

Scottish Environment LINK

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday 19th April 2004



Welcome News on the Future of our Seas

Today Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Task Force [1] welcomed the Scottish Executive's public consultation on how to improve management of Scotland's seas.

Scotland's seas support an amazing variety of marine species and habitats, from seabirds, dolphins and basking sharks to deepwater corals and rich estuaries [2]. They represent 75% of Scotland's jurisdictional area and are vital to the Scottish economy. Yet, current management of the seas around Scotland is fragmented and outdated [3].

Furthermore, the health of our seas is suffering from a wide range of problems, from overfishing and damage by the extraction industries, to pollution from shipping and pressures from recreation [4].

"We believe that a radical change is needed in the way we manage Scotland's seas and that the introduction of new primary legislation offers an effective means of achieving this" said Darren Kindleysides, convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Task Force. "The Scottish Executive obviously share our concerns about the future of our valuable marine resources and we applaud them for beginning this important initiative."

LINK's Marine Task Force is calling for new legislation, a 'Marine Act' for shorthand, to introduce the right mixture of powers and tools needed to manage Scotland's marine environment. This would include a long overdue strategy and planning framework for our seas. It would also allow us to balance the needs of the vast array of marine activities, from fishing and aquaculture to leisure activities and wildlife tourism and encourage the involvement of communities and the users of the sea in its management. Rather than adding a legislative burden to those using the sea, it would instead streamline the current confusion of marine legislation that exists and make it more effective.

"We are convinced that new legislation, such as a 'Marine Act', is essential if we are to achieve a sustainable future for Scotland's seas. Other strong seafaring countries such as Australia and Canada have successfully gone down this route - why not Scotland?" added Calum Duncan, Vice-convener of the LINK Marine Task Force.

"We hope that people will take the time to respond to this important consultation and voice their support for primary legislation so that we can secure a healthy and productive future not only for marine wildlife and habitats, but for the people of Scotland who make their living from the sea and the Scottish economy."

- e n d s -

Notes

[1] Scottish Environment LINK (LINK) is the umbrella body for Scotland's voluntary sector environmental organisations which together represent around 500,000 members throughout Scotland. The LINK 'Marine Task Force' consists of the following environmental organisations 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] Scotland's seas support:

" 8,000 species of marine invertebrate, fish, bird and mammal (SNH)

" 24 of the world's 82 species of whale and dolphin (HWDT)

" internationally important seabed habitats including maerl, serpulid worm reefs and deepwater corals

" 33 of the UK's 65 marine Special Areas of Conservation

" 5.2 million breeding seabirds, outnumbering people (5.1 million at the 2001 census) [Seabird 2000 (published April 2004 - project partnership includes JNCC, SNH, RSPB, SOTEAG)

<http://www.jncc.gov.uk/marine/seabirds/seabird2000/>]

" 60% of the UK fishery (Scottish Executive) and

" 32% of the global population of grey seals (Scottish Executive).

[3] Currently in Scotland, there is **no lead marine body, no coherent marine planning framework and no marine strategy**. Without these there is no means to ensure that our seas remain healthy and productive for future generations

Current legislation is fragmented, conflicting and does not support sustainable resource use. Over 85 Acts of Parliament and many separate bodies govern marine activities. Scottish, UK and international competencies are not linked. User groups compete for the same resources and in the meantime habitats and species are threatened while time and money is wasted

There is a lack of accountability. Common access to resources can mean irresponsible use. Currently there are no means of enabling equitable participation of interest groups or structures for local 'ownership' and management.

[4] Some pressures on Scotland's marine environment:

" 16 out of 21 **Scottish fish stocks** are outside their 'safe biological limits' - meaning their populations are in danger of never recovering. Scottish cod fishing could be up to five times more profitable if stocks were allowed to recover [Scottish Executive, 2003].

" Scots flush 340 million items of debris down the toilet every year. In Scotland in 2001, 14% of beach litter came from our own homes, twice the UK average [MCS Beachwatch 2001].

" Escapes of farmed salmon more than quadrupled between 1998 and 2000 (440,000 in 2000 compared to 95,000 in 1998). Farmed salmon escapes now outnumber wild salmon by more than 1000 to 1 [FoE, 2001]

" The estimated nutrient pollution discharged from Scottish fish farms in 2000 was equivalent to almost twice that of the annual sewage discharged by the entire population of Scotland [M.MacGarvin, 2000].

