

Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy
Rùnaire a' Chaibineit airson Gnìomhachd na Gnàth-shìde agus Cumhachd
Gillian Martin MSP
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Our Reference: 202500492430

Your Reference: Letter from Scottish Environment LINK on marine amendment for Natural Environment Bill

27 February 2026

Dear Calum Duncan,

Thank you for your letter of 03 November 2025 outlining a proposal to introduce a statutory requirement for the publication of a Scotland-specific assessment of Good Environmental Status (GES) through an amendment to the Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill.

I'd first like to express my sincerest apologies for the delay in this response and would like to assure you that the points made in your letter were given careful consideration ahead of the Natural Environment Bill's stage 2 and stage 3 debates.

While I fully recognise the intent behind this proposal, I do not believe that introducing a new statutory requirement of this nature is necessary. In fact, it may risk diverting time and resources away from the delivery and action we all want to see

Scotland already fulfils its obligations to contribute to periodic assessments of GES in UK waters under the UK Marine Strategy, as well as to holistic assessments of the North-East Atlantic prepared by OSPAR. These processes benefit from close collaboration between scientists, experts and institutions across the UK and OSPAR Contracting Parties, ensuring that assessments are scientifically robust, internationally consistent, and at a scale that is most meaningful ecologically.

Moreover, introducing a Scotland-specific assessment of GES, in addition to these existing obligations, would present significant challenges. Much of the existing monitoring, targets and indicators underpinning current GES assessments are designed to serve the marine strategy framework at sub-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

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regional scales. Disaggregating these data for Scottish waters would introduce technical complexity and uncertainty, risking results that are not fully comparable or scientifically robust. This would create a considerable administrative burden without delivering clear additional insight or environmental benefit.

Scottish Ministers are already required to prepare an assessment of the condition of the Scottish marine area, including significant pressures and the impacts of human activity, when developing national or regional marine plans. This assessment provides additional evidence that supports science-based policy and decision-making in Scotland, and this requirement will remain.

It is my view that continuing to ensure that assessments under the UK Marine Strategy, and the closely aligned OSPAR regional seas assessments, fully reflect Scottish data and circumstances offers a more coherent, cost-effective and scientifically robust approach than introducing a parallel Scotland-specific assessment of GES.

As the Bill progresses toward enactment following its approval in Parliament on 29 January, I remain committed to ensuring that Scotland's interests and data continue to be fully reflected in both the UK Marine Strategy and OSPAR processes. Thank you for your ongoing engagement in this area.

Yours sincerely



GILLIAN MARTIN

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