



Good management essential to success of offshore SACs

Proposals to set up five new Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in Scotland's offshore waters have been enthusiastically welcomed by members of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce (MTF).

The proposals, announced today, include the largest marine protected area of its kind in Europe and - if well-managed - will help to protect vital elements of Scotland's globally-renowned marine biodiversity as well as forming part of Scotland's emerging Marine Protected Area network.

The proposals comprise of five SACs to the north and west of Scotland. Hatton Bank, Anton Dohrn Seamount, East Rockall Bank, Pobie Bank Reef and Solan Bank Reef are home to a complex variety of deep sea reefs which support ecologically valuable and rare species such as sea slugs, sponges and corals.

These fragile habitats are under threat from a wide range of human activities and climatic pressures. The conservation measures which would form part of effective SAC implementation are an essential part of managing Scotland's seas for the long-term.

MTF members congratulate the scale of the Scottish Government's ambition to propose the SACs, but also urge firm follow-through on the management measures required to make them effective. A strategic process of SAC site management review, already under way for SACs in English waters, has yet to be initiated for any existing Scottish SACs. Environment groups hope these proposals will kickstart the important stage of agreeing good management in consultation with the many interests which value Scotland's marine environment.

Dr Richard Luxmoore (Senior Nature Conservation Adviser) National Trust for Scotland said: "I'm delighted to see these hugely important sites being proposed as Special Areas of Conservation. The key to ensuring their protection in future will be establishing adequate controls on activities that could damage these fragile ecosystems. Although there are many SACs in inshore waters, remarkably few of them have any form of effective protection."

Kara Brydson (Senior Marine Policy Officer) RSPB Scotland said: "These SACs form more pieces of a very important jigsaw. But Scotland's network of Marine Protected Areas will not be complete until we have sites to protect our globally important seabirds when they feed out at sea. While the MPA jigsaw remains incomplete, Scotland risks its title as a leader in sustainable marine management."

Calum Duncan (Scotland Programme Manager), Marine Conservation Society said: "This is a great step towards protecting Scotland's marine biodiversity. These SACs are far offshore and out of sight to most people, but the importance of their protection and recovery cannot be overstated. Our seas are fundamentally interconnected and these offshore reefs form part of a bigger and complex marine ecosystem that we ignore at our collective peril."

ENDS

For more information....

Contact: Nick Underdown, Scottish Environment LINK

Email: nick@scotlink.org

Tel: 0141 317 4144 / 07726362727

PRESS RELEASE

DATE: 2 NOVEMBER 2012

EMBARGO: FOR IMMEDIATE USE



Scottish Environment LINK

Notes for editors:

Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Taskforce comprises of eight organisations: Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust, , Marine Conservation Society, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Ornithologists' Club, Scottish Wildlife Trust WWF Scotland, Whale & Dolphin Conservation (WDC).

The Scottish Government press release detailing the proposals can be found at:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/11/SAC02112012>

Further information on Hatton Bank, Pobie Bank Reef, Solan Bank Reef, East Rockall Bank and Anton Dohrn Seamount SACs can be found on the JNCC website: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4534>