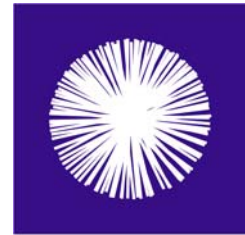


Scottish Environment LINK

Media Release

20th June 2005

Marine Groups Support Plastic Bag Levy to Protect Sea Life



Scottish
Environment

LINK

Environmental groups have voiced support of MSP Mike Pringle's proposed levy on plastic bags, as a means of preventing the unnecessary deaths of some of Scotland's most popular marine wildlife.

Numerous independent scientific studies have shown high concentrations of plastic material, including bags, blocking the guts of 177 marine species, including whales, dolphins, seals, puffins, fulmars and turtles. Some marine species, such as the endangered leatherback turtle, summer visitor to Scottish waters, mistake plastic bags for their normal prey of jelly fish, with deadly results. Many marine species are now affected by the minute toxic particles that plastic items, including bags, are reduced to by photodegradation, leading to a weakening of their immune system.

A rare Cuviers Beaked Whale was washed up dead on Mull last year, its gut completely blocked by compacted bags. In 1998, a leatherback turtle, a species on the IUCN's endangered Red List, was found dead in Galloway with 57kg of plastic bags obstructing its innards. In April 2002, a dead Minke whale in Normandy had 800kg of plastic bags, including UK supermarket bags, in its stomach. The list goes on.

"Last year a total of 5,592 plastic bags were recorded during the MCS Beachwatch survey - that's 2% of all beach litter or one for every 38m of beach surveyed. Mike Pringle's proposed Bill, as supported by LINK since 2003, will certainly reduce the number of windblown plastic bags and play an important role in reducing the impact of discarded litter on Scotland's marine wildlife and habitats," said Calum Duncan, Marine Conservation Society Scottish Officer and Convener of the Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force.

Laura Bateson of WWF Scotland and Scottish Wildlife Trust added "Plastic bags are a real and tragic threat to marine life and it's deeply disturbing to think of the suffering these wild animals face. By reducing the amount of plastic bags that we use and discard in Scotland we can make a real difference in protecting vulnerable marine animals, many of which already face enormous pressures from pollution, shipping and fishing."

- E N D S -

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EDITOR'S NOTES

1 Scottish Environment LINK (LINK) Marine Task Force

Scottish Environment LINK is the network of 36 voluntary sector environment organisations in Scotland. The members of the LINK Marine Task Force include the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust, Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society and WWF Scotland.

2 Although plastic bags are sometimes only a small component of street litter this is due to their mobility. Instead of remaining where dropped, they are blown into trees, hedges, or washed straight into the sewerage system, or into waterways - to end up on beaches and in the marine environment.

3 The everyone campaign -an initiative of Scottish Environment LINK 'must do it' called for Less Landfill (one of six demands) in 2003: ACT NOW: Reduce waste by providing doorstep recycling for every household and by introducing a plastic bag charge. Set a 1% per year reduction target for total waste produced by 2010. More at <http://www.everyonecan.org/mustdoit.html>

4 For more information on Mike Pringle's bill go to www.mikepringlemsp.com

5 **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 is calling for a 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.