we need to make sure that the right measures are taken in the right place to enable their recovery."

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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 can be accessed via <http://www.savescottishseas.org/dont-take-the-p-out-of-mpas/>

Timeline:

1. The 20 inshore MPAs are a combination of newly-designated nature conservation MPAs and European Special Areas of Conservation that were put in place 18 years ago.
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork/MPAMGT/consultation2014>
2. 14 drop-in sessions that will take place between November and December to gather local views on the possible management approaches. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork/MPAMGT/consultation2014/2014consultationevents>
3. In July Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead gave the go-ahead for 30 new MPAs designed to protect a range of important habitats and species throughout Scotland's seas.
4. Members of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce have campaigned for stronger protection of Scotland's sealife for over a decade and last year over 14,000 people backed proposals for new MPAs during an extensive public consultation. Together, they must ensure sea life and seabed habitats in the new MPAs are adequately protected from damaging activities.
5. 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/>
6. A map showing the concerning and declining state of Scotland's seas can be found here: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/save-scottish-seas/recover/>
7. Related information on MPAs can be found at www.savescottishseas.org/why-we-need-mpas