



Marine Protected Areas doubled to tackle Scotland's sealife declines

Scotland's environmental charities have welcomed today's decision by the Scottish Government to double the size of an emerging network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). In a bold move, Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead gave the go-ahead for 30 new MPAs to protect a further 12% of Scotland's seas, as well as paving the way for urgent new measures to protect struggling populations of seabirds, whales and dolphins.

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. The new sites are needed to protect and recover the full spectrum of Scotland's sealife from large-scale and productive offshore habitats to fragile and ecologically important inshore areas around the coastline. Today's announcement also signals a new Scottish Government resolve to provide protection in critical habitats for other nationally important mobile species such as basking sharks, minke whale and Risso's dolphins.

Licensed activities at sea will be subject to the new nature conservation MPA designation orders that come into force on August 7th. Fisheries management measures for all of the sites will be developed during an intensive two years process. Together, they must ensure sealife and seabed habitats in the new MPAs are adequately protected from damaging activities.

Calum Duncan, Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce and Marine

Conservation Society, Scotland Programme Manager said: "These new Marine Protected Areas are very welcome news for sealife and Scotland's hidden, underwater wonderlands. There has been a consensus among our marine scientists that the health of Scotland's seas has suffered in recent decades and that threats from human activities must be better managed. By setting up these MPAs the Government has wisely placed its confidence in that verdict. The work does not stop here – for the time-being these MPAs are just lines on maps, so careful management will be needed to ensure they actively help recover our sealife."

Alex Kinninmonth, Scottish Wildlife Trust Living Seas Policy Officer said: "This is a huge leap forward for nature conservation in Scotland. After many years of making a compelling case for better management of our seas, we are delighted to see these ambitious plans for marine protection. Each new MPA forms an important piece of a complex jigsaw that when complete will help turn the fortunes of our sea around."

Sarah Dolman, North Atlantic Programme Manager for Whale and Dolphin Conservation said:

"Having provided the evidence and demonstrated huge public support for protection of important whale, dolphin and porpoise habitat, it's great news that minke whales and Risso's dolphins are included in the Scottish MPA network. With the right management in place, MPAs in conjunction with wider measures, will help to protect Scotland's precious whale and dolphin populations."

Lang Banks, Director of WWF Scotland said: "Scottish ministers have made the right decision for our seas and the many wonderful species and habitats that live in them. They have also made the right decision for those communities and industries that depend on healthy seas in the long term. The next step is to ensure that this network of MPAs are well managed and result in the recovery of our ecosystems for the benefit of all. This is a great step towards delivering a marine environment where economic interests can operate in a way that does not have to undermine the health of our seas."

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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 via www.savescottishseas.org

- 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/>
- A map showing the locations of the proposed MPAs can be viewed here: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/scottish-marine-protected-area-network>
- SNH Commissioned Report no 747: highlights the advice given to the Scottish Government by its scientific advisors in response to selected responses to the public consultation on MPAs: http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/747.pdf
- SNH Commissioned Report no 547: highlights the advice given to the Scottish Government by its scientific advisors: <http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=1959>
- A map showing the concerning and declining state of Scotland's seas can be found here: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/save-scottish-seas/recover/>
- Related information on MPAs can be found at www.savescottishseas.org/why-we-need-mpas and <http://www.savescottishseas.org/why-we-support-29-mpas>