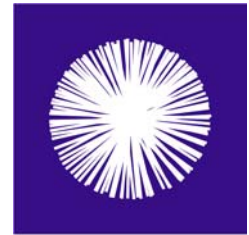


Scottish Environment LINK

Media Release

Wednesday 15th June 2005

Environment groups call for action, not more talk, to protect Scotland's seas



Scottish
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LINK

Real and urgent action is needed to protect Scotland's seas, say the members of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Task Force(1). In response to today's statement by Ross Finnie MSP, the Executive's Environment Minister, Calum Duncan, of the Marine Conservation Society and Convener of the LINK Marine Task Force, said:

"Scotland's seas are crying out for action, not more discussion, to safeguard their future. While we welcome the Minister's overarching goal, we are disappointed that he has not clearly set out the measures he will take to meet this goal, or when they will be introduced. This contrasts markedly to the position taken by the UK Government, which is already committed to a Marine Act that will introduce marine spatial planning(2), leaving the Scottish Executive bobbing in their wake"

Today's statement was made one year after the close of the Executive's consultation on "Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment"(3). In its response to this consultation, the Marine Task Force, and its members, argued for a Marine (Scotland) Bill to deliver a comprehensive network of marine protected areas and a system of Marine Spatial Planning to prevent conflict between sectors in our increasingly congested seas(4).

Lloyd Austin, of RSPB Scotland, and Chair of Scottish Environment LINK, added:

"The Minister's commitment to produce a Marine and Coastal Strategy for Scotland is welcome - and our members look forward to playing their role in its production. However, the Minister should set out, now, that this strategy will deliver his already agreed 2010 targets for marine biodiversity and protected areas(5).

"Moreover, instead of delaying further the Minister should agree to a Marine (Scotland) Act being developed in parallel with Westminster's - and ask the stakeholder group to advise on detail, rather than further delay any decision on the principle."

"In addition, the Minister could use powers already available to begin the process of establishing a marine National park and could also designate trial marine protected areas that could be closely monitored to prove their

worth. It is a disappointment that, after a year of further consideration, no real action is being taken."

Scotland's marine and estuarine environment is our most valuable resource, contributing £14 billion to Scotland's £64 billion GDP, and providing the foundation for important economic and social activities, both industrial (renewable energy, oil extraction, shipping, aquaculture, fisheries) and recreational (diving, sailing, tourism, angling). However, pollution, over-fishing, unchecked coastal development and poor governance threaten the health of the sea, precious marine life and the livelihoods of those dependent upon it.

Calum Duncan, added:

"Scotland has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be world-leader in renewable marine energy, sustainable aquaculture, quality seafood, marine eco-tourism, marine conservation, and to deliver genuinely sustainable fisheries in our inshore waters.

"The proposed Marine Committee must not be a talking shop. It must not waste this opportunity - we urge the Minister to ensure its terms of reference are set so as to deliver a network of marine protected areas and a system of Marine Spatial Planning through the development of a Marine (Scotland) Act."

- - ENDS - -

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EDITOR'S NOTES

1. Scottish Environment LINK (LINK)

LINK is an umbrella body for Scotland's voluntary environmental organisations representing approximately half a million members throughout Scotland and. LINK's Marine Task Force consists of the following environmental NGOs working on marine issues in Scotland:

- Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust
- Marine Conservation Society
- National Trust for Scotland
- RSPB Scotland

- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- WWF Scotland
- Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

2. UK Marine Bill

Following the Queen's Speech on Tuesday 17th May, it was confirmed that a draft Marine Bill will be in the programme of legislation for the new session of the UK Parliament at Westminster. The purpose of such a UK Bill will be to establish a sustainable development framework for planning and managing coastal areas, marine habitats and wildlife. Last week, the Marine Task Force of Wildlife and Countryside Link, Scottish Environment LINK's sister UK organisation, presented an incredible 165,000 pledges of support for a UK Marine Act to 10 Downing Street on World Ocean's Day. While the proposed Westminster legislation will cover reserved matters in Scotland's seas, LINK's Marine Task Force believes a separate Marine (Scotland) Act is needed north of the border to address devolved matters: this should be developed in parallel to (and not subsequent to) the Westminster bill.

3. Developing a Strategic Framework for Scotland's Marine Environment

This marine consultation run by the Scottish Executive closed at the end of July 2004. Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force and a range of other stakeholders have been waiting on an announcement of the outcome of the consultation since September 2004.

4. Marine (Scotland) Act

Since the Scottish Executive controls most activities within 12nm of the Scottish shore, including inshore fisheries, aquaculture, coastal management, renewable energy, conservation, pollution, dumping and dredging, marine works and research. Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Task Force argues for a separate Marine (Scotland) Act to manage Scottish inshore waters in such a way as to ensure they are healthy and productive in perpetuity by delivering:

Adequate protection for marine species and habitats of national and international importance, encompassing a network of well-managed marine areas protected by law. This network should comprise of at least one Marine National Park, further European marine sites, including marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for seabirds, and a new domestic designation of marine protected area to allow protection of marine species and habitats of national importance.

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.

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.

Local management - delegating powers and putting in place structures for local decision-making, including input to spatial planning and resource management.

A duty of care on all bodies whose activities impact upon the marine environment - to protect, manage and enhance marine species, habitats and ecosystems.

5. Targets agreed for 2010

Biodiversity: as part of the European Union, the Scottish Executive is committed to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010. This commitment forms the centrepiece of its Scottish Biodiversity Strategy - and should, therefore, be one of the key environmental objectives of the Marine and Coastal Strategy. As this is a commitment, already agreed at EU level, the Minister could clearly state, now, that the new strategy will include this objective - and measures to achieve it.

Protected areas: at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, in Johannesburg, attended by the First Minister, Jack McConnell, the UK (and the devolved administrations) committed themselves to establishing a comprehensive network of marine protected areas by 2010. As this internationally-agreed commitment already exists, the Minister could clearly state now, that the new strategy will include measures to establish such a network on such a timescale.

