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On behalf of the signatories.

Gillian Martin, MSP
Cabinet Secretary, Net Zero and Energy,
Scottish Parliament
[By e-mail]

1st April 2025

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

We write to you in this open letter as members of environmental and coastal community interest groups representing civil society voices in Scotland to express our deep disappointment at the lack of progress in delivering the long-promised fisheries management measures for Scotland's inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and vulnerable inshore seabed Priority Marine Features (PMFs). Taking these vital measures forward is a long-standing commitment that has been reconfirmed in every Programme for Government this Session. Yet, with just over a year to go until the end of the Session, no demonstrable progress has been made, leaving Scotland's inshore marine environment subject to continued degradation.

You have previously stated the cause of delay is the complexity of assessments required for the full suite of proposed Marine Conservation Orders and Fisheries Orders that will be put forward to public consultation. Whilst we fully support the need for robust assessments, the window for delivering on this commitment is rapidly closing. Further delay is unacceptable. It is imperative that you proceed with consultation on these essential fisheries management measures within inshore MPAs and vulnerable PMF locations outside these areas. We know many people are concerned about delays, with [3,171 supporting](#) the Scottish Environment LINK petition calling for the Scottish Government to protect our marine protected areas without further delay.

Given the urgency of the situation with continued biodiversity decline and only five years until Scotland must deliver on its biodiversity recovery targets, the continued delay to this process over the last 10 years undermines the Scottish Government's ambition to be global leaders in marine conservation, weakening Scotland's contribution to the global 30x30 target. This is a critical opportunity for your government to restore credibility and deliver on its commitments and ensure that these protections, essential for helping our seas attain missed targets for Good Environmental Status, are in place before the next Holyrood elections. Time is running out, and a failure to act now risks these crucial measures being lost amidst the political transitions of the next parliamentary session.



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment



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The suite of fisheries management proposals still to be brought to consultation will include protection measures for: seabirds in colony and marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs); seabed habitat PMFs vulnerable to the most damaging fishing activities and iconic mobile species, such as basking shark, harbour porpoise, Risso's dolphin and minke whale. You will be all too aware of the serious declines facing many of these species and habitats due to human pressures. In 2024 alone, five species of seabird were added to the UK Red List of Conservation Concern with 70% of seabird species in decline - many for which Scotland is globally important. There will be little chance of halting and reversing these trends without restricting the main pressures contributing to these declines in the areas designed to protect them.

Last year the RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, WWF and The Scottish Association for Marine Science published a [report](#) that maps out stores of blue carbon across UK seas. The report shows the value of Scottish seas to supporting climate needs alongside biodiversity. The report revealed an estimated 152 million tonnes of organic carbon is stored in Scotland's marine habitats, with 99% in seabed sediments and Scotland's seabed habitats could capture up to 9.5 million tonnes of organic carbon every year. Areas designated for marine protection cover 37% of Scotland's seas and these contain approximately 50% of total organic carbon. There is a further opportunity through designation and management of activities in protected sites to contribute to both climate and nature targets. Continued disturbance of the seabed in protected sites through fishing activity has the potential to disturb the carbon found within sedimentary habitats protected within these sites. Urgent action is needed to restrict high-risk fishing practices in MPAs, as well as implement ecosystem-based fisheries management measures more broadly to protect marine ecosystems and ensure more sustainable and fairly distributed fishing opportunities to benefit coastal communities.

This is one of the last remaining key pieces of marine policy within your tenure that has not yet been deferred to the next Parliamentary Session or dropped completely. We urge you to secure a lasting legacy for Scotland's seas and its wildlife by prioritising the adoption of these measures before the end of the current Parliamentary session, establishing Scotland as a world leader in protected area delivery. The health of our marine ecosystems, the sustainability of our coastal communities, and Scotland's credibility as a leader in marine conservation and fisheries management depend on swift and decisive action.

We are also keenly awaiting your decision on fisheries management measures for offshore MPAs, following the publication of the consultation analysis in January. We look forward to your response and a clear commitment to progressing the inshore consultation without further delay. We would be happy to meet with you to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,

Blue Marine Foundation
Community Association of Lochs and Sounds CAOLAS
Ethical Seafood Research
Heavy Metal Munchies
Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust



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