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Gillian Martin MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy
Scottish Parliament

17th February 2026

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Many thanks for your letter of 30th January regarding the postponement of the consultation on fisheries management measures for inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Priority Marine Features (PMFs).

We appreciate your reassurance that this delay does not represent a change in policy intent. However, we remain seriously concerned about the absence of any timebound commitment for when the consultation will now be brought forward and we wish to understand how much more time is likely needed to be able to publish the consultation. Given the scale of ecological pressures on inshore ecosystems and the length of time stakeholders have already been engaged in the process, it is frustrating and difficult to understand why an indicative timetable cannot be set out. We want to see that the delivery of this process is being treated with the urgency the biodiversity and climate crises demand.

You note that delays were due to external contractors and the need to finalise statutory assessments. It would be helpful to understand more clearly which specific assessments remain incomplete, whether these delays affect all sites or certain features, and what steps and risk management measures are being taken to prevent further slippage. This consultation has already been significantly deferred compared with previous expectations and commitments, and continued uncertainty coupled with lack of a clear timetable for completion risks undermining both ecological outcomes and stakeholder trust.

You refer to working to “close key knowledge gaps that may be limiting the potential of inshore fisheries to deliver long-term benefits for communities.” It would be helpful to know which specific knowledge gaps are being referred to and what they relate to, and how this work interacts with the existing evidence base used to justify the management measures. These are considerations for which LINK has been advocating throughout the MPA process - a period of more than a decade. We seek clarity on why these gaps are only now being identified as a barrier to progressing protections - particularly at this late stage. Given the amount of time that has already gone into preparing this consultation for publication, we are concerned that the benchmark for evidence is being allowed to drift in a way that postpones necessary protection.



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We recognise the vital role fishing plays in supporting the local communities and businesses they sustain, and that the management measures and policy approach should work to ensure the benefits of MPAs are widely accessible. In light of the significant emphasis on mitigation of socio-economic impacts in your letter, we would be grateful for a clearer explanation of how ecological requirements are being treated as fixed constraints. The legal requirements and core environmental purpose of MPAs must remain the primary driver of management design, and should not be negotiable outcomes.

We look forward to hearing your response addressing these points, and in particular for an updated and specific timetable for the consultation and subsequent decision-making stages. As outlined in our previous letter, we would like to see the Scottish Government launch the consultation within the first 100 days of Session 7 of the Scottish Parliament, sending a strong signal that the government is serious about its commitments to recovering the health of Scotland's seas. We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

Jessica Jones

Acting Convenor, LINK's Marine Group
Marine Policy Manager, Scottish Wildlife Trust.

On behalf of Scottish Environment LINK Marine Group members: Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Seabird Centre, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Whale and Dolphin Conservation and Young Sea Changers Scotland.



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