

Scottish Environment LINK

Media Release

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Sustaining Scotland's Seas: A major parliamentary seminar on the future of Scotland's seas



In a major parliamentary seminar to be held today (Thursday 23rd September), Scotland's marine environment groups [1] and coastal community members [2] will be telling an audience of prominent MSPs and stakeholders why a radical new approach to looking after Scotland's seas is urgently needed.

Scotland's seas support 8,000 higher marine species and a myriad of habitats that underpin important economic and social activities: from recreational - diving, sailing, tourism and angling - to industrial - energy generation, oil extraction, shipping, aquaculture and fisheries. However, growing human pressures threaten the health of the sea, precious marine life and the livelihoods of those dependent upon it:

Helen McLachlan, Convener of the LINK Marine Task Force, said: Current management of the coasts and seas around Scotland is fragmented, outdated and unable to take account of local communities' connection with the sea. Several parts of Government deal with marine issues, yet there is no lead body, no overarching marine strategy and no underpinning primary legislation to streamline their work. The system is failing people and our marine environment. It is time to deliver truly sustainable management of our seas with local community involvement.

Only last week, the Prime Minister Tony Blair said 'I believe there are strong arguments for a new approach to managing our seas, including a new Marine Bill' [3].

The Scottish Executive has devolved control of certain matters within 12 nautical miles of shore - including inshore fisheries, aquaculture, coastal management, renewable energy, conservation, pollution, dumping and dredging, marine works and research. They are currently in the process of drafting a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment [4] and are in an excellent position to help secure a sustainable future for Scotland's territorial seas (comprising 53% of Scotland's territorial area), many thousand kilometres of coast and the marine wildlife and coastal communities that rely upon them.

A rescue package for Scotland's seas is desperately needed and only a whole package underpinned by framework legislation, a Marine (Scotland) Act, will deliver healthy seas and safeguard the resources and communities that depend upon them [5]. By the end of today's seminar it is hoped that many MSPs will agree and help ensure the outcome of the recent consultation does all it can to secure a sustainable and healthy future for Scotland's seas.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

[1] Scottish Environment LINK (LINK) is an umbrella body for Scotland's voluntary environmental organisations representing approximately half a million members throughout Scotland. The LINK 'Marine Task Force' consists of the following environmental NGOs working on marine issues in Scotland:

- British Association of Nature Conservationists
- Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
- Marine Conservation Society
- National Trust for Scotland RSPB Scotland
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- WWF Scotland
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

[2] Presentations supporting the LINK Marine Task Force position [5] will be made at the seminar by representatives of Sea Life Surveys in Mull and the Community of Arran Seabed Trust. Statements of support have also been provided by the Fair Isle Marine Environment and Tourism Initiative, Hebridean Marine National Park Partnership, Soil Association, Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust, Sea Life Adventures and the British Sub-Aqua Club.

[3] At a UK level Labour have been committed to a marine bill for a few months. On Tuesday 14th September Tony Blair made his first public statement on the need for a marine bill whilst speaking on the need to tackle Climate Change at the 10th anniversary of His Royal Highness' Business and the Environment Programme.

[4] The 'Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment' consultation run by the Scottish Executive closed at the end of July 2004. The consultation offered stakeholders the opportunity to influence the development of this strategic framework which is currently being drafted.



[5] The Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force, and many coastal stakeholders, believe Scotland's coast and seas need an effective, co-ordinated marine management strategy based on an understanding of how ecosystems work. The only way we will get this is with fundamental reform of how we manage our seas, underpinning the whole package with new framework legislation for the marine environment, a Marine (Scotland) Act. The pieces of the package must include:

1. A Marine Strategy - for inshore seas and associated issues out to 12nm placing local stakeholders and the sea at the heart of decision-making and integrating with UK strategy to 200nm.
2. An identified lead body - a national decision-making 'body' to oversee marine strategic and spatial planning of devolved activities in Scottish waters in co-ordination with a UK body responsible for reserved matters. The Scottish body should have statutory responsibility for the preparation, implementation and evaluation of a marine strategy and spatial plan(s); powers to decide national priorities, co-ordinate sectoral activities, review policy, oversee enforcement of agreed activities, allocate budget, work with UK bodies on reserved issues, collect and exchange information and ensure the active involvement of stakeholders at all levels. This body need not be a new quango, but could be drawn from existing Scottish Executive departments or agencies. It would be responsible to a nominated Scottish Minister who would lead on, champion and co-ordinate marine affairs within Government.
3. Effective Marine Spatial Planning - a hierarchy of plans and policies for Scotland's inshore seas managing the vast range of marine activities and the regulation of proposals for change.
4. Local management - delegating powers and putting in place structures for local decision-making, including input to spatial planning and resource management.
5. Adequate protection for marine species and habitats of national and international importance, encompassing a network of well-managed marine areas protected by law.
6. A duty of care on all bodies whose activities impact upon the marine environment - to protect, manage and enhance marine species, habitats and ecosystems.

Delivery of the above requires the collection and sharing of good marine information founded on robust science; excellent communication to aid sound decision-making, transparency and accountability and allocation of adequate resources to ensure the human and financial capacity is there to implement the marine strategy and spatial planning.

