

Recovering

SCOTLAND'S SEAS

Scotland's seas are globally important for marine wildlife, valuable in their own right as well as some of our most economically important resources. However, our seas are the busiest they have ever been with the growth of human activities.

The IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate (SROCC)[1] highlights accelerated rates of ocean warming, acidification, deoxygenation, sea-level rise and extreme weather events as a result of the ocean absorbing excess heat and greenhouse gases produced by human activities. In addition, marine species and habitats are also largely declining or shifting distribution, which has consequences for both natural ecosystems and human activities reliant on natural marine assets. Yet it is the oceans' capacity for supporting life and providing resilience that will be key in our efforts to reverse environmental decline and avert ecosystem collapse.

We need to be bold to combat the triple Global Climate Emergency[2], biodiversity crisis[3] and ocean emergency that we are facing. The oceans must be front and centre of our efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change with large-scale recovery of nature at the core. The spotlight is already on the oceans as we enter the UN Decade of Ocean Science and the UN Decade of Ecosystem Recovery. Now is the time for Scotland to show real global leadership in recovering our marine ecosystems. If not now, when?

[1] https://report.ipcc.ch/srocc/pdf/SROCC_SPM_Approved.pdf

[2] <https://www.gov.scot/publications/global-climate-emergency-scotlands-response-climate-change-secretary-roseanna-cunninghams-statement/>

[3] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

Marine Planning



Ecosystem-based marine plans have the potential to support sustainable development, significantly reduce impacts on the environment and decrease conflict between users. LINK firmly believes that much-needed ecosystem recovery can and should be enabled through effective and ambitious marine planning, providing benefits to the environment, industry and society as a whole. Scotland's National Marine Plan seeks to achieve this as an overarching framework and now more than ever the roll out of Regional Marine Plans in a timely manner are essential to successfully guide development in a more ecosystem-based way, taking better account of local environmental and social considerations.

LINK's priorities are:

- Scottish Government should ensure relevant authorities within all Scottish Marine Regions have the capacity and funding to commence RMP development within 2020 for delivery by 2025;
- The updated National Marine Plan, and all Regional Marine Plans, should integrate ecosystem recovery within development and project decisions, and taking an holistic approach to managing all activities;
- Integrate fisheries management into marine planning;
- Mainstream ecosystem recovery within the planning and licencing system, with marine impacts also be a mandatory consideration within terrestrial planning decisions.

Fisheries



The complexities of managing the impact of fishing activities on a dynamic resource often shared with other countries requires bold vision. The recent dire stock assessment of North Sea cod is the latest in a series of fisheries challenges to be overcome for Scotland to become the world leader it should. Commercial fishing has historically been managed in a silo: as an industry, as separate sectors within the industry and, when it comes to management of activities within MPAs, by separate parts of government. The Future of Fisheries Management discussion is a key opportunity for transformative change that must be grasped, to take a holistic approach to management, ensuring recovery of fish stocks both as a public good and as part of the wider marine ecosystem, and deliver a modernised sustainable fishing industry fit for the future. However, discussions need to move with some urgency if we are to address some of the system failings. Future fisheries policy must be bold and have ecosystem recovery at its heart.

LINK's priorities are:

- Review how fishing opportunities are managed against environmental and social objectives;
- New legislation to deliver better spatial management;
- Apportion a large part of the inshore area to managed low impact fishing activities to support and monitor recovery of vulnerable seabed habitats, including those important for blue carbon;
- Be clear on how fishing activities and patterns that actively contribute to ecosystem restoration as well as protection;
- Roll out of Remote Electronic Monitoring across the entire Scottish fleet to support compliance and deliver fully documented fisheries;
- Commit clearly to best scientific advice when negotiating and setting fisheries quotas;
- Eliminate bycatch, including of protected species

Protection of Priority Marine Features



LINK supports the Scottish Government's work to protect Priority Marine Features outwith MPAs, acknowledging the importance of this approach to complement MPA management. The majority of seabed PMFs most sensitive to seabed pressures, such as bottom-towed fishing gears, are found within 1 nautical mile^[1] of the coast. LINK members believe that a presumption against trawling and dredging within this sensitive inshore area, unless low impact can be demonstrated, should be considered to enable critical PMFs, many of which are fish and shellfish nursery habitats, to recover and thrive.

[1]
http://www.scotlink.org/wp/files/documents/LINKMarine_writtencomment_PMF_SEA_Aug2018_FINAL.pdf

LINK's priorities are:

- Take a progressive spatial approach to support long-term ecological recovery and ecosystem service benefits, including sustainable fishing-related jobs;
- An ecosystem-based strategic approach to protect all PMFs in Scottish waters;
- Integrate PMF protection and recovery into a modernised ecosystem-based planning and fisheries management regime provide greater long-term environmental and socio-economic benefits.



Marine Protected Areas



LINK believes that well-managed ecosystem-based MPAs, in conjunction with wider seas measures, in Scottish seas can:

- Recover ecosystems and increase biodiversity, including fish and shellfish nursery habitats;
- Help reverse species and habitat declines;
- Increase natural resilience to environmental change;
- Support climate change mitigation (e.g. by safeguarding and restoring 'blue carbon' habitats);
- Increase direct and indirect economic benefits for fishing, tourism and other maritime industries;
- Demonstrate good global responsibility and accountability in response to the climate and biodiversity crises.

LINK supports the Scottish Government's commitment to the on-going development of Scotland's MPA network, including the designation of historic MPAs, a deep-sea marine reserve and a further four MPAs for mobile species and seabed habitats. Effective management, monitoring and compliance of activities within MPAs must be an absolute priority in order to realise the wealth of potential benefits they could provide. LINK believes that Scotland's MPAs don't currently do this to the extent that they could.

LINK's priorities are:

- Complete Scotland's MPA network, with effective site-based management plans in place that include precautionary/highly protected measures in all sites and that addresses cumulative impacts;
- Place habitat restoration at the heart of management measures;
- Better resourced monitoring and compliance;
- Integrate with wider seas measures
- Appropriate monitoring within and outside of MPAs to inform assessments of their effectiveness
- On-going review of MPA network coherence.

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