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John Swinney MSP  
Scottish National Party  
Scottish Parliament.

18th February 2026

Dear Mr Swinney,

**Scottish Environment LINK members urge prioritisation of delayed MPA fisheries management consultations in the 2026 Parliamentary Session.**

We are writing to urge you and your party to prioritise long-delayed action on the management of Scotland's Inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the protection of Priority Marine Features (PMFs) outside MPAs in the upcoming 2026 Parliamentary session.

Scotland's seas are among the most biologically rich in Europe and support coastal livelihoods, food security, carbon storage, cultural heritage, and an extraordinary variety of marine life. However, scientific evidence shows that in recent decades, marine biodiversity has declined significantly. The UK Government and Devolved Administrations collectively failed to achieve key targets on improving marine health (Good Environmental Status) under the UK Marine Strategy Regulations and, not only that, many of these indicators are continuing to decline *despite* the Programme of Measures designed to address them.

Scotland's MPA network was established as one such measure to safeguard vulnerable habitats and species, help marine ecosystems recover, and ensure that marine use remains sustainable for future generations. As a scientifically proven approach to supporting biodiversity recovery and enhancing socio-economic benefits, MPAs can and do work. However, designation alone does not deliver protection. Without robust management measures alongside effective monitoring and enforcement of these, many MPAs remain "paper parks," with damaging activities still occurring in areas meant to be safeguarded.

The process to introduce fisheries management measures for inshore MPAs has faced repeated delays over several parliamentary terms spanning over a decade. Similarly, promised action to better protect Priority Marine Features outside MPAs has yet to be progressed through consultation and implementation. These delays are already undermining Scotland's environmental commitments, the credibility of the MPA network, and the resilience of marine ecosystems already under pressure from climate change and cumulative human impacts.



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment

Registered office: 5 Atholl Place, Perth, PH1 5NE. A Scottish Charity No. SC000296

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As parties set their priorities for the new Parliamentary session, we ask that you commit to:

- Treating the delayed consultation on inshore MPA fisheries management measures as an early legislative and policy priority;
- Progressing, in parallel, the long-awaited consultation on improved protection for Priority Marine Features outside MPAs; and
- Working to ensure that the consultation is launched within the first 100 days of the 2026 session.

Early action would send a strong signal that Scotland is serious about turning marine protection commitments into meaningful outcomes. It would also provide much-needed clarity for coastal communities, fishers, and other marine users by moving from prolonged uncertainty toward a transparent and evidence-based management framework.

We hope you will support swift progress on these overdue measures, and as such, propose the following becomes a commitment in your Holyrood 2026 Party Manifesto:

**“Within the first 100 days of the next Scottish Parliament, we will launch a public consultation on fisheries management measures for inshore Marine Protected Areas and Priority Marine Features, ensuring Scotland’s seas are protected, productive and resilient for future generations.”**

Yours sincerely,

**Jessica Jones**

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

On behalf of Scottish Environment LINK’s 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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