

## Media Release

For immediate use on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2019

### Hope for whales, dolphins and sharks in Scottish Seas

Conservation group Scottish Environment LINK (1) has welcomed the launch of a public consultation detailing proposals to designate more marine protected areas (MPAs) in Scottish seas (2).

Four new MPAs, one of which spans the Sea of the Hebrides, will add to a developing network of protected areas across Scotland's seas. Once in place, with appropriate management of marine activities, these new MPAs would safeguard some of Scotland's most iconic species, including the basking shark, the world's second largest fish, minke whales and the little-known Risso's dolphin.

Basking sharks migrate to Scottish seas through the summer to feed and breed, but their numbers have declined historically due to commercial hunting. These species make popular viewing for Scotland's growing wildlife-watching industry, in which whale-watching on the west coast alone is worth over £2 million (3). The proposed MPA for the Sea of the Hebrides would be among the first protected areas for basking sharks in the world.

The proposed MPAs would also protect important seabed habitats, such as sea-fan and sponge communities and burrowed mud, which provide a home to many other marine species, and sandeels which are vital in the marine food web. However, these proposals would protect the sites in name only; a further process will be required to implement management measures to reduce the impact of human activities on the protected species and habitats.

The announcement comes the day before World Oceans Day (4), a global initiative that recognises the importance of the marine environment for sustaining life on earth.

Responding to the launch of the consultation, Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation Scotland for Marine Conservation Society and Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group said: "Scotland's seas are globally important for a range of species and habitats, including the mighty basking shark, but they face increasing pressure from climate change and human activity. We know that Scotland's wildlife and environmental quality are of immense value, both intrinsically and to our global reputation, and so are pleased these new sites are being proposed. It is vital such special places are properly protected from damaging activities to support wider marine ecosystem health and ensure Scotland is a beacon of ocean recovery worldwide."

Sarah Dolman, Policy Manager for Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Vice Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group said: "We commend the Scottish Government for bringing forward these MPA proposals, three of which were originally put forward by third parties, including LINK members WDC and HWDT. We need to understand and protect the important habitats of Scotland's little known Risso's dolphins and playful minke whales by monitoring and managing activities that may impact them, individually and collectively."

Dr Richard Luxmoore, Senior Nature Conservation Advisor for the National Trust for Scotland said: “We are delighted to see these proposals to protect some of the largest and most recognisable species in Scotland's seas. However, this is only the first step in the process of securing their protection. Some MPAs designated five years ago still have no statutory protection measures, which we look forward to being addressed, and we can't wait as long again for these new MPAs.”

Dr Sam Collin, Marine Planning Manager, Scottish Wildlife Trust said: “Scotland's seas are vitally important for migratory species such as basking sharks. It is essential that we play our part in ensuring their conservation.”

“The proposed areas represent further progress towards a coherent network of MPAs. Further work is needed to ensure these areas are effectively managed, so that when these species visit our waters they are protected.”

Alison Lomax, Director of Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, said: “Research carried out by HWDT citizen scientists over the last 25 years has helped to identify important feeding grounds for minke whales in Scottish waters. In the Sea of the Hebrides, one of the proposed MPAs, individual whales have been documented returning every year for over a decade.”

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## Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

LINK is a Scottish Charity (SC000296) and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee (SC250899). LINK is core funded by Membership Subscriptions and by grants from Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Government and Charitable Trusts.

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<http://www.scotlink.org/workareas/marine/>

[www.savescottishseas.org](http://www.savescottishseas.org)

[www.fightforscotlandsnature.scot](http://www.fightforscotlandsnature.scot)

(2) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/marine-protected-areas-mobile-marine-species-consultation-proposals-designate-four-new-marine-protected-areas-scottish-waters/pages/3/>

(3) Ryan, C., Bolin, V., Shirra, L., Garrard, P., Putsey, J., Vines, J., & Hartny-Mills, L. (2018). [The development and value of whale-watch tourism in the west of Scotland. \*Tourism in Marine Environments\*, 13\(1\), 17-24.](#)

(4) <https://www.worldoceansday.org/>

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