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*SCENES*, an independent digest of environmental news in Scotland, was launched in 1987 by Dr James Fenton. Issues 49 to 161 were edited and published by Michael and Sue Scott. It is for anyone with an interest in the land and sea, whether professional or amateur. It is based solely on published material, and contains only news, with no editorial comment or opinion.

*SCENES* is published monthly, and comes out in the month following the title month.

**NOTE:** dates in square brackets relate to the most recent reference in *SCENES*.

**WEBSITE:** [www.scenes.org.uk](http://www.scenes.org.uk)

**DEADLINES:** News releases and press cuttings for inclusion in *SCENES* are welcomed from organisations and individuals. Please post, or email, them to the address below, by the end of each month.

**SUBSCRIPTIONS:** The basic annual subscription is £50. Concessions are available for small firms and charities (£28), individuals, and outworkers with a main subscription (£22), students and seniors (£18) and for extra copies, either paper or electronic, sent to the same address (£12).

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*SCENES* is edited and published by Sue Fenton.

Polldoran, Clachan Seil, by Oban, Argyll PA34 4TJ  
email: [enquiries@scenes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@scenes.org.uk)

Printed by Printsmith Lochaber Ltd

ISSN 0955-226X



## CONSERVATION

### PEATLAND PLAN

Scotland's National Peatland Plan has been published for consultation. The strategy has been compiled with input from a wide range of stakeholders, and involved drawing on the expertise of the IUCN Peatland Programme, hosted by the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), which was set up to promote peatland restoration in the UK.

Dr Maggie Keegan, of SWT, said: "Peatlands are an important part of Scotland's natural capital, making up 20% of the landscape. Healthy peatlands store carbon, provide clean water, aid flood prevention and provide crucial habitat for plants and animals including bog rosemary, round-leaved sundew, greenshank, golden plover and dunlin. Sadly many of Scotland's peatlands – including its lowland raised bogs – have become degraded by draining, overgrazing, burning or commercial peat extraction so this plan is a step in right direction to reversing past damage. The trick will be to ensure that there is adequate funding for restoration in the long term so that the benefits they provide can be enjoyed by future generations."

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "RSPB Scotland has long worked to help bring peatlands into good condition, particularly at Scotland's flagship site in the Flow Country. We look forward to working together with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and other partners on this vital plan to guide widescale peatland protection, management and restoration in Scotland to 2030. Bringing Scotland's peatlands into good condition has proven environmental benefits alongside economic opportunities for rural communities and health benefits as wonderful outdoor places to enjoy. We hope this plan will enable a wide partnership of action with the right level of government and private funding to ensure success. Scotland needs a long-term strategic approach to restoration of these habitats in order to ensure the greatest multiple benefits are achieved from bringing our damaged peatland back into good condition. We hope that the final plan will remove existing barriers and ensure the realisation of these ambitions, whilst enabling peatland restoration to play its part in assisting Scotland to meet its climate change targets."

Consultation responses are due by 12 September. Contact: *Morag Elliott, Scottish Natural Heritage, Great Glen House, Leachkin Road, Inverness IV3 9NW; telephone: 01463 725325; email: [peatlandplan@snh.gov.uk](mailto:peatlandplan@snh.gov.uk) See: [www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1306595.pdf](http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1306595.pdf)*

### FLOW COUNTRY

The *BBC News* website reported that the Peatland Partnership's Flow to the Future scheme to restore seven square miles (18.1 km<sup>2</sup>) of blanket bog in Caithness and Sutherland has been awarded a £4m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The scheme needs £9.6m in total. Commercial forestry will be removed, drains blocked and water courses restored. The partnership wants to develop an education centre and build a new observatory, an addition to RSPB Scotland's visitor centre at Forsinard Railway Station.

Some of the community, of about 12 people, are opposed to the new building, with concerns that it would be an eyesore and draw increased numbers of people to a 'remote, isolated and fragile community.'

SNH, Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland, Highland Council, Plantlife Scotland, RSPB Scotland and the Environmental Research Institute UHI are members of the partnership.

### PENTLAND HILLS PARK

The *BBC News* website reported that The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) is supporting plans to extend the Pentland Hills Regional Park into the Scottish Borders and South Lanarkshire [Oct 13]. In its response to consultation by Christine Grahame MSP on the park's expansion, APRS said that the proposed new boundary lines reflected the original plan for the park: "It is clear that the compromise boundary established in 1986 lacks logic, as it resulted from administrative considerations at the time rather than defensible landscape criteria, so it is right that this anomaly should now be rectified. This will help the entire Pentland Hills range and its surrounding communities to achieve its full potential, and will secure the integrated management of the Pentland Hills for the benefit of future generations."

Regional parks are usually funded by neighbouring councils, but do not have the same planning restrictions as Scotland's two National Parks. The two other regional parks in Scotland are Clyde Muirshiel, near Lochwinnoch in Renfrewshire and Lomond Hills in Fife.

### SHIANT RATS

The *Herald* reported that £450,000 of European Union funding has been awarded to the Shiant Seabird Recovery Project. Attempts are to be made to eradicate a population of black rats on the Shiant islands in the Minch, Outer Hebrides. The overall cost of the project is about £900,000.

Rats, which came ashore in about 1900 from shipwrecks, eat seabird eggs and young chicks. There are more than 150,000 seabirds breeding there each year. The islands are one of the most important seabird breeding sites in Europe. They support 10% of the UK's puffin population and 7% of the UK's razorbills, and have been designated an EU Special Protection Area for Wild Birds. It is hoped that, with the removal of rats, the Manx shearwater and European storm petrel will be encouraged to breed on the islands. The project will use recordings of calls to attract the birds and will carry out active management to make sure the birds have the best opportunity to settle and breed. The project to remove the rats is a partnership between RSPB Scotland, SNH and the Nicolson family, owners of the islands.

### GIANT HOGWEED

The *BBC News* website reported on a successful pilot project in an area beside the Deveron River in Aberdeenshire, using blackface sheep as an alternative to chemical spraying for giant hogweed. The skin pigmentation of the blackface sheep gives them protection from the toxic plant. The sheep will now be deployed in other areas in Aberdeenshire with giant hogweed problems. SNH funded the research.

### GREY PARTRIDGE CONSERVATION

The *BBC News* website reported that the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) is trialling the growth of chicory on the Balgonie Estate near Glenrothes in Fife. The woody, herbaceous plant, which can grow over three feet high could

provide year-round shelter for grey partridge, allowing them to move freely whilst hidden from raptors.

**HEN HARRIERS**

*The Herald* reported that RSPB Scotland said the hen harrier population in Scotland has declined by 20% over a six year period. It called on grouse moor managers and gamekeepers to do more to prevent their illegal persecution.

The hen harrier is a natural predator of the red grouse. RSPB Scotland said that work has also been carried out at the Langholm Moor Demonstration Project over the last seven years to reconcile sustainable grouse shooting with maintaining a viable population of hen harriers [Oct 13]. Duncan Orr-Ewing said: "This work has clearly shown that using techniques such as diversionary feeding of harriers during the breeding season markedly reduces their predation of red grouse. It is exceedingly disappointing that so few sporting estates have used this legal and effective management tool. The illegal killing of hen harriers is condemned by all of the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime in Scotland (PAWS) partners, and needlessly threatens the population of one of our most spectacular and rarest birds when there is a practical solution."

A spokesman for the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA), said: "In terms of accusing grouse moors alone for the decline of hen harrier, the RSPB, as a bird charity, could spend donor money more wisely by assessing the bigger picture of harrier decline and the criminal drop in the smaller, less iconic prey birds, rather than spending it on demonising gamekeepers; the vast majority of whom work within the law every day, under very trying circumstances, to produce a balance of species as well as a surplus of grouse to shoot.

"Diversionary feeding is supported by the SGA, which advocates legal tools for species conflicts, but faith in its deployment will depend on it being proven to work when harrier numbers rise. As yet, there is no evidence to show this is the case. In Orkney, the hen harrier population declined 70% from 1970, yet there are no gamekeepers or grouse moors. Prior to 1995, Langholm Moor was one of the most successful grouse moors in the world but became commercially unviable when a build-up of protected predators, including hen harriers, forced it to close and the gamekeeping staff to be withdrawn.

"When the gamekeepers lost their jobs, hen harrier numbers dropped from 28 to 2 and the wading bird population on the moor crashed by 75%. These are not people who should be demonised *en masse* by RSPB if we are interested in preventing hen harrier decline."

• RSPB Scotland reported that, on 30 May 2013, two witnesses contacted Police Scotland about what they described as a 'coordinated hunt' of a male hen harrier on a grouse-shooting estate in Aberdeenshire, which ended with the bird allegedly being shot. Two individuals, armed with shotguns, criss-crossed the moor, with at least one other individual directing them by radio from his vehicle to the location of where the bird was seen perched. Police Scotland launched an investigation but insufficient evidence meant that nobody was charged. The incident has never formerly been made public.

An SGA spokesman said: "Our understanding from the case in the Cairngorms is that there is no evidence to support the RSPB's interpretation of events and the RSPB is aware of this."

• Two orphaned hen harrier chicks are being hand reared by the Scottish SPCA after their mother was killed on moorland near Muirkirk,

East Ayrshire. Police Scotland said that the bird was killed 'as a result of a criminal act' and has asked for assistance with its enquiries.

**BEAVER TRIAL**

*SNH Commissioned Report 763: The Scottish Beaver Trial: Ecological monitoring of the European Beaver Castor fiber and other Riparian Mammals. Fourth Annual Report 2013*, has been published by SNH, independent monitors of the trial [Apr 14]. The report sets out interim findings from ecological monitoring in Knapdale, Argyll, up to spring 2013. The monitoring phase of the trial concluded at the end of May 2014.

The trial is run by the SWT and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, on land managed by FC Scotland. The 15 beavers released in the first year of the trial formed five families, or pairs, and one further animal was released in year two of the trial. By June 2013, eight of the released beavers were thought to still be alive and present in the trial area, five having gone missing and three, all males, were known to have died. Fourteen beavers are also known to have been wild-born at Knapdale by June 2013, five of which have gone missing.

The remaining beavers, which remain in four distinct family groups, appear to be healthy and have mostly put on weight since their release. The groups' combined territory covers an area of 423 hectares, with one beaver family per 4 km of waterway edge. The report finds no evidence that the beavers have had any negative impact on otters in the area.

The final report, due in December, will be based on the five years of monitoring. This will contribute to the information provided to Scottish Government on the outcomes of the trial.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2146](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=2146); [www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme](http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/safeguarding-biodiversity/reintroducing-native-species/scottish-beaver-trial/the-monitoring-programme); [www.scottishbeavers.org.uk](http://www.scottishbeavers.org.uk); [snh.gov.uk/scottishbeavertrial](http://snh.gov.uk/scottishbeavertrial)

• The *BBC News* website reported that RSPB Scotland has offered some of its 80 nature reserves as potential sites for releasing more beavers into the countryside, following the conclusion of beaver trial. Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Beavers are incredible mammals that have an important role to play in our countryside. We urge the Scottish Government to make way for further projects to bring this remarkable species back to our countryside."

**MARSH FRITILLARY**

*The Herald* reported that an unprecedented number of marsh fritillary caterpillars have been spotted at The Oa and Loch Gruinart RSPB Scotland reserves on Islay in the Inner Hebrides. Both sites have been managed to create a home for the caterpillars and resulting butterflies, which eat only the leaves of devil's bit scabious. Their population is almost entirely limited to the Inner Hebrides and coastal Argyll.

The population boom on Islay this year is part of a natural seven-year cycle that involves the butterflies, their food plant and a parasitic wasp. This year numbers favour the butterflies but next year an abundance of parasite wasps could lead to a population crash.

**TREE BUMBLEBEE**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that the tree bumblebee, *Bombus hypnorum*, has been seen in Edinburgh and East Lothian for the first time. Tree bumblebees arrived in the south of England from France in 2001 and have since gradually colonised the country, being first detected in

the west of Scotland in 2013. It is hoped that they will move to Fife and then across the Tay to help pollinate soft fruit crops.

One of the reasons that tree bumblebees are successfully expanding is that they are thought to be more resistant to parasite infections than other species. However, there are some concerns that they might displace other native bees.

See: [www.bwars.com/index.php?q=submit-bombus-hypnorum-sighting](http://www.bwars.com/index.php?q=submit-bombus-hypnorum-sighting)

**COLL BEETLE**

RSPB Scotland and Buglife discovered over 150 short-necked oil beetles on survey sites on the island of Coll in the Inner Hebrides, a 400% increase on the last count carried out in 2010. Until 2008, short-necked oil beetles were thought to be extinct in the UK, largely because of farming practices.

**HIGHLANDS MOTH**

*The Herald* reported that *Ethmia pyrausta*, one of the UK's rarest moths, has been seen in the Highlands for the first time since 1853. The micro moth was seen by Butterfly Conservation on the Croick Estate in Easter Ross on 15 occasions over five weeks.



**FARMING**

**CAP**

The Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, has outlined in a statement at Holyrood how the new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), both Pillar I direct subsidies and Pillar II rural development funds, will be allocated in Scotland over the next seven years [May 14]. A five-year transition between 2015 and 2019 for the move from historic to area-based farm payments, which is required by Europe, is also proposed. The allocation of entitlements will reflect the area farmed in 2013.

These include strict activity requirements that farmers will have to meet to be eligible for direct payments. This will remove land with no agricultural activity from the payment regime, which is currently estimated at 600,000 hectares.

Basic direct farm payments will be capped at around £400,000 *per* year after labour costs; sporting estates will be added to the negative list to exclude them from receiving direct farm payments unless they can prove they are a genuine farm business. Three payment regions will be created with a coupled support scheme for sheep for producers in the third region. New entrants, who have previously been excluded from receiving direct farm payments, will get the regional average from day one of the new CAP. Farmers will be rewarded with Pillar 1 top-up payments for taking action to protect biodiversity and reduce emissions. Rural development funding for agri-environment and climate change schemes will increase by more than £10m *per* year and a separate capital grant scheme will be available for crofters in the rural development programme.

Mr Lochhead said: "This is the most radical redistribution of CAP payments ever and we have strained every sinew to forge from challenging circumstances a production-based and sustainable agricultural policy. And all this against a background of an atrocious budget negotiated by the UK government ... It is vital that the new CAP supports farming and food production, as well as responsible land use, and strikes the right balance between flexibility and complexity ... The rural development programme is designed to deliver our key priorities of sustainable economic growth, protecting the environment and tackling climate change, and vibrant rural communities ... Some farmers, who were disadvantaged under the old CAP, will finally move towards a level playing field. Others will see their payments go down."

Jonny Hughes, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust,

said: "Changing farming practices have led to the serious decline of some very familiar farmland birds in Scotland such as the skylark, curlew and lapwing. Agricultural intensification has also led to the disappearance of other wildlife such as bumblebees, butterflies and hedgehogs. We want the Scottish Government to allocate the maximum amount of taxpayers' monies to agri-environment schemes to help put back the lost hedgerows, wildflower margins, wetland areas and ponds. Restoring wildlife habitats increases farmland biodiversity, which is a good thing for farmers too as it makes soils more fertile and productive, increases pollination, genetic diversity and the chances of biological pest control.

"What makes good ecological sense almost always makes good economic sense and it's high time Scottish ministers understood the direct link between healthy nature and healthy food production systems. Pollinators alone are worth at least £43m to Scotland's economy annually."

RSPB Scotland said that decisions on how to spend £4.2 billion of farm subsidies do too little to encourage greener farming or support farmers who manage Scotland's most environmentally important land.

RSPB Scotland said that a combination of EU rules exempting so many farmers from greening requirements plus a lack of ambition by the Scottish Government means that it will do little to helping declining farmland wildlife. Allowing nitrogen fixing crops to count towards the 5% Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) on arable farms will provide little wildlife habitat whilst applying weightings will act to reduce the 5% EFA, thereby reducing its benefit. The most positive aspect is the requirement for some grassland farmers to have a fertiliser plan which should reduce fertiliser use and will help in relation to climate change and reducing water pollution.

RSPB Scotland welcomes the funding that is available in Pillar II for a new agri-environment scheme, for forestry grants and cooperation and advisory services in the new programme. It said that the budget is so stretched that it is going to be very difficult for the government to meet its own targets in relation to climate change, water quality and halting the loss of wildlife unless it increases funding or is willing to enforce a tougher regulatory regime on farmers in future.

Richard Lochhead announced that the rough grazing would be split into two regions with the larger one, extensive hill ground where many common grazings are found, receiving 10 euros *per* hectare. Higher quality land would receive 220 euros *per* hectare.

#### NVZs

NFU Scotland has made a submission to the Scottish Government calling for self-regulation and monitoring rather than designation to apply to those areas near Stranraer in Dumfries & Galloway, and Finavon in Angus that are to become Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) for the first time [Apr 14]. Groundwater monitoring has shown that nitrate levels have already fallen in these two areas, following action by farmers.

NFU Scotland also believes that monitoring results also justify the removal of the Lochan Moss area near Dumfries from the NVZ restrictions. Being within an NVZ has a considerable impact on a farm business, with closed periods for slurry application, restrictions on nitrate inputs, winter housing for cattle and fencing off water courses required together with a paperwork burden.

The Scottish Government is proposing to reduce the area of Scotland covered by NVZ restrictions by almost a quarter. Currently, 14% of Scotland is designated as an NVZ [Apr 14].

#### AGRICULTURE STATISTICS

The Economic Report on Scottish Agriculture has been published which brings together a wide range of information from the Scottish Government's agriculture analysts.

The report covers the difficult 2012 crop year, which was followed by the harsh winter, as well as the recovery that occurred in 2013. It also sets the data in the context of the last ten years. A series of new maps show where agricultural output is highest, the average size of farms, and agricultural employment patterns.

The Agricultural Facts & Figures card has also been published. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01108](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01108); [www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01109](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01109)



## WOODLAND

#### LARCH DISEASE

The Plant Health (Forestry) (*Phytophthora ramorum* Management Zone) (Scotland) Order has been made which applies only to the management zone in south west Scotland where *P. ramorum* on larch trees is widespread [Dec 13]. Due to the scale of the outbreak in this region, continuing with the approach of issuing individual Statutory Plant Health Notices and Movement Licences to owners of infected larch trees is no longer seen as practical or the most effective way of controlling the wider spread of the disease from this area.

The new order therefore enables Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland to ease controls on the movement of larch materials which stay entirely within the zone. To prevent infected or potentially infected material being transported in an uncontrolled way to other parts of Scotland, the order places a restriction on any person wishing to move larch material from within the Management zone to anywhere outside the zone unless the movement is to an approved facility and records are kept of that movement.

See: <http://scotland.forestry.gov.uk/supporting/forest-industries/tree-health/phytophthora-ramorum/management-zone-restrictions>

#### ORCHARDS

A desktop survey of candidate orchards across Scotland was undertaken by CW Hayes Associates, contracted by Scottish Natural Heritage. 1,728 likely orchards were found; an orchard is defined as a collection of five or more fruit trees. While new smaller orchards are being planted, large traditional orchards, containing many veteran trees, are still in decline.

Orchards were found in 31 out of 32 local council areas. South Lanarkshire, followed by Fife, has the largest number of candidate orchards at 213 and 186 respectively. Dumfries & Galloway, Highland, Perth & Kinross and Scottish Borders have more than 100 candidate orchards each. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar was found to have just one candidate orchard while in Shetland none were found.

A more detailed study of the candidate orchards will be undertaken as part of a field survey involving volunteers across Scotland. See: [www.scotlandthefruit.org.uk](http://www.scotlandthefruit.org.uk)

#### WOODLAND EXPANSION TARGETS

Figures released by the FC show that the Scottish Government has missed its tree planting targets for the third year in a row [Sep 13]. In 2012, the government committed to creating 100,000 hectares of new woodland cover by 2022, but in the 2013/14 planting season just 8,300 hectares of woodland was planted, well short of the 10,000 hectares *per* year needed to achieve this.

Charles Dundas, from the Woodland Trust

Scotland, said: "Planting rates are governed by the availability of grants for woodland creation through Scotland's Rural Development Programme (SRDP). The reason that the Scotland is failing to hit a target of 10,000 hectares a year is that there is simply not enough money available to achieve it."

*The Herald* reported that a FC Scotland spokesman said that around 65% of new planting in the UK took place in Scotland. A further 15,000 hectares was expected under the current SRDP in addition to that in FC woodland.

See: [www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/statistics)

#### KETTLESTOUN WOODLAND

The Woodland Trust Scotland is concerned over Cemex's plans to build houses and a hotel complex on the site of a new native woodland near Linlithgow in West Lothian. Six hectares of woodland, dominated by birch, oak and ash, was planted two years ago as part of a restoration project on a former aggregates quarry at Kettlestoun Mains.

The restoration site was commended in the New Native Woodland category of Scotland's Finest Woods Awards in 2013.

A spokesman for Cemex said that the concerns were 'overstated' adding: "There only seems to be a small area that is affected on the eastern boundary and the vast majority of the planting scheme would remain intact."



## FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

#### AQUACULTURE CENTRE

The Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) has been launched at the University of Stirling. It will bring together industry and research to provide innovative solutions to support the growth, sustainability and profitability of the industry in Scotland. SAIC will also have a local delivery centre in the western Highlands.

The SAIC will focus on areas such as fish and shellfish health and welfare; feeding, quality and nutrition; breeding and stock improvement and engineering to contribute towards increased production of clean, safe and sustainable food.

The centre has been jointly funded by the Scottish Funding Council (in partnership with Scottish Enterprise and Highlands & Islands Enterprise), and matched by the Scottish aquaculture industry.

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Publications/publicationslatest/farmedfish/AqBenefits](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/Publications/publicationslatest/farmedfish/AqBenefits)

#### SALMON NETTING

*The Herald* reported that the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland) has submitted a formal complaint to the European Commission as it believes a failure to assess the impact of increased commercial salmon netting means Scotland has not complied with the European law which aims to safeguard salmon populations in Scottish rivers designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC).

An additional 12 miles of coastline and dormant netting stations had been allowed to reopen without the Scottish Government carrying out an appropriate assessment on the likely impact on salmon rivers with SAC status.

#### POACHING INCIDENT

*The Herald* reported that 60 large sea trout, ranging in size between 4lb and 12lb, were found in a poacher's net on the River Tyne, near East Linton in East Lothian. The poacher, who had 33 previous convictions for stealing fish from Scottish rivers, was jailed for five months at Haddington Sheriff Court for the poaching offence and for breaching

bail conditions banning him from the Rivers Tyne and Tweed. The sheriff also fined him £200.

The net was retrieved by a team of water bailiffs who act for the Forth District Salmon Fishery Board in partnership with the local Police Wildlife Crime Officer.

**ICES**

The annual publication by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) reports that haddock, plaice and North Sea nephrop numbers are increasing; this should lead to higher quotas being set in the autumn for 2015. Cod, whiting, saithe and herring catches will remain at current levels and potentially decrease in line with management plans. North East Atlantic mackerel stocks are at their highest level for many years.

See: [www.ices.dk/community/advisory-process/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx](http://www.ices.dk/community/advisory-process/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx)

**DAYS AT SEA EXEMPTION**

59 Scottish fishing vessels, which fish for prawns in inshore waters, will no longer be subject to European time at sea limits. The Scottish Government successfully applied to the European Commission for the derogation; a total of 122 vessels are now exempt.

Fishing vessels that can catch cod are subject to time at sea controls under the EU's Cod Recovery Plan, but member states can apply to exempt vessels that catch very little cod.

In the Firth of Clyde, 42 vessels have been made exempt as a result of catch data gathered by on-board observers. In the Firth of Forth, 17 vessels gathered data using on-board cameras. Prawn fishermen have installed new nets with panels from which cod can escape, while retaining the nephrops target species. The Clyde is unique in that a weekend ban has been in place for mobile gears for more than 20 years.

**FiS**

Fisheries Innovation Scotland (FiS) has been established as a centre of excellence. Members include the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, the Seafish Industry Authority, Youngs Seafood, Sainsbury's, Scottish Natural Heritage and Marine Scotland. See: [www.fiscot.org](http://www.fiscot.org)



**MARINE**

**BATHING WATERS**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Keep Scotland Beautiful (KSB) awarded Seaside Awards to 61 beaches across Scotland this year [May 14]. Eight beaches, condemned as 'poor' by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) because the bathing waters are polluted, were given the award. A further 12 bathing waters contaminated by human and animal faeces and rated as 'sufficient' by SEPA have also been awarded Seaside Awards.

A new analysis by SEPA has rated 20 of Scotland's most popular bathing waters as 'poor' because they fail to meet European pollution limits currently being brought into force. The waters are contaminated with toxic bacteria from overflowing sewers or animal wastes washed off the land. A further 20 beaches were put in the second worst category of 'sufficient.' 28 bathing waters were classed by SEPA as 'good' and 15 as 'excellent.'

Andy Cummins, of Surfers Against Sewage, said: "The seaside award is worthless in relation to water quality. The water quality standards it requires are so low that qualifying beaches could worryingly still offer bathers a one in seven

chance of contracting gastroenteritis. Because of these shockingly poor water quality requirements Surfers Against Sewage believes the seaside award flag should be flying at half mast."

Claire Baker MSP said that most people would expect prize-winning beaches to have high quality bathing water. "We have to ensure that these awards are more than just PR exercises and that the seaside award benchmarks are robust enough to reflect what the public expect from our award-winning beaches. There is a clear discrepancy in the toughness of criteria between the seaside award and the Blue Flag scheme. If people are to have confidence in the awards then they must be credible."

Two of the beaches rated by SEPA as having 'excellent' water quality – Ruby Bay at Elie and Silver Sands at Aberdour in Fife – were the only two in Scotland to be awarded the international Blue Flag Award this year.

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "For us to have confidence in the beaches we all use and love we need clear information. The way SEPA scores these beaches on water quality over a longer periods compared to the wider amenity aspects KSB consider will result in mixed messages, and I would urge the tourism minister to address this. Where there are beaches at risk we must see investment. By improving the quality of our beaches we protect a great environmental resource which in turn helps the economies of our coastal communities."

A KSB spokeswoman said: "The Scottish seaside awards are given by a jury on the basis of 28 criteria, of which water quality is only one. The criteria are designed to reflect the whole visitor experience and they also recognise excellence in beach management, on-site facilities, benefits to local people and the tourism economy of the area. On water quality standards, KSB is guided by SEPA and no award would be made if measured water quality fell below the current EU directive standard," she said.

A SEPA spokesman said that its ratings of bathing waters were projections based the previous four years and could change: "It is encouraging that already more than 75% of our existing bathing waters would be 'sufficient,' 'good' or 'excellent' under the revised directive classifications."

However, the Scottish Government said that the new EU Directive was not due to be fully introduced until 2016.

**MPAs**

Nine marine research reports, on work led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Marine Scotland to identify Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Scotland's seas, have been published by SNH.

SNH has recommended 17 possible MPAs to Scottish Ministers. Together with possible MPAs in offshore waters recommended by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, these could help complete Scotland's MPA network. Further work is underway on another four areas which may also be recommended as MPAs. Ministers are expected to make an announcement on the designation of MPAs later this summer.

The SNH commissioned reports (numbers 517, 530, 573, 594, 619, 745, 754, 760 and 764) are available on the SNH website: at [www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/new](http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/new)

**SEALS**

Legislation to designate 194 protected sites for seals has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament [Jun 11]. Under the draft Order, it will be an offence from 30 September to

intentionally or recklessly harass the animals within the designated areas, selected haul-out sites around the coasts where seals come ashore to rest, breed or moult. Together with the existing network of 15 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for seals, it will protect at least half of the grey and common (or harbour) seals in Scotland.

149 haul-out sites include 62 used by common seals, 20 used by grey seals and a further 67 shared by both species. 45 grey seal breeding sites, used specifically during the breeding season (September to December) are also included. Isolated and uninhabited islands account for 107 sites with a further 70 on similar stretches of coastline. Only 17 are close to human habitation but often at the foot of cliffs or on offshore rocks or sandbanks.

Marine Scotland has worked with the Natural Environment Research Council and the Sea Mammal Research Unit to identify the listed sites. The locations will be reviewed regularly to reflect changes in haul-out patterns.

The penalties for those found guilty of the offence of harassing a seal at a designated haul-out site are up to 6 months imprisonment or a fine up to £5,000. This applies to anyone, whether a recreational boater, fishfarmer or marine wildlife tour operator.

Alex Kinninmonth of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "Seals should be free from harassment wherever they are, but the designation of these haul-out sites is certainly a step in the right direction. Along with other conservation measures, this will aid the protection and recovery of these iconic animals."

Vassili Papastavrou, of the International Fund for Animal Welfare said that protecting sites used by only half of the seals was 'bizarre.' He said: "The government suggests that allowing intentional harassment of seals on about half of their haul-out sites is part of some kind of 'balance' between seals and other sustainable activities. But how could an activity that forces a top predator from the local ecosystem ever meet criteria for 'sustainability'?"

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/sealhaulouts](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/sealhaulouts)

**HUMPBAC WHALE**

A post-mortem of a humpback whale has been carried out by the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust and Scotland's Rural College. The 22 feet long, eight-ton male calf died after it became stranded at Fishnish on Mull, thought to be the first recorded stranding of a humpback on the island. Preliminary results of the tests suggest that the whale drowned.

Humpbacks are rarely seen in the Hebrides but are known to migrate through the region, far from shore.



**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

**LAND REFORM**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Government said that it will bring forward a Land Reform Bill before the end of the current term of the Scottish Parliament, taking forward the 'direction of travel' set out in the Land Reform Review Group's report [May 14]. The government said that the bill would ensure land was 'used in the public interest.' The Scottish Land Fund, a fund to help communities to buy land, will be extended until at least 2020.

**COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**

The Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Bill plans to streamline and extend the already existing community right to buy scheme to cover all parts of Scotland. One aim is to make it easier to bring derelict public land and buildings back into use. The government said it hoped to

have one million acres of land in community ownership by 2020.

Rules on Scotland's local authority allotment sites will also be simplified, strengthening the duty on councils to provide sites triggered by actual demand. The bill will also protect allotment sites from closure.

**GEESE**

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) appeared before the Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs Committee to support the petition raised by the SCF calling for government action on the wild goose epidemic in crofting areas. Patrick Krause, of SCF, said: "It is undisputed that there is a problem with wild goose populations escalating and out of control in crofting areas. But the Scottish Government cut the budget in 2008 and so we are petitioning the Scottish Parliament to support our call on the government to increase resources, especially to areas such as the Uists where the greylag geese are threatening the future of crofting."

Roddy MacDonald, of SCF, said: "Goose numbers have increased significantly, some ten-fold over the last decade and the budget cuts have contributed to this. Greylag geese have been resident in these islands for many years but the problems caused have escalated dramatically over the last number of years. Crofters are despairing as they see the geese destroy their crops and their grazing. We had an effective method of control, the Machair Life Project, which had community support, but the funding for the scheme has now ceased. In fact Scottish Government seem to be withdrawing financial support even though the problem is worsening.

"Wild goose meat can be sold now but the licencing is very restrictive and, despite the demand, we are not allowed to sell meat off the islands. This is a great resource and a sustainable means of controlling the geese, a natural, community-led method. We just need a bit more financial support from the government and to open up the market for goose meat sales."

The SCF said that there is also an agricultural problem with the Greenland barnacle geese on Islay, but unlike the greylags in Uist and Orkney, the barnacle is rare and therefore protected. Scotland has less than 5% of the world's greylags but 75% of the world's barnacles. A goose control programme on Islay, which costs the public around £1m per year, pays farmers to shoot and scare the barnacle geese to protect crops. However, in the Uists, only £10,000 per year is spent on reducing goose numbers through the SNH Adaptive Management programme. Crofters are asking for it to be raised to £80,000 per year to re-instate the Machair Life crop protection project to complement the SNH work.

Mr Krause said: "The Machair Life crop protection project, running with the SNH Adaptive Management scheme, has been very effective and the cost seems a small price to pay to protect the world's only arable machair system and some of Europe's finest High Nature Value farming."

 **GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

**PLANNING POLICY**

The National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) have been launched by planning minister, Derek Mackay [Mar 13]. They will shape long term economic development and local planning policy in areas such as transport, town centres, energy and

infrastructure, and balance economic growth with protection of our environment.

NPF3 confirms the government's support for 14 large-scale national developments, including pumped hydroelectric storage, the Central Scotland Green Network and the National Long Distance Cycling and Walking Network.

NPF3 and SPP also place a ban on windfarm development in the 19% of Scotland identified as National Parks and National Scenic Areas. Significant protection is provided to sensitive areas of land identified within Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)'s Wild Land Areas Map 2014 (see below). In total, approximately 30% of Scotland's landscape will benefit from stronger protection against inappropriate development.

The five main changes on onshore unconventional oil and gas extraction are confirmation that the concept of buffer zones should be applied to all proposals for the first time; an additional requirement for risk assessments to be prepared to assess whether the proposed buffer zones are acceptable; buffer zones will be assessed by the planning authority and statutory consultees, with a strong expectation that planning permission should be refused if they are unacceptable; operators must be upfront about their plans and consult communities on all unconventional gas developments and a fresh planning application (and public consultation) must be sought if permission was not sought for hydraulic fracturing but developers subsequently intend to undertake this process.

The policy includes an instruction that there should be a presumption in favour of developments, although firms will have to show that they are environmentally friendly and sustainable [Oct 13].

The new SPP recommends that rural development plans make provision for huts, cabins and bothies. Ninian Stewart, of Reforesting Scotland and the A Thousand Huts campaign, said: "We believe the provision in the new Scottish Planning Policy hails a new era for the revival of hutting in Scotland. Though there are barriers to be removed, networks to build and much to do in terms of bringing private and public landowners on board, this is a very significant step forward for us."

A definition of 'huts' appears in the planning guidelines – there was previously no provision to apply for permission to build a simple, low impact structure. Reforesting Scotland is working on a pilot scheme with Forestry Commission Scotland that could see the creation of ten huts in Fife.

*The Herald* reported that Alison Johnstone MSP said: "They may not be as gung-ho as Westminster but the Scottish Government has failed to come down on the side of communities worried about the impacts of fracking. Greens proposed a 2km buffer zone but this has been rejected and now it will be up to developers to put forward a plan for approval. We already have standard buffer zones for windfarms and coal mines, so why not gas extraction?"

Joss Blamire, of Scottish Renewables, said: "It is essential that we strike the right balance between harnessing our fantastic wind resource and protecting Scotland's most valued landscapes. We need to remember that the onshore wind sector supports thousands of jobs, has attracted billions of pounds of investment and generates enough carbon-free electricity to meet the equivalent of almost a third of Scotland's needs. It is also the cheapest form of renewable energy that can be built at the scale we need. The Scottish Government needs to ensure the new planning framework does not rule out good quality proposals outwith national scenic areas and national parks, and

we reaffirm our view that new developments are best judged on a case-by-case basis. It would be in nobody's interest for Scotland to lose out on the important environmental, economic and social opportunities that are created by the onshore wind sector."

Murdo Fraser MSP said: "Public opposition to wind turbines in areas of high scenic value has been growing and that has forced the Scottish Government to respond with this announcement. These measures will afford a greater degree of protection than currently exists but windfarms will still be possible on wild lands. We need a complete overhaul of planning policy for wind power to ensure that decisions are taken at a local level. It's critical that areas of natural beauty are protected, but the problem goes far beyond that."

John Mayhew, of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, said: "We need to look after our environment and generate renewable energy. The Scottish Government has pretended that they can do both without having a plan. The result has been a battle between communities, local authorities and windfarm developers."

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We are disappointed that a national ecological network for Scotland has not been included as a national development but welcome the continued inclusion of the Central Scotland Green Network."

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) welcomed the Scottish Government's endorsement of a national ecological network, a natural highway for wildlife, in the new national planning strategy. Large-scale 'green and blue networks' (parks, woodlands, rivers, lochs) will help re-connect Scotland's fragmented habitats which will allow wildlife to move more easily from place to place. This will decrease the likelihood of species extinctions and increase the potential breeding pool, thereby improving ecosystem health and resilience in the face of climate change. The physical elements of the natural highway could be large or small – green roofs, tree-lined streets and cycleways, hedgerows, woodlands and lowland raised bogs, protected areas and landscape-scale conservation projects.

SWT believes that planning for nature at a strategic level will not only boost Scotland's wildlife but will also improve Scotland's stock of natural capital. Dr Maggie Keegan said: "In the past, poor planning decisions have led to some of Scotland's species-rich habitats becoming increasingly isolated from each other, and have contributed to the decline in Scotland's wildlife, its biodiversity and people's enjoyment of outdoor spaces ... The SWT believes the Scottish Government's 2020 Biodiversity Challenge, which sets out actions for protecting and enhancing Scotland's biodiversity and ecosystems, cannot be delivered without having decision-makers such as planners on-board."

See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Framework](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Framework); [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Policy](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/Policy)

**WILD LAND MAP**

*The Herald* reported that the final version of the Wild Land map, which supports the Scottish Government's new planning policy framework (see above), has been produced by SNH [Mar 14].

Following consultation, the number of wild land areas has been reduced from 43 covering around 20% of the country to 42 areas covering around 19.5%. The main changes are that one area in Perthshire is removed, as is one in the Borders. An area in the Monadhliath Mountains is reduced following the decision by the Scottish Government to approve the 67 turbine Stronelairg windfarm nearby (see ENERGY below).

The John Muir Trust (JMT) hailed the map as 'a historic breakthrough' in its campaign to have

Scotland's wild land recognised and protected. Stuart Brookes, of JMT, said: "Although this falls short of our request for the absolute protection of wild land from large scale developments, we applaud the Scottish Government for taking this bold step in the face of a sustained campaign to undermine wild land protection by powerful vested interests. The adoption of this policy and map should result in more consistent decision making by planners and government, and it should discourage energy companies from targeting the 42 areas that make up the wild land map."

The Crofting Commission had said that people like crofters, who had worked Scotland's remote rural landscapes for generations, were 'rendered invisible' by the map.

The Western Isles Council had also expressed its concerns local control over development would be lost. A spokesman responded to the final map saying there was disappointment that the national planning policy framework still insisted on development plans having to safeguard the areas of wild land as identified in this map.

Huw Francis of Stòras Uibhist, the community landowner of South Uist Estate, said: "There was consultation but our submission has been ignored. We detailed serious concerns as to how it would affect South Uist, but to no avail."

Rob Gibson MSP questioned why Garvey Island off Cape Wrath, which is used as a bombing range in military exercises, should be included on the wild land map.

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said that while there was greater protection for wild land from windfarm developments, large tracts of other fragile upland areas remained under threat. She said: "We'll be watching carefully to see whether the government is really serious about protecting wild land, or whether this policy can be ripped up whenever a big developer comes along with big promises and a massive new wind farm scheme." She warned that the recent approval of the Stronelairg windfarm, right in the heart of one of these core areas of wild land, suggests that the new wild land policy may not necessarily bring the proper protections Ramblers is looking for.

See: [www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/](http://www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/looking-after-landscapes/landscape-policy-and-guidance/wild-land/mapping/)

**PORTOBELLO COMMON GOOD LAND**

The Scottish Parliament has passed a bill to allow Edinburgh City Council to build a new high school within Portobello Park – common good land [Jan 14]. Portobello Park Action Group, set up to oppose the plans because of the resulting loss of green space, said that the decision 'should worry people across Scotland.' However, MSPs said that the ruling did not change the legal status of other land in Scotland and that any other case would have to go through the same process. The new school is expected to open by August 2016, twelve years after it was first proposed.

**RAPTOR PERSECUTION**

The Raptor Persecution Scotland blog reported that an Easter Ross farmer believes that the 22 red kites and buzzards killed in Easter Ross were fed sheep carcasses, at the Tollie Red Kite Feeding Station, containing legal treatments used to prevent fluke, which can be toxic to birds [May 14]. The claim was strongly denied by RSPB Scotland. Jamie McGrigor MSP also made the same claim in during a parliamentary debate although he did admit it was based purely on rumour [Apr 14].

Andrea Goddard, an RSPB Scotland volunteer, said that rumours that the charity was responsible

for the bird deaths at Tollie visitor centre were 'completely outrageous.' She said: "The poisoned birds were all found around Conon Bridge, some distance from Tollie. Most of the birds have been proven to have been illegally poisoned and we are awaiting confirmation that the others were likewise killed this way. These anonymous rumour-mongers seem to be attempting to muddy the waters and mislead the general public."

Furthermore, she said that the regular feeding birds at the Tollie Red Kites viewing centre have all survived the 'mass poisoning.'

Brian Etheridge, the red kite officer for RSPB Scotland, said that the 'Ross-shire Massacre' was caused by 'somebody who knew what they were doing' when they placed small poisoned baits in various locations around Conon Bridge.

Police Scotland sought to reassure the public that enquiries are still ongoing into the wildlife crime investigation. 15 birds have now been confirmed as having digested an illegally-held poisonous substance (twelve red kites and three buzzards). *Post mortem* examinations and toxicology work continues into all the birds.

- The Raptor Persecution Scotland website reported that a Scottish gamekeeper, William Dick, is facing trial over allegations that he shot a buzzard, then bludgeoned it with a rock, stamped on it, and then wrapped it in a coat and removed it. He denied the charges at Dumfries Sheriff Court.

- The *BBC News* website reported that police in Fife are investigating the discovery of a poisoned buzzard in woods to the north of Ballingry. The bird was discovered in April, and tests have now confirmed that it was killed by a banned pesticide; the area is used by dog walkers and is close to the RSPB reserve at Loch Leven.

**STATE OF SCOTLAND'S ENVIRONMENT**

*Scotland's State of Environment Report 2014* has been published on Scotland's Environment website. The report, with five main chapter areas on air, land, water, climate and people and the environment, provides a comprehensive, impartial assessment of Scotland's environment and how it is changing, based on the latest data from a wide range of sources.

It concludes that, on the whole, Scotland's environment is of good quality and there have been many significant improvements in recent years. However, the report clearly shows that some habitats and species are under threat, and poor air quality continues to affect some people in towns and cities.

This is the first major update since the report was last published in 2011. It has been produced by Scotland's Environment Website Partnership which comprises representatives from Scottish Government, local government, public organisations, NGOs, universities and research institutes, the British Geological Survey, The Conservation Volunteers, Forestry Commission Scotland, Health Protection Scotland, Historic Scotland, James Hutton Institute, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Marine Scotland, NHS Scotland, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and SNH.

See: [www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/get-informed/state-of-the-environment-summary](http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk/get-informed/state-of-the-environment-summary)

**NATIONAL LITTER STRATEGY**

The new national litter strategy, Towards a Litter-free Scotland, has been launched. It aims to reduce litter and fly-tipped waste and increase recycling by encouraging personal responsibility, over a five year period.

250 million pieces of visible litter are dropped in Scotland each year, damaging the environment

and posing a risk to public health, with littering and fly-tipping costing at least £53m of public money to tackle. 50 tonnes of litter is cleared up from the sides of Scotland's motorways each month alone. Discarded plastic bottles, aluminium cans and other materials would have been worth an estimated £1.2m when recycled.

New enforcement powers have been made available for the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, SEPA and other public bodies from 1 April, 2015.

Zero Waste Scotland will be driving the delivery of the new litter strategy. See: [www.scotland.gov.uk/nationallitterstrategy](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/nationallitterstrategy)

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

The Scottish Government reported new climate change statistics for 2012 show that, although Scotland has met its original target for 2012 in percentage terms with a 26.4% reduction from 1990 compared to a 24.2% reduction at the time the targets were set, Scotland missed the fixed annual target in terms of emissions in 2012. This is because of improvements in measuring carbon emissions, not known in 2009 when the targets were set, or known in 2012 the year being measured.

Scotland's 2012 target was 53.226 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO<sub>2</sub>e). Actual adjusted emissions were 55.6 Mt. The baseline change since the targets were set is 5.4 Mt. If the same percentage reduction (24.18%) is applied to the current baseline set out in 2012 and the target was revised accordingly, then it would have been 57.312 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e. On this basis, the revised 2012 target would have been met with 1.647 MtCO<sub>2</sub>e to spare.

The *BBC News* website reported that emissions of the six greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, were estimated to be 52.9m tonnes in 2012. This was a 0.8% rise compared to 2011 and exceeded the revised annual emissions target for 2012, bucking a general downward trend over the last decade. The statistics pointed to a 29.9% reduction in estimated emissions between 1990 and 2012, but there was not a uniform downward trend. Increases in emissions were recorded in 1999, 2005, 2010 and 2012.

Scottish ministers said the figures had been revised since a previous publication in 2013 'to incorporate methodological improvements and new data.' When adjusted to take account of trading in the EU Emissions Trading System, emissions increased by 0.5% between 2011 and 2012.

The government said that historic emissions data have been significantly revised upwards in the years since the Climate Change Targets were set and these revisions contribute significantly to Scottish emissions being higher than the statutory target for 2012 under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act. Source emissions have shown a reduction of 29.9% since 1990, compared with 23.7% for the UK as whole. This is better than the average for the EU-15 and the EU-28 countries as a whole, which saw reductions of 13.9% and 18.5% respectively.

The government welcomes these measuring improvements but they have the effect of retrospectively making Scotland's 'already ambitious' targets more challenging.

The longer term trend shows a substantial emissions reduction of 26.4% since the 1990 baseline, indicating that Scotland is on track to meet the statutory 42% reduction in emissions by 2020, which is prescribed under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act.

The Scottish Government has therefore put together a package of measures to demonstrate its resolve to meet future targets and ensure Scotland remains a world leader in this field.

The Scottish Government has published a *Report on Proposals & Policies (RPP2)* which sets the strategic

direction to the interim target for 42%, and shows the annual markers along the way between now and 2027. The long-term long term target is 80% emissions reduction by 2050.

The *BBC News* website reported that Claire Baker MSP said: "It is five years since the Climate Change Act was passed by the parliament but so far the government's lack of action has led to a significant lack of progress on a number of environmental targets. Time is running out for the Scottish government to prove they are serious about meeting their own targets. They must show that they are willing to take bold action rather than hiding behind flimsy excuses and political spin."

Patrick Harvie MSP said: "This latest failed target will strengthen the growing mood in support of bolder action from government, and it's essential that the climate change minister takes the opportunity to act. There's agreement across the parties at Holyrood for a series of additional policies to cut our greenhouse gas emissions, and it's simply not good enough for ministers to wheel out the same old rhetoric. [The government] must give detailed plans to get Scotland back on track. Re-announcement of existing commitments would be simply unacceptable."

- The environment minister, Paul Wheelhouse, announced that a cabinet sub-committee is to ensure co-ordination of the government's strategic response to emissions. Mr Wheelhouse said the sub-committee would complement the new Public Sector Climate Leaders' Forum and Scottish Government's Climate Change Delivery Board. The membership of the sub-committee will include the Deputy First Minister, two other Cabinet secretaries and a range of government ministers, further 'highlighting the importance of a cross-government approach on this crucial global issue.'

Mr Wheelhouse said: "The data indicates that Scotland has seen a 29.9% reduction in emissions of the basket of six key greenhouse gases between 1990 and 2012. On a comparable basis, this contrasts with a reduction of 23.9% for England, 17.7% for Wales and 15.0% for Northern Ireland. We also know emissions among all EU-28 members fell by 18.5% and for the EU-15 they fell by just 13.9% in the same period."

Gina Hanrahan, from Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, said: "It's been a difficult start to the implementation of the Climate Change Act, but the Scottish Government's package of new measures across different sectors such as energy efficiency, low-carbon travel and district heating looks promising."

See: <http://news.scotland.gov.uk/News/Scottish-Greenhouse-Gas-Emissions-rise-in-2012-d62.aspx>

**POLLUTION PROSECUTION**

SEPA reported that Scottish Water received a £12,000 fine after pleading guilty to a series of uncontrolled sewage discharges into the Purgatory Burn, which runs into the River Kelvin, near Kirkintilloch in 2013. Sewage fungus and debris was observed on the river bed and a dark plume of contaminated water seen entering the River Kelvin.

- Hamish Irvine, trading as Sports Car Breakers, of Newbridge, Edinburgh pled guilty at Edinburgh Sheriff Court to causing pollution after discharging oil, via an oil interceptor, into a tributary of the River Almond.

**GOREBRIDGE GAS**

The *Herald* reported that the Newbyres Crescent council house development in Gorebridge, Midlothian was completed eight years ago, but all 64 houses are now to be demolished. There

are safety fears over carbon dioxide gas leaking into properties from former coal mines. The five worst-hit homes have already been evacuated; the gas is said to have penetrated homes due to a 25 year build-up of pressure. Midlothian Council has asked the Scottish Government to investigate why the houses were not fitted with protective gas membranes, and has called for a public inquiry.

**MAR LODGE BLAZE**

Firefighters tackled a major grass blaze at the National Trust for Scotland (NTS)'s Mar Lodge estate near Braemar in Aberdeenshire. Ten fire engines, from as far away as Dundee, and a forestry unit were involved in the operation; a helicopter was also used to water bomb the fire. The blaze, which engulfed 10 hectares of land in Glen Lui, is thought to have originated in an abandoned BBQ at a campsite.

- The *BBC News* website reported that a large forest fire occurred on half an acre of land between Criarlarich and Killin in Stirlingshire.

**WATER WORKS FLOWERS**

The former Barrhead sewage works, known as the Water Works, is now the main Scottish site for the Grow Wild initiative, which encourages people to sow UK native wild flowers. It will also be a park and garden for local people. The site was transformed by volunteers, who removed rubbish, spread 500 tonnes of soil, planted 16,000 wild flowers and laid 350m of path. The development of the site was supported by £120,000 from the Big Lottery Fund and assistance from East Renfrewshire Council.

The Grow Wild campaign, led by the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, aims to encourage development of new green spaces.

**AN CAMAS MÒR**

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that developers An Camus Mòr LLP have submitted an Implementation Masterplan for the new community near Aviemore to Highland Council. The masterplan has been called in by the Cairngorm National Park's planning committee for consideration in the autumn.

Approval is needed for the landscape and ecology method statement for the construction period and for longterm management. The report states that pine marten are present in the wider area but the core development area is of little value to them. Wildcat may be present in the area although not recorded. It pledges that the community will not be a holiday home/second home 'enclave', but a 'real community.'

**STRATHDEARN SUBSTATION**

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission proposes to site an electricity substation at Garbole, near Tomatin in the Findhorn valley, Highland. The substation is part of the reinforcement which is necessary to allow 'significant volumes of additional wind energy forecast for south of Inverness around the Tomatin area.' The substation will be approximately 300 metres by 280 metres. The community, wildlife tourism businesses and some local estates have objected to the plans. See: [www.savesstrathdearn.com](http://www.savesstrathdearn.com)

 **ENERGY**

**RENEWABLES GENERATION**

Figures released by the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change, show that Scotland generated 6,678 GWh of renewable electricity in the first quarter of 2014, an increase of over 50% from same quarter in 2013.

This overall increase is primarily due to a record quarter of hydro output, 9.2% higher than the previous record quarter at the end of 2011. Wind generation is also at record levels, 4% higher than the previous record quarter.

Renewables have been confirmed as meeting 46.5% of gross electricity consumption in 2013, confirming that Scotland is on track to meet its interim target of 50% by 2015.

**WINDFARM UPDATES**

**Borders:** The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Borders councillors are being advised to oppose plans for an 18 turbine windfarm at Cloich Forest near Eddleston in Peeblesshire. Three community councils have lodged objections to the proposals by Cloich Wind Farm LLP. Planning officials have advised the local authority to object to the proposals on the grounds of impact on landscape character.

- The Scottish Government has turned down Wind Energy's plans for 21 turbines at Newfield Moor, near Lockerbie. The scheme was rejected on the grounds of 'unacceptable adverse visual, landscape and cumulative impacts.' A two-part public inquiry into the development was held in February 2011 and February last year.

- The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Borders Council's new draft local development plan highlights the cumulative adverse landscape impact of the growing number of turbines. There are already 306 turbines in the region, with ten more under construction; another 41 have received planning permission. Nine windfarm companies have objected to the council's plan. Developers have asked for the plan to be rewritten and said that there is 'no national planning guidance support for any such precautionary approach.'

In a letter to the Scottish Government, the council asks that ministers do not overrule council planning decisions should developers appeal.

- Both the proposed Brunta Hill windfarm near Westruther, Berwickshire, and the Shawpark windfarm near Stow, Selkirkshire, have been refused permission by a Scottish Government reporter [Oct 13]. A total of 17 turbines would have been constructed.

**Dumfries & Galloway:** The local authority had refused permission for a ten turbine windfarm at Minnygap Heights, near Moffat [Oct 12]. There has been objections from the Ministry of Defence on grounds it would interfere with seismic monitoring at Eskdalemuir. Renewable Energy Systems appealed, and an independent reporter was appointed to rule on the issue. The Scottish Government has now upheld the appeal.

- Planning officials said that Burcote Wind Renewables plan for a 30 turbine windfarm at Sandyknowes would have an impact on the landscape and advised that an objection be lodged.

**Highlands:** SSE Renewables' 67 turbine Stronelairg windfarm proposed for the Garrogie Estate near Fort Augustus in Inverness-shire has been consented by the Scottish Government [Jan 14]. Stronelairg is the largest windfarm ever proposed in the Highlands. The site, in the Monadhliath mountains, had been identified as one of Scotland's 'Core Areas of Wild Land' by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) [see GENERAL ENVIRONMENT].

The WalkHighlands website reported that conservationists had hoped that the proposed new protection for such wild areas would result in rejection of the plan. Objectors to the Stronelairg plans included SNH and the Cairngorms National Park authority as well as the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS), Ramblers Scotland and the John Muir Trust (JMT). Helen McDade,

of the JMT, said: "This development flies in the face of advice from SNH which objected to the development on the grounds that it would destroy the character of one of Scotland's key areas of wild land. It is unfortunate that SSE's views seem to hold greater sway over ministers than the opinions of the Scottish Government's own expert body on the natural environment.

"We are concerned about the wider implications of this decision for the future of wild land across Scotland. The Stronelairg Wind Farm is a massive industrial development in the heart of the Monadhliath Mountains – Area 17 of the Core Areas of Wild Land map. This decision would suggest that the Scottish Government intends either to remove the Monadhliaths from the wild land map, or to render the entire map meaningless. We will continue to fight for wild land in Scotland."

David Gibson, of the MCoFS, said "The MCoFS objected to Stronelairg because it will be a massively intrusive industrial development located on a 700 metre high plateau, meaning that the height of turbines will extend to more than 800 metres above sea level and be visible from mountains for miles around and from the Cairngorms National Park. The Scottish Government appears to be oblivious to the adverse impacts of such developments on tourism. Even research studies sponsored by the renewables industry itself already show a worrying and serious trend in the adverse impact on visitor intentions, based on their perceptions of windfarm developments.

"The Scottish Government [published] its latest planning policy (NPF3 & SPP) in which it laid out the measures by which it aims to protect Scotland's world-renowned landscape from onshore windfarm developments [see GENERAL ENVIRONMENT above]. If Stronelairg is indicative of the value it places on our landscape, there seems to be little hope for its future, and for that of the many businesses and thousands of jobs in rural communities which rely on tourists who come to Scotland for its landscape, unless strong protective measures are put in place."

The Cairngorms National Park Authority described the impact of the original 83 turbine Stronelairg plans on the National Park as 'significant, adverse, and in some locations, overwhelming.'

The Save the Monadhliath Mountains Campaign (SMM) said that the planning approval poses 'a serious threat' to Scottish conservation interests and the democratic planning process. The group says it was approved in the face of legitimate and widespread opposition from a wide range of stakeholders.

Chris Townsend, of SMM, said that allowing the application had set a dangerous precedent and posed a danger to wildlife habitats and areas of outstanding natural beauty.

The JMT has written to Fergus Ewing MSP, the minister for energy, expressing concerns about the Stronelairg windfarm approval. It said: "For a number of reasons, [JMT] believes that a Public Local Inquiry is the only reasonable way that this development could be adequately assessed. First, because of its sheer scale: this windfarm is the biggest ever in the mainland Highlands, with 67 turbines spread over an area the size of Inverness. Second, it will have, according to the Scottish Government, 'a significant impact on the wildness qualities of (the) Search Area for Wild Land (SAWL)' while SNH is of the opinion that 'there would be significant adverse effects to the extent that the SAWL would no longer be considered wild land.' We think it highly likely that a different decision would have resulted in

light of all the evidence brought forward to such a public examination by objectors and expert witnesses.

"Furthermore, given that Stronelairg is located within Area 17 of the proposed Core Areas of Wild Land map, currently being considered by the Scottish Government, along with the National Planning Framework 3, and the Scottish Planning Policy 2, we are left with the impression that the timing of this announcement has been deliberately planned to pre-empt these national decisions.

"The Scottish Government has, over the last 18 months, demonstrated a direction of travel towards protecting wild land for the public benefit. Public opinion polls have supported this position, and we now look to the Scottish Government to ensure that words are turned into action, and that wild land receives robust protection from industrialisation."

**Sutherland:** Highland Council planning officials recommended that councillors raise no objection to SSE's proposed Strathy South windfarm on the condition that it is reduced in size from 47 to 39 turbines. 77 turbines were originally planned [Dec 13]. However, the councillors voted, four to one, to object to the windfarm; an inquiry is now inevitable. The windfarm would be sited in an area of moorland at the heart of the Flow Country. This area of Caithness and Sutherland is on the UK's tentative list for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as one of the largest and most intact areas of blanket bog in the world. However, although the site is surrounded by environmental designations, it itself is not restricted.

More than 200 letters of objection were received, although two of the three local community councils supported the application. SNH and RSPB Scotland raised concerns about the farm's impact on hen harriers, waders, wood sandpipers and divers. RSPB Scotland called the project 'one of the most worrying it has ever seen.'

SSE said that the windfarm would be built on an area already badly damaged by commercial forestry plantation and, as a consequence, would help the restoration of the peatland. The company said that it recognised the importance of the fragile Flow Country habitat and that its project would involve restoring degraded peat; the project would involve the area's biggest restoration effort and 12 square miles of bog.

RSPB Scotland said harmful tree plantations were already being removed from areas of the Flow Country [see CONSERVATION]. RSPB Scotland said that it supported renewable energy schemes, but said the Strathy South project would see trees replaced with a new problem in the form of turbines.

**Western Isles:** The Ministry of Defence (MoD) raised judicial review proceedings at the Court of Session in Edinburgh and succeeded in overturning Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's decision to approve three wind turbines on crofting land; two at Bornish and one at Frobost on South Uist. The MoD said wind turbines could interfere with air defence radar systems. The risks arose when a certain level of proliferation of turbines in a localised area was exceeded.

**SHALE GAS & OIL**

The BBC News website reported that a British Geological Survey report assessed the potential reserves of fuel in Scotland. It estimated that there are 80 trillion cubic feet of shale gas in central Scotland and six billion barrels of shale oil, a 'modest amount' compared to English reserves. The amount of oil and gas which could be commercially recovered is expected to be 'substantially' lower.

The report said: "The complex geology of the area and historic mine workings mean that exploratory drilling and testing is even more important to determine how much can be recovered." The Midland Valley estimates are particularly uncertain because the area has fewer historic wells and less seismic data to rely on than other areas which have been assessed.

**SOLAR ENERGY PARK**

A plan for a 50 acre, 9.5 MW solar energy park at New Mains of Guynd Farm outside Arbroath has been lodged with Angus Council. BWE partnership's project would create one of the country's first commercial-scale solar energy parks on four crop fields.

An Orbit Communications poll found that 10% of Scots would be unhappy living near commercial solar projects. More than one-third of people polled would be happy to live near one, with half of those surveyed saying they had no strong opinion about them.

- The UK government announced a consultation on plans to cut incentives for the development of commercial solar power farms. Farms with a generating capacity of 5 MW or more would no longer get direct payments under the Renewables Obligation Order, having to compete with other forms of renewable electricity for capped funds.

- An action plan for development of the solar industry in Scotland has been published, prepared on behalf of the Scottish Institute for Solar Energy Research and the Scottish Solar Energy Group.



**RECREATION & TOURISM**

**TICKS & LYME DISEASE**

The Herald reported that Dr John Gillies, chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners in Scotland, urged organisations that own and manage public footpaths to put up warning notices about Lyme disease, a chronic bacterial infection caused by tick bites.

A National Trust for Scotland spokeswoman said most of the countryside it conserves is wild land and it would be inappropriate to place signage there. She said: "As there is a 'right to roam' in Scotland, visitors and hill walkers do not necessarily stick to particular routes and pathways – as a result it is very difficult to position signage that would be seen by a majority of visitors outwith car parks and established visitor centres. It is our view that we should avoid scaring people away from the countryside, as, with reasonable precautions, the danger of tick bites can be minimised."

**ST ABBS HEAD**

The Herald reported that the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has been criticised by some locals for allowing dive boats close to the cliffs at St Abb's Head in Berwickshire. The NTS owns and manages the headland which is a National Nature Reserve, a Special Protection Area, a Special Area of Conservation and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It has one of the largest mainland seabird colonies in the UK.

A meeting between NTS, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and RSPB Scotland has resulted in plans to draw up a voluntary code of practice. SNH said that the vast majority of dive boat operators were sensitive to the need to avoid disturbing seabirds.

Kara Brydson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "If it is the case that birds at this internationally important and protected site are being kept away from their nests, then we will ensure that all action is taken to stop illegal or unacceptable behaviour."