



T : 0300 244 4000
E : scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Esther Brooker
esther@scotlink.org

Our Reference: 202500460103

Your Reference: Letter from environmental and community groups on inshore MPA consultation

1 May 2025

Dear Esther,

Thank you for your letter dated April 1, 2025, regarding your concern with the timelines on implementing fisheries management measures for inshore marine protected areas (MPAs) and the safeguarding of Priority Marine Features.

When introducing a new policy, due process needs to be undertaken. Scottish Ministers have statutory processes they must adhere to in developing and implementing the fisheries management measures. This includes undertaking required statutory assessments, engaging stakeholders and a public consultation. Developing evidence-based and effective fisheries management measures for more than 160 sites and areas within the inshore region is a complicated and challenging process.

37% of our seas are now designated as MPAs, exceeding the global biodiversity target to achieve MPA coverage of 30% of global seas by 2030. Management measures for the most vulnerable sites in the Scottish Marine Protected Area (MPA) network were implemented in 2016. Putting in place the remaining fisheries management measures and further measures for the 11 Priority Marine Features most at risk from bottom trawling outside MPAs remains a top priority.

Statutory social, economic and environmental impact assessments are currently being undertaken for inshore MPAs and proposed PMF management areas ahead of public consultation on the proposals for fisheries management measures.

We will consult on the proposed fisheries management measures for inshore sites and areas following the completion of these assessments. We will continue, as we have done from the very start of this process, to reach out and engage with all stakeholders to support our coastal communities working to Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot



ensure we find a balanced approach.

Fisheries management measures for offshore MPAs were consulted on in October 2024. The responses have been collated and analysed and the analysis report was published 31 January 2025. The key findings are being considered along with any other available evidence to help reach a decision regarding fisheries management measures, before being implemented in 2025.

Our aim is to manage sites in the MPA network to achieve the conservation objectives for their protected features, whilst still allowing sustainable use. Implementing the fisheries management measures in remaining sites and key biodiversity locations outside these sites will ensure we have a well-managed MPA network.

The MPA network is a key tool in ensuring our marine environment is restored, adaptable and resilient to climate change, and sustainably managed to achieve good environmental status, protecting Scotland's vulnerable and unique species and habitats ensuring that their benefits can be accessed by current and future generations.

While we recognise that some recent research has indicated bottom trawling may disturb carbon stores in seabed sediments, this is a complex and uncertain area of science and key evidence gaps remain. To address these gaps, we will be conducting further research on the impact of bottom trawling on sedimentary organic carbon stores later this year. Further information on this, along with our next steps on other blue carbon habitats, will be set out in the Blue Carbon Action Plan, due to be published this summer.

Yours sincerely,



GILLIAN MARTIN

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St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1
3DG
www.gov.scot



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