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CONSERVATION

SEABIRDS

The *BBC News* website reported that a study by RSPB Scotland proposed creating seven initial sites to be designated as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which include sandbanks located off the Firth of Forth, an area of the Pentland Firth and the sea north of St Kilda. The recommended areas were first identified by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and are all considered vital feeding areas used by many tens of thousands of seabirds.

The original deadline to create SPAs to try to protect seabird numbers was set in the early 1980s and further strengthened by the Marine (Scotland) Act in 2010. Although the Scottish Government is set to designate 33 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), the RSPB feel that not enough has been done and that this lack of action means that standards have not been met. RSPB Scotland further claims that the government is in danger of breaking conservation legislation if no action is taken. RSPB Scotland said that according to the government's own figures, of the 11 seabird species for which a trend can be calculated, nine have shown sustained declines since 1996. Arctic skua have collapsed by 80%, Arctic tern by 72% and kittiwakes by 68%.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "With numerous proposed windfarm developments 'queuing up' in the areas that overlap key feeding sites for birds, we cannot wait any longer. The best feeding sites for seabirds must be given the protection the government's own scientists say they deserve."

In addition to the proposed SPA sites, RSPB Scotland will propose a second set of sites later this year that, along with MPAs, are necessary for building an ecologically coherent network of protected areas for seabirds [see MARINE].

A government spokesman said: "The Scottish Government is committed to ensuring protection for our seabirds including the completion of work to identify marine SPAs under the EU Birds Directive. We are confident that completion of marine SPA designations will deliver adequate site protection for seabirds. We consulted on 33 Nature Conservation MPA proposals which will provide valuable protection for our marine environment, including seabirds, in 2013. Six of these would include national protection for black guillemot in the marine environment, while several of the other MPA proposals include protection for habitats or species such as sand eels that support seabirds."

NATIONAL PARKS

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) have called for seven new national parks to be established in Scotland. SCNP chairman Ross Anderson said: "We are anxious to get over the message that there is unfinished business in Scotland. Along with APRS, we have prepared a well-argued strategy for the establishment of seven more national parks to join the two existing national parks covering the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & The Trossachs."

Charles Millar, of APRS, said: "As a nation we are currently near the bottom of the world league in terms of our number of national parks. We

believe it would be a fitting tribute to the legacy of John Muir if the Scottish Government set the wheels in motion to create some new national parks to protect and promote more of Scotland's magnificent landscapes and help regenerate some of the more economically fragile parts of rural Scotland."

The groups claimed the Scottish Government had rebuffed their calls, despite a 2011 SNP manifesto promise to work with them 'to explore the creation of new national parks.'

The Scottish Government said it recognised the importance of national parks to conservation, tourism and the wider economy and had invested heavily in the existing parks. A spokesman said: "The report does not make a compelling business case to establish new national parks, nor does it provide robust evidence of broad-based community and local authority support for such proposals. The Scottish Government's priority, especially in the current economic climate, is to focus support on Scotland's existing national parks and the contribution they are making to meet local needs and national objectives."

The charities argued that Ben Nevis, Glen Coe and Black Mount should become a National Park along with a Coastal & Marine National Park centred around Mull; also Galloway; Glen Affric; Harris and Wester Ross. They also said that the Cheviots should be designated a National Park as an extension to the Northumberland National Park in England.

See: www.rewilding.org/rewildit/images/Unfinished-Business-a-national-parks-strategy-for-scotland.pdf

SEA EAGLES

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported on the NFU Scotland's proposed action plan for sea eagles [Apr 14]. It said that the action is based on the results of a NFU Scotland survey completed by 103 NFU Scotland members. 66% of them claimed their farm business had been negatively affected by sea eagles although the report doesn't provide any quantitative evidence to support those claims. Respondents were asked whether it was adult or juvenile eagles that were having an impact; the results varied, although the report doesn't provide any quantitative evidence to support the claims.

The respondents were asked to document the scale of the impacts (*i.e.* how many lambs were lost *per year* to sea eagles) with a reported average of 40 lambs *per year per* negatively affected respondent. However, losses to other factors, such as weather and disease, were not eliminated as the cause of death.

Respondents were then asked about the impact of sea eagles on other biodiversity. The negative effect of sea eagles on other biodiversity ranges from 'very negative,' 'negative' and 'very positive', while others 'did not know'. One person said there was no impact. There is no quantitative data to support these claims, although qualitative data (anecdotal remarks) were given at meetings and included reported impacts on golden eagles, mountain hares, lapwings, curlews, black grouse, otters and rabbits. A section on the impact of sea eagles on the farmers' 'emotional well-being' is included. In a section on the 'positive opportunities' that the sea eagles provide, 80% of the negatively impacted respondents didn't think there were any.

Andrew Bauer of NFU Scotland said that however successful the reintroduction had been, it had come at a growing cost to those keeping sheep in some of the most economically fragile parts of Scotland. He said: "We believe the recommendations [the action plan] contains can secure a sustainable co-existence between sheep farmers and sea eagles."

Access to the action plan is restricted to members only on the NFU Scotland website. See: www.raptorpersecutionscotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/nfus-sea-eagle-action-plan-march-2014.pdf

- *The Herald* reported that a photograph of a sea eagle carrying off a lamb was published on the online *Kilchoan Diary*. Ricky Clark, based on the Ardnamurchan peninsula, said that there were 20 eye-witnesses to the event. Four mature sea eagles and a juvenile were in the area. The photograph has led some farmers to claim it is proof that sea eagles regularly take lambs from fields. Mr Clark said: "From its pelvis down, much of the lamb had been eaten so it was clearly dead. But I have no idea whether it was still alive when the eagle got it. That's the million dollar question."

Ross Lilley, of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), said: "We acknowledge that sea eagles can be opportunistic feeders and will take some live lambs in some years in some locations, as part of a varied diet. However, two detailed studies have found no evidence of wholesale predation of live lambs. Most lambs are taken as carrion with occasional live lambs taken, which can have a significant impact on individual farmers and crofters."

Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland, said: "Many west coast sheep farmers are concerned that the long-term success of the Scottish sea eagle reintroduction will come at a cost to them. The current scientific evidence on sea eagle ecology in Scotland shows only small numbers of live lambs are killed by sea eagles, although some farm businesses may be impacted more than others." He said that RSPB Scotland was committed to find sustainable ways for the birds and farmers to co-exist.

- A sea-eagle chick has successfully hatched on an island on Loch Maree in Wester Ross. The nest at Loch Maree has been regularly used by a pair of sea eagles for the past 16 years, and SNH installed a remote camera there last year. A further nest has been discovered in the Loch Broom area, containing the first chick recorded in the region for over 100 years.

PINE MARTENS

The *BBC News* website reported that a study by SNH and the Vincent Wildlife Trust found that pine martens have re-colonised three sites south of the Central Belt – the Upper Tweed Valley, Annandale and Eskdalemuir – having been absent from most of the area for nearly 200 years.

Populations recovered in Scotland in the second half of last century, and are now established in most areas north of the Central Belt, including the northern fringes of Glasgow. The species is still rare in the UK and absent from most of England and Wales. In 1988, the species was given full legal protection.

A small number of pine martens were reintroduced to the Galloway Forest in the early 1980s, but the new arrivals are not thought to have spread from this group, which has remained in isolation. The new groups of pine martens have probably originated from a 'combination of natural spread and deliberate releases.'

Rob Raynor, of SNH, said: "At present, re-colonisation of the new areas is still at an early stage, but if breeding populations do establish

successfully, pine martens will probably expand throughout southern Scotland and south into northern England."

GLEN AFFRIC DRAGONFLIES

A survey carried out in 2013 of the Glen Affric and Loch Bran Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) sites has shown that they are amongst the top four sites in the Highlands for a wide range of dragonflies and damselflies. The survey found 12 species, with evidence that ten of them are breeding. Three are classified as being vulnerable or rare. Both sites are managed by Forestry Commission Scotland and SNH.

RED KITES

The Herald reported that a pair of red kites has nested near Cawdor Castle in Nairnshire – the first to attempt breeding in the area since the 1800s.

FAVOURABLE CONDITION

SNH reported that 78.8% of natural features on protected sites are in favourable condition, a slight rise compared with last year. However, the report said that there has been a marked increase in the proportion of natural features which are being adversely affected by invasive species: "so much so that this is now the main pressure on natural features; 19.3% of all negative pressures identified are related to the effects of invasive species. This includes both non-native species, such as rhododendron in woodlands, and native species, such as whins (gorse) encroaching on to grassland habitats."

CHOUGH SURVEY

A survey has begun to assess the current numbers of chough in Scotland. Choughs are found in a small area of south west Scotland, with 90% concentrated on Islay. Scottish fieldwork will cover Islay, Colonsay, Jura and parts of Dumfries & Galloway.

The population is believed to number around 60 pairs after years of decline. 14 pairs are thought to have been lost between 2002 and 2012. Researchers are particularly concerned about the survival rates of young birds in their first year. Variations in weather and food supply could be having an impact on the survival of the young choughs.

The research is part of a UK study by RSPB, SNH and the Scottish Chough Study Group.



FARMING

CAP REFORM

The Herald reported that NFU Scotland has given its full support to UK Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) plans to confront the European Commission over the crop diversification element of new CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform requirements [May 12].

NFU Scotland has prepared a briefing on the impact of the so-called 'three crop rule' in Scotland and submitted it to Owen Paterson, the DEFRA secretary of state, to support his effort for this greening measure to be reviewed. NFU Scotland has consistently argued against crop diversification as being suitable or appropriate for Scotland. A primary reason for its inclusion in the greening requirements of the reform package was as a means of combating monoculture, an issue in some regions of the EU, but not in Scotland.

Nigel Miller, of NFU Scotland, said: "We have consistently highlighted the damage that crop diversification requirements could wreak on arable production here in Scotland and we fully support

the secretary of state in his efforts to have this nonsensical element of CAP reform reviewed at the earliest opportunity. Its impact will be considerable. The 'three crop rule' proposed by Europe will force Scottish growers away from established markets like malting barley, and instead of being market-focussed in the crops they grow, look to plant other crops simply to secure the greening element of the support available.

"For Scotland, weather pressures at harvest and during sowing periods are another factor which often dictates what crops our growers can produce. In the northern and more upland parts of Scotland, crop choice is limited with spring barley at the core of production, underpinning our world famous whisky industry. These specialist malting barley growers add significant value to the economy and the ecology of Scotland and for European rules to force them into growing other crops is a nonsense."

He said that the three crop requirement, when compared to more traditional crop rotations, will fail to deliver benefits and will not add diversity to an already mixed landscape.

- The Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment Committee (RACCE) wrote in a letter to the Scottish Government that the allocation of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments to Scotland's farmers and crofters should be distributed more fairly, and that additional support is needed for hill farmers.

The committee called for the establishment of three payment regions in Scotland, if an increase in coupled payments targeted at hill farmers is not possible. This would ensure that farming continues to be sustainable in the most challenging parts of the country. The letter stressed the need for farming and crofting to become greener and more sustainable and recommended that a simple carbon audit be carried out by every farmer and crofter in receipt of CAP funding within this period of the policy.

The committee also heard concerns that the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS) may not be achieving the desired outcomes. Instead, it recommended that the transition to an Area of Natural Constraint (ANC) scheme takes place as soon as possible. LFASS is required to evolve into an ANC support scheme from 2017. Agricultural land designated as having natural constraints may be eligible for support to encourage continued use of that land. Roughly the same amount of land in Scotland is likely to be designated ANC as has been LFASS.

- It has now been confirmed that Scotland can couple up to 13% of its budget to headage-based schemes targeting actual farming activity – a rise from the current 8%. This was firmly ruled out last month, with the overall shift towards area-based payments [Apr 14]. Scotland's CAP budget was to be used for flat-rate payments to vast tracts of unproductive hill ground; extra coupling would direct support back towards farmers actually keeping animals on the hills.

FOCUS FARMS

The Scottish Government's *Farming for a Better Climate* programme has been awarded a further £100,000. The number of Focus Farms will be increased from four to eight [Nov 13]. The programme also provides farmers with practical advice from Scotland's Rural College on adapting to changing climate through better soil management and field drainage.

Scotland's Rural College's new Carbon Footprint calculator was also launched. The free online tool, called AgRECalc, allows farmers to estimate their resource use and greenhouse gas emissions to reduce environmental impact.



WOODLAND

NATIVE WOODLANDS

In a joint letter to *The Herald*, the heads of eight conservation organisations wrote in response to articles and letters debating the approach to expansion and regeneration of native forests by various conservation and environmental bodies [May 14]: "We are all unified in the view that the enhancement, expansion and reconnection of native woodlands is among the most important of current conservation imperatives. We know that native species and habitats are right now facing very real and present threats to their continued existence, and this crisis is only going to further intensify with growing pressures such as climate change, economic and build development and conflicting land use issues.

"The ground-breaking *State of Nature* report published last year – a stock-take and health check of our of our native wildlife compiled by 25 wildlife organisations – revealed that 60% of species studied have declined over recent decades, and more than one in ten of all the species assessed are under threat of disappearing from our shores altogether. Some of the most charismatic icons of our native woodland, including Scotland's pinewoods, as well as capercaillie, wildcat, twinflower, the shining guest ant, timberman beetle, some rare tooth fungi and green shield-moss, are all nationally rare or scarce.

"There is a need to make our native habitats as resilient as possible in order to help them and the species they support from drifting towards national extinction, and we need to do this as a matter of urgency. Of course, any such restoration must be done sympathetically and sensitively in the appropriate places using the right species of the right provenance, and based on all the latest peer reviewed and best science. But none of this removes or negates the imperative. We are united in our view that much of our wildlife, and that found in native woodlands in particular, is in dire trouble and it needs our help to restore it."

ANCIENT WOODLAND

The Woodland Trust Scotland has launched a project with partners RDI Associates Ltd to work with woodland owners in both the Great Glen & Three Firths, and the Cairngorms & Hinterland. 1,600 hectares of planted ancient woodland in each area will be restored in a four-year project. The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a total of £1.9m to ten such projects across the UK.

Scott Petrie from Scottish Land & Estates said: "Restoring ancient woodland can be a win-win situation for landowners because it delivers widespread environmental benefits as well as offering benefits for their business. Sensitive restoration work can be combined with activities including producing wood fuel and managing woodland for game and forestry."

LOCH ARKAIG PINEWOODS

The Achnacarry, Bunarkaig & Clunes Group, together with Trees for Life, are to buy 2,683 acres of woodland from Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland. The Caledonian pinewoods, at Glen Mallie and South Loch Arkaig to the west of Loch Lochy and the Great Glen, will be restored. The *BBC News* website reported that the woodlands were damaged by fire during commando training in World War Two.

COMMERCIAL PLANTING

The *BBC News* website reported that the forestry and timber industry body, Confor, has said not enough trees are being planted now to meet expected demand for wood in 50 to 100 years

time. Confor forecast a shortage of 60 million cubic metres of timber.

Stuart Goodall of Confor said that not planting new trees now would create a 'time lag.' He said: "A lot of trees were planted in the 20th century and then it stopped about 1990 and we've hardly planted anything since. What that creates is a time lag because trees take about 35 to 40 years to grow. We are going to see the effect of that from about the 2030s onwards."

Confor said the Scottish Government was committed to planting 148,263 acres (60,000 ha) of commercial forestry by 2022. However, it said there should be a further commitment after that date to planting 14,826 acres (6,000 ha) every year until 2042.

Cameron Maxwell, from FC Scotland, said: "We have got good levels of supply coming for the next 20 years plus. It is a question of what to do beyond the 2040s when the increase we have seen starts to reduce and falls away." He said that most timber available for harvesting in the next 40 years would come from private forests.

CENTENARY WOOD

The Woodland Trust Scotland is working in partnership with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to create Scotland's First World War Centenary Wood at Dreghorn in the Pentland Hills. Dreghorn is one of four native memorial woodlands planned across the UK.

Over the next four years more than 50,000 trees on including oak, birch and rowan will be planted on the Ministry of Defence estate land that has been for training for more than a century. 40 hectares of native woodland will be created to extend and buffer existing woods on the site. Sainsbury's will be partnering the Woodland Trust to deliver the project.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SEA-LICE

John Robins, of Animal Concern, made a Freedom of Information request to find out what information on the interaction between sea-lice at salmon farms and wild salmon and sea trout populations had been given to government ministers by their scientific advisors in the last three years. 17 relevant documents were found but, despite recognising the public interest in disclosing this information, the Scottish Government refused to hand these over to Mr. Robins on the grounds that doing so might deter government scientists from providing ministers with 'similar frank advice on this and other topics in future.'

Animal Concern has now called on the government to review the decision to withhold this information and if the government continues to refuse to release the documents, a complaint will be made to the Freedom of Information Commissionaire.

John Robins said: "Once again the Scottish Government appears to be covering up for the mainly Norwegian owned salmon farming industry in Scotland. If Government ministers knew of the link between sea-lice infestations on salmon farms and the decline in wild salmon and sea trout populations then their failure to act on that information is an extremely serious matter which calls into question their suitability to hold public office. Quite frankly, the Scottish Government is far too close to the aquaculture industry and does more to protect salmon farmers than to protect our environment, our wild fish stocks and our tourist industry from the damage

caused by floating factory fishfarms. This is also by no means the first time the Scottish Government has refused to comply with freedom of information legislation. Like it or not, Alex Salmond and his ministers live in an era of open and accountable government and they cannot withhold information which might embarrass them or controversial industries they are closely associated with."

John Robins claims that Dr Richard Shelton, former head of the Scottish Government's Freshwater Fisheries Laboratory, has stated that he and his colleagues have known since 1989 that salmon and sea trout populations on the west coast of Scotland are being adversely effected by sea-lice from salmon farms. This has never been publicly accepted by the Scottish Government.

SHETLAND FISHFARM

The Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation (SSPO) has expelled Hjaltland Sea Farms because it had been importing smolts to Shetland from Norway without putting them in quarantine. The SSPO said the practice was legal but against the voluntary code for the industry.

Hjaltland, owned by Grieg Seafood, is based in Shetland and operates sites in Shetland and Skye. It rears more than a third of the farmed salmon in Shetland and processes more than 60% of the islands' total production.

Scott Landsburgh of SSPO said: "The importation of smolts from a country with lower health status without undertaking a quarantine period is strictly against the Code of the Good Practice for fishfarming. The potential consequences of bringing in smolts without quarantine are exceptionally serious for the whole Scottish industry."

ORKNEY FISHFARM

Orkney Islands Council voted to approve the Scottish Seafarms fishfarm in Gairsay Sound between the island of Wyre and the north-east of the Orkney mainland, reversing its previous decision [Apr 14].

Fiona Matheson, of the Orkney Fisheries Association (OFA), said: "OFA are very disappointed that procedural inexperience has led to a U-turn. They have politically aligned themselves with big business against their indigenous fishermen." She said that OFA would be objecting to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency over the decision. OFA said that the local authority should now develop a planning policy that better protects island fishermen.

ELECTRO-FISHING

The Scottish Government is to introduce new licensing arrangements, by creating a specific additional authority, with tougher and more enforceable conditions to minimise the risk of illegal electro-fishing [Jan 14]. This initiative will require anyone involved in the razor clam fishery to make a specific application for an authorisation allowing them to prosecute the fishery through legal and sustainable means.

Concerns have been raised with Marine Scotland about the impact that electro-fishing may have on razor fish stocks and the wider marine ecosystem around the Scottish coast. It is legal to fish or dive for razor clams, but the practice of electro-fishing by passing an electric current into the seabed is against the law. Vessels will be inspected by Marine Scotland fishery officers to ensure that equipment capable of electro-fishing is not installed and checks will be made by the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that all necessary diving and safety authorisations are in place prior to a razor fish licence being issued.

There are approximately 40 Scottish vessels currently fishing legally for razors. In 2013, 897.3

tonnes of razors were landed into Scotland, with a value of £3.1m. Since May 2010, eleven vessels have been issued with Fixed Penalty Notices of up to £2,000 (the current maximum) for electro-fishing. Fishing using electricity was banned in the EU in 1998.

SHELLFISH

Marine Scotland Science published the Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 2013. Industry trends within the mussel, Pacific oyster, native oyster, queen scallop and scallop species sectors are shown. The production tonnage of mussels rose by 8% from 6,277 tonnes in 2012 to 6,757 tonnes in 2013. The figure was up on the previous year, even though high toxin levels caused some firms to suspend production voluntarily for several months. Shetland accounted for 4,337 tonnes of mussels, or 64% of Scotland's total.

Mussel and Pacific oysters remained the main species produced in terms of both value and tonnage. Pacific oyster shells production decreased by 30% from the 2012 total, although Pacific oyster production for on-growing has significantly increased (95%) from 3,190,000 shells in 2012 to 6,216,000 shells in 2013.

Native oyster production dropped from 317,000 to 260,000 shells in 2013 but the survey found demand for the species continued to be high.

The industry employs a total of 333 people; the overall estimated value of the industry was £8.9m in 2013, an increase of 0.2m from the 2012 total. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/marine/fish-shellfish/FHI/surveys

MACKEREL QUOTA

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a pilot project is being introduced this summer which will allow small fishing vessels to catch a percentage of Scotland's mackerel quota [Sep 13]. Traditionally, mackerel has been caught by larger pelagic trawlers operating out of the north east and Shetland. 1,300 tonnes (less than 1%) from the quota has been allocated to vessels less than ten metres in length. Any quota not taken up will be handed back to the larger trawlers. Duncan Macinnes, of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said that Western Isles vessels would develop a small, localised, selective fishery with no discards. The trial is the idea of the Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group.

DISCARDS & WILDLIFE

Strathclyde University studied the EU's decision to stop 'discards,' designed to regulate strict quotas on how much fish the fleet can land. The changes, being brought in from next year, are designed to improve fish stocks. The study shows that landing the currently discarded fish can have an adverse effect on seabirds and marine mammals, without improving fish stocks.

Professor Mike Heath said: "Wildlife everywhere capitalises on waste from human activity, and discarded fish are food for a wide range of seabirds, marine mammals, seabed animals and other fish. Therefore, banning discards of fish could have unintended effects on the ecosystem."

Dr Robin Cook said: "Our results highlight the importance of considering the broader ecosystem consequences of fishery management. Policy changes to reduce discards affect the food web and, without careful consideration, may dissipate or negate intended benefits. Inflating landing quotas to accommodate the entire catch is an inadequate solution with few conservation benefits. On the other hand, the effective reductions in harvest rates resulting from changes in fishing practices to eliminate the

capture of unwanted fish can deliver conservation benefits, especially in heavily exploited systems. These ecological effects need to be considered alongside the practical, societal and economic issues in developing a sustainable policy."

The study suggests changing fishing practices so that unwanted fish are no longer caught in the first place. This would have 'dramatic' effects on the entire ecosystem, with major benefits for birds, mammals, and fish stocks.

The *BBC News* website reported that Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said: "There does, in recent years, appear to be a most interesting correlation between declines in the breeding success of our precious seabirds that matches closely with the quite staggering reductions in fishing effort over the last decade or so. Our fishermen have also been using increasingly selective gear in recent years to reduce discards, which has further compounded the impact."

The Scottish Government said that ending the practice of throwing healthy, dead fish back into the sea would bring environmental benefits. A spokesman said: "Scottish whitefish fishermen are already landing more fish, but discarding less – with overall discards of cod, haddock and whiting reduced from 47% of catch in 2007 to 18% in 2012, whilst landings have increased by 6,056 tonnes. We will consider the report's findings, although we have no evidence that this is having an adverse impact on wildlife."

A spokeswoman for the European Commission fisheries commissioner said: "It is well known that species of seabirds such as herring gulls and fulmars have grown accustomed to feeding on discards and their populations have increased significantly. Undoubtedly such species will be impacted in the short term as a result of the landing obligation. But recent research carried out by scientists from Plymouth University in collaboration with the RSPB has given clear indications that such species are very resilient and should adapt by switching to alternative food sources over time."

The study was published in the journal *Nature Communications*.



MARINE

MPAs

A Scottish Government report, *Planning Scotland's Seas. Possible Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas. Analysis of Consultation Responses* has been published [Jul 13]. The independent analysis reports that over 99% of 14,703 respondents to a public consultation support the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Scotland's seas [see CONSERVATION].

As well as support for the proposals for a network of MPAs, there was a strong response in favour of greater protection for whales, dolphins and seabirds with an increased focus on the recovery of marine species and habitats.

Scientific advice to ministers from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has also been published. SNH is recommending 17 MPAs in territorial waters (within 12 nautical miles of the coast) and JNCC recommends a further 16 MPAs in offshore waters. Together with existing EU designations, such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) with marine elements, these could form Scotland's MPA network.

SNH Commissioned Report No. 749: The distribution of maerl and other coarse sediment proposed protected features within the South Arran pMPA – a data review

to inform management options; Commissioned Report No. 746: Biological analyses of underwater video from proposed marine protected areas, renewable energy sites and spoil grounds around Scotland.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-consultation; www.snh.gov.uk/mpa-advice; www.jncc.gov.uk/scottish-mpa-consultation; www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00448890.pdf

DALGETY BAY

The *BBC News* website reported that the delayed publication of a study on radioactive contamination at Dalgety Bay in Fife, by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Radiation in the Environment (COMARE), has been published [Feb 14].

The report said that it is unacceptable that the UK does not have comprehensive records of land potentially contaminated with radiation; the failure meant such sites pose an unknown risk to the population. COMARE said that the problem at Dalgety Bay posed a potential risk to public health and could get worse unless action was taken.

The report recommended that the Scottish Government should consider building an offshore barrier on the affected coastline.

It also recommended that children should not dig on the beach, additional warnings should be posted at the site and further research should be carried out into the effect of the contamination. The report said that a lack of records of the amount of radioactive material brought onto the site meant that it was not possible 'to determine the radioactivity remaining or to estimate the longevity or magnitude of the associated hazard.'

The committee said it was 'unlikely that there is a current significant risk posed by airborne contamination' but that more work was needed to determine the risk posed by skin contact, particularly for young children.

Scotland's Public Health minister, Michael Matheson, said: "The report confirms that it is very unlikely that there is a link between elevated rates of particular cancers at Dalgety Bay and the radioactive contamination. This is welcome, and I hope it offers some measure of reassurance to the community of Dalgety Bay. Nonetheless, the report does conclude that the contamination poses a public health risk, particularly through possible skin contact and ingestion. While the warning signs and access restrictions applied at the beach should minimise these risks, these measures cannot be permanent. The report makes a number of important recommendations about managing this in the long term, including that effective remediation of the affected area is undertaken as soon as possible. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has been working with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) on the development of remediation options, even while the report remained unpublished, and so I am expecting the MoD to start to implement a long term solution shortly."

Gordon Brown MP said: "There has been a dereliction of duty. There should have been immediate action on the report not its suppression for months on end. I want an explanation of why no action was taken immediately on child health and on advising urgent action on cleaning up the area."

A Scottish Government spokesman said: "The delay in publishing the report is extremely regrettable, and demonstrates the MoD's ongoing lack of consideration for the community of Dalgety Bay."

An MoD spokesman said: "The advice from Public Health England, formerly the Health Protection Agency, has consistently been and following consideration of this report, continues to be, that the risk to the local community at Dalgety Bay from the presence of radium is very low. The government is committed to ensuring that those

living locally continue to receive the best possible advice which is why we have worked closely with COMARE to ensure the report's findings are based on the most comprehensive and up-to-date information available. Over the last two decades the MoD has worked closely with SEPA, the Scottish Government and the Dalgety Bay Forum to manage the site so that the local community can continue to safely use the bay. A report setting out remediation options was published earlier this year and next month the MoD will publish a long term solution for the bay, setting out how all parties can best manage the site in the future."

MARINE INVASIVES

The Firth of Clyde Forum, in partnership with SNH, has published guidance which gives marine businesses and other marine site managers easy-to-follow procedures for creating a biosecurity plan. The plan will then help to reduce the threat of moving and introducing new species to their site. The guidance, along with a review of marine biosecurity best practice literature, was produced by SAMS Research Services Ltd.

17 alien species are now established in Scottish waters. The Firth of Clyde Forum, in partnership with SNH, has also created a website to which photographs can be uploaded for identification and for reporting marine species throughout Scotland. If the species is identified as being of high concern, then it will automatically be prioritised for action by the authorities.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/policy-and-guidance/guidance-documents/document/?category=Guidance&topic_id=1628, www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2126, www.clydeforum.com/projects/invasive-species

MARINE MAP

SEPA is undertaking a four week survey in its vessel, *Sir John Murray*. Loch Linnhe and Loch Tuath in Argyll will be surveyed, as well as Skye and the Western Isles. Data and samples will be collected to gauge the health and ecological condition of coastal water bodies. 3D maps of the various habitats and physical features found on the seabed will be created. A high definition underwater camera system will be used for environmental monitoring.

UNUSUAL SIGHTINGS

The carcass of a beluga whale was washed up at Lunan Bay in Angus. The species, normally seen in the Arctic, is the first to be seen in Scotland for 40 years.

- Five basking sharks were spotted off the island of Coll this month, earlier than usual.

SEASIDE AWARDS

The Herald reported that a record number of 61 beaches have won Seaside Awards from Keep Scotland Beautiful, recognised for their water quality and cleanliness.

 **POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

LAND REFORM

The *BBC News* website reported that the Land Reform Review Group's has published its report, *The Land of Scotland and the Common Good* [Dec 13]. The group, led by Dr Alison Elliot, had been asked to look at how best to enable more people in rural and urban Scotland to have a stake in the ownership, governance, management and use of land. The document seeks to establish provisions in the public interest, where necessary backed by law.

The group highlighted the need to address transparency of land ownership in Scotland and made 62 recommendations. These included the establishment of a maximum landholding in law, to achieve a declared goal of 'a fairer, or wider and more equitable, distribution of land in Scotland ... with greater diversity of land ownership.' However, the group did not define the maximum acreage, leaving it up to the Scottish Government to fix the limit.

Other recommendations included the abolition of District Salmon Fishing Boards and giving the government and local authorities first refusal on land coming on to the market, when this would be in the public interest.

The report calls for local authorities to have the right to serve a compulsory sale order in a vacant land area, and for community councils or other local groups to be able to ask the council to do this. It seeks to establish who exactly owns what and to introduce measures to stop vast tracts of land being held by anonymous companies outwith the EU.

The report recommends that the laws of succession, which protect landholdings from being split up, should be changed so leading to an increase in the number of landowners.

Meanwhile, a Community Land Agency with a range of powers should be created to 'support and deliver' an increase in local community landowners and to facilitate negotiations between landowners and communities, with the goal of achieving a 'significant increase in local community land ownership.'

The review group also argued that ending the Crown Estate Commissioners' involvement in Scotland would 'deliver wide ranging and important benefits.' It further said the responsibilities of the Crown Estate Commissioners in Scotland should be devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Scotland's current common law public rights over the foreshore, inland water and seabed should be replaced by statutory public rights that are integrated with the public's statutory access rights over land.

The group called for the current tax system to be changed. 'Serious consideration' should be given to introducing a system of land-value taxation, which could be an alternative to the council tax. It said: "Tax plays an important part in maintaining the concentrated pattern of large scale, private land ownership in Scotland."

It said that public funding remained 'critical' and the Scottish Government must ensure there is an 'integrated legislative and financial support structure' to help communities in urban and rural Scotland buy and develop land and buildings.

A Scottish Land & Property Commission should be established as a single body with responsibility for monitoring the system governing the ownership and management of Scotland's land, and recommending changes in the public interest. The Scottish Government should do more to increase the rate of registrations to complete the Land Register.

The government should develop a National Land Policy for Scotland, taking full account of international experience and best practice. Also a short life working group should be set up to improve information on the numbers and types of community land owners.

Opportunities for the public to fish for wild freshwater fish should be improved.

The need to prohibit the transfer of public land at less than market value should be ended, which would make more Forestry Commission land available to communities. The Scottish Government and Forestry Commission Scotland

should develop a more integrated and ambitious programme of land acquisitions in rural Scotland.

Trust Ports and other forms of local control over harbours, piers, slipways and similar coastal assets should be encouraged as a form of community land ownership.

The position of Common Good lands should be improved to ensure they are adequately safeguarded and managed.

The government should consider the introduction of a conditional right to buy for tenant farmers in the public interest.

Statutory land rights of local communities should include a right to register an interest in land, the existing right of pre-emption over land and a right to buy, as well as rights to request the purchase of public land. Crofting trusts or crofting community owners should be able to purchase Scottish Government crofting estates at less than open market value.

There is a clear need to update Scotland's system of compulsory purchase and local authorities should be given new powers to issue compulsory sale orders.

Dr Elliot said: "What we need to see is policy and decision-making taking greater account of the public interest, opening up land ownership to more people and giving communities more influence over land use. There are weaknesses in the market and contradictions in public policy that must be addressed if we are to see the kind of reforms that will modernise Scotland's approach to land ownership and use."

Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, said: "While some of the proposals are sensible, there is no denying this is a state-centred programme of recommendations which, if implemented, would greatly discourage private investment in Scotland. Naturally, this will place a major burden on Scottish tax-payers as we seek to re-circulate a smaller pot of money. If the state cannot foot the cost, our members' jobs on the hills and rivers are at stake."

Andy Wightman, the land reform campaigner, said: "This is a controversial subject, it is complex and it has received scant academic or political attention for over a decade. The final report is thus something of a minor triumph. It is more comprehensive than anything that has gone before and it is detailed and thorough in its description and analysis of the topics covered. The 62 recommendations are wide-ranging. Some will be regarded as radical and perhaps even controversial in certain quarters but there is in fact not one which is anything other than plain common sense and certainly none that citizens of most other European countries would be surprised at."

David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said: "We welcome support for the principle of a land agency to secure more community ownership."

Douglas McAdam, of Scottish Land & Estates said that the report appeared to be biased against private landowners. He said: "It makes a series of unfounded recommendations that will create more publicly funded bodies, increase bureaucracy and place an even heavier burden on the public purse."

Paul Wheelhouse, the minister for the environment, said that he agreed with the review group's recommendation for a working group to develop the strategy for achieving the Scottish Government's million acre target for community ownership by 2020. He said that such a working group would be set up shortly. He said: "Land reform is not just about land ownership but how that land is used and managed and the benefits it can bring to the people of Scotland."

The Scottish Government appeared to rule out

one recommendation on taxation within hours of the group's report being published. Experts said there was no clear public interest in keeping a universal exemption of agriculture, forestry and other land-based businesses from non-domestic rates. The government stated: "We can confirm there are no plans to make changes to the position of agricultural business rates relief."

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Review/land-reform/events/FinalReport23May2014; www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0045/00451087.pdf

LAND MAP

Paul Wheelhouse has announced a mapping project to work out who owns Scotland. He said he agreed with the land reform group that 'a fundamental step on this journey must be having a clear understanding' of who owns land in Scotland [see above]. He argued that land transactions were 'more difficult and expensive' if land was not already registered. He said: "This is a vital underpinning step in Scotland's land reform journey and will ensure that at last everyone will know who owns Scotland."

Registers of Scotland has been asked to finish the register within ten years, with all public land registered within five years.

Dr Elliot said: "We are pleased that the Scottish Government has been so prompt in deciding to implement one of the recommendations made by the Land Reform Review Group. Setting a target for completing the register of land ownership will bring closer the day when there is a definitive answer to the question: 'Who owns Scotland?' We hope that this momentum is maintained as the Scottish Government gives consideration to our other recommendations."

PAIRC ESTATE

Residents of the 26,800 acre Pairc Estate on Lewis have voted to go ahead with a community buyout for £500,000 [Mar 14]. The price has been agreed between community-led Pairc Trust and landowner Barry Lomas, avoiding the need for a hostile buyout as was once feared. The saga of this community buyout has been ongoing for 11 years.

68.3% voted for the buyout. Angus McDowall, of Pairc Trust, said: "Now that the terms negotiated with the landlord for an amicable transfer of the estate have been endorsed by the community, we will proceed to conclude missives and register title to the estate as soon as possible ... A considerable exercise is under way to provide the necessary details of title which are required by the Registers of Scotland, a task which may well take many months for them to complete because of the many hundreds of transactions which have taken place over the preceding 90 years."

The trust is supported by the Scottish Land Fund with an award of £230,000 and £76,500 from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles Council), and the same sum from Highlands & Islands Enterprise. The balance will be raised by the community.

NORTH UIST

The Herald reported that a meeting held to gauge support for a community buyout of the North Uist Estate has voted overwhelmingly against commissioning a feasibility study to examine community control. An estimated 75% of the audience who voted want to abandon the idea altogether. Residents at the public forum criticised local councillors for launching a process to take over the 75,000 acre island. *The West Highland Free Press* reported that many of those who attended defended the record of the estate, and said that the Glanville family were good landlords; islanders did not want to proceed with

a hostile bid. The Glanvilles said that they did not want to sell, and questioned the legitimacy of community ownership.

An independent, island-wide postal ballot will formally canvass the island's 1,000 adult residents.

CARLOWAY ESTATE

The Carloway Estate Trust on Lewis has been given £38,964 by Highlands & Islands Enterprise towards the community buyout of the 11,000 acre estate [Feb 14]. The bid has also received a grant of £207,500 from the Scottish Land Fund and the monies will be used to employ a development officer.

WILDLIFE CRIME DEBATE

A debate took place in the Scottish Parliament, entitled *Wildlife Crime. Eradicating Raptor Persecution from Scotland*.

The *RaptorPersecution Scotland* blog reported that Paul Wheelhouse opened the debate and condemned the 'horrendous' poisoning of 22 birds of prey in Ross-shire [Apr 14] and expressed his 'anger, revulsion and utter frustration' that these crimes continue in 21st century Scotland. He ran through a list of previous measures brought in since 2007, some of which are still to be fully implemented. He said he understood the calls from some quarters for further measures to be introduced now, but insisted that more time was needed to allow these measures to take effect.

He said: "If and when we judge it necessary, I am committed to taking further action. If that involves licensing certain types of businesses, then we will do so."

The Herald reported that Mr Wheelhouse said: "The death of so many birds in a single incident is very likely to have a significant impact on the population in an area where huge efforts have been made to reintroduce them. The red kite population in this area was reintroduced at the same time as a similar number of red kites were released in the Chilterns in England. Now, though, there are roughly six times as many birds there as in the north of Scotland. While there may be other factors, the difference is most likely, if not entirely, due to illegal killing here in Scotland. I regret that if toxicology confirms the suspected poisonings we have probably now passed a shameful landmark. And that is the recording of 100 illegally killed red kites in Scotland since 1989. Let me be absolutely clear – the Scottish Government is determined to stamp out this deeply unpleasant and pernicious criminal behaviour. If and when we judge it necessary I am prepared to take further action. We are implementing measures I believe will have an impact, but our patience and that of parliament is not infinite. This government and I believe this parliament are determined to rid Scotland of a blight on her reputation."

Mr Wheelhouse agreed to a call from Labour for the Scottish Government to carry out a review of licensing and game bird legislation in other countries. He said that a review is underway to assess wildlife crime penalties [Jul 13]. The review group is expected to report their findings by December. The group's remit is this: "To examine and report on how wildlife crime in Scotland is dealt with by the criminal courts, with particular reference to the range of penalties available and whether these are sufficient for the purposes of deterrence and whether they are commensurate with the damage to ecosystems that may be caused by wildlife crime".

The *RaptorPersecution Scotland* blog reports that the members of the group have now been made public. The chair is Professor Mark Poustie of the University of Strathclyde. Members are

Detective Chief Superintendent Robbie Allan from Police Scotland; Hugh Dignon from the Scottish Government; Jeremy Greenwood, former director of the British Trust for Ornithology; Hugh Campbell-Adamson, of Stracathro Estates and a representative from the Crown Office.

Jamie McGrigor MSP said: "Wildlife crime is being perpetrated by a very few individuals, rather than any sector of the Scottish countryside." Speaking about the so-called 'Ross-shire Massacre' he said that it was rumoured that the 'hand-fed' red kites at the Tollie Red Kite feeding station may have been fed contaminated food.

• Mr Wheelhouse said during the debate that proceedings have commenced in the first vicarious liability case at Stranraer Sheriff Court relating to the Glasserton & Physgill Estates buzzard poisoning case [Jun 13].

SEAL PETITION

A petition has been lodged, asking the Scottish Government to make it illegal to shoot seals in Scotland [Mar 14]. Each year, the Scottish Government issues licenses allowing the killing over 1,000 seals in Scottish waters. Most are killed by netsmen who fish for wild salmon at the mouths of salmon rivers and by salmon farmers who rear fish in floating factory farms. Salmon farmers could protect their stock by installing and maintaining tensioned high strength predator exclusion nets and wild salmon netsmen have claimed to have used acoustic scarers to keep seals away from their nets.

John Robins of Save Our Seals Fund said: "There is a Scottish Government sanctioned seal slaughter going on based on economics. It is cheaper to shoot seals than to humanely keep them away from salmon farms and salmon nets. Seals are scapegoats for human greed and this slaughter must stop. Apart from killing seals this government policy is damaging the tourist industry with people cutting their holidays short and going home after witnessing seals being shot. We want a total ban on killing seals in Scottish waters."

See: www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/sealshooting

DOG FOULING

NFU Scotland is to submit a petition to the Scottish Parliament concerning the issue of dog fouling on agricultural land. Farmers want agricultural land and moorland to be included in the Dog Fouling Act 2003 which imposes fines on people failing to clean up after their pets.

Nigel Don MSP said that irresponsible dog ownership can be a serious issue in rural areas, causing stress to livestock and increasing the risk of disease. He said: "I suspect that many responsible dog owners are unaware that it is equally important to pick up after their dog while on agricultural land."

Penalty payments under the existing legislation are set at £40, but anyone who does not pay can be hit with a charge of up to £500.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

RAPTOR PERSECUTION

The Scotsman reported that RSPB Scotland and the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) are pressing for the police and the Crown Office to make use of existing laws to impose prison terms for crimes against the nation's protected species. They are advocating a 'zero tolerance' approach to persecution of wild animals and said that tougher sentencing will discourage unlawful activity [see POLITICS].

Duncan Orr-Ewing of RSPB Scotland, said: "Existing laws should be implemented – both jail

sentences, which we think would send out a strong deterrent, but also the 'vicarious liability' measure." Vicarious liability is the legal term for landowners being held responsible for the actions of their employees.

Other proposals include a licensing scheme for sporting estates which would include powers to revoke permits if conditions are broken, as well as extending the powers of the country's leading animal cruelty charity to tackle wildlife crimes; under current terms, SSPCA workers can only intervene where animal welfare is an issue.

RSPB Scotland and the SWT also called for long-term funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit and continued support for a pesticide disposal scheme designed to rid the country of chemicals used to kill birds of prey.

The *RaptorPersecution Scotland* blog reported that a prison term as a sentencing option is already in place – no new laws are required, just a willingness from the authorities to start using existing legislation to its full effect. To date, nobody has ever received a jail term for the persecution of raptors. The new measures for vicarious liability in relation to raptor crime came in to force on 1 January 2012; there has not yet been a case tried.

- The *North Star* reported that The Highland Council agreed a cross-party motion that: "The Highland Council condemns the recent illegal killing of red kites and buzzards on the Black Isle both as wrong in itself and as an act with potential to reduce the economic benefits that wildlife tourism brings to the Highlands. The council urges anyone with relevant information to contact Police Scotland; welcomes the actions of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) and of NFU Scotland in supporting attempts to identify the culprit(s); and commits itself to continuing to work with community planning partners, through the Highland Environment Forum, to reinvigorate the fight against all wildlife crime in the Highlands [Apr 14]."

RSPB Scotland, local landowners and 217 individual members of the public have contributed to a reward fund of £27,473 for information leading to the identity of the culprit(s).

TRAP REVIEW

SNH has begun a study into the use of corvid traps in Scotland. This research was first proposed in 2012, following SNH's decision to permit the use of clam-type traps on the 2013 General Licences [Dec 12]. SNH has now commissioned Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture and the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) to conduct 'objective, rigorous and independent' research.

The research will cover all the traps that are currently licensed for use in Scotland (e.g. clam-type traps, Larsen traps, crow cage traps). Concerns about these traps and their use have been unresolved for many years. These include the compliance with European environmental legislation; welfare concerns; poor trap design that allows indiscriminate species trapping; year-round use (as opposed to seasonal use); ineffective regulation of crow trap users; ineffective monitoring of crow trap use (i.e. number and species caught/killed) and the inability to identify an individual trap user (traps are registered to estates, not to individual users).

A survey of trap users from British Association for Shooting & Conservation, Scottish Gamekeepers Association, SLE, GWCT, and NFU Scotland will be undertaken. Later stages of the study will include field studies of how different traps are used in practice. See: www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/index.php?option=com_attachments&task=download&id=1541

WILD LAND POLL

A new Survation opinion poll has gauged the level of support in the Highlands & Islands for Scottish Government proposals for strengthened protection for wild land [Mar 14]. The poll, of over 500 people in eight constituencies across the Highland & Islands, asked people their attitude to the proposal that: 'The Scottish Parliament is currently discussing a proposal that Scotland's wild land – land that is rugged and remote with a lack of visible built structures – should be given special protection from development such as large scale windfarms. To what extent do you support or oppose these proposals?'

The poll showed that 53% support the proposal to protect wild land; 24% oppose the proposal wild land protection; 23% neither support nor oppose the proposal.

Highland residents were also asked what impact onshore windfarms on wild land in the region would have on tourism 49.4% thought there would be a negative impact; 44.8% said no impact and 5.8% said that it would have a positive impact.

Stuart Brooks of the John Muir Trust (JMT) said: "This is a resounding mandate to stand firm on the proposal to identify and protect 20% of Scotland as 'core wild land.' And that mandate is not just coming from conservationists, or from the outdoor recreation community, or from the tourist industry. It is coming from the people who live and work in the Highlands & Islands, adjacent to wild land areas, and have the most to gain or lose from whatever decisions are taken."

ECOCO LIFE PROJECT

SNH is to lead a £2.3m LIFE project, a cooperative effort to restore, create and improve natural habitats and wildlife corridors throughout the Central Belt. The four-year EcoCo Life project will run from summer 2014 to summer 2018, and will enrich and connect wildlife and habitats throughout the Central Scotland Green Network area.

The LIFE project, which is part-funded through the European Commission, will involve SNH, RSPB, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), SWT, Buglife, Butterfly Conservation and the East Ayrshire Coalfield Environment Initiative.

Flanders Moss, Blawhorn Moss, the Inner Forth, the Baronshaugh RSPB reserve, the Whitesands quarry, the Slammanan Plateau, the Garnock Valley, sites within the Glazert water catchment, a wetland restoration project at Cambus Pools, and the East Ayrshire Coalfield Environment Initiative area have all been identified for improvement by the project.

CULLODEN HOUSING

Scottish ministers have written to the Highland Council directing that two current planning applications on sites near Culloden battlefield should be notified to Scottish ministers should the council be minded to approve [Feb 14]. In the event that the council wishes to approve the applications for residential development, they will now be duty bound to notify the applications to ministers in the first instance.

This provides ministers with the opportunity to consider whether the developments proposed raise issues of national significance that would warrant the applications being called in for a decision to be taken at a national rather than local authority level.

Planning minister, Derek Mackay, said that proposals had been set out that will update Scottish Planning Policy to reflect more recent legislation on the protection and management of battlefields.

The draft policy makes it clear that planning authorities should protect, conserve and, where appropriate, seek to enhance the key landscape characteristics and special qualities of sites on the current inventory of historic battlefields.

RIVER POLLUTION

The *Sunday Herald* reported that SEPA has found traces of nonylphenols in the Clyde, the Kelvin, the Water of Leith, the Tay, the Ness, the Don, the Brora in Sutherland and 13 other rivers in Scotland. Nonylphenols are endocrine disruptors, which means they can affect hormones such as oestrogen in the body. Studies have found that they can cause the 'feminisation' of fish, decreasing male fertility. The chemicals are very toxic to wildlife, very persistent in the environment and build up in fish, birds and other animals.

Production and use of nonylphenols is banned in Europe but they have recently been detected in clothes imported from China and other Asian countries, where there are no restrictions. When the clothes are washed, the chemicals can end up in rivers.

Professor Andrew Watterson, of the University of Stirling, said: "Recent research has found associations between environmental exposures and adverse reproductive and neurological effects in humans. It is worrying that elevated levels are still being recorded across the country under the current controls when less hazardous substitutes and toxic-use reduction strategies may be available." He urged Scotland to follow Sweden and assume that even the tiniest concentrations of nonylphenols were unsafe. Nonylphenols are regarded as a 'priority hazardous substance' in water under European law.

Ashley Roberts, of SEPA, said that, of the 20 rivers where elevated levels of nonylphenols were detected in 2011-2013, only the River Irvine breached SEPA's environmental quality standard.

- SEPA and Scottish Water reported that aluminium sulphate was released into the River Farg from the Glenfarg Water Treatment Works. Extra water was released from the Glenfarg Reservoir to dilute the effects of the chemicals, which particularly affected Glenfarg village and Aberargie. Dead fish were seen in the river.

HORSE MANURE

SEPA is appealing for information as part of an investigation into the dumping of horse manure on the foreshore of the Cromarty Firth.

Alastair Duff, of SEPA, said: "Dumping horse manure without the appropriate authorisations is illegal and if disposed of incorrectly it can potentially have significant impacts on the water environment. Horse manure should be placed where there is no risk of run-off polluting watercourses and disposed of by spreading it on land where it is of agricultural benefit. Alternatively, a registered waste carrier can be used to remove the waste."

Contact; telephone: SEPA 01349 862021; Highland Council 01349 886603

CLIMATE ADAPTION

The first statutory Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme (SCCAP), *Climate Ready Scotland*, has been published. The aim of the document is to increase the resilience of Scotland's people, environment and economy to the impacts of a changing climate.

The Adaptation Programme addresses the key impacts identified for Scotland in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment, including the natural environment – looking at risks identified for agriculture, biodiversity and ecosystem services, flooding and coastal erosion, forestry, marine and fisheries.

SCCAP has been drawn up in accordance with section 53 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. Subsequent programmes are required to address potential impacts for Scotland in progressive climate change risk assessments due every five years.

See: <http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.aspx?Menu=Menu&Module=More&Location=None&Complete=0&ProjectID=15747#RelatedDocuments>, www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/05/4669



ENERGY

WINDFARM SITING

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has published revised guidance on siting and designing windfarms in the landscape. The guidance sets out key principles and provides advice on minimising impacts through good design. It seeks to provide an early steer to developers on the design issues they should consider and promote a consistent approach to assessing proposals.

It contains new advice on turbine colour and uses clearer and more explanatory images to illustrate the design principles. The first version was first published in 2009. It sets out key principles for landscapes with multiple windfarms. The aim is to reduce cumulative effects by making sure that windfarms relate well to one another.

WINDFARMS & EAGLES

The Sunday Herald reported that the first known reported eagle has been killed by a windfarm in Scotland. The victim was a young male sea eagle, known as Red T, released in 2011 as part of the East Scotland Sea Eagle Reintroduction Project. The body was discovered in February at Burnfoot Hill windfarm in the Ochils near Tillicoultry, Clackmannanshire.

Ron Macdonald, of SNH, said: "Evidence has been growing from Europe that white tailed sea eagles are fairly vulnerable to collisions with wind turbines. Clearly we have to monitor the situation closely here."

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "This tragic incident serves as a stark reminder of the importance of ensuring windfarms are carefully planned to avoid our best places for wildlife." RSPB Scotland is increasingly concerned about the number of applications for wind turbines in areas that, unlike the Ochils, were known to be important for eagles. However, sea eagles are far more likely to be killed by other causes. Since 2007, six had been killed by trains, eight by power lines and at least six illegally poisoned or shot.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Argyll: RWE Innogy's 45 MW Ardchnonnell windfarm has been refused planning permission by Argyll & Bute council. 15 turbines were planned, on Sir Jamie McGrigor's estate above Loch Awe. Sir Jamie is the Scottish Conservative's environment spokesman. A planning officer report said that Ardchnonnell was inconsistent with the local development plan 'due to its adverse landscape, visual, and cumulative impact on the landscape setting of Loch Awe.'

Borders: The *BBC News* website reported that RWE Innogy's 21 turbine Rowantree windfarm near Oxtou has been refused by energy minister, Fergus Ewing as being 'environmentally acceptable'.

Dumfries & Galloway: Developer RES has appealed against the rejection of the 15 turbine Solwaybank windfarm near Langholm [Feb 14]. The council had refused permission because of radar and seismic interference concerns at Eskdalemuir; these have now been withdrawn. Mitigation measures have been agreed with the

Ministry of Defence and NATS (National Air Traffic Service).

Highland: WPD is planning to erect seven turbines on the slopes of Beinn Mhor, just south of Glen Affric. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has lodged an objection with Highland Council, warning that the development would 'severely impact on the important and iconic landscape.' David Gibson, of MCofS, said: "The Affric area is not on a through-route open to passing trade – it is a destination which people choose to go to specifically because of its natural beauty. The spread of turbines is making our extraordinary landscapes seem increasingly ordinary. People don't come to the Highlands for ordinary."

Perth & Kinross: *The Herald* reported that the council has received 52 letters of objection to plans to extend the Calliachair windfarm, near Amulree, by seven turbines. A 14 turbine windfarm was built last year, but only after the Scottish Government granted the application which had been refused by the council and a public inquiry [Jan 11]. The council has recommended approval of the extension, saying that the scheme had been 'carefully designed' to minimise significant adverse effects on the environment. Residents claim that the turbines would have an impact on birds and wildlife and lead to a loss of visual amenity.

Susan MacKinnon, a local farmer, said: "The proposal clearly breaches Perth & Kinross' development plan. The landscape, communities and wildlife are at saturation point."

South Lanarkshire: Banks Renewables' 26 turbine, 104 MW Kype Muir windfarm, south of Strathaven, has been approved by the Scottish Government.

OFFSHORE WIND

The *BBC News* website reported that Kincardine Offshore Windfarm Ltd, a joint project between Pilot Offshore Renewables and Atkins, plans to put up eight turbines on semi-submersible platforms about ten miles off the coast, south of Aberdeen. The windfarm, which could be operational by 2017, would be the world's first array of floating wind turbines.

COALBED METHANE

The Sunday Herald reported that Pete Roche, radiation adviser to Nuclear-Free Local Authorities (NFLA), said that Dart Energy's proposals to drill for coalbed methane near Falkirk could result in discharges of three times as much radioactivity as that at the Rosyth naval base [Mar 14]. At a public inquiry, Dart produced evidence which stated that 'predicted annual discharges' of untreated water from the development could contain up to 1.7 billion becquerels of radioactivity [Mar 14].

A submission to the inquiry by Dr Ian Fairlie, a radiation expert hired by local objectors, suggested that annual emissions of radium-226, radon-222 and other radiotoxic isotopes will be significant. Additional radioactivity would also end up in waste sludges that would have to be transported to licenced dumps.

Shehu Saleh, of Dart Energy, criticised Dr Fairlie's submission as not being an accurate interpretation of the company's information. He said that a treatment facility planned by Dart would remove 99% of the particulate matter and that Dr Fairlie's submission was 'sensationalist and out of context.' The impact of any radioactivity released would be 'insignificant.'

• Ministers announced that a safety buffer zone was to be required around all underground gas developments [Oct 13]. It was thought that minimum buffer zones would be imposed, but it

is now clear in the draft Scottish Planning Policy that companies will propose the size of the zones themselves.

• IGas Energy is to buy Dart Energy, and intends to lead the race to exploit shale gas across the UK. The company would not comment on its plans for Scotland. Professor Stuart Haszeldine, of the University of Edinburgh, said that rock in central and east Scotland held 'potentially suitable' shale gas.

TIDAL POWER

The community-owned Nova Innovation 30kW tidal power turbine in Bluemull Sound, off north Yell in Shetland has started exporting electricity to the local grid, a world first. The turbine is more than 100 feet down on the seabed and consists of a propeller that is spun by the power of the tide as it flows past. Electricity is transmitted onshore via a 1 km subsea cable. The project, developed in partnership with North Yell Development Council, was funded by the Scottish Government's Community & Renewable Energy Scheme, Shetland Islands Council and North Yell Development Council.

ARRAN BIOMASS

The Herald reported that a plan for a biomass plant in the forestry at the Dyemill above Lamlash on Arran has been dropped [Jun 12]. Northern Energy Development Ltd (NEDL) said they would not be proceeding with the project after persistent opposition from a 'section of the community' concerned about the impact on tourism. The Arran Energy Action Group was set up to argue the case against the plans; Arran Community Council backed the proposal.



TOURISM & RECREATION

GLEN LYON ACCESS

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) undertook a public survey of access on North Chesthill Estate in Glen Lyon, Perthshire [Jan 14]. Walkers claimed that they have had difficulty gaining access to the estate for several years; the estate contains four Munros. In total, 611 problems with the attitude to access were reported.

Major Alastair Riddell, the landowner, said: "The views of MCofS fail to address local concerns, real rural issues, conservation and sustainability. Over the years the deer here have been disturbed beyond all reasonable measure and, as a consequence, deer management on the estate and the revenue we gain from it has suffered to the point that its continuation is, frankly, unviable."



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

JAMES HUTTON INSTITUTE

The James Hutton Institute, based in Invergowrie and Aberdeen, is to cut up to 70 jobs as part of a voluntary redundancy scheme aimed at reducing costs. The institute has about 600 staff split between its two sites, conducting research to support the sustainable use of land and natural resources. The institute was set up in 2011 by the amalgamation of the Scottish Crop Research Institute in Invergowrie and the Macaulay Land Use Research Institute in Aberdeen.

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