

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS – THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS

A NETWORK OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS WILL HAVE ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS, BUT DID YOU KNOW IT WILL ALSO BE WORTH BILLIONS IN ECONOMIC BENEFITS TO SCOTLAND.

November 2012

4

£6.3 BILLION-£10 BILLION – THE ESTIMATED BENEFITS OF A NETWORK OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN SCOTTISH WATERS OVER 20 YEARS. AND THIS MAY BE A CONSERVATIVE ESTIMATE.

In Scotland, we depend on the sea. There are obvious benefits it brings – the wonderful seafood and renewable energy – and less obvious ones like climate regulation and improving our wellbeing. However, collectively we have failed to fully appreciate, protect or value our seas leaving many habitats and species in a dire state. What's more, pressure on the marine environment that provides our goods and services is increasing. Major research has shown ignoring their value has led to over-exploitation and inefficient management of these precious resources¹.

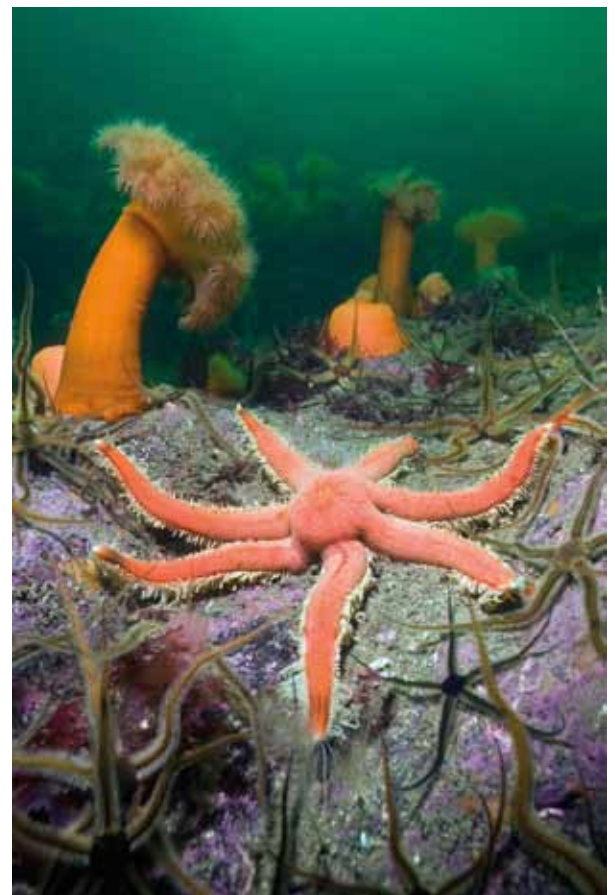
But there is time to change. The Scottish Government has made a start – it's currently identifying a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Together with other measures such as marine planning, this network offers the potential to help safeguard the goods and services our seas provide, whilst ensuring they are healthy, productive and biologically diverse. Find out why we need marine protected areas, how this network is being selected and what the key principles are when designing an ecologically coherent network in our previous briefings.

INVESTIGATING THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The degraded environmental state of our seas, and thus the need for MPAs, is well-reported². But what about the economic benefits of this network? The value of fisheries and aquaculture to the Scottish economy, or the financial benefits of renewable energy have been calculated, but is it possible to estimate wider economic benefits provided by MPAs – from the obvious to those less obvious?

Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Taskforce decided to find out. A report was commissioned which, for the first time, estimates the economic benefits provided by designating a representative network of MPAs in Scottish waters³. Why? Because by understanding the economic value of an MPA network, in addition to the more obvious ecological value, better-informed decisions can be made about managing our seas.

In just 20 years the overall benefit of a network of MPAs in Scottish offshore and territorial waters is estimated to be somewhere between £6.3 billion and £10 billion. Benefits gained can range from improved populations of marine life to a boost in marine tourism. This is a real opportunity to help create a flourishing Scotland⁴.



Scottish reef with seven-armed starfish (*Luidia ciliaris*), plumose anemones (*Metridium senile*) and black brittlestars (*Ophiocoma nigra*) © Paul Kay

¹ The UK's National Ecosystem Assessment and the UN led The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity study.

² See Scotland's Marine Atlas: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/science/atlas>

³ This report is based on Defra commissioned research undertaken for the UK Marine and Coastal Access Act. See full report for details.

⁴ <http://www.scotlink.org/files/policy/PositionPapers/LINKHelpingScotlandFlourish.pdf>

WHY EVEN *THIS* MAY BE AN UNDERESTIMATE

Methodologies have advanced in recent years but there are still elements beyond our understanding. It was not possible, for example, to calculate the off-site benefits such as increasing fish and shellfish populations spilling over site boundaries into surrounding areas. Nor could several services, such as the removal of pollutants, be calculated. So while £6.3 billion to £10 billion is eye-opening, it's likely that we are *still* undervaluing the true worth of a network of MPAs to Scotland.

Since Scotland's MPA project is not yet complete, the report's calculation is based on a range of theoretical networks and management regimes. You can find out more in the [full report](#).

THE REPORT ALSO FOUND...

The marine environment varies from site to site, and so too will the economic benefits of protecting them. We need to carefully consider each site to ensure the environment is protected and the economic benefits are realised.

For example, the report found greater benefits arise in networks which protect a high proportion of threatened and declining features. Halting activities, like the use of bottom-towed fishing gear, can have significant benefits in some areas. Furthermore, including spawning and nursery grounds in the network appears to help maximise benefits.

LINK'S VIEW

- If we understand the broadest environmental, social *and* economic value of our seas we'll be able to make the most sustainable decisions.
- Scotland's MPA network has the potential to help create a more prosperous country – the decisions to designate and properly manage these sites are critical.
- We *must* ensure that the marine environment is protected in a way that offers maximum benefits, such as halting activities that damage particular areas and protecting, and where appropriate recovering, an adequate extent of marine features
- A network of MPAs *must* be used in tandem with other measures, such as marine planning, and be well-designed and well-managed for the benefits to flow.
- We will never be able to fully quantify the total worth of our seas, therefore a coherent Scottish MPA network makes plain environmental, social *and* economic sense.

It is currently anticipated the Scottish Parliament will receive an update on the Scottish Government's proposed network in December 2012 with a public consultation on the proposed MPAs taking place in summer 2013.

Scottish Environment LINK is the liaison body for Scotland's voluntary environmental organisations, over thirty organisations collectively representing around half a million people, working together for a sustainable Scotland. Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Taskforce comprises of the following organisations.



For further information please contact LINK's Marine Taskforce policy officers:
Sarah Archer (sarah@scotlink.org) and Nick Underdown (nick@scotlink.org)

