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*Dear Calum,*

Thank you for letter of 24<sup>th</sup> May regarding the damage of flame shell beds at Loch Carron from scallop dredging. I would also like to thank you for the invaluable contributions from your Seasearch members in gathering photographic evidence of the damage caused by the dredger.

Following an investigation of this regrettable incident, it has been confirmed that damage has occurred to the flame shell beds at Loch Carron. I have a responsibility to the improvement of the health of the Scottish Marine Area, and therefore I have designated the Loch Carron Marine Protected Area (MPA), to enable recovery of the flame shell beds in Loch Carron. Accompanying this is The Loch Carron Urgent Marine Conservation Order 2017. The purpose of the Order is to prohibit the deployment and use of certain fishing gears, including dredges, in the Loch Carron MPA.

This is especially relevant given that the flame shell habitat is of importance to fishermen. Flame shell reefs are good hunting grounds for young fish, and offer good attachment for scallop spat as they settle from the plankton, and are therefore a vital part of the wider ecosystem that supports a sustainable and responsible fishing industry that is of importance to many coastal communities.

While this was a regrettable incident, the Scottish Government is aware of the impact that fishing activity can have on vulnerable habitats. I intend to take steps to reduce risk of further occurrences of incidents like this, and I look forward to hearing from you how we can best achieve this.

There is already a broad range of protection in place for marine habitats. The Scottish MPA network covers around 20% of our seas and provides representation of habitats found in our seas. Measures already taken mean that scallop dredging is already prohibited from 11% of Scotland's waters that are within 6 nautical miles of the coastline.

I trust this reassures you of my commitment to the protection of our rich and diverse marine environment, and I believe the designation of this MPA will permit the habitat to recover in time.

*Yours*

*Roseanna*

**Roseanna Cunningham**