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CONSERVATION

SEA EAGLE MANAGEMENT

The *BBC News* website reported that NFU Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have agreed to work towards a new Sea Eagle Management Scheme to manage white tailed sea eagles and their impact on farming [May 14]. The action plan will be published by September 2016 and implemented by March 2017.

NFU Scotland said that the new joint statement of intent was an acknowledgement that the birds posed problems for farmers, but also recognised that eagles 'are here to stay' and were part of Scotland's biodiversity. It added that management of the species 'did not mean shooting them.'

A scheme which compensated farmers and crofters for the loss of stock to eagles came to an end this year. It is expected to be reinstated by spring 2015, subject to funding approval from SNH and the Scottish Government.

Contractors will be available, free of charge, to record incidents of eagle predation and to offer advice on how to scare away the birds. In some cases, diversionary feeding may be a solution. The contractors would understand the conservation needs of eagles, but also their impact on farmers.

Under the terms of the agreement, SNH said it recognised that sea eagle predation on live lambs occurs. However, SNH said that previous studies in Mull and Gairloch found no evidence of 'widespread significant predation' on live lambs, and concluded that most lambs found in eagle nests were taken as carrion. SNH said that examination of some nests had frequently revealed remains of dead lambs, and it accepted that some of these would have been taken when live.

Nigel Miller of NFU Scotland said: "Today's agreement with SNH is a lot more than a commitment of two organisations to collaborate, it is a significant milestone towards understanding and managing Scotland's sea eagle population. The joint plan will be driven through regional groups involving farmers and crofters, and has a clear timetable."

Ian Ross, of SNH, said: "It is also important to recognise the economic benefits that sea eagles bring to tourism, particularly to rural areas, while acknowledging that in some cases, sea eagles have taken live lambs."

A new steering panel will be set up to develop proposals for sheep, sea eagle and habitat management measures, with representatives from NFU Scotland, SNH, Scottish Crofting Federation, RSPB Scotland and the Scottish Government. Local stakeholder groups will be set up by November this year to cover Mull, North Argyll and Lochaber, Skye & Lochalsh, Gairloch and Wester Ross.

WATER VOLES

Water voles have been discovered at the RSPB Insh Marshes reserve in Strathspey for the first time in more than 20 years.

RSPB Scotland said that there is a strong colony of the creatures in the area, despite being the fastest declining mammal in the UK. Water vole numbers have dropped by 90% in the UK over the last 40 years, with predation by American mink, a non-native species, and habitat loss mainly responsible for the decline. Water voles were decimated along

the main stem of the River Spey, with only a few holding on in isolated pockets.

However, the Scottish Mink Initiative has worked alongside organisations and landowners since 2011 to eradicate mink from large parts of northern Scotland, including the Cairngorms National Park and Insh Marshes [May 11]. This has allowed water voles to re-establish. Around 30 mink were caught at Insh Marshes in the first two years of the project, and the trapping proved so effective that there have been only occasional sightings since then. No mink have been trapped on the reserve for several years.

James Silvey, of RSPB Scotland, said: "It is extremely difficult to estimate numbers [of voles] as their population can vary from season to season. However, this year we have had numerous reports of water voles returning to areas where they haven't been seen for over 30 years, so in some areas water voles seem to be doing very well."

He said that water voles were thriving in Cardowan Moss Woodland in Glasgow, and the Loch Ard forest near Aberfoyle in the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, where a project to reintroduce the animals began in 2008.

- A report on a survey for SNH records the discovery, and distribution, of water voles in Beinn Eithe National Nature Reserve in Torridon. They were found at 19 locations; eight were active colonies.

See: www.scottishmink.org.uk

PEARL MUSSELS

The Riverwatch scheme, part of the Pearls in Peril LIFE + project, has been launched in the Kyle of Sutherland area. The project is a partnership set up to restore river habitats and protect freshwater pearl mussels from illegal fishing. The scheme will focus on the Oykel and the Evelix, both Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated rivers as well as other rivers such as the Cassley and the Shin.

Fishing for pearls is illegal as they are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take pearl mussels and to destroy, damage or disturb pearl mussel habitats. This includes unauthorised modification or engineering to the river and any activities causing excessive siltation or pollution.

The Riverwatch scheme works in collaboration with land owners, local communities, Police Scotland, Fishery Boards and Trusts and other river users. As part of the project, 16 Riverwatch schemes are to be launched by the end of 2015.

- The *BBC News* website reported that Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group (BSCG) released a report by the James Hutton Institute that suggests that, over the past 15 years, there has been a 50% decline in the number of freshwater mussels in the River Spey. BSCG said that the building of thousands more homes in the Cairngorms had put the rare species at greater risk. Pollutants, such as high levels of phosphorus from detergents, fertilisers and human waste, had been identified as being the cause of the harm; the worst area for pollution was at Aviemore.

SNH said a survey of the River Spey last

year had indicated a decline in pearl mussels since 1998-99. The survey results are still being analysed and a report on its findings is due to be released in October.

CAPERCAILLIE

The *Herald* reported that counts of capercaillie at the main breeding areas in Strathspey have found that the average number of chicks per hen this year was 0.6 – at or above the minimum required to sustain the population.

Numbers and range have declined hugely over the last few decades and the forests of the Cairngorms National Park, and Strathspey in particular, are seen as a vital last refuge. Declines have been attributed to loss of habitat, forest fence collisions, wet spring and summer weather, predation and human disturbance.

The Capercaillie Framework is a new initiative which aims to secure the future of the species by pulling together information relating to its distribution and productivity, the pressures it faces and the current management measures being undertaken.

BEAVERS

The Scottish Farming Leader reported that a recent survey of NFU Scotland members in the East Central region reported that beavers have been found in rivers in areas including Aberfeldy, Perth and Kenmore [Mar 13]. The exact number of beavers in Tayside is unknown, but estimated as being 100 and growing. Farmers have noticed that burrowing, to create a lodge, has caused riverbank collapse and undermining of flood banks. NFU Scotland said that all beavers captured to date have tested negative for diseases of risk to farm animals, or humans.

At present, the Tayside beaver population is not protected under the Habitats Directive. It is currently legal for Scottish landowners or tenants to shoot beavers. However, it is illegal to touch the carcass.

NFU Scotland said that the Scottish Government is to decide in the summer of 2015 whether to allow beavers to remain in Scotland [Jun 14]. If so, then it is essential that staff and resources are put in place to ensure that the situation be properly be monitored, problem beavers relocated, problematic dams destroyed and payments made to those suffering losses from beaver activity. NFU Scotland said that land managers views should be taken seriously from the outset, if reintroduction goes ahead, unlike the situation with the reintroduction of sea eagles [see above].

ORKNEY CORNCRAKES

The *BBC News* website reported that RSPB Scotland has recorded 36 male birds on Orkney this summer, the highest number since 1996 and a three-fold increase from last year.

The Orkney Corncrake Initiative was set up in 1993, when there were only six calling corncrakes, to help protect the corncrake population by providing more safe places for them to breed when they return. The initiative offers payments to farmers who have corncrakes on their land to support 'corncrake-friendly' farming practices.

Inga Seator of RSPB Scotland said "We were expecting very few birds to return this year because corncrakes have a very low survival rate and we heard just 12 across the whole of Orkney last year. Amazingly, this year, there were 16 calling on Westray alone. The birds have bounced back from previous lows but such an increase from one year to the next is unprecedented. Corncrakes need tall grass where they can safely raise a family, so leaving silage fields uncut or ungrazed

until August gives them a chance to have at least one successful brood. Cutting fields from inside out also gives the birds an opportunity to escape, as the corncrakes don't like to break cover so traditional cutting methods often trap corncrakes in the middle of the field. Farmers across the county have been very supportive."

KESTRELS

RSPB Scotland research has found that the number of kestrels has decreased by 65% between 1995 and 2012. In 1995 there were around 10,000 breeding pairs in Scotland, but by 2013 there were roughly 4,500 pairs – the biggest decline of any monitored bird species in the country.

During the 2013 Bird Breeding Survey, run by the British Trust for Ornithology and jointly funded by the trust, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the RSPB, kestrels were spotted at only 35 sites of 471 monitored in Scotland.

The move away from spring-sown barley to autumn-sown wheat and oilseed rape leaves fewer winter food sources for prey species such as voles and seed-eating songbirds. This means less food for predators like kestrels. Other possible factors in the species decline include climate change, increased competition for nest sites, a rise in rat poisons in their rodent prey and the impact of larger predators like goshawks and peregrines.

Staffan Roos, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We are already supporting practical steps that we believe will help us to better understand the population decline. For example, we can speak with farmers about increasing field margins to boost vole numbers, which would give kestrels a more abundant food source. We support the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme which recently has increased the monitoring of kestrels and ringing of kestrel chicks throughout Scotland. This will provide useful information on the survival and movements of kestrels. We provide nest boxes, including on some of our reserves, to reduce the risk of competition for suitable nest sites."

GANNET DEATHS

Large numbers of dead and dying young gannets have been found on the East Lothian coast. The birds were washed ashore after leaving their nests on the Bass Rock in the Firth of Forth. The Bass Rock is one of the world's biggest gannet colonies and every autumn between 10,000 and 20,000 young birds leave their nests.

The juvenile gannets, gugas, are heavier than adult gannets and are unable to fly until they lose weight. Their first few days at sea are perilous and they are unable to feed for themselves so many fail to survive. The weather conditions led to hundreds of birds being washed ashore.

BARNACLE GEESE

A report has been commissioned by SNH which describes a new population viability analysis of the Svalbard barnacle goose population which winters almost exclusively around the Solway Firth. The population has increased over recent decades to number approximately 34,000 birds in 2011.

In the absence of shooting, an annual growth rate of 4.9% is predicted which is close to the observed trend. A model is used to make predictions for how changes in shooting pressure may influence future population trajectories, along with associated risks of decline, and the potential impacts of future management regimes are discussed.

See: *SNH Commissioned Report 756: Status and population viability of Svalbard barnacle geese in Scotland*; www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/756.pdf

ISLAY CHOUGHS

The Scottish Chough Study Group and local farmers have been providing additional food for young choughs on Islay for the last three seasons to help combat the poor survival rate for young birds. Few birds were managing to survive the two to three year period from when they leave the nest as fledglings through to adulthood. Only 39 breeding pairs were counted on Islay in 2013, compared with 95 breeding pairs in 1986.

An Islay-wide census of choughs carried out in collaboration with the Scottish Chough Study Group and the RSPB, as part of a wider survey including England, Wales and the Isle of Man, counted 46 breeding pairs in 2014. This includes several new pairs of young adults which have been fed at the sites during the project. There are also 40 young choughs, missing from the population in recent years.

Longer term habitat management to benefit chough is being encouraged through Scottish Rural Development Programme options designed specifically for chough habitats.



FARMING

VCS

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that Voluntary Coupled Support (VCS) provides targeted, limited support, for Scottish agriculture under the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) budget [Aug 14]. The Scottish Government has opted for three payment regions, plus VCS, to help regions or sectors where specific types of farming undergo difficulties and are important for economic, social or environmental reasons.

The UK could offer VCS schemes of up to 8% of its national budget for Pillar 1 (direct support) payments. After negotiations with the European Commission and the UK government, it was agreed that Scotland could exceed this regional limit for VCS and increase it to approximately 10.5%. This will be funded entirely through Scotland's direct support payments budget, and will be administered entirely at Scotland's own risk. VCS will be targeted at the suckler beef herd in remote and fragile communities on the mainland and islands, and the upland sheep sector on extensive rough grazing. The islands will receive an estimated 160 euros per calf; mainland calves 100 euros and 100 euros per ewe hogg.

There are 1,268 farms in Scotland which declare only rough grazing, and a further 7,662 farms that declare more than 50% of their land as rough grazing. The number of farms is 30 times greater than farms in Wales on similar land.

GREENING

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that crop diversification (CD) and Ecological Focus Areas (EFA) will be compulsory measures from 1 January 2015 under CAP reforms and apply to most farmers with arable land [May 14].

For CD, land is exempt if under ten hectares. At least two crops must be grown if there is less than 30 hectares of land; the main crop must be no more than 75% of the total arable area. If the claimed land is greater than 30 hectares, then at least three crops must be grown, with the largest not taking up more than 75%; the total of the two largest crops cannot exceed 95%. Temporary grass and fallow are considered to be 'crops' although the Scottish Government has not published a list of which crops can be grown.

There is expected to be an equivalence scheme in 2016, which would allow catch/winter cover crops covering at least 25% of a farm's arable land as an alternative to having additional crops during the

main growing season. These would have to be in place by 1 October and could be grazed but not harvested before mid February.

The EFA acreage is 5% of the claimant's total arable land for 2015 and 2016, which is expected to rise to 7% in the future. Land under 15 hectares is exempt. If a farm has more than 75% in grass or herbaceous forage, leguminous crops or fallow on over 30 hectares, then EFA requirements apply. The options are fallow, buffer strips, field margins, catch/cover crops (not simultaneously claimed as CD) and nitrogen-fixing crops (NFCs). The management conditions for NFCs are to be published 'soon.'

The Scottish Government has announced further guidance about how the new greening element of the CAP will be implemented in Scotland. It includes more details of management rules for EFA buffer strips and NFCs.

These include allowing cutting but not grazing on EFA buffer strips. NFCs will count as EFA if there is no harvesting before 1 August, in order to protect ground-nesting birds. They will also be allowed if they are surrounded by an EFA field margin where adjacent to the edge of a field or if there are two different NFCs on the EFA area (to extend the flowering period for pollinators), with the main crop covering no more than 75% of the total area of NFC declared as EFA.

Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said that the new guidance will not answer all farmers' questions because the government is still lacking 'crucial clarity' from Europe on a number of aspects. He said: "With greening accounting for about a third of the direct farm budget, it is imperative we get the implementation rules right to avoid the risk of farmers facing an unknown level of disallowance further down the line. That is why the Scottish Government is only publishing guidance that we are confident is correct, rather than our best guess."

The Herald reported that NFU Scotland expressed disappointment with the guidance, saying that such restrictions mean growing NFCs is no longer a viable EFA option for many growers.

Jonny Hughes, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said: "Scottish farmers will receive subsidies from the taxpayer of around £580m this year to support their businesses. In return, farmers will be expected to provide some modest 'greening' measures designed to reduce pollution, improve soils and stem the decline of wildlife, such as ground nesting birds, bees, butterflies, moths and other pollinators. One thing farmers need to do to receive the subsidies is to keep 5% of their farms as 'Ecological Focus Areas', in other words, they need to maintain a small area where wildlife can thrive within an often intensively managed arable or mixed farm.

"Richard Lochhead has announced that this 5% can include crops, so long as they are nitrogen-fixing crops, for example peas, beans or clover. While this may not sound like wildlife habitat, such crops can provide valuable cover for nesting birds, flowers for bees and pollinators and may also improve the soil.

"The SWT, therefore, welcomes the announcement and hopes that though a modest measure, the planting of nitrogen-fixing crops in small areas on lowland farms may help begin to reverse the decline in our farmland birds and insects. Farming interests have called this announcement a 'stringent management restriction.' The SWT disagrees and prefers to view this as a win-win where food can be produced at the same time as other non-market benefits such as reduction of pollution from artificial fertilisers, improved soils and more

birds and bees. Of the £580m subsidy being paid to farmers in Scotland this year, only a fraction will go towards protecting wildlife, including helping farmers with creating EFAs. In anyone's book, the announcement on nitrogen-fixing crops represents a good deal for the farmers and a small step in the right direction for encouraging wildlife to return to our agricultural landscapes."

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/CAP



WOODLANDS

FORESTRY SURVEY

A survey of Scottish forest industries is being undertaken to establish an updated picture of forestry's contribution to the Scottish economy. The two part study will look both at the economic contribution of the forest industries (including forest based tourism) as a whole, and at the economic contribution of the National Forest Estate, including non-forestry activities such as renewables developments and agriculture.

The last assessment was carried out in 2008. It is anticipated that the findings of this new survey will be published in 2015.

CJC Consulting has been commissioned to undertake the study on behalf of Forestry Commission Scotland, in conjunction with Confor, the UK Forest Products Association, Scottish Enterprise and Scottish Land & Estates.

GLENGARRY WOODLAND

Glengarry Community Woodland Steering Group has applied to the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) to purchase the former Forestry Depot and adjacent woodland in Invergarry, Inverness-shire. The area amounts to approximately 30.5 hectares. The group said that, historically, employment in the area was based on agriculture, forestry and some aquaculture but that all the major employers have reduced their numbers. It said that purchasing this land will help to retain people within the area by providing increased economic activity and a renewed focus.

RANNOCH WOODLAND

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has applied to the NFLS to purchase 4,487 hectares of conifer woodland at Barracks Forest, located between Loch Rannoch and Rannoch Moor, adjacent to the West Highland Railway. SWT said that this proposal would help to deliver its Reserve Acquisition Policy, by acquiring and maintaining a network of wildlife reserves, safeguarding a broad representation of wildlife found throughout Scotland.

FOURPENNY PLANTATION

The Embo Trust (Urras Euraboil) has applied to the NFLS to purchase a recently-felled area, about 17 hectares, of Fourpenny Plantation in Sutherland. The aim of the project is to establish an area of Common Good Land and also to give individuals a part of the land to be held as runrigs under low cost annual tenure. The group's plans also include the possibility of a community turbine.

KIRKTON WOODLANDS

Kirkton Woodland & Heritage Group has been awarded £149,500 from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the 93 hectares Kirkton Woodlands in Lochcarron, Wester Ross from Forestry Commission Scotland. The funding covers three years; a community forester will be employed.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

RAZOR CLAMS

The Herald reported that divers working for organised crime gangs are electrifying the seabed off the coast of Argyll to harvest razor clams [May 14]. Detective Chief Inspector Calum Young, of Police Scotland, said: "They have a generator on the boat and deploy electrodes and probes on to the seabed and run them along the seabed, 10 to 15 metres deep. The electricity stuns the razor clams and divers walk behind the boat scooping the clams up. Many of the divers are known to be of eastern European origin and there is concern that they are being exploited and their personal safety is in danger – because of the proximity of electricity in water. There is a major concern that we will be faced with fatalities. The money to organised crime and criminals is significant. It makes more than drugs does. When these skippers are approached, they throw any evidence of electro-fishing over the side of the boat."

It is estimated that illegally active fishing boats are taking 500 - 600kg of razor clams a day, worth up to £65,000. The illegally harvested razor clams are sold on the black market and shipped away within 24 hours, having obtained legal paperwork along the way, to Singapore [Mar 14].

A legal boat might recover only one or two kilos a day. It has been illegal since 1998 to use electro-fishing methods; the Scottish Government has brought in tougher licensing measures [May 14].

New licensing introduced in August means that vessels will now be inspected by Marine Scotland officers to ensure that equipment capable of electro-fishing is not installed.

LOCH MOIDART OYSTERS

The *BBC News* website reported that Highland Council has refused planning permission for an oyster farm near Castle Tioram on Loch Moidart. Measan Na Mara Ltd had proposed four plots of oyster trestles in the south channel of the loch. Lochaber councillor Andrew Baxter, who moved the motion to reject the scheme, said that the industrial scale of the operation was inappropriate for the area, and could impact on the environment and local tourism.

MITTEN CRAB

The *BBC News* website reported that the remains of an invasive crab, the Chinese mitten crab, *Eriocheir sinensis*, were found in the Clyde in June and only just reported. It is the first recorded sighting in Scotland.

The mitten crab is classed as one of the top 100 worst alien species and threatens biodiversity; it preys on native species and causes severe structural damage to riverbanks. The crabs will eat fish eggs if they spread to areas where trout and salmon spawn. The crustaceans are native to East Asia and were first recorded in the River Thames in 1935, probably accidentally introduced by shipping.

Dr David Morrill, of Royal Holloway, University of London, said: "The occurrence of these Chinese mitten crabs in a Scottish river could have a devastating impact on the famous salmon and trout fishing rivers should they manage to reach parts of the catchments where these fish spawn."

Dr Willie Yeomans, of the Clyde River Foundation, said: "The chance discovery by an angler poses a potentially significant ecological threat to the Clyde system, the ecology of which is recovering from centuries of poor water quality and structural modification."

It is not clear yet whether the crab was deliberately released or has naturally colonised the river. The

Clyde River Foundation is appealing for any information relating to mitten crabs in the Clyde catchment. Please report any sightings, along with details (date, location, size) and a photograph if possible to: info@clyderiverfoundation.org; see: Mitten Crab Recording Project, <http://mittencrabs.org.uk>

SALMON & SEA TROUT 2013

Scotland's chief statistician has published *Salmon and Sea Trout Fishery Statistics 2013 season*.

The total reported rod catch of salmon (retained and released) is 67,468, the lowest reported catch since 2003 and is 76% of the previous 5 year average. The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release is the highest reported since these figures were first recorded in 1994. 92% of rod caught spring salmon was released, as was 80% of the annual rod catch.

Reported catch of spring salmon shows a general decline since records began and, although there is some indication that catch has stabilised in recent years, it remains at a historically low level. Overall catch of salmon and grilse in later months has generally increased over the same period.

Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble salmon fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 16,734 and 7,636; 7% and 3% of the maximum reported in the respective time series.

The total reported rod catch of sea trout (retained and released) for 2013 is 16,078. Catches have declined over much of the period since 1952, when records began and the 2013 catch is the lowest in the time series. The proportion of the rod catch accounted for by catch and release is 77%, the highest reported since these figures were first recorded in 1994.

Catch and effort for both fixed engine and net & coble sea trout fisheries remain at historically low levels. Reported catch in each fishery was 2,681 and 3,435; 4% and 2% of the maximum reported in the respective time series.

SUSTAINABLE FISH

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) has published its updated sustainable seafood guide. It states that, in Scotland, there is a lack of appropriate management measures to prevent overfishing of salmon from rivers where stocks are low. The absence of internationally recognised conservation limits has resulted in salmon being placed on the MCS Fish to Avoid list.

Bernadette Clarke, of MCS, said: "Unlike most other members of the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO), Scotland has not yet set conservation limits for its salmon rivers, and according to NASCO has almost no management regime in place to prevent an increase in coastal netting, neither has it adequate mechanisms to limit catches whether local salmon populations are strong or weak."

It is illegal in Scotland to sell salmon caught by a rod, so the wild salmon sold to commercial properties come from Scottish netmen. *The Herald* reported that Andrew Graham-Stewart, of the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), said that the evidence of the last three years confirmed conclusively that wild salmon stocks were in marked decline. He said: "Given the parlous state of our wild salmon stocks, it makes no sense at all to permit unrestricted and indiscriminate killing by coastal nets."

Keith Allan, of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland, pointed to the low water conditions in Scotland's river in the last two years, which indicated the salmon were staying out at

sea. He said: "It is pure speculation to conclude that because the fish are not in the river systems, they must be being captured by the few remaining netting stations."

MCS said that the Scottish Government is planning to consult on the introduction of mandatory measures to protect spring salmon.

• Bernadette Clarke, of MCS, said: "Whiting is being discarded in alarming quantities. On the west coast of Scotland, more than half of the annual catch weight comprises under-sized or low-value whiting which are then discarded. 90% of these discards come from scampi fisheries using small-mesh gears."

MCS said that there is widespread use of large square mesh panels to help reduce discarding and improve selectivity, but despite this the amount of fish discarded from this fishery remains high. Further measures are required to reduce discarding and protect the low-level whiting stock in the west of Scotland fishery.

See: www.fishonline.org

SEA FISHERIES STATISTICS

Scotland's chief statistician has published the *Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2013* report. It shows that the value of fish landed by Scottish vessels in 2013 decreased by 9% in real terms from 2012, following two record years. The quantity of fish landed remained broadly constant for the seventh consecutive year.

367,000 tonnes of sea fish and shellfish were landed by Scottish based vessels in 2013, with a value of £430m. The value of pelagic landings decreased by 9% to £153m, demersal landings decreased by 4% to £140m and shellfish landings decreased by 14% to £137m. Many of the decreases in the value of key fish species stem from reductions in price.

Mackerel is the most valuable stock to the Scottish fleet, accounting for 29% (£126m) of the total value of Scottish landings. In 2013 it decreased in real terms value by 5% from 2012, driven by a 5% fall in price. Nephrops are the most valuable shellfish species to the Scottish fishing industry, accounting for 15% (£65m) of the total value of all Scottish landings. The value of Nephrops landings by Scottish vessels decreased by 23% in real terms from 2012, driven by a 13% decrease in the quantity landed and an 11% fall in the price.

North Sea cod, haddock, whiting and saithe all exceeded 90% quota uptake in 2013. North Sea nephrops and monkfish quota uptake was relatively low, at 48% and 65%, respectively. The West of Scotland demersal stocks had generally lower quota uptakes than North Sea stocks. Quota uptake exceeded 100% for most of the pelagic stocks.

The number of active fishing vessels based in Scotland was 2,020 at the end of 2013, representing a decrease of 26 vessels (1%) from 2012, and the smallest recorded fleet size.

From the end of 2012, there was a loss of 22 vessels in the 10 metres and under fleet to 1,426 vessels; a loss of 4 vessels in the over 10 metre fleet to 594 vessels, the demersal sector was reduced to 204 vessels, the shellfish sector increased to 367 vessels and the pelagic sector was reduced by one to 23 vessels.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/bulletins/01113



MARINE

SOUTH ARRAN MCO

An urgent Marine Conservation Order (MCO) has been made to protect a fragile underwater ecosystem off South Arran [Jul 14]. The Scottish

Government said that the order would protect maerl beds, which are a nursery habitat for young scallops and other fish and shellfish. The order was made after illegal fishing at South Arran Marine Protected Area, in breach of the voluntary agreement between Marine Scotland and the fishing industry. This is the first time such powers from the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 have been used.

WAVE ENERGY & KELP

Scottish Natural Heritage has published a report, *Understanding the potential effects of wave energy devices on kelp biotopes*, which discusses the potential changes to kelp habitats that could occur as a result of the development of wave energy renewables projects. However, given the extent of kelp habitats in Scotland and the high levels of natural disturbance tolerated by these habitats, the magnitude of the predicted impact is not considered significant on a regional and national scale. A framework for assessing the significance of the impacts of projects on kelp is provided to inform impact assessments. See: www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/783.pdf

BATHING BEACHES

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) reported that Scotland's 84 designated bathing waters achieved a pass rate of 97% this year. Two beaches (Heads of Ayr and Lunan Bay) failed for the overall 2014 season. SEPA said that this was because heavy rain, following the aftermath of Hurricane Bertha, had caused sewer overflows and washed animal wastes from farmland and urban areas. However, last year, no beaches in Scotland breached these basic safety limits. Of the other 82, 36 were mandatory passes and 46 reached the higher guideline standard.

14 bathing waters had recorded pollution incidents in 2014, with two breaching the basic sewage safety limits. Andy Cummins, of Surfers Against Sewage, said: "We are calling on the Scottish Government to require Scottish Water to warn water users when untreated sewage is discharged into the sea, as water companies do in England and Wales. We are concerned that a wetter bathing season, combined with new, tougher water quality standards, which come into force next year, will result in a dramatic number of Scottish beaches failing water quality standards in the coming years."

SEPA has estimated that as many as 20 beaches could be officially rated as 'poor' under the new EU regulations to be introduced in 2015.



POLITICS

COUNTRYSIDE CANDIDATE

The Scottish Gamekeeper magazine reported that the idea of fielding a 'countryside' candidate to stand for the Scottish Parliament has been discussed privately at committee level and it is likely that the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) will look to other rural representative bodies, such as Scottish Land & Estates, the Association of Deer Management Groups, angling bodies and NFU Scotland for support.

Alex Hogg, of SGA, said: "Part of the problem is the level of understanding of issues, MSPs being heavily influenced by the wealthier conservation organisations who are constantly lobbying in Edinburgh, or parties not willing to risk votes by backing policies which seem common sense to people on the ground in rural areas but may not be popular with their majority urban voter base. Unfenced forestry schemes, the lack of action to protect dwindling wild fish stocks, air gun licensing, land reform and the lack of movement on tail shortening for working dogs are further causes of contention and frustration."

He pointed to 'government-blessed deer culls, lack of protection for globally important heather moorland and the political refusal to entertain new conservation measures to help endangered prey species.'

A Highland constituency is the most likely target for a 'voice of the countryside' but it is unlikely that a new political party would be started.

BAYS OF HARRIS

The Herald reported that a feasibility study is being undertaken into a possible community buy-out of the 30,000 acre Bays of Harris Estate. It is the last large privately owned estate on the island of Harris. The estate is fragmented into three areas: much of the east coast of the island from Tarbert south, Northton on the south west and the island of Berneray across the Sound of Harris.

If given approval, the buyout would bring the vast bulk of Harris under community ownership, although there are still smaller private estates in the area.

The feasibility study was voted for by nearly 700 residents two years ago, but it has been delayed until now by 'administrative and presentational' problems [Oct 12].

The estate is owned by the Hitchcock family, who bought it for a reported £5,000 after the death of Lord Leverhulme in 1925.

David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said: "This area has seen a severe decline in population, especially youngsters, and also reduction in services for many decades. Today wind turbines and business units are currently being constructed in the neighbouring community-owned North Harris, with similar proposals for the community of West Harris. If the people in the Bays decide that land ownership is also for them, I am sure that they too will create a better future for themselves."

CASTLE TOWARD

The *BBC News* website reported that the 143 acre Castle Toward estate in Argyll, currently owned by Argyll & Bute Council, is to be taken into community ownership. The South Cowal Community Development Company has been awarded £750,000 from the Scottish Land Fund.

Under the community buyout plan, the Mansion House would be leased and developed by a national outdoor education company. The estate's Gate House buildings would be developed for a range of activities including a tea-room, bunk-house, self-catering units and retail workshops.

- The Scottish Land Fund has also awarded £181,500 to Arran Community Land Initiative to buy land near Whiting Bay. 81 acres of abandoned farmland will be used for 'outdoor educational purposes, pursuits and activities.'

URBAN RIGHT-TO-BUY

The Herald reported that the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill amends land reform legislation by allowing bodies to register an interest in respect of not only rural land, but also land in towns and cities [Jun 14].

Alan McCreadie, of the Law Society's planning committee, welcomed the intention behind the bill, but warned of unintended consequences: "What would happen if a community registered its interest in urban land which is already subject to a redevelopment proposal? While Scottish ministers could decide that registration is not in the public interest, the uncertainty could have an adverse impact on investment decisions for developers."

He said that the land reform legislation had

benefited people in Scotland's rural communities and the society would want to ensure the same kind of success in our towns and cities.

The society also highlighted the procedure for registering community interest in abandoned or neglected land, undefined in the bill, was similar to compulsory purchase and 'there should therefore be a requirement for a viable business plan and robust development proposals.'

Mr McCreadie said that it may be advisable to set up a central body to steer community bodies through the bill.

NATIONAL PEATLAND PLAN

Scottish Environment LINK has published its response to the National Peatland Plan Consultation [Jun 14]. See: bit.ly/Zev8jv

RIGHT OF APPEAL

The Scotsman reported that the campaign group, Planning Democracy, has asked MSPs on Holyrood's petitions committee to consider the case for equal rights of appeal for communities in planning decisions. The need for this petition comes from the strong feeling of injustice among communities in Scotland who have been affected by decisions to grant planning permission.

Under current rules, if a large scale development is rejected, the developer can appeal. If the same development is approved, the community has no right to have the decision reviewed. The public have no equal right of appeal.

A right of appeal for communities would ensure, further, that planning authorities and the government would be less tempted to circumvent public scrutiny of decisions in which the decision-maker has a vested interest.

An equal right of appeal would encourage the public to engage early on in the planning system, at the local development plan stage. It would also provide an alternative to going to court. This would address the unreasonable costs of the only action currently available to the public – judicial review. An appeal could provide a method whereby the quality and merits of the planning decision can be considered, whereas in a judicial review, currently, the courts will only look at the process which was used. See: www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01534



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

SSPCA POWERS

The Scottish Government consulted on plans to give the Scottish SPCA the ability to investigate reports of traps and dead wildlife rather than simply investigating the mistreatment of live animals [Aug 14]. Under current law, the Scottish SPCA has 'specialist reporting' status, which means that it can make reports on wildlife crime to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, which then decides whether to prosecute.

The *Police Oracle* reported that Nevin Hunter, the former head of the National Wildlife Crime Unit who retired in July, said he had 'significant concerns' about the Scottish Government's proposals. He said: "If you give a charity the same powers as police, they would have to have the same level of accountability and transparency. That is the issue, because they are not as accountable."

Legal experts have raised concerns too, saying that the job of investigating wildlife crime should ideally be done by warranted police officers.

OTTER DEATHS

A police investigation was launched after an otter and her two pups were found dead inside an illegal

trapping net in the River Tyne, next to Haddington Golf Course. The trap was probably being used illegally to catch eels or crayfish. The Scottish SPCA is helping police with the investigation.

PARK OF KEIR

An application for planning permission for a sporting 'superhub' at Park of Keir, between Bridge of Allan and Dunblane, was lodged by Park of Keir Partners. The plans include 100 luxury houses, a museum and visitor centre, indoor and outdoor tennis courts, a golf course with clubhouse and practice areas, and a hotel with leisure and conference facilities.

However, a report by the principal planning officer at Stirling Council, said: "The countryside and greenbelt between Bridge of Allan and Dunblane is particularly sensitive in a local context, and plays an important role in maintaining the distinct identity of Dunblane from Bridge of Allan. The proposed main land uses would be contrary to local and national policy on development in the countryside and greenbelts, and should not be supported unless there is considered to be an overriding national requirement or established need for the development that could not be satisfied elsewhere.

The proposed housing is not intended to meet any local affordable or particular housing needs, and will in fact exacerbate [the problem of] affordability in the local area. Although it is accepted the tennis, golf, tourism and recreational element of this development proposal may provide a degree of social as well as economic benefit to the local area, what is proposed is essentially a private commercial venture. The submitted business case is not sufficiently convincing to warrant approval of the proposed housing. The net economic benefits of the proposed development are considerably outweighed by the significant detrimental costs to the environment and the lack of physical and social infrastructure to support the development. On this basis the development cannot be supported in policy terms."

There have also been over 600 letters of objection to the plan. The plan has been publicly backed by the Lawn Tennis Association, the Professional Golfers Association, and Tennis Scotland.

VICTORIA PARK

The *BBC News* website reported that Glasgow City Council is considering the development of land on the former blaes football pitches at Victoria Park. Consultants, Ryden, have undertaken a feasibility study. The report listed potential uses for the north west area of the park, including a retail development, a pub or restaurant, a garden centre, an open-air market or children's soft play.

Robert Mellish, of Friends of Victoria Park, said: "People are only just becoming aware of what the city council's land services have done and it is causing a great deal of distress. Any proposals would need planning approval and despite the financial problems the council is facing, we cannot seriously believe our councillors would go against their own local plan, their own structure plan, their own Climate Change Declaration and their policies on biodiversity to lease off prime parkland to a developer."

T IN THE PARK

Scottish ministers have ruled that DF Concerts will need to submit a full planning application for the T in the Park music festival before the event can move to Strathallan Castle from Balado [Jun 14]. An environmental impact study is also required.

Some tickets have already been sold, but Perth & Kinross Council said that it not yet received any planning notice.

PROSECUTION

The *BBC News* website reported that a farmer and his contractor have been fined £7,000 at Perth Sheriff Court for destroying trout breeding grounds while dredging the Hatton Burn, near Milnathort in Perth & Kinross. There were signs that trout spawning habitats and recently-laid brown trout eggs had been destroyed, and there had been a 'significant detrimental effect' on the ecosystem.

The burn, also known as the Burleigh Burn, is one of the main feeder streams of Loch Leven, an important trout fishery. It is designated as a Special Protection Area and a Site of Special Scientific Interest; it is also an internationally designated wetlands site.

AIR POLLUTION

Scotland's chief statistician has announced the release of the *Air Quality Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 1990 – 2012* report. Scottish emissions data for carbon monoxide, ammonia, nitrogen oxides, sub-10 micron particulate matter (PM10), sulphur dioxide, lead and non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs) are detailed on the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory website.

The report is produced by Aether and Ricardo-AEA for the Scottish Government, the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Department of Environment. See: www.naei.defra.gov.uk/reports/reports?report_id=801

LANDOWNERS' COMMITMENT

Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) has launched a new charter, Landowners' Commitment, setting out how landowners should behave in Scotland. The charter argues that it is essential to demonstrate clearly what good land ownership and management means, and set standards of good practice to which all landowners should aspire.

The four main pillars of the charter form a clear undertaking that SLE's 2,500 members should be 'open, inclusive, enabling and responsible.'

These include welcoming responsible public access and promoting enjoyment of rural Scotland, and working with tenants and the wider community to encourage and support enterprise and business development. The charter also stresses landowners should be aware of how their actions affect those who live and work in rural Scotland and those who visit for enjoyment.

In addition they should 'treat everyone with courtesy, politeness and respect, and act with integrity across land-based business activities.'

The charter makes clear that owners of sporting estates should 'openly condemn bad and illegal practice where it exists.'

David Johnstone, of SLE, said: "There are those who take great delight in stigmatising private landownership regardless of the overwhelming evidence of the positive contribution we make. Time and again we are reminded that the admirable efforts of the majority of landowners are undermined by a minority who make little or no effort to engage with their communities or the people who they work with and live alongside. Numerous examples of good practice can be negated by isolated cases of bad practice within the sector. We recognise that there is always scope for improvement in the way landowners operate in a modern Scotland."

Douglas McAdam, of SLE, said: "We have always had a Code of Good Practice for our members but this commitment goes beyond just

our membership, simplifying and underlining the message of what good practice entails and reinforcing what modern landownership should look like in Scotland. We call on all landowners in Scotland, large and small whether private, public, community, NGO or charities, to adopt these principles without delay. We would hope to see landowners of all sizes and types embracing the commitment wholeheartedly and displaying it prominently in estate and farm offices and where visitors can see it."

David Cameron, of Community Land Scotland, said of the charter: "You have to ask how it will empower communities to develop the land on which they live and work and directly share the benefits of that development; how it will prevent land being bought and sold for the wrong reasons; and how it will give a community long-term stability when land passes from one generation or individual, to another? I would have been able to be more enthusiastic about this initiative if it had included real change by committing landowners to engage with communities in offering to sell some of their vast land holdings to communities which want to go down that road." He said that he suspected the charter was prompted only by threatened changes to the Land Reform Act to give communities new purchase rights [May 14].

See: bit.ly/1qQdoFi

RAPTOR PERSECUTION

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that it has been over six months since 22 raptors were poisoned 'in a single incident' at Conon Bridge in Ross-shire [Jul 14]. 16 of those birds (12 red kites and four buzzards) were killed by ingesting 'an illegally-held poisonous substance.' However, the name of the poison has been redacted from official government documents in the public domain and nobody has been arrested. Raptor Persecution Scotland said that is about the sum total of the 'official' information that is available about one of the most high-profile wildlife crimes in recent years.

The blog also reported that Sir John Lister-Kaye, of Aigas Field Centre and a vice-president of the RSPB, named the poison used as being carboforan. Speaking at the RSPB's Rutland Bird Fair he also said that the identity of the alleged perpetrator was known.

CLIMATE CHANGE

A 115 year study of seasonal weather records has been undertaken by East Anglia and Sheffield Universities, together with the Met Office, and published in the *International Journal of Climatology*. It shows that whilst most seasons have not changed dramatically, winter has become much more unpredictable and unsettled. The North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO) is a series of barometric pressure variations which indicates the strength of westerly winds approaching the UK. With strong westerlies, Britain experiences mild, wet and stormy weather. Weaker or reverse airflow typically brings cold, snowy weather.

William Austin, of St Andrews University and the Scottish Association of Marine Sciences, said that the study had implications for Scottish weather and indicated that more extreme winters are affecting our environment. He said: "The NAO has a really strong influence on Scotland. It can have some serious knock-on and far-reaching effects. It also affects our fishing and the environment in our sea lochs. Changes to the amount of fresh water coming into the loch can change the overall marine environment."

GREEN DRIVE

The Green Drive – a partnership between the Ryder Cup Europe, the Scottish Government,

the Golf Environmental Organisation, and Perth & Kinross Council – has supported four organisations, including the John Muir Trust, to help leave behind a strong environmental legacy for Scotland in the wake of the golf tournament.

These will focus on landscape and ecological conservation, waste management and youth education. Projects include native woodland expansion and peatland restoration at a number of locations across the Highlands.

CAIRNGORMS PLANNING

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that a Scottish Government reporter has published a 432 page report on the Cairngorms National Park's Local Development Plan, 2014-2019. Specific recommendations concerning housing in School Wood, Nethy Bridge, in Carrbridge and An Camus Mòr are made. Modifications are to be presented to the planning committee for approval in November.

See: www.dpea.scotland.gov.uk/CaseDetails.aspx

COCKENZIE PLANS

Scottish Enterprise has put forward proposals to develop the site of the disused Cockenzie power station in East Lothian, which include developing a deep water quay, built on 11 hectares of land reclaimed from the sea, along with an energy park servicing green technologies which could see the area become the European hub for the offshore wind industry [Mar 13].

The Coastal Regeneration Alliance (CRA) warn that the marine park would dramatically change the coastline and the surrounding area and damage valuable greenbelt. CRA is coordinating a petition against the plans, which would also involve the re-routing of a section of the of the newly-opened John Muir Way [Feb 12]. Carl Barber, spokesman for the CRA, said that people living locally were 'tired of industry' and wanted the waterfront to be used for recreation and to improve quality of life for residents.



ENERGY

RENEWABLES

The UK Department of Energy & Climate Change said that the amount of power generated from renewable sources in Scotland in the first half of 2014 was 30% up on 2013. The period saw wind output rise by 20%, while hydro generation climbed by 50%. Holyrood said that Scotland was on track to meet its interim target of achieving 50% of its electricity demand from renewables by 2015.

Scottish renewable electricity made up 32% of the UK's renewable energy generation in 2013. Scotland is a net exporter of electricity.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said: "If we're to meet our aim of generating 100% of our electricity needs from renewables by 2020 then we'll need to see continued government support in both Holyrood and Westminster. This is especially the case for offshore wind power, where we need to see a major roll-out of sites in Scotland in the next few years."

ENERGY POLICY

Scottish Renewables published a paper setting out the way ahead for the £1 billion-a-year green energy sector. It calls on the Scottish and UK governments to agree a joint strategy document, setting out energy policy for the UK and the role devolved administrations can play.

It also wants the Scottish Government to be given a formal role in the strategy and policy document of the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change, which gives strategic direction to regulator Ofgem. The Scottish Parliament should have a formal role in holding Ofgem to account for its regulatory decisions in Scotland, with an annual session where

MSPs can question Ofgem's chief executive.

Niall Stuart, of Scottish Renewables, said: "Given the importance of the contribution Scotland and the other devolved nations will make to the UK's energy ambitions, and the growing importance of the sector to all our economies, we believe it is time for a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to the formation of energy policy across the UK. If there is one obvious failure of the current regulation of our industry it is the lack of grid connections to Shetland, Orkney and the Western Isles – home to the country's best wind resources and key to development of wave and tidal power. We want to see the Scottish and UK governments commit to getting the islands connected before 2020. This will allow the islands to contribute to the cleaning-up of our energy sector, while benefiting from the jobs and investment that would follow."

POWERLINE UPGRADE

The Herald reported that the action group, Strathdearn Against Windfarm Developments, claims that SSE subsidiary Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission (SHE-T) plans to construct a new 400 kv powerline from Beauly, Inverness-shire, to Blackhillock near Keith in Moray. The route would run via Tomatin in Inverness-shire and then cross the River Findhorn valley, the Slochd hills and the Dava Moor.

The campaigners claim that it is known that three route options are under consideration. The group said that survey work had been ongoing for many months in Strathdearn and on the surrounding hills. SSE had claimed this was connected with the Beauly/Tomatin line reinforcement and denied there was any firm plan for another transmission line. However, the company said it had to look into the future and consider what connections to the grid might be needed. Under the terms of SSE's licence, windfarms and other developments that had been approved had to be connected to the grid network.

NORTH EAST CABLES

ABB has signed a £497m contract to install a 100 mile cable under the Moray Firth to link up north east Scotland's power network [Jul 14]. It will allow 1.2 gigawatts of renewable energy to be connected to the grid. A high voltage direct current cable will be put in place between Blackhillock, Moray and Spittal in Caithness.

- A high-voltage cable linking offshore windfarms in the Moray Firth with the grid has been approved. The interconnector will land at Inverbodie near Banff and run 20 miles to New Deer in Aberdeenshire. There are concerns that salmon stock could be hit by electromagnetic fields.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Argyll: RWE Innogy has lodged an appeal with the Scottish Government against the refusal of the 15 turbine, 45 MW Ardchnonnell windfarm [May 14]. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) had said that the windfarm was out of scale with its surroundings and would have significant adverse impacts on the landscape 'for residents and visitors alike.' In its appeal to Scottish ministers, RWE argued that Argyll & Bute Council was wrong to refuse planning permission on the 'very narrowly focused' grounds of impact on the local landscape. It said that the impacts would be 'highly limited,' 'acceptable' and would not affect the most dramatic views in and around Loch Awe. It also claimed that there is no evidence to support fears about the tourist trade, and accuses SNH of using 'emotive language' about the proposal.

The 3,500 acre estate belongs to Sir Jamie McGrigor MSP who said that the windfarm is in

a suitable area and would provide valuable local jobs. In 2008, he signed a parliamentary motion demanding rules on windfarms be imposed to end 'speculative applications ... threatening scenic areas.'

Easter Ross: Highland Council has refused PI Renewables permission to build a 14 turbine windfarm at Carn Gorm, near Garve close to Ben Wyvis [Sep 13]. The council said that the development 'would be detrimental to Wild Land Area 29 – Rhiddoroch-Beinn Dearg-Ben Wyvis.'

Helen McDade of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said: "This decision should send a clear message to developers to steer clear of the 42 Wild Land Areas mapped earlier this year by SNH and supported by the JMT."

Dumfries & Galloway: RES has won its appeal against the refusal of plans for a 15 turbine Solwaybank windfarm, near Langholm [Feb 14]. The scheme had been turned down because of seismic and radar concerns; both these objections have now been withdrawn.

Lewis: Community company, Point & Sandwick Power, plans three turbines at Beinn Ghrideag, west of Stornoway. It has now secured a £15m funding package with Santander Bank, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and the Big Lottery Fund. The 9 MW scheme will be the largest community-owned windfarm in the UK.

Inverness-shire: The *Press & Journal* reported that wpd Scotland is planning a seven turbine windfarm on the slopes of Bein Mhor, near Tomich. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), JMT and the Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society have all objected to the proposal, as have a majority of residents in Glen Affric. Over 1,200 comments have been received on Highland Council's website. None of the statutory consultees has objected.

- A public local inquiry was held into RWE Innogy UK's plans to build 31 turbines at Allt Duine, in the Monadhliath Mountains, some two years ago and a ministerial judgement is awaited [Feb 14]. Until now SNH has not objected.

Jenny Gascoigne, of RWE, said: "Over the past four years, SNH has consistently maintained its 'no objection' to the Allt Duine scheme. It is both disappointing and concerning that SNH has now objected at this late stage."

John Utley, of SNH, said that when advice to the government on the windfarm before the public inquiry in 2012, it was at the edge of a large area SNH was considering classifying as wild land. He said it subsequently improved its approach to mapping wild land and published a new map which supports the new Scottish Planning Policy [Jun 14]. He said that the changes meant it was now appropriate to object.

Perthshire: There have been around 1,000 objections to plans for Eventus' 24 turbine Talladh a Bheithe windfarm between Loch Rannoch and Loch Erich including the JMT, MCofS, Keep Rannoch Wild, SNH, the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Ramblers Scotland and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) [Aug 14]. A debate on the plans was held in the Scottish Parliament, after a motion was lodged by Murdo Fraser MSP.

Scottish Borders: Community Windpower has applied to construct 27 turbines in the Aikengall IIa scheme near Cockburnspath. The local authority has opposed the plans, adjacent to an existing windfarm site on the boundary with East Lothian. Planning officials said that the windfarm would 'unacceptably harm' the landscape and would also impact on local residents and visitors.

Cockburnspath, Abbey St Bathans, Bonkyl and Preston Community Councils in the Borders and

East Lammermuir Community Council in East Lothian are all opposed to the proposals.

South Lanarkshire: The Scottish Government has approved Banks Renewables' plans for the 15 turbine, 60 MW Middle Muir windfarm, near Crawfordjohn. The turbines will be the tallest ever approved on the UK mainland. Two more turbines were turned down to mitigate landscape and visual impacts.

Sutherland: SNH and the JMT have objected to Creag Riabhach Windfarm Ltd's plans for a 22 turbine scheme on the Altnaharra estate. It would fall within one of the 42 new Areas of Wild Land mapped by SNH [Jun 14].

MARINE ENERGY

The *BBC News* website reported that the Marine Milestones report by Scottish Renewables showed that the wave and tidal energy sector has invested more than £217m in Scotland to date. £32m was invested in the sector during the last twelve months alone. Almost two thirds of the industry's supply chain is Scottish. It has been estimated that marine energy may be worth £50 billion to the economy by 2050.

Scottish Renewables highlighted the importance of continued government support to help develop the sector and ensure that Scotland remained a key player.

PENTLAND FIRTH

The *BBC News* website reported that Atlantis has secured a 25 year lease from the Crown Estate for the seabed involved in the MeyGen 269 turbine tidal scheme [Aug 14]. It is the largest marine energy lease to be awarded by the Crown Estate and is the first in the Pentland Firth and Orkney Waters region.

Atlantis plans to start installing devices in the Inner Sound of the firth over the next two years. MeyGen has signed a ten year Power Purchase Agreement with energy firm SmartestEnergy, which could be worth £50m over the scheme's lifetime. Under the first phase of the project, four 1.5 MW turbines will be installed on the seabed.

CLYDE HEAT EXCHANGER

The Herald reported that the University of Glasgow is to conduct a feasibility study into installing a heat pump two metres below the surface of the River Clyde. Star Renewable Energy is to install the renewable energy system. A small proportion of the river water would be fed through the pump where around two degrees of heat in the water would be harvested using heat exchangers and the cooler water would then be pumped back into the river. Heat from the exchangers would be transferred to condensers which would boost the low-grade heat to 45 degrees C or higher using a process of reverse refrigeration. The resultant hot water would then be piped around 30 university buildings, along with heat from other sources.

David Pearson, of Star Renewable Energy, said that the Clyde has the potential to provide heat for half a million homes. Most of Scotland's main rivers, sea lochs and firths also have the potential to be tapped for their heat. Other sources include the country's abundant aquifers and flooded mines.

SHETLAND OIL

Hurricane Energy has reported encouraging results from work on the Lancaster oil find west of Shetland, highlighting the potential of the area. Analysis has indicated that the find is contained in a good-quality reservoir from which a well could produce oil at 20,000 barrels a day. Lancaster is estimated to contain 207 million barrels of oil. It lies in an area of hard granite rock found below the sandstone reservoirs that have formed the basis for the majority of North Sea exploration. Hurricane

expects to be able to produce from such basement reservoirs by tapping into natural fractures in the rock through which oil could flow.

BP is developing the Clair field and revamping the Schiehallion development, 16 miles from the Lancaster discovery.

FRACKING

The Scottish Government called for devolved powers on fracking after the UK government decided to let companies drill up to 300 metres under private land without first negotiating a right of access.

Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, said: "UK government proposals to remove the right of Scottish householders to object to drilling under their homes, without so much as debate in the Scottish Parliament, flies in the face of Scotland's cautious, considered and evidence-based approach on this issue. It is also fundamentally an issue affecting land ownership rights. Whatever your view on the issue of unconventional oil and gas – and it is clear that there are both opportunities and concerns – there is only one way that the people of Scotland can determine the approach in Scotland – including beneath their homes and land. That is with the devolution of the necessary powers to Scotland and the current devolution process for the extensive new powers promised in the vow should include these powers."

The consultation stated that under the present system a single landowner had the power to significantly delay a development 'even though the drilling and use of underground wells does not affect their enjoyment of their land.' A spokesman for the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change said: "We intend to change this system by making it less burdensome for companies to gain underground access rights."

Tom Greatrex MP said: "Shale gas extraction must only be permitted to happen in Scotland and across the UK with robust regulation and comprehensive monitoring. Too often, David Cameron's government has ignored genuine and legitimate environmental concerns in pursuit of a rhetoric-led policy. Labour is pushing the government to close a number of loopholes in the current regulation and put existing good practice on to a statutory footing. We will force companies to publicly disclose what chemicals are used in shale gas extraction and to ensure that environmental impact assessments are conducted at all sites. Anyone looking to extract shale gas in the UK will also be required to conduct baseline assessments over 12 months, setting an accurate standard by which we can identify any impact on the local environment."

A UK government spokesman said: "The Scottish Government statement ignores the fact most of the powers needed to make Scottish decisions on this matter are already devolved to Holyrood. It is simply misleading to claim householders will lose their say. The Scottish Parliament already has all the necessary powers to decide on application of this approach in Scotland, as planning policy is devolved to the Parliament and is unaffected by these proposals."

Companies looking to develop shale gas and oil would still need to obtain all the necessary environmental and planning permissions but the proposed legislation would effectively remove the issue of trespass at depths of 300 metres or more. Under the proposals, people living on the ground above a horizontal well extending more than 200 metres would receive a payment of £20,000.

Ineos, the Grangemouth operator, said that those living in an area where shale gas was extracted could share £375m over the life of the project. Home owners and land owners directly

above the wells would share 4% of the revenue. A further 2% will go to communities close to the wells.

Mary Church, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "It is absolutely outrageous that the UK government has ignored over 99% of responses to this consultation, and the stated objection of the Scottish Government, that the removal of people's rights to object to fracking underneath their homes is simply unacceptable."

NORTH SEA FRACKING

The *BBC News* website reported that the N56 business body claimed that underwater fracking could almost double the amount of recoverable oil and gas in the North Sea to 45 billion barrels. The Kimmeridge Clay formation, an Upper Jurassic organic rich shale, is the major oil and gas source rock for the central and northern North Sea.

Fergus Ewing said that the report showed the strong possibilities in offshore unconventional and hard-to-reach oil and gas.

AD PLANTS

The Herald reported that Scottish Renewables said that 8,000 tonnes of food waste is being collected from households and converted into energy using anaerobic digesting (AD) plants. Sixteen plants operate in Scotland and a further 24 have planning approval.

Scottish Renewables said that the AD industry was set to double in size in the next two years, fuelled by a rise in local authority food waste collections and the compulsory measures for businesses to separate their food waste, which came into effect in January.

Stephanie Clark, of Scottish Renewables, said: "Food waste is being diverted from landfills where it would have rotted and produced polluting methane gas. Instead, the waste is broken down by micro-organisms and converted into energy, providing electricity and heat to homes and businesses and reducing carbon emissions."

Scottish Renewables said that if all 32 Scottish councils introduced a weekly waste collection scheme, 72,000 tonnes of food could be recycled every year.

NUCLEAR WASTE

EDF Energy has submitted an application to SEPA for permission to alter its certificate for the disposal of radioactive waste at its Hunterston B nuclear plant south of Largs in North Ayrshire [Jul 14]. If granted, it would let the firm transfer intermediate-level radioactive waste off site, while similar material could be brought in to Hunterston from other EDF nuclear power plants for storage.

A similar application has been made at Torness nuclear power station in East Lothian, which if granted would be likely to see an increase in the amount of nuclear waste transferred by road across the central belt. North Ayrshire Council has opposed the Hunterston proposal during the consultation by SEPA. The council has fears over the safety of the plan and says it has no idea how much nuclear waste would be brought into its area; the license change could allow nuclear waste to be brought to the site from any of EDF's seven other UK nuclear power stations or even its 19 nuclear sites overseas.

The Scottish Government has said that long-term management of higher-activity radioactive waste should be in near-surface facilities, as near as possible to the site where the waste is produced. North Ayrshire Council has said the application, if allowed, would go against the national policy.

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority is to undertake sea trials in the Minch, carrying nuclear

waste from Dounreay to Sellafield in Cumbria. Highland councillors on the Dounreay Stakeholder Group are concerned about incidents of 'potential devastation' to the environment of the west coast and Western Isles [Apr 14]. They said that ships should always be double-hulled: "A non-negotiable part of the programme must be the permanent deployment of suitable Emergency Towing Vessels based in Wester Ross, Sutherland or Stornoway and capable of total patrol of the Minch, north and south, and therefore, the Pentland Firth."



RECREATION & TOURISM

LOCHMADDY MARINA

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a new marina has been opened at Lochmaddy in North Uist. Comann na Mara were given £410,000 from the Crown Estate on a commercial basis in order to develop the new facility, which offers 26 berths for visiting yachts. Under the local management agreement, the Crown Estate will look to re-coup their investment [Feb 13].



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

KEEP SCOTLAND BEAUTIFUL

Charges imposed for buying plastic bags are to come into force in October. Tesco said that the money paid for bags in its supermarkets, expected to be about £1m per year, would be donated to Keep Scotland Beautiful. The charity said the money would help support its Clean Up campaign and Seaside Awards.

MULL EAGLE WATCH

The Mull Eagle Watch partnership project has been awarded a gold rating by UK-wide Green Tourism Business Scheme, acknowledging the 'excellent efforts' to boost the positive environmental, conservation and community aspects of the project. It also received a 5 Star Wildlife Experience award from VisitScotland. See: bit.ly/1nA6Rdb

NTS

The Herald reported that the National Trust for Scotland (NTS)'s leadership has begun a dialogue with its 320,000 members about the trust's future at a time when land reform has been empowering communities. The NTS is the country's third largest landowner, with 190,000 acres of properties including Glencoe, the Mar Estate, Torridon, Fair Isle, Canna and Iona.

Entitled *A Place for Heritage*, the debate is based on an examination of different factors and issues that might influence the Trust's role in modern Scotland. The debate is the centrepiece of a consultative process that will ultimately lead to the charity developing a new strategy and long-term vision to take effect from 2016/17. As a charity, NTS is rare in having legislative backing for its core conservation role. This provides two unique powers: inalienability, which means that important heritage sites are held by the Trust for the nation on an inter-generational basis and cannot readily be sold; and conservation agreements, where the NTS can enter into a partnership with an owner to ensure the natural or historical significance of a property is not subsequently obliterated by unsympathetic land uses.

Kate Mavor, of the NTS, said: "We are looking at the relationship between heritage and communities, and there is no doubt that in rural Scotland especially there is a tidal force behind local empowerment. We need to understand what this means for conservation." See: www.nts.org.uk/Charity/A-place-for-heritage/Introduction