

MPA management: essential to recover marine life and boost coastal communities

Members of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce (LINK) welcome the scientifically robust and ecologically sound management measures for inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) proposed by the Scottish Government. These measures - due to be laid in Parliament as Marine Conservation Orders (MCOs) and Fisheries Orders (FOs) - will make a considerable contribution to the protection and recovery of Scotland's most naturally diverse and important areas of sea. LINK members:

- **recommend these statutory measures – as a bare minimum - are introduced to help deliver the Marine (Scotland) Act's duty to protect, and where appropriate enhance, the health of Scotland's seas;**
- **recommend that management measures for Luce Bay and Sands SAC,ⁱ Loch Sween MPA and Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPAⁱⁱ are amended to ensure those sites meet their conservation objectives;**
- **emphasise the fact that well managed MPAs can deliver socio-economic benefits that outweigh the short-term financial impacts. These benefits have so far been inadequately accounted for in socio-economic impact assessments;**
- **urge that any significant socio-economic impacts of the measures are addressed by European Marine Fisheries Fund (or equivalent) support, but not by diluting the urgently-needed protection measures.**

BACKGROUND

Our seas are in poor health. Scotland's Marine Atlas shows some or many concerns exist for nearly all marine habitats. The Scottish Parliament passed the Marine (Scotland) Act in 2010 to address this, placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to act to "further the achievement of sustainable development, including the protection and, where appropriate, enhancement of the health of" Scottish seas.

A key requirement of the Act is a duty to create a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and the 30 new MPAs designated in July 2014 were welcomed by a wide range of stakeholders. In order to fulfil legal requirements, and achieve healthy seas, existing and new MPAs must be well-managed by 2016.

40 years' worth of scientific literature from around the globe proves that MPAs are able to protect and recover damaged marine ecosystems. Contemporary research shows that they also provide significant socio-economic benefits, including for commercial fishing and marine tourism, as well as helping support often hidden services such as carbon sequestration and coastal protection. Many of the fisheries management options for inshore MPAs proposed by the Scottish Government last year did not reflect the ecological urgency of the situation, and would have allowed damaging scallop dredging and bottom trawling to continue largely unchanged within many MPAs. These weaker options focused on protecting mainly just the remnants of species and habitats in our inshore and made little ecological sense.

Scottish Environment LINK, its members and 4,758 supporters from around Scotland and the UK, responded to the consultation seeking more robust and ecologically appropriate measures. We warmly welcome the majority of these newly-proposed MCOs and FOs as a response to our representations. However, we still have concerns regarding Luce Bay SAC, Loch Sween MPA and Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPA, proposals for which could potentially set a poor precedent for future management.



SUPPORTING SOUND MANAGEMENT

Scottish Environment LINK welcomes and is supportive of the Marine Conservation Orders proposed by the Scottish Government for management of the South Arran, Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura, Wester Ross and Small Isles MPAs. We have made our views clear via consultation and still maintain that the scientific evidence justifies greater restrictions in some sites; for example, we contend that a prohibition on mobile demersal gear throughout the South Arran MPA would be the most appropriate form of management. The measures therefore contain compromises and we acknowledge a progressive balance has been struck. We also support measures for other previously-consulted sites – due to be laid as Fishing Orders – (*other* than Loch Sween MPA, Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPA and Luce Bay and Sands SAC). These measures protect sensitive species and habitats from fishing practices known to be damaging to them and will help to secure healthy ecosystem function.

A single tow of bottom-contact mobile fishing gear can cause considerable damage to sensitive habitats. The ecological benefit of restricting these forms of fishing is therefore clear. Maerl beds, kelp habitats, fan mussel aggregations and flame shell beds, among many others, will not only be protected by these proposals, they will be given a chance to recover, expanding into areas from where they may previously have been removed. Since these habitats provide refuge and spawning areas for commercial fish and shellfish, there are also **potential long-term secondary fishery benefits**.

Marine scientists, fishermen, NGOs and coastal communities agree there needs to be positive and progressive change in the way our marine environment is managed. We believe that **the forthcoming Marine Conservation Orders (MCOs) and Fishing Orders (FOs) are a major step forward in that process of change and recommend their formal adoption is the absolute minimum required to make tangible progress.**

IMPROVING MANAGEMENT

There is a high risk that the proposals for **Luce Bay and Sands SAC, Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPA and Loch Sween MPA** will prevent those sites meeting their conservation objectives. The proposal for Luce Bay would permit seasonal dredging in two large areas which include sensitive kelp habitat and one area of a particular bivalve habitat, risking site integrity. The proposals in Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPA would allow bottom trawling to continue in horse mussel and ocean quahog habitat. We also support a site-wide prohibition of bottom trawling and dredging in Loch Sween MPA to allow recovery of the burrowed mud habitat in the outer part of the sea loch system. **We recommend that the forthcoming FOs are modified to reflect our significant reservations about Upper Loch Fyne and Loch Goil MPA, Loch Sween MPA and Luce Bay and Sands SAC. If not, we suggest that the adoption of the SSIs are supplemented by an immediate requirement to establish robust monitoring to provide Marine Scotland with an early warning if habitats within these sites are damaged.**

ADDRESSING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

We acknowledge that these restrictions will have an impact on some fishing vessels and fishermen currently using these areas. However, these impacts must be considered in context. The current proposals will prohibit scallop dredging in just 2.9% (2,500km²) of inshore waters. Prawn trawling will be prohibited in just 2.5% of our inshore (2,000km²)ⁱⁱⁱ. Scottish Government figures indicate that restrictions will have the potential to impact 1.6% of total scallop dredge income and 1.03% of total trawl income. Only around 80km² of Scotland's seabed will be restricted from creeling, dredging *and*

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Registered HQ office: 2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BD tel 01738 630804 email enquiries@scotlink.org
Parliamentary office: 3rd Floor, Gladstone's Land, 483 Lawnmarket, Edinburgh EH1 2NT tel 0131 225 4345 email parliamentary@scotlink.org



trawling; this is less than 0.1% of the total area of our inshore sea.

We acknowledge the proposed measures will be unevenly experienced and affect some sectors more than others. However we have concerns about economic assumptions used to assess these likely impacts described in written submissions to the Rural Affairs Climate Change & Environment Committee^{iv}. **It is our view that the likely socio-economic benefits of the proposed MPA management measures are severely under-accounted for.** Analyses for different, broader, *theoretical* sets of management scenarios (*Management of the Scottish Inshore Fisheries: Assessing the Options for Change*^v and *Looking below the surface: The cultural ecosystem service values of UK marine protected areas*^{vi}) highlight the significant potential for economic and social benefits from restricting bottom-towed fishing activities in our inshore area. Although Scotland's MPAs cover just a small proportion of our inshore and were not developed as a fisheries management tool, they will - in some areas - incidentally separate different methods of fishing spatially. Opportunities for lower impact commercial and recreational fishing could continue throughout most of the MPAs. Indeed some methods of fishing – such as creeling and hand-diving which already provide significant employment in coastal communities – will consequently gain access to a greater area of the inshore. MPAs represent a major and positive opportunity for our coastal communities.

It is our view that the environmental benefits arising from the proposed management measures will help underpin far greater, and more sustainable, long-term public and economic benefit. **We therefore urge that any significant short-term socio-economic impacts are addressed via European Marine Fisheries Fund support and equivalent policy mechanisms rather than by diluting MPA management proposals.**

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For more information contact:

Nick Underdown
SE LINK Marine Policy and Engagement Officer
Email: nick@scotlink.org / mob: 07726362727

Calum Duncan
Convenor, SE LINK's Marine Taskforce
Email: scotland@mcsuk.org

ⁱ <http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/response-to-management-proposals-for-the-luce-bay-and-sands-special-area-of-conservation/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/response-to-proposed-marine-conservation-orders-for-fisheries-management-in-inshore-mpas/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00479260.pdf>

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http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/20150923_RACCE_Papers_PUBLIC.pdf

^v <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/01/4022/0>

^{vi} <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212041614001089>