

Media Release

For immediate release

Vital protection for Scotland's seabirds delayed by UK Government

Environment groups urge immediate action

Scottish environment groups have expressed concern that an important consultation on the protection of special places for seabirds has been held back by the UK Government. Earlier this year in July the Scottish Government launched a consultation on 10 marine Special Protection Areas, a requirement under EU law to help safeguard areas crucial for internationally important bird populations.

However, a further five proposed marine SPAs were not included in the consultation as the required agreement of the UK Government had not been provided.

Now Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group has written to the UK Environment Minister, Thérèse Coffey MP, urging her to agree to the Scottish Government consulting on the sites without further delay.

The delayed sites include the seas off St Kilda, the UNESCO World Heritage Site which supports the largest seabird colony in Europe. The wide range of marine birds that would benefit from proposals include puffins, which have seen rapid declines in numbers across Europe and are now classified as Endangered on the IUCN European Red List.

Richard Luxmoore, Senior Nature Conservation Adviser at the National Trust for Scotland said: "The National Trust for Scotland has been monitoring seabird populations on its properties for over 40 years and has recorded alarming declines – over 90 per cent in the case of kittiwakes on St Kilda. Most of these are attributable to problems with their feeding areas at sea. Without effective protection for these birds, our monitoring amounts to little more than a protracted obituary."

Alex Kinninmonth, Head of Marine Policy at RSPB Scotland said: "Seabirds are amongst the world's most threatened group of birds, and with globally significant colonies dependent on the seas around Scotland for survival we have a duty to protect them. Yet right when we should be accelerating seabird conservation efforts, the UK Government appears to have pulled the handbrake.

"It's now time for action and progressing these scientifically credible protected areas would be a clear demonstration of the government's commitment to improving our marine environment and achieving the UK vision for our seas and oceans."

Contact details

Nick Underdown, Marine Policy and Engagement Officer, Scottish Environment LINK
nick@scotlink.org, 07726362727

Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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www.scotlink.org

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(2) The five delayed sites are: Seas off St Kilda, Seas off Foula, Pentland Firth, Outer Firth of Forth and St. Andrews Bay, Solway Firth.

(3) Under the EU Wild Birds Directive member states are legally obliged to classify Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for rare and vulnerable species as well as regularly occurring migratory species.

(4) 15 areas at sea have been identified by Scottish Natural heritage and JNCC as meeting the criteria for SPAs. The 10 sites being consulted on now are wholly within Scottish Territorial Waters, where decision making is the exclusive responsibility of Scottish Ministers. The other five have cross-border and offshore components which, under the Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009, need the agreement of the UK Government, which it has thus far failed to provide.

(5) Map of the proposed 15 marine SPA sites attached.

(6) The letter can be seen [here](#).

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Registered office: 2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth PH2 8BD, T. 01738 630804 email information@scotlink.org
Parliamentary office: 3rd Floor, Gladstone's Land, 483 Lawnmarket, Edinburgh EH1 2NT, T 0131 225 4345
advocacy@scotlink.org