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CONSERVATION

WILD CATS

The Herald reported that a wildcat haven, a 250 square mile sanctuary on the Ardnamurchan and Sunart peninsula, has been cleared of feral domestic cats that pose a threat by interbreeding with wildcats [Sep 13]. The sanctuary is funded by American animal welfare organisations. Over the last five years, a project has taken place to trap, neuter and release feral cats and ensure that pet cats are neutered.

Dr Paul O'Donoghue, of the University of Chester, said: "Cats of any kind are notoriously difficult to survey. However over the last six months we've really saturated the area with live traps, cameras, vets and ecologists, and had lots of people from the local community out looking as well. The only feral cats seen have already been neutered, which means the population should collapse naturally within the next couple of years. Our goal is to establish populations of genetically-pure wildcats. We are determined not to settle for second best or to settle for a bunch of tabbies that bear a resemblance to wildcats. Protecting anything less than the pure Scottish wildcat will condemn the species to extinction. The behaviour of feral cats and pure wildcats is very different. Scotland's ecology needs the true wildcat and, outside of a wildlife park enclosure, this is the only place in the UK where they are safe from hybridisation. If we had the funding available, we would be very confident of saving the wildcat; the only thing that limits the scale of the Haven project is lack of funding."

This is thought to be the first time that feral cats have been managed in such a large mainland area anywhere in the world. Camera trap footage, using remote motion-sensor cameras, suggests that Ardnamurchan's wildcats, which could number fewer than ten, might be genetically pure. The animals will be trapped and DNA tested to establish whether this is the case. If they are, they will be monitored, in the expectation that their population will grow.

If the population proves to be made up of hybrids then discussions will be held with other agencies about the best way forward. As a last resort, wildcats could be brought to Ardnamurchan from areas of Scotland where Dr O'Donoghue believes they are 'doomed' such as the Cairngorms, or from captivity.

The area is protected by a heavily monitored buffer zone at a geographic bottleneck through which feral cats could not easily migrate.

Steve Piper, previously the Scottish Wildcat Association's chairman, said that the haven is 'the only future the Scottish wildcat has.' He said: "This is a huge achievement for everyone involved. Wildcat haven is easily five years ahead of the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) action plan and people need to get behind it." He believes that the haven is a good model which could be replicated by SNH elsewhere in Scotland.

ISLAY GEESE

A report on Greenland barnacle geese on Islay has been published by SNH. It describes a new population viability analysis of the overwintering barnacle geese population, which represented approximately 70% of the flyway population. The Islay population has increased from around

7,000 birds in the 1960s to 44,000 in 2011. As no survival or productivity trends were apparent, an average population model was developed using count and ring-resighting data, which accounts for shooting on Iceland and Islay. At 2011 shooting levels, the Islay population is predicted to continue to increase at 2.6 to 3% per year. The model is then used to make predictions for how changes in shooting pressure on Islay may influence future population trajectories, along with associated risks of decline. The potential impacts of future management regimes are discussed. See: *SNH Commissioned Report 568: Status and population viability of Greenland barnacle geese on Islay*. See: bit.ly/1jMxpVWL

GOLDEN EAGLES

A report, *Golden Eagles in South Scotland: An overview*, was commissioned by SNH (Commissioned Report 626). It details the recovery prospects for golden eagles in southern Scotland and was written by Alan Fielding and Paul Haworth, both of whom were involved with the Golden Eagle Conservation Framework report [Jul 08]

The report contains a very detailed analysis of the various issues that could affect the recovery of this tiny population including the effect of illegal persecution. It mentions persecution in several areas (Lowther Hills, Tweedsmuir Hills, Ettrick Hills and Moorfoot Hills) and suggests that it needs to be brought under control if golden eagles are to once again survive in these areas.

SNH said that habitat changes could see southern Scotland support 16 breeding pairs. It is believed that only one or two pairs currently attempt to breed in Galloway each year and no more than three pairs in the Scottish Borders. The total Scottish golden eagle population is 440 pairs, with most of the birds to be found in the Highlands and Islands.

Professor Des Thompson of SNH, who led the research, said: "We would now like to see on-the-ground, practical work to improve the habitat for golden eagles in the south of Scotland. With habitat improvements, we could see connections with the small reintroduced population in Ireland. This would help both groups of eagles and could even help bolster the population in the north of England."

A *BBC News* report implies that golden eagles in southern Scotland are constrained by impoverished habitat and potentially by climate change, lack of prey, windfarms and afforestation. Illegal persecution 'may have been an historical factor' but Scottish Land & Estates stated that 'the number of such incidents has dropped significantly in recent years.'

See: bit.ly/1rwp762

ST KILDA BAT

The *BBC News* website reports that a *Nathusius* pipistrelle bat was spotted by visitors to the island of Hirta in the St Kilda archipelago. It is believed to be the most north-westerly part of Europe in which a bat has been discovered. St Kilda ranger Paul Sharman said: "We haven't got bats at St Kilda. It's too far across the sea for them to fly and we don't think there are any bats resident here. Imagine my surprise when not just one, but three visitors that day showed me photos of a bat they had seen resting on a cleit."

SCOTTISH REINTRODUCTION CODE

The Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations has been launched, believed to be the first of its kind in the world. The code, and the accompanying guidelines, provides information to individuals or organisations considering animal or plant reintroductions in Scotland. It outlines how to identify benefits and risks, what permits and licences are necessary, how to evaluate the impact on other species, habitats and people, who they need to consult, and what follow-up assessment is required. The guidelines set out the types of situation in which translocations may benefit wildlife, people and the environment, enabling thorough and transparent evaluation on a case by case basis.

The code covers plant, animal and fungal reintroductions and other types of 'translocations' – moving a species from one area to another and releasing it for conservation purposes. Reintroductions and other types of translocations can help conserve individual animals and plants and make up for declines caused by habitat loss, climate change, and other human impacts on the environment.

Translocations are just one type of conservation action. In most circumstances, managing animals and plants in their current locations, as well as wider habitat management, will be more cost-effective and lower risk. But there are some situations where conservation translocations are appropriate.

Reintroducing an animal or plant which may have a significant impact on the environment, such as a top-level predator, needs careful consideration.

The code was developed by the National Species Reintroduction Forum, which is chaired by SNH, and includes representatives from conservation organisations, government departments, landowners and estates, and the farming, forestry, fishing, and game-keeping sectors.

Andrew Bauer of NFU Scotland said that the union did 'not have the confidence that the current code will result in a balanced and rigorous assessment of potential reintroductions.'

See: www.snh.gov.uk/translocation-code; www.snh.gov.uk/protecting-scotlands-nature/reintroducing-native-species/nsrf

DEER MANAGEMENT

The Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has published a report, *Deer Management on the National Forest Estate – Current Practices and Future Directions*, to help promote and share good practice in sustainable deer management in Scotland. FC Scotland manages deer sustainably so that Scotland's diverse, productive and resilient national forest estate can function as a multi-benefit resource delivering a range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

FC Scotland culls around 30,000 deer per year, approximately one third of the annual national cull of a population estimated to number 777,000.

See: www.scotland.forestry.gov.uk/managing-plans-and-strategies/deer-management-strategy

 **FARMING**

CAP REFORM

Greening, a new environmental element of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), comes into effect on 1 January 2015, and accounts for almost a third of direct farm funding [Jun 14]. Richard Lochhead, the agriculture minister, has agreed with industry to proceed with Europe's default

greening measures in 2015. This is because Europe has not approved the Scottish Governments' proposals for alternative measures which better suit Scottish circumstances. Scotland's proposed equivalence measures included fertiliser plans and an alternative to the three crop rule. The Scottish Government will now seek European approval to implement them from 2016 onwards.

In the meantime, Scotland will be using the UK's flexibility on coupled support for sheep.

AMERICAN FOULBROOD

An outbreak of American Foulbrood, a disease affecting colonies of honeybees, has been found in an apiary in Tarland, Aberdeenshire. The disease was confirmed following laboratory diagnosis by Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture. The infected hive is being destroyed as there is no permitted treatment for the disease in the UK. The movement of bees and related equipment into or out of the affected apiary are under specific controls.

ORKNEY GEESE

A project to control the goose population in Orkney has been renewed for a third year. Local residents will be licensed to shoot greylag geese, with the meat available for sale at shops on the islands and online [Feb 14].

The population of greylag geese nesting in the area has increased over the last 20 years, but shooting in recent years has helped keep numbers down. Last year, 5,844 resident greylag geese were shot, and a target of 5,500 has been set for this year. More than 20,000 greylags nest in Orkney each summer, and shooting is carried out in August and September before migratory birds arrive from Iceland in October.

The population control project is part of a pilot being trialled by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and the National Goose Management Review Group.

SUSTAINABLE ARABLE

The *Press & Journal* reported on the progress of a 18 year experiment into sustainable arable farming at the James Hutton Institute. Funded by the Scottish Government, it is designed to last for three six year rotations.

Conventional arable farming will be compared with a sustainable cropping system at Balrudery Farm near Dundee, using Discovery compost made by Dundee City Council. Straw incorporation is used rather than baling together with 70% less nitrogenous fertiliser.

 **WOODLANDS**

MORVERN WOODLANDS

Morvern Community Woodlands has applied to the National Forest Land Scheme to purchase 8 hectares of woodland at Achnaha, on the Morvern peninsula. MCW has been managing the woodland in conjunction with Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland, through a management agreement, since 2004. The purchase of the woodland would enable the community to continue managing the land and seek funding for which it is not currently eligible. The company intends extending access networks, a wildlife hide and pond, art in the woods and an external play area.

PINE TREE LAPPET MOTH

FC Scotland is increasing surveillance of the pine tree lappet moth, first discovered in Scotland in 2004. Timber movement controls, implemented in 2007, will remain in place.

The monitoring, outside the current breeding area, is precautionary until more is known about

its status and its potential to cause extensive damage to pine trees in current and predicted future Scottish conditions.

The aim is to contain the geographic range of moth. The caterpillars feed mainly on Scots pine needles and have the potential, if present in sufficiently large numbers, to cause substantial forest damage over large areas.

Despite extensive DNA analysis by Forest Research it has not yet been possible to determine definitively whether the moth is a previously overlooked native species with an extremely restricted distribution or a recent introduction to Scotland.

Numbers of moths have remained very low, and there has been no sign of damage to pine trees. However, Scotland's pine resource is already under threat from a number of other pests and diseases, such as *Dothistroma* needle blight.

Any new breeding areas discovered will be dealt with by an experimental, non-chemical method of control (glue banding on pine trees) or, if appropriate, by some tree felling.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk/pinetreelappet

HIGHLAND WOODLANDS

The Coille Alba charity has received a grant of £135,000 to restore habitats in broadleaf and mixed woodlands around Glen Urquhart and the River Nairn. Over the next three years, invasive, non-native plants will be removed.

 **FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

LOCH TORRIDON SEA-LICE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Sheildaig Community Council has lodged an objection to the application by the Scottish Salmon Company (SSC) to remove sea-lice controls at Sgeir Dughall fishfarm in Loch Torridon. The application to alter the 2012 planning agreement (section 42) is currently being considered by Highland Council. Sea-lice infestations in the area are at 24 times the level at which remedial action is required, according to the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation's *Fish Health Management Report 2013*. The original planning consent for 14 cages was subject to a ten-year limit within which the company had to demonstrate effective control of sea-lice to present minimum risk to wild salmonid stocks in the area [Mar 12].

2013 was the second year of production, and sea-lice burdens were high; there were alsomarge numbers of fish mortalities.

The community council asked that steps be taken by SSC in conjunction with Marine Harvest, the Wester Ross Salmon Fisheries Board and Marine Scotland to set up monitoring arrangements so that 'appropriate information' is available towards the end of the ten year period to judge whether sea-lice from this (and other fishfarms in the area) are likely to be having a deleterious impact on wild fish stocks.

A Scottish Salmon Company spokeswoman said: "Our section 42 application presents our desire to create a sustainable salmon farming operation at Sgier Dhugall ... Our continuous research and development programme is bringing about new and improved fish health and environmental practices. Neither Marine Scotland, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency nor Scottish Natural Heritage objected to the original planning application and that position has not changed with SSC's section 42 application."

NESS FISHERY

A six-year plan has been put out for local consultation

about the River Ness catchment in Inverness-shire. It aims to enhance salmon populations and seeks greater knowledge of fish populations in Loch Ness and the Caledonian Canal. The potential impacts of proposed large-scale offshore renewable energy projects on migratory fish is one of the priorities in the strategy [Sep 13]. Measures are also proposed to tackle invasive plants such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam around Inverness.

OUTER HEBRIDES SHELLFISH

A consultation has been launched into the shellfish industries on the Outer Hebrides. The Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group (IFG) approached Marine Scotland to legislate on management proposals it has developed to help improve the sustainability of these fisheries through the regulation of harvesting controls.

The IFG's proposals include increasing the minimum landing sizes of brown crab, velvet crab and lobster, which will help to increase yield and spawning stock biomass for the three most important species by value for the static gear fleet operating within the IFG area.

The prohibition of landing of larger female lobsters in the area has also been proposed.

FISHERIES FUNDING

The latest round of European Fisheries Funding (EFF) has been announced. The £6m grants will support 109 new projects and enable investment of over £14m in sea fisheries, aquaculture and processing industries.

Inshore Fisheries Groups across Scotland will benefit from £1.4m of research projects designed to improve and maintain their sustainable management measures. Funding is being allocated to the establishment of the location of fishing activities within inshore areas; identifying fishery impacts; defining the environmental footprint and availability of stocks; developing economic value within local fisheries and establishing an information resource base to assist the management of inshore fisheries.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation received almost £400,000 for a West of Scotland demersal stock survey, including the Western Isles. *The West Highland Free Press* reported that the detailed survey could open up new opportunities for whitefish for smaller west coast boats; the licensing quota for cod, whiting, haddock and mackerel is predominantly run by large trawlers operating out of the east coast and Shetland.

The Shetland Fishermen's Association also received funding for research into fish stocks in the northern North Sea.

This is the final round of grants under the EFF which will be replaced by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and brings the total funding for this scheme to almost £84m.

 **MARINE**
BASKING SHARKS

A report has been published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) on a project which uses satellite tagging technology to track the near real-time movements of basking sharks [Dec 13]. The project is a joint venture between SNH and the University of Exeter (UoE).

Each year, large numbers of basking sharks are seen in an area of the Sea of the Hebrides which is currently being assessed as part of the Scottish Marine Protected Areas Project.

Findings from the first two years of the project are set out. 20 sharks were tagged in summer 2012 and a further 31 were tagged a year later. In both

years the tagged sharks spent most of July, August and September in waters around the islands of Coll and Tiree and the Hyskeir lighthouse. In these months more than 80% of the satellite transmissions received from tagged sharks came from within the Sea of the Hebrides.

Dr Suzanne Henderson from SNH said: "As well as cruising around and feeding at the surface they can be seen showing courtship-like behaviours, such as jumping clear of the water, known as breaching and swimming around nose-to-tail. These social behaviours suggest that the sharks return to the area not just to feed on the plankton bloom but for other reasons too, perhaps even to find a mate.

"Information received from the tags also shows that the sharks spend these summer months at different depths, moving up and down in the water on a daily basis. A large proportion of their time is spent in shallow water less than five metres deep, but they also spend time in deeper water down to 250 metres. There doesn't seem to be a single pattern to this daily vertical migration, and it appears that the sharks adapt their behaviour to local conditions. One of the sharks we tagged last year which migrated to the Isle of Man, and likely beyond, has recently returned to Scotland this year. This is exciting because although we believe it's the same sharks returning to the Sea of the Hebrides each year, this is the first evidence we have. It highlights the importance of the route between the Isle of Man and Scotland for basking sharks. Some sharks have with tags still attached, so we may see more returning to Scotland this year, providing further evidence of the importance of the Sea of the Hebrides for basking sharks. People can keep an eye on the tracking website and hopefully watch this unfold."

Dr Matthew Witt from UoE said: "We know quite a lot about basking shark biology and distribution but relatively little about their seasonal movements, although we have already learnt a lot from the first two years of this project. We now know that as autumn approaches the sharks start to spend more time in deeper water, with less activity at the surface. Two of the sharks reached depths of over 1,000 metres, indicating that they were off the continental shelf. After September the sharks head away from Scotland and evidence suggests that the Celtic and Irish Seas are an important migration route for them. Only one shark was tracked migrating south via the west coast of Ireland, others were tracked moving south to the Isle of Man and south-west England. One shark was seen to head as far south as the Canary Islands."

The tags are silver grey, torpedo shaped and 15 to 18 cm in length with a small antenna. Some of the tags contain additional information which is not transmitted. If a tag is found, please call: telephone 0300 244 9360; email: baskingsharks@snh.gov.uk

SNH Commissioned Report 752: Basking shark satellite tagging project: insights into basking shark (Cetorhinus maximus) movement, distribution and behaviour using satellite telemetry (phase 1 July 2014).

See: www.snh.gov.uk/basking-shark-tagging; www.wildlifetracking.org/?project_id=839

• *The Herald* reported that the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT) believes that numbers of basking sharks so far recorded this year is the lowest ever recorded for the same period.

14 sightings, most of them individuals, have been recorded by the trust, although a group of 37 was seen west of Barra by Sea Life Surveys. In the same period from January to mid-July 2013 there were 42 sightings.

Conor Ryan, of HWDT, said: "If the plankton is further offshore then the basking sharks will

follow it making sightings less likely. Because there are fewer sightings so far this year does not necessarily mean there are less basking sharks about. It is just that they are harder to see. It is a bit of a mystery why there have been so few sightings this year. The conditions are quite favourable for them and we have had good sightings of other species like minke whales and various dolphins. August is the peak month for sightings of basking sharks so we are hoping to get more records then."

MPAs

The Scottish Government has announced the creation of a network of 30 marine protected areas around Scotland's coastline to protect marine species and their habitats [Jun 14]. Scotland's seas support many habitats and species, including cold water coral reefs, 22 individual species of whales and dolphins and almost half of the EU's breeding seabirds. The North East Faroe Shetland Channel is now estimated to be the largest MPA in the EU.

The 30 MPAs were identified through a project led by Marine Scotland with support from SNH, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Marine Scotland Science, SEPA and Historic Scotland.

See: <http://bit.ly/1ujQ3z2>; <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1414>; <http://bit.ly/1kedKEX>

14 draft Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for seabirds were also announced. Further plans include four new areas for the protection of basking sharks, whales and dolphins. See: www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1350044.pdf; <http://bit.ly/1k0w7qd>

Around 20% of Scotland's seas are now in protected areas. Existing protected areas include SPAs, Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

The habitats and species were identified from an initial list of Priority Marine Features developed by SNH, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and Marine Scotland Science. The list has now been finalised following a public consultation. See: <http://bit.ly/1k0vPFT>

Calum Duncan, convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's marine taskforce, said: "After many years of unchecked decline, we have now started to recognise our nationally important sealife and neglected marine habitats need better protection. If well-managed, these MPAs will also work for the public interest. They will help to recover our damaged seas and benefit everyone who depends upon their health."

Where possible, the MPA management will allow sustainable use of the sea by marine users, including the fishing industry.

Alistair Sinclair, of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, said: "If the whole industry embraces MPAs we will, without doubt, start the process of enhancing our marine environment, creating more opportunities for communities around our coastline."

Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland, said: "Many of these MPAs – such as South Arran and Wester Ross – have been the direct result of local campaigning and research. We know these measures to recover our sea life have popular support within many communities, but there is still work to do. Other communities, such as the tireless campaigners of Fair Isle, are still calling for better protection of their local marine environment and we hope these MPAs mark a new, regionally-sensitive approach to coastal and marine management."

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The designation of draft Special Protection Areas is an excellent first step on what will be a long journey towards securing a healthy marine environment in Scotland. However, the real test will be how well these sites are protected and managed to help

restore Scotland's seabird populations. Although we are now at last making progress in protecting key areas, our seabirds are still without the protection they need further out at sea where they feed. The Scottish Government must bring forward more SPAs for seabirds soon and also recognise the value of MPAs for other seabirds like razorbills, kittiwakes and Arctic terns. A number of crucially important areas, for example parts of the outer Firth of Forth, have not yet been protected for seabirds, despite their enormous value to gannets, kittiwakes and other species. Worryingly this is the same area being scoped for large scale offshore wind development."

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said: "A significant area of the seas around our coasts are now protected, and we firmly believe that rather than falling into the temptation to deliver even more MPAs, there now needs to be a period of reflection and assessment to see how effective this current designation is in delivering overall ecosystem benefits and the impact they may have on our fishing fleets."

A report has been published as part of the Scottish Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Project into the science behind Scotland's possible MPAs. It describes how detailed ecological guidance on selected marine wildlife was produced to help SNH complete their assessment of the features and sites that could make up Scotland's MPA network. See: *SNH Commissioned Report 491: Development of Detailed Ecological Guidance to Support the Application of MPA Selection Guidelines within Scotland's Seas: Final Report*

The *Herald* reported that the Community Of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) said that the new MPAs would be ineffectual, as dredging for scallops can still take place within some MPAs, threatening coral reefs, fish nurseries and other marine wildlife. It wants dredging banned in all near-shore waters.

Andrew Binnie of COAST said: "Dredging will continue over most of our MPA and others with the exception of a few select habitats within them. This means a lot of MPAs will be paper parks – lines on maps with no effective regulation of the most damaging activities. At present the plans will only appease a few dredgers at the continued expense of the environment and a healthier Clyde Sea.

Calum Duncan of Scottish Environment LINK said: "Impractical patch-management could seriously dilute the positive effects of MPAs. The ecological footprint of this heavy gear remains too great and needs to be reduced."

Dr Bryce Beukers-Stewart, from York University, said that broad areas of the seabed needed to be protected, not just specific features. He said: "Scientific studies have demonstrated scallop dredges are among the most damaging of all fishing gears to benthic species and habitats."

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, pointed out that scallop dredging was banned in three areas in the South Arran MPA thanks to a voluntary agreement introduced by fishermen. He said: "Our scallop fishermen concentrate their efforts in less sensitive habitats such as sand and gravel, which are naturally dynamic environments due to the movement of water on the seabed ... to impose undue and ill-informed restrictions to this sector would deny the majority of consumers the chance to enjoy this marvellous-tasting shellfish."

Fisheries minister, Richard Lochhead, did not deny that dredging would be allowed in MPAs, but highlighted the 'voluntary measures' introduced by fishermen.

SUMMER ISLES SCALLOPS

A petition on Change.org.uk is to be delivered to Richard Lochhead and Marine Scotland, concerning the activities of scallop dredgers in the Summer Isles.

The area is being considered by the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland for establishment of a MPA. The petition claims that these plans will be 'lacklustre and ineffectual' unless scallop dredging is stopped. See: chn.ge/1oe10L7

HUMPBAC WHALE

A *post-mortem* on a humpback whale calf found drowned off Mull has suggested that it drowned after swimming into a fishfarm at Fishnish and becoming trapped [Jun 14].

There have only been six recorded humpback whale strandings in Scotland since 1992 and 17 for the whole of the UK.

DALGETY BAY

The *BBC News* website reported that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) has agreed in principle to remove radioactive material from Dalgety Bay, resolving the long-running dispute between the MoD, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and the local authority over who is responsible for managing risks to the public in the area [May 14].

The MoD has said it expects the work to be started later this year, subject to permission, and completed by the end of 2018; costs are 'still being finalised' but were said by Gordon Brown MP to be in the region of £10m. He said: "I am satisfied that the Ministry of Defence is going to fund the clean-up costs. At the same time I want an accelerated timetable so we don't have to wait another four years before the pollution is removed and we are satisfied that the risks have been dealt with."

The plan, which was commissioned by the MoD's Defence Infrastructure Organisation, has been endorsed by SEPA. As well as the removal of radioactive particles, the plan calls for building a wall and slipway to prevent other radioactive material from reaching the area, and the reinforcement, replacement and extension of coastal rock armour. A replacement slipway will be constructed at Dalgety Bay Sailing Club.

The UK defence minister, Andrew Murrison, said: "We are committed to supporting the Dalgety Bay community and, whilst the risk to the public has always been very low, this report sets out a clear and strong strategy to address the radium contamination on the beach. We continue to work with SEPA and the council to achieve agreement on their future responsibilities and a definitive solution as soon as possible.

"We welcome the proposals and will continue to work with MoD, Fife Council and other partners as detailed plans for the works are developed and implemented."

Councillor David Ross, of Fife Council, said: "The council looks forward to being involved through the design and planning phases and in the development and implementation of the proposals." The council said, in principle, that it could take on the long-term maintenance of the coastal protection measures.

Dr Richard Dixon, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "It is great that the MoD have finally stopped denying responsibility and come up with a plan to deal with the mess they caused at Dalgety Bay. This is not a complete solution because some radioactive waste will be left entombed on site but it should finally put an end to the danger faced by humans and wildlife in what should be one of Scotland's more attractive

seaside spots. All credit to the local community and to SEPA for their dogged persistence in getting the MoD to finally do the right thing. The next challenge will be getting them to pay for it all and to do it properly."

JELLYFISH

Large numbers of jellyfish have been reported in Ullapool Harbour and Loch Broom in Highland. It is unclear whether the sudden increase in numbers is the result of low mackerel catches or if other factors, such as global warming, have caused the phenomenon.

Noel Hawkins, of Summer Queen Cruises, said: "Certain fishing zones in the world have reported 'jellification', where jellyfish have reached such levels that other species have been displaced. There are scientific teams looking into this, but we just don't know. The most common species are the harmless blue-ringed moon jellyfish but there are also blue jellyfish and red lion's mane that can cause swimmers and fishermen problems if touched. There are also continued reports of barrel jellyfish, the largest jellyfish encountered in UK waters."

Calum Duncan, of the Marine Conservation Society, said: "It is very difficult to link cause and effect with certainty. That is why we are very keen that the public report their sightings of jellyfish to us so we can get a fuller picture. It appears that proliferations of jellyfish blooms across the world are on the rise. Jellyfish are just large plankton, so you get naturally occurring blooms caused by the surface of the sea getting warmer in spring and summer which, combined with current and wind, can lead to localised aggregation. That may be the explanation of what has happened in Loch Broom.

"However, globally there is also speculation that over-fishing may be contributing to the blooms. Fish eat plankton. If you have fewer fish to eat the plankton, then there may well be bigger blooms. So it could also be that there are more jellyfish in Loch Broom because there are fewer mackerel, rather than the other way round."

However, climate change and pollution from agricultural run-off are taking nutrients into the sea which artificially boost the blooms.

 **POLITICS & PARLIAMENT**

RURAL PARLIAMENT

The Scottish Rural Parliament is to meet for the first full session in Oban, in November. The themes will include land use, planning and land reform, protecting natural assets and adapting to environmental changes.

 **GENERAL ENVIRONMENT**

PROJECT FINDER

A new Project Finder service is available through the recently re-launched Scotland's Environment Web website which will enable volunteers to find environmental projects with local voluntary groups, Citizen Science and Citizen Action. Local voluntary groups can register their profile and volunteering opportunities free-of-charge. See: www.environment.scotland.gov.uk

BEEWATCH

BeeWatch is an online project, led by the University of Aberdeen, that has photographs submitted by members of the public. The project is aimed at creating a clearer picture of the distribution of bees around the country. A new online training tool allows them to identify the bees. The BeeWatch

project is run in conjunction with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, and was prompted by the decline of the country's bumblebee species as a result of habitat loss and changes in agricultural practices.

Crowdsourcing as an operational part of a monitoring programme is a world first. BeeWatch has a statistical model for putting together IDs by different members of the public and estimating the likelihood of their consensus being correct.

SEWAGE SLUDGE

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has received a large number of complaints about offensive odour from residents in Erskine and Bishopton in Renfrewshire, linked to the spreading, and storage, of sewage sludge on Drumcross Farm near Erskine.

HIGHLAND WILDFIRES

A major moorland blaze occurred above Loch Ceo Glais on the B862 Inverness to Fort Augustus road, threatening powerlines.

- A wildfire was fought by firefighters on the Scoraig peninsula, between Little Loch Broom and Loch Broom south of Ullapool. The forested area also has a pair of rare white-tailed sea eagles who have settled on the coast, the first to do so in more than 100 years.

- A wildfire broke out in the sandunes at the RSPB Scotland reserve at Loch of Strathbeg, near Fraserburgh. The fire was spread over more than 60 acres because of strong winds, and tens of chicks are thought to have died in the fire. The fire was caused by burning rubbish on the beach.

FIELD SPORTS

A report by Public & Corporate Economic Consultants stated that 120,000 people took part in hunting in Scotland in 2012/13, many of them visitors to sporting estates. Shooters, and those providing shooting services, made a total economic contribution of £200m to Scotland, around 10% of the UK total for the industry.

Tim Baynes, director of the Scottish Moorland Group, part of landowners' organisation Scottish Land & Estates, said: "Scotland is a special place for all types of shooting sports, most notably red deer stalking and grouse shooting, which have shaped large parts of the landscape. This new report sets out their important contribution to the rural economy and biodiversity of the UK."

A spokeswoman for the League Against Cruel Sports said: "Shooting is not good for the economy. The recent report by the Land Reform Review Group [May 14] stated that devoting large areas of land to shooting estates was not in the public interest, and suggested that the government reform tax and land ownership structures to make shooting estates less socially and economically damaging. Aside from the economic arguments, the shooting industry is based on animal cruelty – both in terms of the game birds, and the other animals which are shot and snared in the name of predator control. There's no excuse for causing animal suffering in the name of entertainment, and this is something the report completely fails to address."

Visit Scotland said that £500m was spent by hikers in 2009. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) estimated that £127m was spent on wildlife tourism.

GROUSE LICENCES

The BBC's *Good Morning Scotland* programme included interviews with Stuart Housden of RSPB Scotland and Tim Baynes of Scottish Land & Estates' Moorland Group concerning the 'need' for the introduction of a licensed regulatory

system for driven grouse moors [Feb 14].

Tim Baynes said that RSPB Scotland's data on raptor persecution is 'out of date' and that there is 'very little proof' of raptor persecution.

OPEN CAST COAL

The Herald reported that East Ayrshire Council has failed in a bid to get the insurance company, Zurich, to pay out £3.34m for environmental remediation at Dalfad mine. Instead, the company is now only liable for £1.67m or less. The Court of Session in Edinburgh rejected the council's claim on a legal technicality [Feb 14].

Even if the council had won the full amount under the insurance bond, it would probably have fallen far short of the money needed. The full cost of restoring Dalfad has been estimated at £8.56m.

East Ayrshire, which has by far the highest concentration of opencast coal mining in Scotland, needs a further £132m to restore the landscapes scarred by 22 mines. It says it expects to retrieve £14m in bond money by the end of this month, with negotiations continuing.

RSPB Scotland, expressed disappointment that the council had missed out on 'desperately needed' funds. Zoe Clelland said: "This highlights the risks of using complex commercial bonds, which place too much trust in the developers and in the bond issuers. A simpler system is needed to ensure it is always the polluters that pay for clean-up when they harm our environment and it doesn't fall to hard-pressed local councils and taxpayers."

- The *Sunday Herald* reported that conditions at seven old open cast coal mines in the central belt are deteriorating, following the collapse of Scottish Coal [Apr 13]. There is a growing risk of rising water levels, contaminated lagoons and erosion.

A bid for the old mines by a specially formed company, Scot Coal Energy Limited, has twice been rejected by SEPA because of concerns that pollution permits would be breached at five mines, including Dalfad.

SEPA has now transferred environmental licences for six former opencast coal sites from the liquidators, KPMG, to Mines Restoration Limited (MRL), a new government-initiated company. Licences for the former Scottish Coal Company Ltd sites at Dunstonhill, Powharnal, and Spireslack/Ponesk in Ayrshire, Glentaggart and Mainshill in South Lanarkshire, and Blairhouse in Fife have been transferred.

Lin Buntin of SEPA said: "The transference of licences to MRL represents a positive step forward in ensuring that these opencast sites will be adequately managed and the local environment safeguarded. To allow SEPA to approve the transfer of these licences, MRL has had to demonstrate to SEPA that it is capable of securing compliance with the strict conditions outlined under each environmental licence and we are satisfied that these conditions can be met for the foreseeable future."

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: "It is very frustrating to learn that these sites are still deteriorating over a year after Scottish Coal went bust and left dereliction and chaos in its wake. Scotland has a legal and moral obligation to protect these areas and our international reputation for environmental stewardship is at stake. This is a national crisis and we urgently need to see more leadership and action from the Scottish Government on this issue. We need a clear plan for restoration, and all available remaining funds must be transferred quickly from KPMG along with the sites to allow MRL to get on with the challenge of securing and restoring

them."

- Alan Neish, the head of planning at East Ayrshire Council, has been dismissed following a disciplinary hearing over a £132m shortfall to restore former opencast mine sites after the collapse of Scottish Coal and ATH Resources [Feb 14].

STRATHALLAN ESTATE

Residents on the Strathallan Estate are taking legal action over the new T in the Park festival site, which is to be at Strathallan in Perthshire from next year. They said that the festival could have a 'significant effect' on wildlife, including bats, nesting ospreys and kites. The Machany Water, which splits the estate in two, is an important site for wild salmon spawning and fishing.

David Summers, of the Tay Salmon Fisheries Board, said: "We would like to know what things are planned around the stream and what precautions would be taken to ensure there is no pollution."

The festival organisers have not been required by Perth & Kinross Council to lodge a planning application for the annual event. Any landowner can temporarily change the use of their land, if it is for less than 28 days in a year, without needing planning permission unless it has a 'significant effect on the local environment.'

AIR POLLUTION

Monitoring has shown that average levels of nitrogen dioxide gas have increased on Byres Road in Glasgow from 45 to 54 microgrammes per cubic metre from 2013 to the first half of this year. Over the same period levels have increased at Hope Street in the city centre, at Queensferry Road in Edinburgh and on two streets in Dundee.

There are another seven streets in Scotland where nitrogen dioxide pollution breaches the legal safety limit of 40 microgrammes per cubic metre.

- *The Herald* reported that plans to cut levels of air pollution from traffic in Scotland have been delayed by five years. Glasgow is not now expected to comply with air pollution safety limits until 2025, while Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Dundee and other conurbations won't meet the limits until 2020, having been expected to comply with the extended deadline of 2015. The delays mean that Scotland is involved in a legal case; the European Commission launched a legal action against the UK in February.

The UK agreed to an air pollution law that required levels of nitrogen dioxide gas in cities to be brought below safety limits by 2010. But as it had difficulties meeting this target, it applied for extensions until 2015. In 2011, the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) accepted that Glasgow would not meet the target until 2020.

A second legal action is being brought against the UK government by the environmental lawyers, ClientEarth. The UK court has now asked the European Court of Justice to rule on what remedial action it can compel the government to take; the UK government could be fined for the breaches.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "These revised projections from DEFRA are very disappointing as previous projections suggested that all parts of Scotland would comply with legal limits for nitrogen dioxide pollution from traffic within the next couple of years ... Our action plans set out the work being done to meet European Union standards in the shortest possible time."

Glasgow City Council said it has two pilot projects to fit sensors to street lights to monitor air pollution levels. "The real-time information will help identify the reason for spikes such as taxis failing to turn their engines off at ranks, or buses sitting with their engines running at bus stops."

Aberdeen City Council said it was reducing pollution by managing traffic in the city centre, starting a car club and launching a fleet of hydrogen buses. A spokeswoman said: "The Aberdeen western peripheral route is also expected to improve air quality by diverting traffic from the city centre."

Craig Melville, of Dundee City Council, said that the northeast Scotland zone included eight local authorities and did not give compliance dates for individual cities.

CO₂ EMISSIONS

The Herald reported that Europe's Dirty 30 report has been published by WWF, CAN Europe, the European Environmental Bureau, the Health and Environment Alliance and Climate Alliance Germany. It looks at carbon dioxide emissions from coal power plants in the EU.

Longannet power station was ranked 21st in a list of the most polluting power plants in the EU, according to the total CO₂ emissions in 2013. A Scottish Power spokesman said: "Substantial investment has been made in recent years to ensure that Longannet operates within strict environmental legislative limits. Major projects have been carried out to help limit emissions, with over £200m being invested on projects to reduce sulphur dioxide and nitrous oxide emissions. As a flexible station, Longannet can also respond quickly to requests from National Grid and can reduce output when wind power generation is high."

RIVER POLLUTION

Scottish Water was fined £6,500 at Alloa Sheriff Court after pleading guilty to polluting the Alva Burn, near Alloa. Investigations revealed that a pipe had been discharging chlorinated water, resulting in the death of 1,000 fish. The fine was reduced from £10,000 due to the fact the incident was relatively 'short-lived and localised.'

RAPTOR PERSECUTION

The Press & Journal reported that the 'official' number of birds confirmed poisoned in the Ross-shire 'massacre' is now 16 (12 red kites and four buzzards), according to Police Scotland [Jun 14]. Toxicology tests on the remaining birds are still 'continuing,' four months after discovery. The total reward being offered for information leading to the conviction of the culprit has risen to over £32,000.

GREEN FLAG AWARDS

Keep Scotland Beautiful has awarded green flag status to 59 parks in towns and cities, mainly across central Scotland. Entrants are assessed on eight criteria, including whether the park or green space is welcoming, healthy, safe, clean and well-maintained. Successful parks also have to be sustainable, manage conservation and heritage, have community involvement, market themselves and have good management.

AN CAMUS MÒR

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that the recreational management plan for the An Camus Mòr new town near Aviemore has still to be submitted to the Cairngorms National Park Authority [Jun 14]. The current masterplan application has now been withdrawn, and all the information will be resubmitted together.

Dr Gus Jones, spokesman for the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group (BSCG), said: "The masterplan is desperately ill-thought through. It is hopelessly incomplete and conspicuously out-of-date."

WILD LAND

An editorial in the *West Highland Free Press (WHFP)* reported that Rob Gibson MSP questioned the motives and methodology behind Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)'s final Wild Land Areas Maps [Jun 14]. He said that he thought that SNH had 'been subjected to considerable pressures from some organisations who wish to exclude human activities from these areas if at all possible.'

The *WHFP* said that the 'wild land' designations are undemocratic and potentially stifling. The final wild land map is not much different from the first, including 19% of Scotland. However, about 60% of the northwest Highlands & Islands fall into this category, including almost all of wester Ross, Rum, the Cuillins, south Glendale, the eastern hills of South Uist, south-central Lewis and South Lochs.

Mr Gibson points out some inclusions and omissions – the bombing range of Garvey Island is included, for instance, but not the island of Canna. The relatively unremarkable South Glendale district is included, but not the Trotternish Ridge on Skye. Why is South Lewis included, but not Barvas Moor, said by conservationists to be a national natural treasure when a planning application was made for a windfarm [Mar 08]? The small minority of the Scottish population which actually lives in the Highlands & Islands often has a different, more ambitious view of its future than offering bed and breakfast to holidaymakers.

The *WHFP* said: [Control] has been taken out of the hands of elected local authorities in the Highlands & Islands, and usurped by a body of anonymous, unaccountable civil servants who are answerable only to Holyrood ... More than half of the northwest has been condemned by a quango to a perpetual wilderness."



ENERGY

RENEWABLE ENERGY

The *BBC News* website reported that SmartestEnergy's Energy Entrepreneurs Report 2014 said that independent renewable energy schemes in Scotland generated about £234 m of power last year, an increase of £43m on 2012. 169 new independent renewable projects of 50 kW or more started in Scotland in 2013, an increase of 50% on 2012.

The Herald reported that, departing from historical trends, Scotland imported power from England on 162 days over the past three years according to National Grid figures. Scotland continues to export more electricity to England, however. Scotland's self-sufficiency faces 'further erosion' as nuclear and coal-fired power stations are scheduled to close or cut capacity in the next few years. Professor Paul Younger, of Glasgow University, said that the increasing need for English electricity reflected the increasingly tight margins in Scotland's baseload (constantly available) and dispatchable (available on demand) electricity sources.

TRANSMISSION CHARGING

Ofgem is to cut charges for green energy generators from 1 April 2016. Charges to these suppliers from the transmission operator, National Grid, will more closely reflect their use of the network; this will benefit suppliers of wind or solar energy.

SUBSEA CABLES

Ofgem has approved SSE's plans for a 100 mile underground and subsea electricity link between Caithness and Moray. It aims to deliver 1.2 gigawatts of renewable electricity generation from

planned windfarm projects through the link across the Moray Firth. The scheme is due to be completed in 2018.

The Press & Journal reported that plans to link Norway and Peterhead with a super subsea cable, mothballed in 2011, have been resubmitted. It will open in 2022 and connect planned and existing onshore and offshore developments in the northeast, Caithness, Orkney and Shetland.

WINDFARM PHOTOMONTAGES

Revised Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) guidelines have been published which update advice on how photomontages and drawings should be presented to help planning authorities assess the impact of windfarm projects. It requires the production of images with an equivalent focal length of 75mm, increased from 50mm, and recommends new digital methods to make it easier for the public to view images online. Viewpoints out to 12.5 miles should be illustrated, and there should be 'zone of theoretical visibility' maps to show where a windfarm would be seen.

Brendan Turvey, of SNH, said: "It will make it easier to illustrate cumulative effects. No visualisation can ever represent exactly what the windfarm will look like, due to different weather conditions, lighting, and turbine movement."

The new guidance is supported by the Scottish Government, Landscape Institute, Scottish Renewables, and Heads of Planning Scotland. It will be phased in over six months.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Caithness: A public local inquiry is to be held into the 24 turbine windfarm planned at Limekiln, Reay. This will be the first inquiry into a development affecting one of the recently confirmed Wild Land Areas (Area 39, East Halladale Flows).

The John Muir Trust (JMT) considers that a new assessment of wild land effects is required in the light of the recently confirmed new National Planning Framework 3, and Scottish Planning Policy 2, alongside SNH's 2014 Wild Land Areas map and advice to the Scottish Government. The JMT also believes that, in a new assessment of wild land, the developers need to consider the current rate of loss of wild land and the cumulative effects of wind farms, in say a 60 km radius, on the remaining wild land in that area.

East Ayrshire: Council officials recommended that members of the authority's planning committee oppose Vattenfall's planned South Kyle Wind Farm development, near Dalmellington, in sight of the popular tourist spot of Loch Doon. The plans would involve 3.5 square miles of forestry clearance to make way for the turbines.

Of the 50 turbines, 30 would be built in the East Ayrshire area with the remainder in Dumfries & Galloway; Dumfries & Galloway Council voted not to object, instead asking for a series of conditions. The Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Scottish Dark Sky Observatory have objected. Glasgow Prestwick Airport, the Ministry of Defence and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) have not objected, but asked that conditions be attached if the application is granted.

Dumfries & Galloway: 2020 Renewables has lost an appeal against the refusal of the 11 turbine Loch Hill windfarm near St John's Town of Dalry [Dec 13]. Planning officials had recommended approval, but it was rejected by councillors due to its 'visual and cumulative impact on the surrounding area.' The Scottish Government reporter concluded that the 'visual harm would be disproportionate to the renewable energy generation benefits.'

Plans for a 14 turbine windfarm near Sanquhar have been withdrawn by the developer, Community Wind Power Ltd. Concerns had been raised about the

impact the proposals would have on wildlife and objections were lodged by RSPB Scotland, SNH and individuals. The site is part of the Muirkirk & North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area and is important for threatened wildlife, such as hen harriers, peregrines and short-eared owls. SNH also raised concerns that the scheme will create a 'corridor effect' where turbines would be visible on either side of Nithsdale. The company aims to resubmit the plans, once the concerns have been addressed.

- Planning officials have recommended refusal of Renewable Energy Systems' five-turbine scheme at Barclay Hill, citing an adverse impact on the landscape, being overwhelming in scale and detracting from the character of the area. The proposed site falls within the Solway Coastal Regional Scenic Area. NATS (formerly National Air Traffic Services) is concerned about the impact the turbines would have on the Lowther Hill Radar.

Highlands: The JMT has received a reply from the energy minister, Fergus Ewing, to a letter expressing concern over his decision to approve the Stronelairg windfarm in the Monadhliath Mountains [Jun 14].

Mr Ewing said: "With regards to your observation that the application should have been considered at a Public Local Inquiry (PLI), I carefully considered the option of a PLI as part of that determination. I took all objections, including that of the JMT, and all material considerations into account, and considered that were no significant issues which had not been adequately considered in the application, environmental information, consultation responses, and third party representations and that I had sufficient information to be able to make an informed decision on the application without the need for a PLI."

The JMT does not consider that its serious concerns have been addressed and is awaiting legal advice regarding the possibility of taking a Judicial Review.

Perthshire: The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has objected to the 24 turbine Talladh-a-Bheithe windfarm proposed for moorland between Loch Rannoch and Loch Erich.

David Gibson of MCofS said that it would affect views from Schiehallion, the Ben Alder massif, the mountains above Glen Lyon and Loch Tay and some above the Drumochter Pass, and that it would be visible from the main A82 on the far side of Rannoch Moor and from Buachaille Etive Mor. There are 54 Munros and Corbetts within 21 miles of the site, from which the development would be visible.

Mr Gibson said: "It is a stunning landscape vista which is very sensitive to any form of intrusive human activity and an increasingly rare and valuable experience in Scotland. Any presumed benefit from this development would be far outweighed by the damage it would do to such a distinctive landscape which is vital not only to highland Perthshire's identity but also to Scotland's international image. There might be a reason for the approval of this proposal if there was a dearth of onshore windfarm developments coming forward to achieve the Scottish Government's energy goals, but this is not the case, so Talladh-a-Bheithe cannot be considered a necessary development, far less an essential one, and it's certainly not in the national interest."

The JMT said that Talladh-a-Bheithe was the first major windfarm application to be submitted to the Scottish Government under the new Scottish planning policy and impacting on one of the newly-established Wild Land Areas

(Area 14). The JMT considers that the sensitive wild land character of the proposed site is not suitable for this type and scale of development and that no amount of mitigation whether by siting or design can overcome the stark, intrusive and environmentally destructive impact of this proposal. Ramblers Scotland has also objected to the planning proposal.

Scottish Borders: West Coast Energy Ltd has applied to build an eight turbine windfarm at Hag Law near Romanno Bridge in Peeblesshire. The firm was originally planning 11 turbines.

Shetland: The Viking Energy Partnership windfarm has been given permission to proceed by appeal judges, who announced that there is insufficient reason to stop the 103 turbine, 370 MW project from going ahead [Jan 14]. The campaign group Sustainable Shetland had sought a judicial review of the Scottish Government's decision in April 2012 to approve the development as long as the turbines were reduced from 127 to 103. The original plan was for 150 turbines.

In a previous ruling, Lady Clark of Calton said that she was not satisfied that ministers had complied with their obligations under the European Wild Birds Directive 2009, thereby blocking the development [Sep 13]. But ministers then appealed and Lord Brodie has now delivered the opinion that the consent was lawful and there had been no breach of the birds directive.

South Ayrshire: Scottish Power Renewables' 69 MW 23 turbine Dersaloch windfarm has been approved by the Scottish Government.

South Lanarkshire: SSE's Clyde windfarm extension, to the east of Abington, has been approved by the Scottish Government [Jan 12]. The extension will have 45 turbines which will generate an additional 171 MW, bringing the total generating capacity of the windfarm to 512 MW.

West Lothian: Consent for Enel Viento S.L's 22 turbine, 66 MW windfarm, at Harburnhead near West Calder, has been granted by the Scottish Government.

An application to build the 21 turbine Fauch Hill windfarm, also near West Calder, was refused on the grounds of unacceptable adverse visual and landscape impacts, particularly on the Pentland Hills.

OFFSHORE SUBSTATION

A Scottish Government reporter has upheld a planning appeal from the developers of an electricity substation at Blackdog, integral to the development of the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) [Jan 14]. Aberdeenshire Council had refused permission for the substation at Blackdog, and the majority of local residents were against it, because of increased traffic and the presence of asbestos on the former landfill site. However, council planning officers had recommended approval. Planning permission has now been granted, subject to 16 conditions. Construction is due to start in 2017.

The *Press & Journal* reported that a spokesman for Trump International, which is opposed to the EOWDC, said: "It is a disgrace that the Scottish Government has recklessly disregarded the health and safety of the Blackdog residents and ignored the fears of Aberdeenshire Council. We intend to pursue a separate legal challenge to this decision and will continue to fight it in the Court of Session and beyond. This matter will be in court for many years to come."

Aberdeenshire councillor, Martin Ford, said: "Mr Trump does not have a leg to stand on, complaining about local planning decisions being overturned by the Scottish Government. He has probably gained more than anyone else from government over-ruling a planning committee."

WAVE & TIDAL POWER

The *BBC News* website reported that The Crown Estate has given approval to lease two new wave and tidal demonstration zones and two new project sites in Scotland – the Stronsay Firth in Orkney, the Mull of Galloway, Islay and Harris.

The European Marine Energy Centre (EMEC), in collaboration with local partners, has been awarded rights in Harris, Islay and Orkney. The consortia will then submit applications to Marine Scotland to secure permission for energy devices to be installed.

- AWS Ocean Energy has completed deployment and initial testing of a wave energy device at Lyness, off Orkney, to help power offshore fishfarms and remote communities.

HYDRO SCHEMES

Dalavich Improvement Group (DIG) has applied to the National Forest Land Scheme to lease 4.5 hectares of land in Dalavich Oakwoods, near Taynuilt, for a run-of-river hydro scheme on the River Avich.

- RWE Innogy has submitted an application to Highland Council for a 9 MW hydro storage scheme on the River Pattack west of Dalwhinnie. A new area of loch, one kilometre long, would be created. The access for the development is within the Cairngorms National Park, but the bulk of the scheme is outwith the park boundary. A pipeline would run to a powerhouse on Loch Laggan.

UNCONVENTIONAL HYDROCARBONS

A report has been published by an independent expert scientific panel looking at unconventional oil & gas. The panel was convened by the Scottish Government to review and report on the scientific facts available on unconventional hydrocarbons [Sep 13].

Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, said that the Scottish Government will now set up a working group to consider the findings of the panel's report in more detail and to ensure that regulation of this industry is completely robust.

The chairman of the panel, Dr Chris Masters, said: "It is clear that the development of unconventional hydrocarbons has had a profound effect on the economy of the United States with global repercussions in terms of gas and chemical feedstock prices. While it is unlikely that Scotland, or indeed, Europe, would benefit to a similar degree, there could be a number of positive economic impacts from the development of unconventional hydrocarbons, particularly in the petrochemical industry. Scotland has a significant petrochemical industry, a rich heritage in the extractive industries and some advantages in terms of an existing supply chain and experience with the offshore oil & gas industry.

"The panel found that there are no significant technological impediments to the development of an onshore unconventional hydrocarbon industry in Scotland and furthermore that the technology currently exists to extract such hydrocarbons safely. The panel also found that much of the regulatory regime is already in place to ensure effective monitoring and control of unconventional oil & gas developments, although a number of areas were identified which require further consideration.

"... Although further exploratory drilling will be required, Scotland's geology suggests that there could be significant reserves of unconventional oil and gas – the greatest potential reserves are likely to be in the Midland Valley of Scotland. When viewed in the context of the factors that have supported coal bed methane and shale gas development in other countries, it seems likely that unconventional gas could be developed in Scotland at scale.

“This is particularly true, given Scotland’s domestic oil and gas supply-chain industry, and Scotland’s longstanding experience in other extractive industries such as coal mining, shale oil, and conventional oil and gas. The high population density of those parts of Scotland most likely to host significant unconventional oil and gas resources would be a challenge for any form of re-industrialisation, and will thus be so for any future unconventional oil and gas industry.”

The *BBC News* website reported that Mary Church, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said ministers should put a moratorium on all unconventional gas extraction until a full assessment of the public health implications had been carried out. She said: “The analysis clearly demonstrates that even if all the environmental, health and regulatory issues could be overcome, there still wouldn’t be a US-style bonanza here, simply because the cost of extraction and the technical and geological challenges are too great. It is simply wishful thinking to imagine that it is possible to safely frack for unconventional gas in the most densely populated part of the country.”

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/07/1758

• *The Herald* reported that the Central Belt has been opened up to fracking by the UK government, including areas within the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park. UK ministers said that they would only allow drilling in National Parks under ‘exceptional circumstances.’ Communities minister Lord Ahmad said that, in such areas, ‘environmental qualities need to be balanced against the benefits of oil and gas.’

The UK government has control over Scottish mineral rights but not planning regulations. It advertised almost all of Scotland’s Central Belt for onshore oil and gas exploration. Firms are expected to make bids for plots over the next three months. The UK Onshore Operators group said that Scotland has had a shale industry since the 19th century. Angus MacDonald MSP said that the UK government’s ‘complete failure to consult the Scottish Government is totally irresponsible.’

RADIOACTIVE WASTE

The Sunday Herald reported that EDF Energy has made two applications to SEPA for new authorisations to allow radioactive waste to be transported by road between its two nuclear power stations at Hunterston in North Ayrshire and Torness in East Lothian. The applications are out for public consultation and they both include ‘the ability to receive radioactive waste from other EDF Energy power stations for the purposes of interim storage, loading of containers and onward transfer.’ An EDF Energy spokesman said: “This change is purely a practical one to facilitate more flexible disposals by allowing waste to be collected temporarily at one site before being sent for disposal.”

Pete Roche, a former government radiation adviser, said: “Transporting nuclear waste is always going to be a risk, so the more you transport it, the greater the danger. The Scottish Government should force EDF Energy to operate according to its sensible policy of requiring waste to be treated as near to where it is produced as possible instead of allowing this crazy plan putting the central belt of Scotland at risk.”

The Scottish Government’s policy on managing nuclear waste is for it to be stored in near-surface facilities ‘located as near to the site where the waste is produced as possible.’ A government spokesman pointed out that ‘there would be no long-term storage of waste transferred to Hunterston B power station from another site.’

The Office for Nuclear Regulation said that it had made no objection to the applications because they should help facilitate timely disposal of waste from the sites.

• *The Herald* reported that trials are to be conducted to establish whether it is a realistic option to transport 26 tonnes of ‘exotic’ radioactive material from Dounreay to Sellafield by sea.

Concerns have been raised about plans to take the cargo through the Pentland Firth and down through the Minch and past the Argyll islands to Cumbria. The waste belongs to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority which wants the spent fuel to be managed at Sellafield.

The Western Isles Council has written to the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, amid concerns a maritime option is being investigated when there is now only one emergency coastguard tug providing cover for the whole maritime area around Orkney, Shetland and the Inner and Outer Hebrides [Apr 14].

Mark Hackett, chairman of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities, said: “Rail transports of such materials are bad enough, but at least there is the possibility of reasonably prompt emergency response with such an incident.”

Norman McDonald, of Western Isles Council and president of KIMO International (The European Local Authorities Environmental Organisation) said the possibility of a fire, collision and subsequent radiation leak would have potentially devastating and harmful effects on one of the most sensitive parts of the north east Atlantic.

DOUNREAY

Dounreay Site Restoration Limited (DSRL) notified SEPA of the detection of a small quantity of radioactivity in a sample of sludge. The sample was taken from a manhole within a foul drain system, outwith and upstream of the Dounreay site. DSRL is now undertaking subsequent analysis work to help determine the source of the radioactivity.

SOLAR FARMS

The *BBC News* website reported that four former landfill sites in Dumfries and Galloway are being proposed for redevelopment as solar energy farms. The local authority reported that the most attractive long-term option is to lease the sites to house ground-mounted solar panels. A 9 MW scheme at the Lochar Moss site on the outskirts of Dumfries would also supply power to the adjacent zero waste recycling park. A second 2.3 MW scheme would be developed at Corsehill near Annan and two further solar energy farms could be created at former waste sites near Sanquhar and Whithorn.



RECREATION & TOURISM

ISLE OF MAY

A new visitor centre has been opened for visitors to the Isle of May National Nature Reserve. The new facility creates a focal point and provides toilets, shelter and interpretation for visitors. The island sits on the edge of the Firth of Forth and is important for seabirds. It has the oldest continuously running bird observatory in the UK.

UPLAND PATH EROSION

The People and The Mountains project has been set up to restore and upgrade 41 eroded upland paths in the Loch Lomond & the Trossachs and Cairngorms National Parks. The Heritage Lottery Fund has announced an initial grant of £3.28m.

FORESTRY VISITS

The All Forests Survey 2, carried out by Forestry Commission Scotland, showed that 9.1 million visits are made to the National Forest Estate every year. The most popular reason for a visit is for walking, with 72 % undertaking this activity. Around 8% of all visits were undertaken by cyclists, with the remaining enjoying sightseeing, wildlife and picnics.

See: bit.ly/1n1C3pF



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

JMT

A £10,000 grant has been made to the John Muir Trust (JMT) by the Scottish Government’s Talking Science programme to help engage people with science and nature through its John Muir Award scheme.

MERL

The Marine Environmental Research Laboratory (MERL) at Machrihanish in Argyll is to undergo a major expansion. The Stirling University-run facility provides research services and facilities to industry and academics working within the aquaculture sector. It currently has more than 200 holding tanks, purpose-built for research with Atlantic salmon and marine species. More research tanks are now to be built; Highlands & Islands Enterprise is backing the expansion with a grant of £90,192.

The facility has long-term service agreements with a number of multinational animal health organisations to develop a range of safe and environmentally acceptable products for sea-lice control.