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## Now is the time to save Scotland's ocean giants

Urgently-needed measures to protect and recover populations of whales, dolphins and basking sharks must not fall victim to administrative delays, warn environmental groups. Two years ago (24<sup>th</sup> July 2012), the Scottish Government received [formal advice](#) recommending four Marine Protected Areas to safeguard some of the largest mammals and fish in our seas, including the world's first MPAs for basking sharks and Risso's dolphins. Despite governmental commitment, progress has stalled and the plans remain on hold.

Meanwhile important management requirements to ensure the population survival of some of Scotland's most loved and visited marine wildlife and habitats have been delayed.

With new Cabinet Secretary Roseanna Cunningham now in charge of marine conservation and planning, environment groups urge the implementation of these important mobile species MPA designations to avoid further delays.

The exciting opportunity to designate the world's first Risso's dolphin and basking shark MPAs, as well as MPAs for minke whales, would make Scotland a world leader in marine conservation, enable greater planning certainty for marine industries and be a large step toward completing a coherent network of protection in Scottish waters.

**Sarah Dolman, Senior policy manager at Whale and Dolphin Conservation** said "There is huge public support for these measures. In December 2012, WDC presented over 36,000 public responses to the Scottish Government calling for whales and dolphins to be protected within Scotland's MPA network. The network is progressing, but we are frustrated at its slow pace. We cannot afford to wait any longer - there are serious management gaps that leave our treasured marine mammals vulnerable in key feeding and calving habitats."

**Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation Scotland for the Marine Conservation Society** said: "Sightings from our dedicated volunteers have helped make MCS's the world's largest basking shark database, evidence used to support the case for a world-first MPA off Scotland's west coast for these gentle giants. Such a safe haven would further bolster Scotland's globally important role as a hotspot for these amazing animals. Promised sites for these and other species and habitats are now overdue to help stem declines in our seas."

**Sam Collin, Marine Planning Officer for the Scottish Wildlife Trust** said "Scotland's seas provide a valuable environment for some of the oceans largest and most charismatic species. It is our responsibility to ensure that these animals are safe and protected from human pressures when visiting our waters. These MPAs will mark an important step forward in marine protection and should not be delayed any further."

**Dr Lauren Hartny-Mills, Science Officer for Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust** said "HWDT research has shown the Hebrides are an important feeding area for minke whales. A network of MPAs that are important for feeding, breeding or upbringing of calves are essential to provide some protection for highly mobile species, such as whales and dolphins, which regularly travel large distances. Progress is needed to implement sustainable management measures and regular monitoring procedures to ensure minke whales have adequate protection in Scottish waters."

**ENDS**

**Pictures and maps available on request. For more information, contact:**

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**Notes/links for editors:**

Scotland has resident and visiting populations of minke whales, basking sharks and Risso's dolphins – which attract tourists to Scotland's coastal communities and are vital parts of Scotland's rich marine ecosystem. The animals face a number of threats from human activities at sea.

The sites recommended for protection by the Scottish Government's advisors are:

*Sea of Hebrides* – for minke whales and basking sharks, tidal fronts and geodiversity

*North East Lewis* – for Risso's dolphins and sandeels, geodiversity

*Southern Trench* – for minke whales, burrowed mud, fronts, shelf deeps, geodiversity

*Shiant East Bank* – for circalittoral sands and mixed sediment communities, Northern sea fan and sponge communities, Shelf banks and mounds, geodiversity

**Timeline:**

The full history of the development of MPAs in Scotland can be viewed here:

<http://www.savescottishseas.org/history-of-marine-protected-areas-in-scotland/>

**2012:** A Scottish Government process invited Third Party Proposals for MPAs to form part of the MPA network. <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork/engagement/140312/thirdparty>

Proposals for three sites were submitted by WDC, HWDT and other groups in 2012.

[http://us.whales.org/sites/default/files/work/wdcs\\_hwdt\\_crru\\_third\\_party\\_proposals\\_final.pdf](http://us.whales.org/sites/default/files/work/wdcs_hwdt_crru_third_party_proposals_final.pdf)

**December 2012:** A petition of 36,000 signatures supporting MPAs for whales and dolphins was presented to the Scottish Government <http://www.savescottishseas.org/news/blog/36000-support-mpas-for-whales-and-dolphins/>

**24<sup>th</sup> July 2014:** Formal advice from the Scottish Government's nature conservation advisor Scottish Natural Heritage recommended the designation of 4 MPAs for whales, dolphins and basking sharks.

[http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned\\_reports/780.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/780.pdf) At the time, environmental groups welcomed the progress: <http://www.savescottishseas.org/news/mpas-doubled-to-tackle-scotlands-sealife-declines/>

Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group - a coalition of environmental charities campaigning to protect and recover Scotland's seas – comprises the following organisations: Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, WWF Scotland, Whale & Dolphin Conservation (<http://www.scotlink.org/public/work/taskforce.php?id=7>) The members' campaign for effective marine planning and well-managed Marine Protected Areas can be accessed via <http://www.savescottishseas.org>