

Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

# Protecting 30% of Scotland's land and sea for nature

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Making '30 by 30'  
meaningful







## Acknowledgements

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November 2022

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# Protecting 30% of Scotland's land and sea for nature

## Protecting land and sea effectively for biodiversity is critical for securing nature's recovery.

Protected areas are our best places for nature, such as Scotland's vast expanses of blanket bog, ancient Caledonian forest, rivers and lochs, our precious sea lochs, kelp forests, and places for whales and dolphins. They are the frontline of defence for nature against growing pressures from human activity and climate change and are vital for supporting our species and habitats.

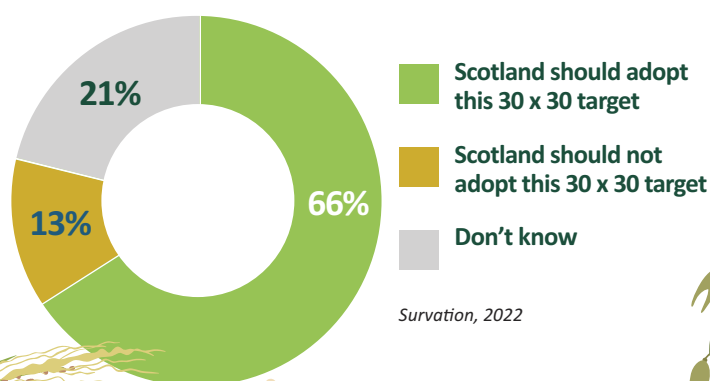
A target to protect at least 30% of the planet's land and sea by 2030 is expected to be a key element of the new global framework for nature, set to be agreed at the COP15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022. 100 countries have already signed up to this target, known as '30x30'.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Government has committed to protect at least 30% of Scotland's land and seas for nature by 2030, and highly protect 10%.<sup>2</sup> This commitment goes beyond those of the other governments in the UK and aligns with the European Union's 2030 Biodiversity Strategy.<sup>3</sup>

Nature is in trouble. In Scotland, nearly 50% of species have decreased in abundance since 1994.<sup>4</sup>

This comes on top of large historical losses in nature: the Biodiversity Intactness Index ranked Scotland as coming 212th out of 240 countries on how intact its biodiversity remains.<sup>5</sup> We urgently need to start actively restoring our ecosystems and species at scale. Maintaining strong protections through robust delivery of 30x30 is crucial to support this programme of restoration. Make no mistake, there is a huge opportunity to deliver for nature through this target. Scotland has a chance to lead the way in making 30x30 meaningful for nature, but the Scottish Government must not underestimate the task ahead.

A poll by Survation has found that 66% of Scots support the 30 by 30 approach being adopted in Scotland, with only 13% opposed. Excluding "don't knows", 84% of those who expressed an opinion were in favour of the target.





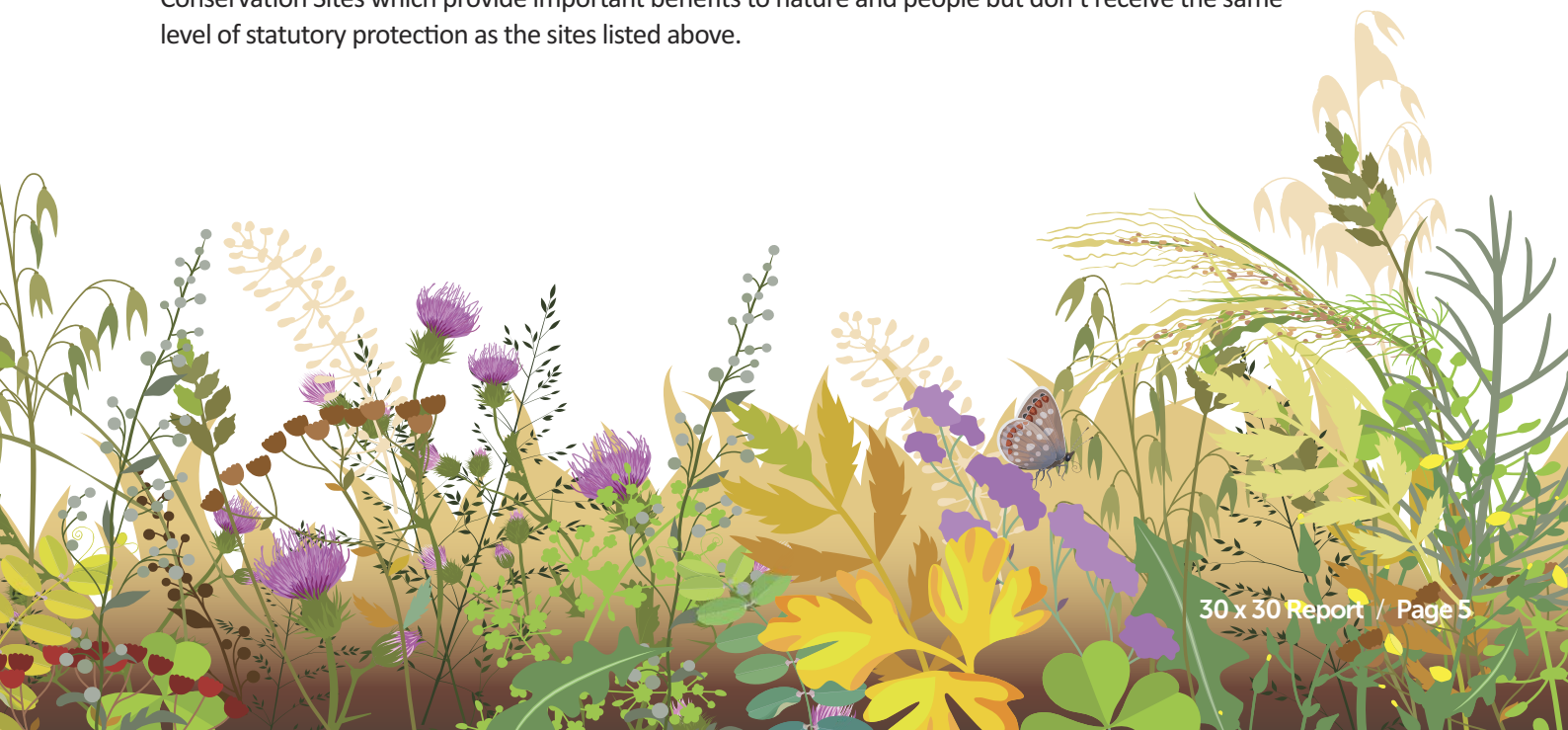
## Defining 'protected'

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines a protected area as: A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.<sup>6</sup>

In Scotland the most important protected areas for nature are:

- **Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)** which protect nationally important species, habitats, geology and landforms.
- **Special Protection Areas (SPAs)** and **Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)** which protect internationally important species and habitats. These are known in Scotland as European sites.
- **Ramsar sites**, which protect internationally important wetlands.
- **Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**, which are designed to protect Priority Marine Features (marine species and habitats of conservation importance in Scotland). Historic MPAs protect features of historic importance, and some may provide de facto protection to localised biodiversity. Research and Demonstration MPAs (of which there is one in Scotland) are designed to protect features under specific research objectives.

There are a range of other types of designations in Scotland. These include designated landscapes such as National Parks, Regional Parks and National Scenic Area, which are designated to protect a range of values like landscape and cultural heritage in addition to an area's natural heritage. There are also Local Nature Conservation Sites which provide important benefits to nature and people but don't receive the same level of statutory protection as the sites listed above.





# The benefits of protected areas



**Protected areas are vital as part of a mix of approaches to tackling the nature and climate emergency in Scotland.** Protected areas are proven to be effective for protecting nature. For example:

- Protected area coverage is the most important predictor of Red List vascular plant species richness across Britain.<sup>7</sup>
- Bird species for which protected areas are designated have been found to experience improved populations relative to bird species that haven't had protected areas designated for them. Species were found to be faring better in countries where that level of protection has been in place for longer.<sup>8</sup>
- One study found that the most important factor in a species' conservation status is whether or not it has benefited from this protection. This was found to be even more important than the species' vulnerability to the levels of climate change we've seen so far.<sup>9</sup>

Protected areas deliver many benefits to people beyond supporting wildlife<sup>10</sup>, including delivering vital services such as carbon storage<sup>11</sup> and flood mitigation, providing opportunities for the public to connect with and learn about nature, and improving people's health and wellbeing<sup>12</sup>:

- The recent Dasgupta Review commissioned by the UK HM Treasury found that the benefits of protecting 30% of land and ocean would exceed costs and would provide better financial and higher non-monetary benefits than currently and deliver significant social benefits.<sup>13</sup>
- The benefits of protecting European sites in Scotland have been estimated at more than 7 times annual costs of their management, based on recreational values alone.<sup>14</sup>
- One study found the benefits of Natura 2000 sites in the EU could be between 200-300 billion euros annually.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence also tells us that protected areas are absolutely insufficient on their own and must be embedded within wider landscapes and nature networks that are also managed ways that supports nature's recovery.

**We need more protected areas and for these places to be bigger, better and more joined up.**<sup>16</sup>

## 30x30 in the European Union

The European Commission has been leading the way on 30x30 and the Scottish Government has committed to stay aligned with EU environmental laws and standards. The EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2030<sup>17</sup> includes a number of key commitments:

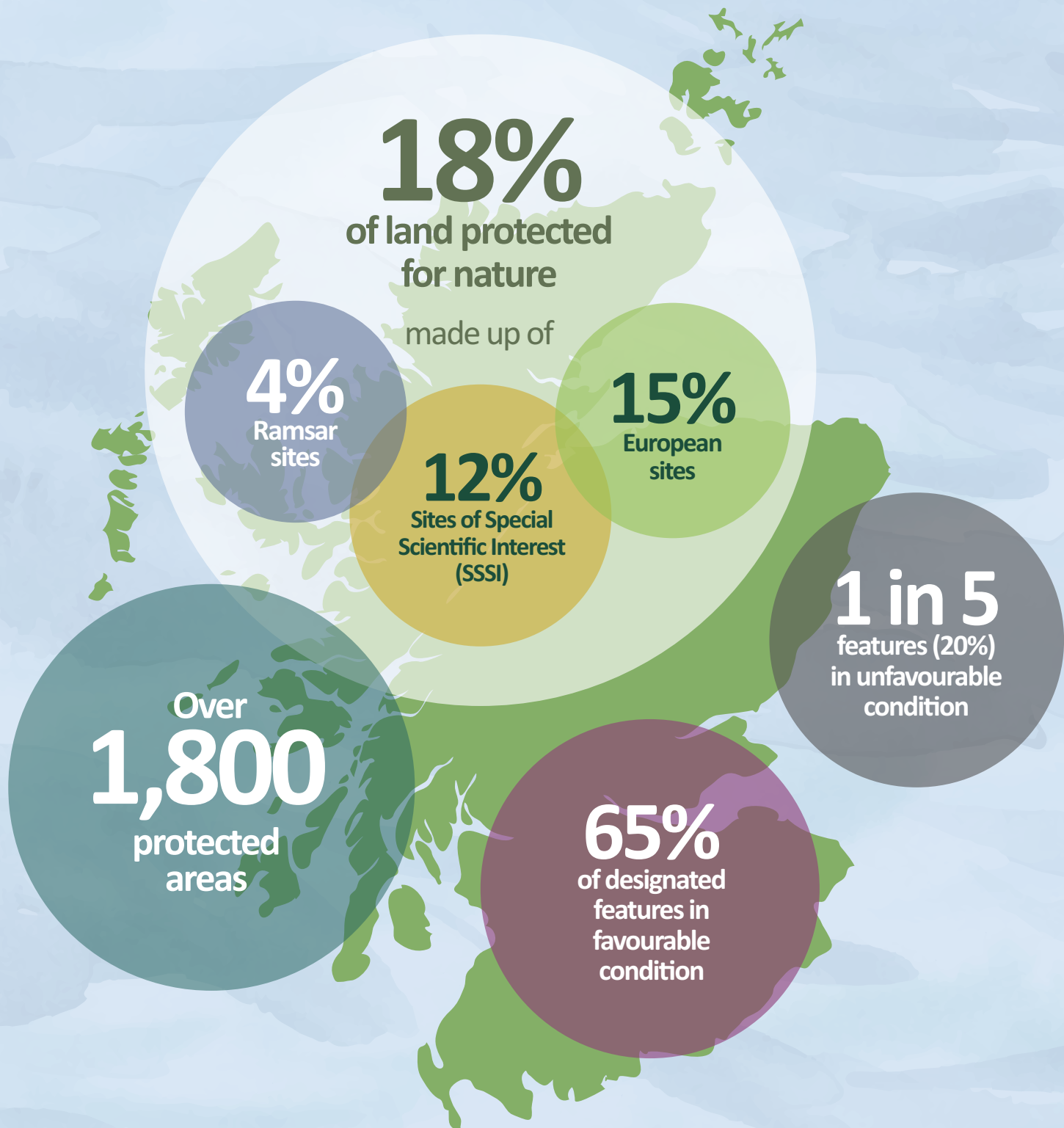
- Legally protect a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of the EU's sea area and integrate ecological corridors, as part of a true Trans-European Nature Network
- Strictly protect at least a third of the EU's protected areas, including all remaining primary and old-growth forests
- Effectively manage all protected areas, defining clear conservation objectives and measures, and monitoring them appropriately.

The European Commission has published initial guidance on how the 30% protection and 10% strict protection should be interpreted. The Commission has also recently brought forward a proposal<sup>18</sup> for a legally binding Nature Restoration Law, with a target for 20% of the EU's land and sea area to be under area-based restoration by 2030, to work in tandem with the Nature Directives that create the framework for the Natura 2000 network in Europe.



# Protecting Scotland's land: where are we now?

## Land protected for nature





The last few decades saw progress on the designation of protected areas in Scotland: 18% of Scotland's land is now legally protected for nature.<sup>19</sup> However, not all of these places are working as well as they should for nature and progress to improve our protected areas has stalled. This means that the proportion of land **effectively** protected for nature is less than 18%.

## There have been significant and persistent issues with management, monitoring and insufficient resourcing of protected areas.

Protected areas are designated to protect specific 'features', which are the species, habitats or geology that make the site important. In 2022, 65% of designated features were assessed as being in favourable (good) condition.<sup>20</sup> This represents a decrease since 2007. More features are now classed as recovering or as having positive management in place that should help the site to recover, however overall, the data imply a failure to significantly improve the condition of our protected areas over the last 15 years.

A more strategic approach is required for improving the condition of protected areas, such as tackling pressures like *Rhododendron ponticum* and deer management at landscape scales. NatureScot announced in June 2022 that they would be developing new approach to deliver strategic improvements to protected areas as part of 30x30.<sup>21</sup> This approach should set out the role of protected areas within a wider programme of ecosystem restoration.

In the past the Scottish Government has included National Parks when it reports on protected area extent, bringing the coverage from 18% to around 23% of Scotland's land.<sup>22</sup> LINK does not support the inclusion of National Parks to the target, in their entirety and in their current form, but National Parks do have potential to contribute more land to the target over time, see p.20 – 21.

The effectiveness of protected areas has been subject to a variety of reviews, at Scotland, UK and EU levels. These reviews have tended to find that protected areas remain relevant for tackling key pressures on habitats and species, and that issues with effectiveness is often due to poor implementation.<sup>23</sup>

### Issues affecting the effectiveness of protected areas on land:

- > Landscape-scale pressures such as herbivores, invasive species and pollution
- > Declining budgets for management and monitoring
- > Insufficient monitoring within appropriate timescales
- > Insufficient use of enforcement powers
- > Continued threats from inappropriate development
- > Negative perceptions about protected areas

# Protecting Scotland's sea: where are we now?

## Sea protected for nature

**37%** of seas are legally, but not effectively, protected for nature. The MPA network is currently made up of:

**233**<sup>24</sup>

sites for nature conservation purposes, which currently include nature conservation, historic, and demonstration and research MPAs, marine SACs, marine SPAs, SSSIs, and RAMSAR sites.

It also includes

**14**

Other Area-Based Measures (OABMs) e.g. fisheries closures.

Proposed Highly Protected Marine Areas will be added to the network by 2026. Only **9 MPAs** (of 31 assessed) have achieved their conservation objectives.



Currently, while 37% of Scotland's seas fall within the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) network, very little of this is effectively protected. Scotland's MPA network is comprised of 233 sites<sup>25</sup> for nature conservation, as well as 14 Other Area-Based Measures (OABMs). OABMs are very targeted restrictions, e.g. prohibition on catching a specific species and may provide limited wider ecological benefits.

## The twin climate and nature crises are globally acknowledged to equate to a de facto ocean emergency.<sup>26</sup>

To recover our marine environment's health, and its associated ecosystem services at least 30% of Scotland's seas under high or full<sup>27</sup> levels of protection is essential.<sup>28</sup> Scotland failed to meet the last international biodiversity target for the marine environment<sup>29</sup>, and in 2019 the UK achieved just 4 out of 15 key marine targets, known as 'Good Environmental Status'.<sup>30</sup>

Well-managed MPAs contribute to many of these key conservation goals, and provide climate change mitigation, adaptation, long-term resilience<sup>31</sup>, and deliver many socio-economic benefits.

The majority of Scotland's MPAs still lack targeted management measures for pressures that pose the highest risk to nature, such as bottom-towed mobile fishing. Recent research indicates that the MPA network protects less than 1% of the historically trawled inshore seabed.<sup>32</sup>

The effectiveness of MPAs as conservation tools is contingent on proportionate, ecosystem-based levels of protection from damaging activities.

## The pace of change must reflect the urgency of tackling the climate and nature crises.

### Issues affecting the effectiveness of Marine Protected Areas

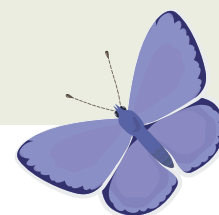
- Lack of awareness of the benefits and negative perceptions of MPAs
- Insufficient MPA management and ecological monitoring
- Delayed implementation of the MPA network
- Low capacity for enforcement, and low financial penalties for illegal activity
- Lack of political will and long-term vision
- Insufficient public and private funding for marine conservation and restoration

# Making 30x30 meaningful



In order to be counted towards the 30% target, areas must meet three conditions:

- 1** Be identified as our most important places for nature
- 2** Be protected for nature in the long-term: the entirety of the 30% should be afforded robust protection against damaging development, land- and sea- use..
- 3** Be well managed and in good or recovering condition: land and sea that count towards the 30% should be well-managed for nature and must be regularly monitored at appropriate intervals as part of a programme of active management and investment. Evidence should show that the nature on site is in good condition or showing demonstrable signs of ecological recovery.



LINK also endorses the 'ABCD' criteria for what areas should count towards 30x30 developed by the British Ecological Society, which align strongly with our criteria set out here.<sup>33</sup>



**Done well, 30x30 is a chance for a real step change for our protected areas, resulting in increased political will, targeted action and long-term funding to properly protect and effectively manage these places so that they really work for nature.**

The evidence has been clear for many years, that to make our protected areas fit for purpose, they need to be better, bigger, we need more of them and they need to be joined up. 30x30 presents an opportunity to finally put these principles into practice and integrate protected areas into our wider landscapes and seascapes, allowing them to play their role as the beating hearts of our ecosystems.

Done badly, 30x30 will result in lines on a map but little benefit for nature.

**Failing to meaningfully protect, manage, restore and fund our best nature sites means that they will become little more than paper parks, protected in name only.**

30x30 should look to build on and improve on what we already have, for example creating mechanisms to support our protected areas to become more dynamic. As environmental conditions change, some features' natural ranges may shift. The protected areas framework should be flexible enough to accommodate this movement through the network, but any changes must be supported by robust evidence, and ensure no species is left behind.

Our designated sites represent the best of our remaining intact ecosystems and are the last refuge for many species. They will go on being important, even if the features they are valued for change. This means we must not lose any of our protected areas or the level of protection they provide.

Robust monitoring and assessment will be a critical tool for achieving this goal, by providing the information needed to make informed decisions that can result in adaptive management where appropriate.

As a starting point, a number of key actions are needed to ensure our protected areas are doing the best they can for nature:

- **Protected areas placed at the heart of a wider programme of ecosystem restoration and species recovery**
- **A strategic approach to addressing pressures inside and outside of protected areas**
- **Management plans prepared and implemented for all sites**
- **Robust monitoring of species and habitats, to track progress and inform management**
- **Long-term funding for monitoring and management**
- **Better use of enforcement powers**
- **New targets for improving the condition of protected areas**
- **Action to ensure protected areas are resilient and dynamic in the face of climate change**
- **Better valuing the many benefits that our protected areas provide**
- **Better including, supporting and incentivising people especially local communities in the stewardship and positive management of protected areas**
- **Communicating the importance of protected areas to the public and improving responsible access to protected areas**





# A roadmap for achieving 30x30 on land





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### 1 Secure effective protection, management and restoration for all protected areas

- Secure effective on- and off-site management for all sites, tackling pressures strategically where needed to restore nature in our protected sites
- Put in place robust monitoring for all sites, so that progress can be tracked and management can be adjusted where necessary
- Set new, binding targets for the condition of protected areas
- Commit long-term funding for protected areas

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### 2 Identify protected areas that would complete our existing networks of nationally and internationally important sites

- Implement the recommendations of the UK 2016 SPA Review<sup>34</sup> to ensure adequate protections for important bird species
- Identify and protect sites that already meet the selection criteria for SSSI, SPA and SAC, particularly for habitats or species that are irreplaceable and/or currently under-represented in Scotland's protected areas

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### 3 Identify additional sites to be protected, based on robust criteria that demonstrate these are our best places for nature, such as:

- Identify and protect other areas that are important for biodiversity, based on national red list criteria
- Irreplaceable habitats such as Ancient Woodland, blanket bog and salt marsh
- The Important Plant Area network, which identifies sites based on standardised, internationally agreed, criteria.<sup>35</sup>

### 4 Develop a framework for Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) identification, protection and effective management and identify and classify suitable areas as OECMs using the IUCN and CBD guidelines as a starting point.<sup>36</sup>

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### 5 Transform and resource National Parks so that a much larger part of these landscapes are truly protected and managed for nature and are developed and delivered inclusively. Examine the potential for other designated landscapes such as National Scenic Areas and Regional Parks to be reformed to deliver more effective protection for nature.

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### 6 Embed protected areas and OECMs as key biodiversity sites within wider Scottish nature networks

- Identify sites that are in the right position to help complete the network or provide better connectivity if restored for nature





# A roadmap for achieving 30x30 at sea



**The Scottish Government must prioritise, work collaboratively and champion recovery and restoration of marine ecosystems over the next four years in order to put in place the necessary actions to halt biodiversity loss and put Scotland's seas on a path to recovery by 2030. At sea, the extent to which MPAs and OABMs are included in Scotland's target to protect 30x30 should be assessed<sup>37</sup> on whether the measures are demonstrably contributing to ecosystem enhancement.<sup>38</sup>**

Key actions to achieve 30x30 at sea include:

## By 2024

- Completion of the current MPA network, including ecosystem-based management measures of fisheries and measures for the protection of Priority Marine Features (PMFs) outside MPAs;
- An ecosystem-based approach to designating Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) is adopted in law, with clear guidance for all marine users about permitted activities;
- The MPA network is independently scrutinised and assessed to determine the effectiveness of MPA measures (including Other Area-Based Measures considered part of the network);
- The proposed Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill includes ambitious ocean recovery targets in support of achieving enhanced Good Environmental Status (i.e. inclusion of climate measures);
- Adopt ambitious conservation strategies, namely the UK Dolphin and Porpoise Strategy and Scottish Seabird Conservation Strategy, which aligns with spatial management of critical habitat through MPAs and eliminates key threats (e.g. bycatch);

- Development of Scotland's second National Marine Plan is well-advanced, as a holistic approach to planning for all sectors (including fisheries) with ocean recovery at its heart;
- All over 10m and high-risk smaller fishing vessels operating in Scottish waters and Scottish vessels fishing elsewhere are fitted with Remote Electronic Monitoring with cameras;
- Priority measures for the recovery of seabird populations.

## By 2025

- Scottish Government implements a new spatial management regime for commercial and recreational fishing including a presumption against bottom-towed mobile fishing gear in a significant part of the inshore area;
- Aquaculture, including salmon farming, is integrated into regional marine planning; all areas deemed unsuitable are designated aquaculture free-zones and all poorly sited farms relocated or closed;
- All marine industries invest to appropriate levels in the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund.

## By 2026

- At least 30% Scotland's seas are under high levels of protection through MPAs and other measures, and at least a third of that (at least 10% of Scotland's seas) are designated as HPMAs;
- A clear and transparent approach to enabling the Just Transition of all marine industries to climate-smart and nature-friendly operation is being implemented and supported by the Scottish Government.

# In more detail: OECMs

The IUCN recognises that Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) have a key role to play alongside protected areas in delivering the global 30x30 target.<sup>39</sup> An OECM is defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity as:<sup>40</sup>

“A geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.”

The IUCN has established 3 categories of OECMs:<sup>41</sup>

- 1 Ancillary conservation** – Areas that deliver site-based conservation as a by-product of management activities, even though biodiversity conservation is not a management objective. Examples may include sacred natural sites, shipwrecks, or industrial and military areas that conserve important biodiversity over the long-term.
- 2 Secondary conservation** – Areas where biodiversity conservation may be a secondary objective. For example, protection and management of watersheds or wetlands to protect biodiversity in addition to protection of water resources. Sites managed to provide ecological connectivity between protected areas or other areas of high biodiversity, thereby contributing to their viability, may also qualify as OECMs.
- 3 Primary conservation** – Areas governed by government agencies, Indigenous peoples and local communities and other actors that conform to the IUCN definition of a protected area, but which are not currently designated and reported as protected areas. Some of these areas may later be recognised as protected areas if the governance body agrees.





Whilst OECMs have been recognised in other parts of the world, in the UK they are largely new. To date, OECMs have generally been used to recognise situations where effective biodiversity conservation is already being delivered. While there are currently no OECMs recognised in the UK, there are areas that could be suitable for recognition subject to meeting required standards – such as undesignated land effectively managed for nature over the long-term by NGOs, or land managed for other objectives such as water supply and quality where biodiversity benefits are demonstrably being delivered.

While recognising such places as OECMs will help to count more land in Scotland towards the 30x30 target, it should be recognised that this will not necessarily be delivering more for nature (no additionality) as these areas are by definition already delivering biodiversity benefits.

Key principles and standards for delivering OECMs in Scotland must be co-developed by the Scottish Government, NatureScot and stakeholders as part of a pathway to protecting 30% of Scotland's land and sea.

#### **Scottish Environment LINK initial principles for OECMs in Scotland:**

- All OECMs must meet the LINK tests for making 30x30 meaningful, in order to count towards the 30%. Use of OECMs must be accompanied by rigorous standards, evidence and monitoring capacity to avoid becoming a greenwashing exercise.
- Positive management for nature occurring in these areas must be secured over the long-term in order to be considered for OECM status.
- Areas should not receive recognition as OECMs until they are delivering demonstrable and significant biodiversity outcomes, and monitoring will be essential to ensure continued delivery of those outcomes over time.
- The 30% should be focused on protecting our most important areas for biodiversity. Identifying where these areas are across Scotland, as a starting point, will help determine whether a protected area or an OECM is going to be the most appropriate approach to ensure long-term protection and management.
- OECMs should not be seen as a 'lighter touch' approach and must already be delivering biodiversity benefits equivalent to protected areas to be recognised and count towards 30x30. They should only be counted as 'candidate OECMs' until they are demonstrating these benefits, so early action and monitoring will be crucial.

# In more detail: National Parks

**The Scottish Government has committed to designate at least one new National Park in this parliamentary session and is also actively looking at the role of National Parks in nature's recovery and delivering 30x30.**

National Parks support a wide range of nationally and internationally important and threatened species. Designated landscapes like National Parks are an important complement to our suite of statutory nature protected areas, by providing large areas of good quality semi-natural habitats they can act as refuges for species that continue to be squeezed out of the wider countryside and help strengthen ecological processes over larger areas by better connecting habitats.

Scotland's two National Parks have delivered some significant and successful nature conservation projects, and recently have led the way in setting a progressive direction for scaling up nature restoration in the parks. However, despite this great action, nature still faces many challenges within the National Parks and more is needed to establish the entirety of our National Parks as exemplars of land managed well for nature, climate and people.

Furthermore, National Parks have a range of statutory purposes beyond nature conservation and encompass a diverse range of diverse land uses, including urban areas.

Scottish Environment LINK therefore does not consider it appropriate that new or existing National Parks in their entirety, and in their current format, should count towards the 30%. Only those areas within National Parks that meet criteria of long-term protection and demonstrate positive management for nature should count towards the 30%.

However, there is a huge opportunity for National Parks to expand their role in nature restoration and protection at-scale. With support and reforms to build on the existing positive direction the parks are going in, more and more areas within the parks should meet the criteria and, over time, count towards the 30% target. Other areas of the park managed well for nature will play an important role in helping buffer our most important nature sites and joining them up in a nature network. Any new National Parks must be designated to have a key focus on nature recovery and achieving Net Zero.





### **Proposals for transforming National Parks for nature:**

- Set targets for increasing the proportion of National Parks effectively protected for nature that can count towards the 30%
- Set clear nature recovery targets for all National Parks and reporting requirements
- Require and resource comprehensive monitoring of biodiversity and ecosystems within National Parks
- Designate Nature Recovery Zones with the National Parks
- National Park Authorities to coordinate a pipeline of investment projects for nature restoration
- Strengthen the requirements for all National Park board to include members with expertise or experience in biodiversity and environment
- Establish whether changes are needed to the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, to empower and support National Parks to deliver more for nature
- Establish National Parks as test beds for delivering local nature-positive economies, including ensuring funding streams to encourage and support landowners and managers to support the recovery of nature within the National Parks

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# In more detail: Strict Protection

**In addition to protecting at least 30% of Scotland's land and sea for nature, the Scottish Government has committed to highly protect 10%.**

## **Highly protecting at least 10% of Scotland's seas**

The commitment to designating at least 10% of Scotland's seas as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) represents the promise of significant improvement in the effectiveness of Scotland's MPA network, enabling core areas of ecosystem recovery. By definition HPMAs must prohibit all extractive, depositional and damaging activities, enabling core areas of ecosystem recovery. The potential for these areas to support climate change objectives is also considerable, through prioritisation of coastal blue carbon habitats and oceanic carbon cycling. These must be complemented by wider spatial planning to ensure that ecological benefits beyond protected areas can be realised.

One of the key benefits of HPMAs is in the provision of reference areas to demonstrate the recoverability of marine ecosystems. In Scotland there is only one HMA-equivalent site: Lamlash Bay No Take Zone (NTZ), off the Isle of Arran (and part of South Arran ncMPA). While other ecological benefits are less conclusive (e.g. for slow-growing species), the prevention of further impact from industrial pressures provides crucial protection for complex seabed habitats, including nursery habitats and blue carbon. It is also noteworthy that the Lamlash Bay NTZ was a community-driven initiative. This model needs to be scaled up to provide wider ecosystem services and sustainable socio-economic benefits ('Blue Economy').<sup>42</sup>

## **Highly protecting 10% of Scotland's land**

Discussions about highly protecting or strictly protecting 10% of Scotland's land for nature are at a much earlier stage than equivalent discussions at sea. LINK believes there could be a key opportunity to give 10% of Scotland's land and a third of the protected area network the core focus of nature restoration. This would involve ending all damaging activities within these areas and shifting the focus to active restoration and recovery of ecosystems. This could take the form of 'Nature Recovery Zones', that are focused on targeted, large-scale restoration of Scotland's critical ecosystems, such as Scotland's Rainforest, peatlands, saltmarsh and Caledonian pinewoods.

There are clear and important sensitivities in Scotland and any definition of highly or strictly protected must embed principles of community engagement and empowerment and should follow the Scottish Government's Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement. There will be some areas across Scotland where particularly sensitive and vulnerable habitats require additional protections from the pressures of recreation and disturbance, this could just be during certain seasons, or all year round. We would anticipate that the majority of places would still be compatible with access and would also provide education and engagement opportunities to help people enjoy nature responsibly.



**The Scottish Government should develop criteria for identifying areas that require active restoration and higher levels of protection from damaging activities, starting by looking at the following:**

- Definitions developed for highly and fully protected at sea
- European Commission guidance<sup>43</sup>, which states: “Strictly protected areas are fully and legally protected areas designated to conserve and/or restore the integrity of biodiversity-rich natural areas with their underlying ecological structure and supporting natural environmental processes. Natural processes are therefore left essentially undisturbed from human pressures and threats to the area’s overall ecological structure and functioning, independently of whether those pressures and threats are located inside or outside the strictly protected area”. The EC’s guidance states that many strictly protected areas will be non-intervention areas but may also be areas in which active management sustains or enhances natural processes. In Scotland non-intervention will be less appropriate and we would expect most areas to focus on active management and restoration.
- The IUCN Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories, Ia, strict nature reserve, Ib, wilderness area, and II, national park<sup>44</sup>, are largely in line with the EC’s definition of ‘strict protection’. The IUCN’s Putting Nature on the Map (PNOTM)<sup>45</sup> showed that the UK currently has a very small number of Category 1a sites, for example small islands with limited visitor access or nature reserves which limit visitor access. These are generally small and isolated sites. It also concluded that the only examples of Category II sites in the UK are found in Scotland (the Isle of Rum, Abernethy Estate and Torridon Estate). Consideration should be given to whether a programme to highly protect 10% of Scotland’s land could aim to increase the amount of Category II areas in Scotland. National Parks could have a role in trialling that concept, by looking to increase the amount of Category II areas within the parks.







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# In more detail: Nature Networks and the wider 70% of land

**It is vital that we do not see the 30% as the only places in Scotland for nature, nor 30x30 as the only approach we need to tackle biodiversity loss. It must be one element of a wider package of actions for nature's recovery.**

Evidence shows that protected areas can only be effective if they are integrated within wider landscapes that are also managed in a way that supports nature. Protected areas need to be part of a wholesale transformation to the way that we use and manage land across Scotland. Without improvements to the sustainability of wider land use practices, protected areas become the 'last islands of biodiversity' in an otherwise nature-deprived landscape.

**Put simply, if we effectively protect 30% of land for nature but we are failing nature in the other 70%, then we stand no chance of halting and reversing the nature crisis.**

Instead, efforts must be made to deliver resilient ecological networks which tackle habitat fragmentation and ensure larger areas of good quality habitat, allowing species to move throughout Scotland's landscapes: Scotland's nature networks. Scotland's protected areas, managed appropriately to help nature recovery and strengthen ecological processes should form the backbone of Scotland's

nature networks, where existing areas of natural habitat are enhanced, new areas of habitat are restored and created, and land managed for other purposes is managed in a way that supports nature.

In the Bute House Agreement<sup>46</sup> the Scottish Government committed to embed nature networks across Scotland into the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), and to use the Nature Restoration Fund to establish them across Scotland. They made further commitments to Nature Networks in the Programme for Government 2021–22<sup>47</sup>, sparking NatureScot's work to develop Scotland's Nature Network framework, alongside their 30 x 30 programme.

Beyond Scotland's nature networks, land must also be managed in a more strategic, integrated and nature-positive way, ensuring that more land management minimises or avoids practices that damage nature and give back to nature. Scotland's Land Use Strategy and the forthcoming Regional Land Use Partnerships and Frameworks have a crucial role to play in delivering this integrated vision for Scotland's land, including helping to coordinate and deliver Scotland's Nature Network. Transforming Scotland's future agricultural subsidy scheme to support nature-friendly farming at scale will also be vital here.

# Conclusion

Nature is being squeezed into ever smaller areas because of human activities; Scotland's nature is in freefall – since 1970 nearly 50% of our species have declined and 1 in 9 is now at risk of national extinction.<sup>48</sup> Protected areas create refuges for our remaining wildlife. If we do not look after these places, restore them, expand them and join them up across our land and sea then we will not save Scotland's nature.

'30x30' is a chance for a real step change for our protected areas to make them really work for nature and ensure they aren't just lines on a map but are drivers of nature's recovery and at the heart of a wider programme of ecosystem restoration.

This will deliver many wider benefits across Scotland, helping place us on a pathway to a nature-positive economy, and a resilient healthy society.





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# Endnotes

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