

Environmental groups urge caution on new Marine Plan

Environmental groups have expressed reservations about today's publication of Scotland's first National Marine Plan. Following several years of consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny, the Plan paves the way for a more coordinated approach to developments at sea. A coalition of environmental groups have welcomed the general principles underpinning the Plan, but remain concerned that it supports growth for some sectors which could risk environmental health of the seas.

Calum Duncan, Convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce and Scotland Programme Manager for Marine Conservation Society: "On the whole we are very supportive of the Plan and its purpose of ensuring the sustainable development and stewardship our seas, but the inclusion of targets to expand salmon farming which have not been fully assessed is cause for concern. For the first time in history, planners, communities and industry alike will have a dependable framework to coordinate activity in our increasingly busy seas. It's imperative that sound assessments underpin the direction of the Plan to improve our understanding and ability to monitor interactions between the different sectors. For this reason, marine planning must be well-resourced and implemented swiftly.

We are still extremely concerned that this Plan contains high-level targets for greatly expanding salmon farming along the West coast. We have patiently and consistently argued for their removal, until they have been subjected to environmental assessment. The whole purpose of the Plan is to provide overarching coordination, but until these targets are subject to assessment, Scottish Government cannot confidently secure a sustainable salmon farming industry. Multiple and separate environmental assessments undertaken at a regional level will simply not be able to adequately investigate the combined impacts of a major expansion of salmon farming in Scotland.

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Notes/links for editors:

- The Scottish Government's National Marine Plan contains the following target "with due regard to the marine environment and carrying capacity, support for the industry's target to grow marine finfish (including farmed Atlantic salmon) production sustainably to 210,000 tonnes...by 2020." This represents an increase of approximately 30% see page 49:
- <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00474232.pdf>
- Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce outlined concerns about the need to assess these targets in evidence submitted to the Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment (RACCE) Committee here:
http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_RuralAffairsClimateChangeandEnvironmentCommittee/General%20Documents/se_link_nmp_submission_jan_15.pdf
- Documents detailing the scrutiny of the National Marine Plan by The Rural Affairs Affairs, Climate Change and Environment Committee can be viewed here:
<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/79255.aspx>
- The National Marine Plan related documents are published here:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/seamanagement/national/nmp>
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Timeline

- 2010 Marine Scotland Act enacted: provided legal basis for a National Marine Plan for Scotland
- 2013 draft National Marine Plan public consultation: 16 weeks July-October
- 2013 Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce response to the National Marine Plan consultation:
<http://www.scotlink.org/files/policy/ConsultationResponses/LINKrespNatMarPlanNov2013.pdf>
- 2014 Over 90+ responses to the draft National Marine Plan published. Many commenting the plan does not adequately coordinate development or assess combined impacts of different sectors
- 2015 Scotland's first ever National Marine Plan subject to a 40 day period of review by MSPs at Holyrood: (December 2014 – January 2015)
National Marine Plan published – 27th March 2015

Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce - a coalition of environmental charities campaigning to protect and recover Scotland's seas – comprises the following eight organisations: Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, 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 www.savescottishseas.org