

MARINE BULLETIN 4 – NATIONALLY IMPORTANT MARINE AREAS
September 2007

“All of the sea’s uses depend fundamentally, and in an essentially inter-connected way, on the quality of the marine environment.”
 Scottish Parliamentary Marine Inquiry

Incomplete marine protection

Scotland’s coasts and seas are amongst the most diverse in the world. Our marine wildlife is worth protecting in its own right, and is also the keystone for economic activities like fishing and tourism. However, human activities are destroying Scotland’s unique and beautiful marine environment, and with it the natural resources we all rely on.



Protecting areas of sea, where key habitats and species are allowed to flourish, and human activities may be restricted to varying degrees, can play an important role in improving the health of the marine environment.

Currently less than 0.001% of UK waters is fully protected from damaging activities, and less than 1% has any kind of protection.

The existing legal tools for protecting areas of sea have serious shortcomings. Only five marine species and eight habitat types can be protected with European marine sites, and it can be difficult to restrict activities that are damaging the sites as a whole.

Why new sites are needed

Scotland needs a new, more comprehensive network of Nationally Important Marine Areas (NIMAs) for several reasons:

- ❑ to protect nationally important species like common skate, basking shark and black guillemot; habitats like flameshell reefs, deepwater muds and seagrass beds and landscape scale features like sea lochs that are not adequately protected
- ❑ to meet international commitments by 2010, including that for an ‘*ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas*’
- ❑ to help regenerate our seas, bolstering their productivity and resilience and ensuring that they can continue to support economic activity and social well-being.

This network would consist of areas:

- ❑ **representative** of Scotland’s key marine habitats
- ❑ of **exceptional biodiversity**
- ❑ to protect **nationally important** marine wildlife
- ❑ to protect **feeding, spawning, mating** and **migration** sites.

It would complement the Natura 2000 suite of sites designated under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives. Each area would be chosen according to ecological criteria and managed according to its individual needs. Some areas might make little difference to human activities taking place in them, while others might need more protection from damage.

How NIMAs would work

Nationally Important Marine Areas will work best as part of a complete 'toolbox' of improved marine planning and management, as recommended in March 2007 by the Ministerial Advisory Group on the Marine and Coastal Strategy (AGMACS). We believe a new system of NIMAs must include seven important elements:

1. sites are selected by *agreed scientific criteria alone* and managed according to ecological need
2. socio-economic factors should play a role in management decisions and when choosing between similar alternative sites but not during the *initial scientific site selection* process
3. there must be tools to monitor and enforce management according to the *ecological needs* of the site
4. expert ecological advice should play a key role in all stages of criteria setting, site selection and management
5. sites should be in place to meet Scotland's *international obligations by 2010*
6. the network should operate within a new *marine spatial planning* system designed to deliver genuine sustainable development
7. there should be *local involvement*, where possible and appropriate, in site management

Features of historic and geological importance also require better site-based protection.

This bulletin is the fourth by the Scottish Environment LINK Marine Task Force, comprising the organisations below that are signatories to this bulletin.

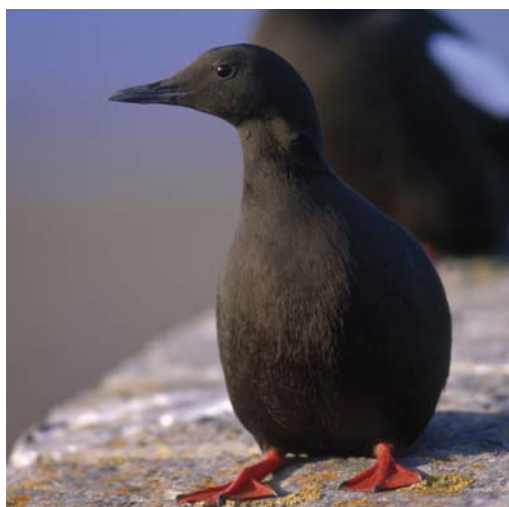
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The way forward



The LINK Marine Task Force urges the Scottish Government to:

- ❑ develop a Scottish Marine Bill with the environment at heart, complementing the UK Marine Bill
- ❑ establish through the Scottish Bill a statutory system of Marine Spatial Planning that furthers the protection, restoration, enhancement and sustainable use of the sea and its resources
- ❑ establish by 2010 a network of NIMAs, selected and managed on sound ecological grounds
- ❑ develop a Scottish list of Nationally Important Marine Features to help inform designation of NIMAs

