

Delay on MPA measures could risk biodiversity

Summary

- LINK members urge MSPs to support the Scottish Government's proposed Marine Conservation Order for South Arran MPA and Omnibus Fishing Order for 13 inshore marine protected areas and Special Areas of Conservation. These measures must be adopted without delay; they have been widely consulted upon over a long period and have the support of many stakeholders including those from the environmental sector, many of the public, numerous academics and much of the fishing industry.
- Marine protected areas are a long-term investment to safeguard the future of Scotland's marine biodiversity and the industries that rely on them; further delay to implementing management will risk potential further damage to the features they are designed to protect. There has already been too much delay.
- The proposed management measures are estimated to reduce revenue for some affected scallop dredgers and trawlers by approximately 1.7% in the short-term. However with adequate protection, we are likely to see mid- to long-term increases in number and size of commercial species as a result of the management measures.

This briefing sets out to highlight the urgency behind the adoption of the proposed Marine Conservation Orders and Fishing Orders and recommend the immediate courses of action that LINK members believe are necessary to maximise the effectiveness of the measures.

Context

There is increasing scientific evidence globally that marine protected areas (MPAs) can be highly effective, not just for the purpose of protecting and facilitating the recovery of denuded biodiversity, but also for safeguarding established species and habitats to prevent future damage from human activities. The Scottish Government has undertaken extensive stakeholder engagement around MPAs over the last four years with a wide range of interests, including over 40 weeks' of public consultation, numerous local drop-in sessions, a series of workshops and frequent bilateral meetings. The public consultations have demonstrated that the majority of respondents and interests, from a wide range of sectors and locations, are supportive of a proportionate approach to MPA management which protects and recovers our precious marine biodiversity and helps improve the health of Scotland's marine environment. It is clear from the evolution of the management proposals since November 2014 that the Scottish Government have listened to the compelling scientific case of the need for ecological recovery and management simplicity, supported by the views of the majority, including many coastal communities, and have responded proportionately and appropriately.

MPAs are a long-term investment

The sites and features for which the proposed Marine Conservation Orders and Fishing Orders are currently being considered (for the first tranche of inshore marine protected areas (MPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)) are considered at high risk or highly sensitive to certain types of fishing gears. It is therefore essential that, after nearly four years' of consultations and stakeholder workshops, they are adopted timeously before any further potential damage to these features can occur. The enlightened resolution of the Scottish Government to implement proportionate management measures for these protected areas is at risk of being diluted by the restrictive and short-term views of a small proportion of the inshore fishing fleet. Adequate protection of the many species and habitats that make up the complex ecosystems is vital so that future generations can continue to benefit from the services the seas provide, including sustaining local communities, supporting commercial fish and shellfish stocks, underpinning the coastal tourism industry, helping regulate our climate, providing natural coastal defense and contributing to the enjoyment and well-being of society. After more than a year of consultation on these particular measures, LINK members insist that the 'Omnibus' Fishing Order and the South Arran MCO should be adopted as soon as possible. While we remain concerned that some of the measures do not go far enough to deliver the ecosystem protection needed (for Loch Fyne and Luce Bay particularly), management measures are urgently needed to reduce the risk of further ecological decline.

Short term vs long-term management

It is evident in the recently revised MCOs, which were consulted on between 18th December 2015 and 18th January 2016, that the amended derogations which allow scallop dredging and demersal trawling have been applied to preserve historic fishing grounds, emphasizing that the concerns of mobile fishing

interests had been accommodated through consultation. While we sympathise with local fishing businesses that may be required to alter their fishing grounds, this contravenes the purpose of the MPAs, which is for the protection and, where appropriate, enhancement of the sites contributing to supporting wider ecosystem processes and improving the health of our wider seas. We acknowledge the Scottish Government's extensive efforts to assess the potential economic impacts of the measures, which estimate an average reduction of revenue of about 1.7% for certain fishing businesses. We also highlight the findings of a Marine Conservation Society commissioned report¹, reviewing economic assessments by the Scottish Government and one commissioned by members of the mobile fishing industry, which indicated that the industry assessment of costs was massively over-estimated and fails to acknowledge the potential benefits of MPA management. We stress that MPAs and SACs are primarily for the conservation of biodiversity, but that case studies have demonstrated the secondary benefits that result from good management, such as increases in the size and number of commercial fish and shellfish species and increased opportunities for coastal tourism.

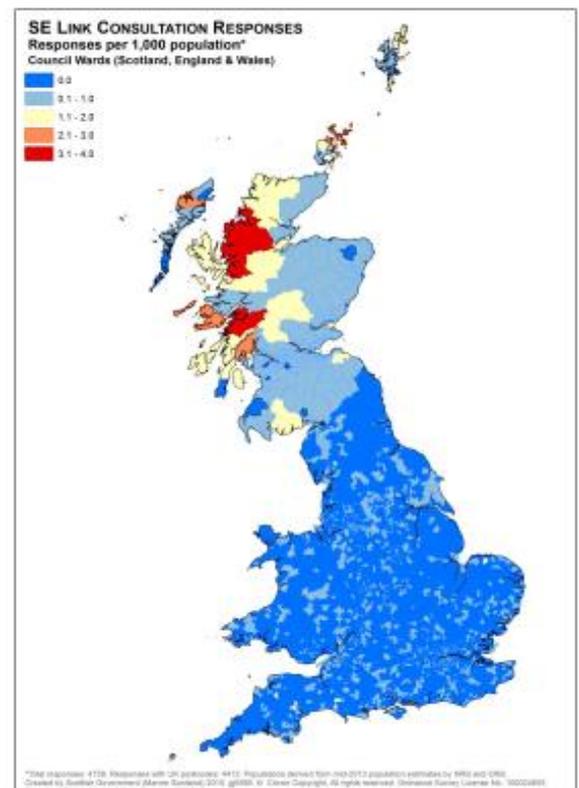
MPA measures must acknowledge the views of the majority

The various consultations that have been undertaken on the designation and management of MPAs and SACs over the last three years clearly demonstrate widespread support for proportionate management that prioritises the ecological features for which the sites are designated. The map (right)² shows that a high proportion of the responses to the 'Don't Take the P out of MPAs' campaign were from coastal communities of place, and there are a number of emerging coastal groups with a clear interest in becoming more involved in management of their local MPA. Furthermore, the static fishing sector, which comprises approximately 70% of the Scottish inshore fleet, expressed widespread support for the management measures announced in June 2015.

Conclusions

We urge the Scottish Parliament to act decisively in support of the Scottish Government's proposed management measures for MPAs and SACs designed to start halting the decline in our marine biodiversity, in turn helping support coastal communities now and into the future. To maximise the success of the measures, the Scottish Government must commit to the necessary resourcing to ensure effective monitoring and compliance.

Figure A3.1 – Distribution of responses



This briefing was compiled on behalf of the Scottish Environment LINK Marine Taskforce and is supported by the following member organizations: Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust; Marine Conservation Society; National Trust for Scotland; Royal Zoological Society of Scotland; RSPB Scotland; Scottish Ornithologists Club; Scottish Wildlife Trust; Whale and Dolphin Conservation; WWF Scotland.

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¹ GRID Economics (2015) A Comparison of the "Business And Regulatory Impact Assessment" of the MPAs undertaken by ABP Marine Environmental Research and the "Socio-Economic Effects of the Proposed Marine Conservation Order 2015: A Scoping Study" undertaken by MKA Associates.

² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00481749.pdf> (P120)