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CONSERVATION

MOUNTAIN HARES

The Scottish Mountaineer reported that hillwalkers have been asked to report any evidence of continued large-scale culling of mountain (blue) hares to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). SNH has received reports of heavy culls leading to local declines [Dec 14]. Heather moorland managed for grouse is a good habitat for hares. However, hares can carry sheep ticks, which in turn, can infect grouse with the louping ill virus. As a result, some estates cull them to try to prevent this disease in grouse; they are also culled to protect young trees. The hare is a quarry species and can be shot for sport outside the March-July close season. The impact of harvesting or culling on its population is poorly understood. Robert Raynor, of SNH, said: "The occasional one or two dead hares found on the moor are not the issue – it's evidence that many hares are being targeted that we are concerned about." Email: robert.raynor@snh.gov.uk

• Scottish Land & Estates (SL&E) reports that grouse moors in the Angus Glens, Speyside and Highlands are finding that hare numbers have increased along with grouse levels; heather moorland managed for red grouse is an extremely good habitat for hares to thrive on. The Scottish population of hares is thought to be around 350,000 and in some areas they are now at historically high levels. It is known that its population fluctuates in seven to ten year cycles, but managed grouse moors give hares a sustainable future.

Danny Lawson, head gamekeeper on Glenogil Estate in the Angus Glens, said: "I have seen more mountain hares this year than at any time since I came here. Our mountain hare population has been increasing along with grouse over the last three years because our heather management gives them good grazing and because of predator control over the estate and other neighbouring estates. Good weather in the breeding season helps mountain hare numbers and the last two seasons, 2013 and 2014, have been very good for both grouse and mountain hares. Like grouse, mountain hare populations have to be carefully managed. Culling is legal and is necessary in some circumstances and such management should be done sustainably and be supported by a sound management plan."

Tim Baynes, of the Scottish Moorland Group, says: "There are surprising gaps in our collective knowledge about this secretive animal. This can lead to assumptions about population changes which are not correct and we support the research project commissioned by SNH to get a better handle on how to accurately count hares on the open hill. What does seem certain from the long term observations of moorland managers on the ground is that there is a strong link to land use; hare numbers are likely to go down where moorland is unmanaged or afforested but will increase where managed for red grouse."

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, wrote to the Letters page of *The Herald*: "I would urge caution on those postulating a dramatic 'increase' in local mountain hare populations in Scotland without offering any hard facts. Due to the lack of any sort of agreed and established method of monitoring mountain hares, there is simply no reliable information on trends or population figures.

"The figure of 350,000 quoted is from a 20 year old report which itself acknowledges that it is based on limited information. Work planned by SNH and the James Hutton Institute aims to provide us with an effective and reliable method of monitoring this important upland species. When this is concluded, it will be possible to more confidently report on the state of our only native hare. Until then, speculative optimism is misplaced and irresponsible and this species needs a cautionary approach which ought to start with a reduction in the numbers of mountain hares subject to culling on grouse moors."

The Herald reported that Robbie Marsland, Scottish director of the League against Cruel Sports, said: "Reliable and robust scientific data is needed to confirm the mountain hare population in Scotland. The only such data available shows mountain hares to be in long term decline. As such, the League continues to oppose the culling shooting and snaring of mountain hares." The League opposes the artificial management of habitats to ensure birds like grouse survive 'simply to be shot.'

BIRDS OF PREY

A report published by SNH shows some of the most complete statistical trends ever for birds of prey in Scotland. It shows emerging trends in the numbers and breeding success for 13 species, and finds mixed results: most species are rising, but some are falling. Certain birds of prey, such as goshawks, buzzards and sparrowhawks, have shown signs of recovery over the past seven years from lows in the past, due to efforts to combat persecution, habitat loss and pesticides.

Not all birds of prey have increased, however, and some declines have been stark. Numbers of kestrels, a once common and widespread breeding bird, have declined and they are now becoming scarce in many parts of Scotland.

SNH Commissioned Report 542: Raptors in Scotland - a methodology for developing trends and indicators was written by BTO Scotland, RSPB Scotland and Haworth Conservation, funded by SNH. The data used in the report is mainly that held by the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme, collected by volunteers largely from the Scottish Raptor Study Group. See: bit.ly/1GpMTP1

GANNETS

An SNH commissioned study of gannets off the northwest coast of Scotland has found the birds' numbers have increased rapidly over the last decade. Gannets nesting at Sule Skerry have increased in number at a rate of more than 47% per year. On the Flannan Islands, the growth was 7.5% per year. Numbers changed very little on St Kilda and Sule Stack. The gannet population estimates for the various colonies in 2013 are: St Kilda (60,290 Apparently Occupied Sites [AOS]); Sula Sgeir (11,230 AOS); Flannan Islands (5,280 AOS); Sule Stack (4,550 AOS); and Sule Skerry (1,870 AOS). Bass Rock was recently surveyed with 75,000 AOS [Feb 15].

The good health of gannets across Scotland may be explained by their foraging behaviour. They can fly for great distances in search of food, and are able to take a wide range of prey species – features which may make them more resistant to changes in the marine environment compared with other birds. They also usually nest at sites which have few predators, have produced lots

of chicks over the past decade, and have high survival rates. Both Sule Skerry and the Flannan Islands have plenty of unused but suitable nesting habitat, and this may explain why the number of gannets in these particular colonies has increased. This contrasts to the stable numbers on Sule Stack, where gannets already occupy all the suitable breeding areas. This may lead to gannets establishing new colonies, as has already occurred at Sule Skerry, and may also be happening at Barra Head. See: <http://bit.ly/1HZmPJl>

LYNX

The Lynx UK Trust has launched a public consultation on a plan to release wild lynx in three privately owned, but unfenced, estates. One of the estates being considered is Grumack Forest, Succoth near Huntly in Aberdeenshire. Four to six Eurasian lynx, wearing radio tracking collars, would be released at each site under the plan. The trust will apply for licences for a controlled trial later this year. The *Press & Journal* reported that Ron Macdonald, of SNH, said: "There are pluses and minuses to reintroducing any species. Lynx could, for example, help reduce deer in Scottish woodlands but, on the other hand, some land use organisations have concerns about a reintroduction on livestock. We would look closely at the many factors involved and assess any proposal on its own merits. Any application would have to take into account the Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations, which is based on international guidelines. These guidelines cover many issues, including habitat availability, the impacts on existing wildlife and people's livelihoods, animal health and welfare, and public opinion."

Andrew Bauer, of NFU Scotland, said that bringing in an 'apex predator' would be a step change in Scottish wildlife reintroductions.

See: www.lynxuk.org/survey.html

RED SQUIRRELS

The Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project has launched a new website with an updated squirrel reporting feature. The website works with the GPS on mobile devices to pinpoint a user's location, which will provide more accurate data for the team. Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels is a partnership project between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, SNH, Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland, SL&E, and the Red Squirrel Survival Trust.

See: scottishsquirrels.org.uk/squirrel-sightings

SEA EAGLES

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that, following publication of the NFU Scotland (NFUS) Sea Eagle Action Plan and agreement between NFUS and SNH to work towards a new Sea Eagle Management Scheme, SNH has now established local stakeholder groups covering the West Highlands, North Argyll & Mull; Skye & Lochalsh and Gairloch/Wester Ross [Sep 14]. Each group has representatives from NFUS, the Scottish Crofting Federation, SNH, RSPB Scotland and, where appropriate, FC Scotland and the Scottish Government's Rural Payments Inspection Division.

The groups have reviewed the 2014 season and specific issues that arose in the stakeholder group areas. A new sea eagle scheme for 2015 has been approved.

NATIONAL PARKS

A joint research report, *The Socio-economic Benefits of New National Park Designations in Scotland*, has been published by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS). It claims that creating more National Parks could be

a cost-effective way to provide a major economic boost to a number of fragile, scenic rural areas in Scotland. The two charities said that the Scottish Government has broken its 2011 manifesto pledge to 'work with communities to explore the creation of new National Parks' [Dec 14].

Jonny Hughes, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said: "We shouldn't limit ourselves to thinking that National Parks should be just in rural areas. SWT would like to see consideration given to the designation of Urban National Parks and a revisiting of proposals for Marine National Parks which would create jobs and help restore damaged wildlife habitats." See: www.scnp.org.uk/News/Docs/2015/SCNP-socio-economic-Report.pdf



FARMING

CAP

RSPB Scotland and the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) are urging the Scottish Government for an immediate rethink on rules and payments before the deadline for applying for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) payments in May [Nov 14].

Vicki Swales, of RSPB Scotland, said: "The Scottish Government is trying to use new EU rules to ensure CAP funds are targeted at active farmers. This is justified but in defining 'minimum activity' they have devised a set of nonsensical rules for Scotland that will exclude many farmers and crofters from receiving vital payments. Those who depend on these payments are often managing land designated for its high environmental importance in places such as the Western and Argyll Islands. The consequences for Scotland's wildlife as well as vulnerable rural communities look very serious indeed."

The SCF has also raised concerns about the payment rates for those who do meet the minimum activity requirements and are eligible for support. Patrick Krause, of SCF, said: "Crofters, and many farmers, with rough grazing land will receive very low levels of payments under the new Basic Payment Scheme compared to their counterparts who farm arable land and permanent grassland. The Scottish Government has indicated the rates will be around €7/ha for Region 3 land and €25/ha for Region 2, compared to €145/ha for arable and permanent grassland.

"The very low rates for Regions 2 and 3 are just not enough to ensure survival. Upland farmers in Wales mounted a successful legal challenge to the UK government when similar regions and rates were announced there. Many believe a similar challenge is warranted here ... It is illogical that a government which is working hard to give crofters and other communities greater access to land is, at the same time, introducing CAP rules that will deny people access to financial support that makes land management a viable activity."

In future, in order to be eligible for support under the Basic Payment Scheme and for many options in the new agri-environment-climate scheme, farmers and crofters with land in Region 2 and 3 will need to meet certain minimum activity requirements. These requirements mean farmers will need to keep sufficient livestock to meet a minimum stocking density of 0.05 livestock units *per* hectare of land or demonstrate why they are stocking below this level. One option is to undertake an environmental assessment including annual surveys of breeding birds, mammals, butterflies and plant health and annual monitoring of habitats. An alternative is to have an environmental agreement with Scottish Natural Heritage or an agri-environment agreement under the Scotland Rural Development Programme.

Vicki Swales said: "Whilst undertaking environmental assessments is generally to be encouraged on farms, the requirements set out are extremely demanding and likely to be beyond the means of most farmers and crofters to carry out on an annual basis. More worryingly is that we are now hearing that those who might have used the agri-environment route and who are seeking to renew recently expired agreements are being told they are not eligible because they do not meet the minimum stocking density. This is sending farmers and crofters round in circles and makes no sense whatsoever. The Scottish Government must act quickly to change the rules."

RSPB Scotland said that one solution to the agri-environment scheme problem would be to remove the requirement which states that applicants must be eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme. This would remove the minimum activity requirements for those applying. Since the 0.05 livestock unit *per* hectare is an entirely arbitrary figure, and has no bearing on achieving the correct environmental management, this would not be detrimental to the objectives of the scheme.

Gaining access to payments and the level of those payments are critical to the future survival of many farmers and crofters who manage their land extensively but are nonetheless active businesses. Without support many farms and crofts are simply not viable and the likelihood is that they will stop farming. If land is abandoned this will lead to serious declines in many species and habitats that depend on farming and crofting and have negative impacts on communities in often remote rural areas.

AGRICULTURAL SURVEY

The results of the December Agricultural Survey have been published by Scotland's chief statistician. Cattle numbers rose marginally, by 0.4%, to 1.73 million. This was driven by a 4% increase in dairy cows, with a 1.3% fall in beef cow numbers. Sheep numbers increased 1.6% to 4.84 million, while pig numbers increased by 10% to 322,000. However, there were 2.4 million fewer broilers leading to a 16% reduction in the overall number of poultry.

The area of winter-sown crops was similar to the previous December at 204,000 hectares, with 2,300 hectares more wheat, offset by 1,300 hectares less barley and 500 hectares less oats. Oilseed rape was relatively unchanged. Hay and grass silage increased in 2014, but arable silage fell.

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/03/2947



WOODLANDS

WOODLAND CREATION

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Scottish Woodlands said that more trees must be planted to compensate for the newer, less intensively-planted and less productive woodlands created under stricter environmental rules imposed since the 1970s. In addition, large tracts of woodland across Scotland which have been felled over the past decade to make way for windfarms have not been replaced.

Colin Mann, of Scottish Woodlands, said that the planning process required for new forests as well as the replanting of felled woodland had become 'extraordinarily thorough' in recent years with complex requirements governing the design of forests and the diversity of species. Extensive consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and RSPB Scotland also slows down the process, meaning that it now takes two to three years to receive the necessary permissions to plant a new forest. He said that, as a result, potential investors and hillside sheep farmers thinking of making over their land to forestry are 'put off.'

However, he expects the new £36m/year Scotland Forestry Grant scheme, part of the £1.35 billion Scottish Rural Development Programme 2, will have a positive stimulus on woodland creation, but will not solve the medium to long-term problem of a shortage of timber production from the 2030s onwards.

Trees planted in the 1970s and 80s, when generous tax incentives encouraged the planting of large plantations, are now being felled. 215,000 hectares were planted between 1981 and 1990 to just over 40,000 hectares over the following 20 years. It is this smaller crop from trees planted from the 1990s onwards that will come to maturity in the 2030s.

Gordon Callander, of sawmills James Callander & Son, said: "I suspect that 99% of the general public would not notice whether the trees being planted in forests were mostly commercial or not." He said that to placate a 'small vociferous environmental lobby' only a quarter of the area of a recently planted forest close to Crianlarich had been planted with commercial species of trees: the rest of the woodland was made up of open space and non-commercial species. The result is that far less timber will be harvested from the forest when the trees come to maturity.

Forestry currently accounts for 18% of Scottish land use, but the Scottish Government wants to increase this to 25% by 2050; it is intended to create 100,000 hectares of new woodland in the decade to 2022.

Stuart Goodall, of Confor, said that the Scottish Government's target, agreed in 2012, was already behind by 35% based on an annual need for 10,000 hectares to be planted each year. He said that the funding for the new forest grant scheme was 'insufficient to meet the Government's own targets and what the sector needs.' £30m of the £36m of the new funding scheme is dedicated to new woodland creation but Mr Goodall said that this will only allow 6,000 hectares of new woodland to be planted a year rather than the annual target of 10,000 hectares.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

TWEED SALMON

The *BBC News* website reported that the River Tweed Commissioner's annual report stated that the total number of salmon caught by rod and net on the Tweed in 2014 was 9,971, a decrease of more than 10,000 compared with the 2013 total of 20,316. It has been attributed to the mildest winter on record coupled with a hot summer and lengthy dry spell.

SUBMARINE AREA

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) wants to double the size of a restricted sea area off Wester Ross where submarine testing is conducted. The British Underwater Test & Evaluation Centre works in the Inner Sound between the Island of Raasay and the Applecross Peninsula on the mainland and is operated by QinetiQ.

Fishing is currently banned in the range over an area six miles by three miles and to a depth of 200 metres. Local static and mobile gear fishers in Wester Ross and around the Inner Sound are concerned; reducing passage to a narrow channel would mean that larger vessels, including fishfarm boats, would be forced to go the long way around Skye. An MoD spokesman said that consultation with local sea-users regarding the proposed expansion of the protected area is due to begin in June as part of the MoD Byelaw Review.

FISH DISCARDS

A University of Strathclyde study reported that the recent ban on discarding unwanted fish into the sea will be difficult to comply with [Jan 15]. The study concluded that reducing waste and improving fish stocks was uncertain.

Professor Mike Heath said: "The campaign to change the Common Fisheries Policy and get the discard ban onto the statute book was based on the assertion that half of all fish caught are discarded, and that EU quota restrictions are to blame. But our comprehensive assessment of discarding in the North Sea shows that's not the case. The wasteful practice of over-quota discarding has to be stopped but our study shows that the fundamental reason for the increasing proportion of catch being discarded is that the stocks have become more dominated by undersized fish. This is a legacy of overfishing in the past."

Dr Robin Cook said: "The discard ban will force skippers to use up the storage capacity aboard their vessels bringing ashore fish for which there is no significant market. This will have a detrimental effect on the profitability of the fishing industry, with no real benefit to the stocks. Further improvements in the performance of fishing gears are needed to overcome this, so that small fish are no longer caught."

A spokesman for the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), said: "No-one hates discarding more than our fishermen, but this study simply confirms what we already knew – the introduction of a discard ban has potentially devastating consequences for our fishing communities if implemented badly. The independent science shows that the majority of fish stocks are recovering and part of this recovery can be attributed to our fishermen using increasingly selective fishing gears – work which is ongoing. However, all this takes time, and it is essential that the discard ban is introduced on a gradual basis and with a large degree of flexibility in its operation."

The study is published in *PLoS One*.



MARINE

CORKSCREW DEATHS

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a coalition of wildlife and conservation groups has urged the Scottish and UK governments to withdraw advice to the shipping industry that they believe could see more seals killed by corkscrew injuries. Advice given to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) concluded that ducted propellers may not be responsible for corkscrew injuries: "Therefore mitigation measures and monitoring may not be necessary." However, the advice also accepts that it would be premature to completely discount the possibility that some of the corkscrew injuries are caused by interactions with propellers.

Official advice was changed after researchers found evidence that an adult male grey seal in the Firth of Forth had killed and cannibalised young grey seals and left distinctive spiral lacerations around their bodies [Feb 15]. Before that, ships using ducted propellers had been blamed for the corkscrew wounds, thought to have killed at least 100 seals in Scotland; more than 30 of those found with the injuries have been harbour seals.

However, the group said that propellers cannot be ruled out as causes of injury so it is 'premature' to change shipping advice. It said that previous precautionary warnings not to use ducted propellers near seal conservation areas, and to avoid the breeding season, should be reinstated. It said that there is no evidence to date that grey seals are killing adult harbour (common) seals

with corkscrew injuries. Sarah Dolman, of Whale & Dolphin Conservation, said: "We need to do more, not less, to turn around the declines in seals, so the ... advice is premature and inappropriate. We urgently need a UK-wide strategy to recover seal populations that should include monitoring at haul-out sites, post-mortem examinations to determine all causes of death and peer-review of all previous work on corkscrew injuries including historical analysis. Precautionary mitigation guidance should be in place until all causes of death are clearly understood."

David Balston, of the Chamber of Shipping, said: "It is frustrating that now the evidence does not suit their theories they continue to blame the industry regardless. The evidence now shows natural factors are to blame for seal deaths. It is time environmental campaign groups stopped demonising the industry. We should have a constructive debate but one that is based on science and evidence, not ideology."

• Researchers from the University of St Andrews found high levels of toxins from algal blooms in harbour seals and concluded that they could have been poisoned by eating contaminated fish. An article in *Toxicon* reported: "We suggest that exposure to these toxins are likely to be important factors driving the harbour seal decline in some regions of Scotland."

John Robins, of Save Our Seals Fund, said: "Our government should immediately stop issuing licenses to shoot seals and launch a full investigation into what is causing seals to resort to cannibalism and fund more research into the cause and effect of toxic algal blooms."

MARINE LITTER

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) says its latest beach litter figures show an overall drop in rubbish on Scotland's beaches. Over 660 volunteer beach cleaners, taking part in the Great British Beach Clean event in September last year, found 1,803 items of litter *per kilometre* of Scottish beaches cleaned and surveyed, an 8% drop on 2013 levels.

However, 14% of litter found on Scottish beaches was sewage related debris on its beaches. Of that 14%, 34% were wet wipes, more than treble the amount in 2013 and the highest increase anywhere in the UK.

• The Fishing for Litter Scotland Project, approaching its tenth anniversary, has removed a total of 800 tonnes of litter from the sea. The project is run by KIMO, and now involves 15 participating harbours and 212 fishing boats. The Scottish Government provided funding of £40,000 in 2014/5.

See: www.kimointernational.org/Scotland.aspx

BLUEFIN TUNA

The *BBC News* website reported that Atlantic bluefin tuna are being tracked in an effort to better understand their appearance in Scottish waters. Angus Campbell, a boat operator from Harris, is working with Marine Scotland on the project. Warming sea temperatures and more herring and mackerel are thought to be drawing the tuna to Scotland. Three tuna caught off St Kilda have been satellite tagged and the fish have been tracked to the Azores and the Bay of Biscay and dived to depths in excess of 1,000m.

Lewis Castle College UHI in Stornoway on Lewis will monitor water temperature in the seas around the Western Isles as part of the study. Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the European Fisheries Fund have provided funding for the tagging scheme.

Francis Neat, of Marine Scotland, said: "Marine Scotland needed to learn more about

bluefin tuna in Scottish waters – how many there might be, how long they reside here, where they come from, and where they spawn. This study is aligned with the tagging programme of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna and is an important first step toward understanding bluefin tuna behaviour in Scottish waters, and assessing in the longer term if a recreational catch-and-release sport fishery could be sustainable.”

The Herald reported that Mr Campbell said: “Our ultimate goal is to be able to offer fishing trips for the tuna, which could extend our tourist season by may be six or eight weeks in the autumn. We only find the fish here in September and October, but it would work in well with our Kilda Cruises, allowing us a few more weeks.”

SCAPA FLOW

The Sunday Herald reported that the Scottish and UK governments have been reported to the European Commission by Steve Sankey, a former chief executive of the Scottish Wildlife Trust. He said that the governments had ignored advice concerning the discharge of ballast water into Scapa Flow in Orkney [Dec 13].

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency had warned that pollution could result from the change in the ballast regime. SNH warned of risks to the Loch of Stenness from the accidental introduction of invasive alien species. Scapa Flow has a low tidal flow and is relatively shallow so particularly susceptible to colonisation by alien species.

Oil tankers began emptying their ballast tanks into the sheltered natural harbour earlier this month, as they transfer oil between ships. The water is brought in from elsewhere and could cause pollution and introduce invasive alien species that could wreck wildlife and the fishing industry. Previously, tankers were not allowed to dump their ballast water in Scapa Flow, but had to do so out at sea. Scapa Flow is also linked to the Loch of Stenness, the largest brackish lagoon in the UK. The lagoon is protected under European law as a Special Area of Conservation for its unusual marine life, and is a wintering ground for wildfowl.

Fiona Matheson, of Orkney Fisheries Association, said: “Where you would expect a local authority to support the indigenous fishing industry, Orkney Council is instead acting competitively against its own people’s interests in attempting a rush to the bottom to undercut other ports. It is only a matter of time before there is irreversible entry of destructive species to Scapa Flow that will harm the valuable crab and lobster fishery. It brings into question whether the council should be allowed to run commercial enterprises that compete with and threaten to displace local fishermen.”

Orkney Islands Council (OIC) said that tankers had to exchange ballast water three times in the North Sea or the Atlantic before they were allowed to dump it in Scapa Flow. An environmental study for the council concluded that it was ‘beyond reasonable scientific doubt’ that the Loch of Stenness would not be harmed.

Steven Heddle, of OIC, said: “The change to our ballast water policy was not a decision we took lightly and followed comprehensive scientific analysis of the potential impact. This reassured us that tankers can discharge ballast water – a requirement for ship-to-ship transfer operations – in an environmentally responsible manner governed by the strict requirements of our new policy. Scapa Flow has been home to a major oil terminal for 40 years and remains a marine environment widely regarded as pristine.

It is something we are proud of and determined to maintain.”

The UK government’s Maritime & Coastguard Agency said: “Our assessment is that the likelihood of an incident is very low. If such an incident were to occur all the necessary measures are in place to ensure that there would be no adverse effect on the integrity of the environment within Scapa Flow.”

Marine Scotland is now finalising an informal review of the council’s decision to approve the new ballast water regime.

MARINE PLAN

Scotland’s National Marine Plan has been published and sets out a single statutory planning framework for all marine activity in Scottish waters out to 200 nautical miles [Jan 15]. This will include policies for the sustainable management of a wide range of marine industries and includes sectoral plans for offshore wind, wave and tidal energy in Scottish waters. It removes the options for offshore wind development in the Solway Firth.

The framework covers devolved and reserved functions and will be reported on within three years of adoption.

Alex Kinninmonth, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: “Implementing the plan around the Scottish coastline will be challenging and will require significant resources and collaboration but after many years of campaigning we are pleased that the broad foundations now exist for a marine planning system that aims to secure healthy seas for future generations.”

Calum Duncan, convenor of Scottish Environment LINK’s marine taskforce, said: “On the whole, we are very supportive of the plan and its purpose of ensuring the sustainable development and stewardship of our sea, but the inclusion of targets to expand salmon farming which have not been fully assessed is cause for concern.”

See: www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/seamanagement/national



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

CROWN ESTATE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a memorandum of understanding is to be drawn up by the Scottish and UK governments concerning the Smith Commission’s proposals to devolve control over Crown Estate assets [Dec 14]. A paper was presented to the Scottish Parliament by the Secretary of State for Scotland, Alasdair Carmichael. It proposed that: “The transfer of management responsibility for the Crown Estate is not detrimental to UK-wide critical national infrastructure in relation to matters such as oil and gas, telecommunications and energy, thereby safeguarding the importance of the Crown Estate’s foreshore and seabed assets to the UK as a whole.” Oil and gas receipts would remain a reserved matter.

Dr Michael Foxley, former leader of Highland Council, said that the paper was silent on further devolution of the Crown Estate assets to local authorities. The report did not allow for the creation of a Scottish Coastguard Agency to protect fishing, aquaculture, tourism and the marine environment.

FRACKING

The Sunday Herald reported that the public consultation on fracking has been delayed until November, pushing the outcome beyond the

Scottish election in 2016 [Jan 15]. The delay has been criticised by both the Scottish Greens, who oppose fracking, and by the Scottish Conservatives, who favour it. Community and environmental groups have cautiously welcomed the news, while the fracking industry itself has sounded neutral or kept silent.

GREAT BERNERA

Residents of Great Bernera have voted, 85% in favour, of a proposed community buyout of the island [Feb 15]. The buyout would involve 5,000 acres and includes the islands of Great and Little Bernera. The family of Count Robin Mirrlees, who owned the island until his death in June last year, had given the crofters first refusal.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

PLANNING

In an open letter to *The Herald*, a group of environmental bodies said that public confidence in the planning system is at an all time low and called for a root and branch overhaul of the planning process. Citing recent decisions to permit windfarms in environmentally sensitive areas, development on green belt land and a luxury housing scheme near the Culloden battlefield site, they argued that the entire planning process must be made ‘truly independent of government’ and complained that the views of bodies set up to protect Scotland’s environment and natural heritage are routinely ignored in the face of ‘powerful commercial interests.’

The letter said: “This situation cannot continue and it is in everyone’s interests to find a way forward. If we are to rebuild public confidence in the planning process and in the objectivity of Scottish ministers responsible for making such decisions, then we must find a way to demonstrate absolute transparency, impartiality and fairness.”

It calls for the creation of a dedicated independent planning body: “The goal would be to ensure clear, neutral adjudication over controversial planning applications where there could be significant impact on important landscapes, natural heritage interests or local communities.”

The letter was signed by the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, the John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, the Munro Society, the National Trust for Scotland (NTS), Ramblers Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Rights of Way & Access Society and the Scottish Wild Land Group.

An NTS spokesman said a recent decision to allow the building of 16 luxury homes near the Culloden site, after permission was initially refused by Highland Council, had raised fresh concerns about the integrity of the planning system. He said: “So many people have doubts about the system now, we have to do something to counteract that. It would be helpful for the government as well.”

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: “We are already taking steps to ensure planning authorities protect, conserve and where appropriate seek to enhance the key landscape characteristics. Our planning process is rigorous and aims to strike the right balance between Scotland’s massive green potential and the need to protect the country’s most scenic and wild areas. Scottish ministers very carefully considered all of the issues raised and all submissions made before coming to a decision on applications. There are numerous competing considerations to be taken into account in determining these important decisions, and ministers take these responsibilities very seriously.”

Dave Morris, formerly of Ramblers Scotland, wrote to *The Herald*: “[Greater protection] will

not be achieved simply through a reform of the planning system, as advocated by NTS, Ramblers Scotland and many other outdoor organisations in the letter. Most of our wild land is primarily affected not by planning decisions but by activities associated with agriculture, forestry, deer and grouse moor management.

“New legislation is undoubtedly part of the process of protecting our wild land in the future from inappropriate windfarms, hill roads, tree planting, ploughing, fencing and so on. But we will not see such legislation this side of the Scottish Parliament elections in 2016. Meanwhile the rate of attrition of wild land is so rapid, well documented by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), that some action must be taken now at governmental level.

“Perhaps we need a Wild Land Forum to bring the main interests, both public and private, together to promote wild land protection and to examine the various options. Something similar to the National Access Forum is needed – established in the early 1990s and still going strong today, this was the SNH led grouping that laid the foundation for Scotland’s world class access legislation, securing rights of public access to most of our land and water. Having protected our rights of access in 2003 surely we must now ensure that the natural and cultural values associated with that land and water are equally well protected.

“A European Parliament resolution in 2009 identified the need to do more to protect wild land and subsequently the Scottish Government responded to this challenge by promoting wild land mapping, including the identification of ‘core’ wild land areas by SNH, and incorporating the results into planning policy. We need to build on this good start by raising awareness of wild land values from garden gate to mountain summit and incorporating wild land protection into Scotland’s land use strategy. With nature based tourism worth at least £1.4 billion *per annum* this makes economic as well as environmental sense.”

Pam Ewen, convenor of the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland (RTPI), wrote to *The Herald* in reply: “The planning system is certainly not broken and does not need further upheaval; rather we live in a democratic country within which decisions on major planning applications are made. Does anyone truly believe the creation of a new, unelected quango is the answer?

“I do not recognise the contention that ‘public confidence in the planning system is at an all-time low.’ This does not chime with the messages I hear from across Scotland through communities and developers. The planning system has an important role and we need to continue to provide stronger leadership across both public and private sectors, including politicians, to protect and enhance our wonderful environment whilst moving to a low carbon economy. What we cannot have is a veto on planning decisions from any group, no matter how well intentioned.”

Terry Levinthal, of NTS, wrote in *The Scotsman*: “The RTPI may well be right in asserting that recent reforms to the planning system offer improvements, but misconstrue the points made. If there is insufficient trust in the system, because it is perceived as being too one-sided, it does not matter how good it is in theory as no-one has confidence in practice. Neither were the signatories arguing for an ‘unelected quango’ to have ‘a veto on planning decisions’ – it is understood public objections are not reasons in themselves to reject applications. The point was that there should be a fair and transparent system of arbitration if there are reasonable indications that decisions rested on incomplete evidence or

where due process had not been followed, as has been alleged in relation to two major wind energy projects where the government is said to have ignored its own advisors. ‘Justice should not only be done; it must also be seen to be done.’

“This was not an argument for removing the Scottish Government from the planning process, nor for ‘special interests’ to have undue sway, but to ensure that all interested parties have exactly the same rights and remedies. At the moment, the only recourse ordinary citizens have to challenge apparently faulty planning decisions, be they local or ministerial, is to spend £50-£100,000 taking the matter to court. This is hardly fair and democratic: developers with their deep, often publicly subsidised, pockets can afford to obtain the best advocacy money can buy. If there was a fair, accessible system of adjudication, this would strengthen public confidence in otherwise unpalatable planning decisions: it certainly could not be diminished further.”

Stuart Brooks, of JMT, wrote to *The Herald*: “We already have the policies in place that should protect our National Scenic Areas, National Parks and Wild Land Areas from further proliferation of windfarms. There are several key proposals in Wild Land Areas for which a refusal should be an easy decision for the Scottish Government. If ministers are not prepared to follow their own policies, there is a good case to be made for introducing more independent scrutiny into our planning process. Let us hope that isn’t necessary and our elected politicians take decisions that benefit all of us for the long term, rather than a few in the here and now.”

- Highland Council is carrying out a consultation on the first ‘substantial’ review of the existing conservation areas for Culloeden Battlefield since they were first designated in 1968. It is proposed to extend the conservation area to help prevent further housing development. The Viewfield Farm development, half a mile from the battlefield, was given planning permission by a Scottish Government reporter following an appeal by the developers against Highland Council’s refusal [Feb 14].

WILD LAND

The Herald reported that research by Community Land Scotland (CLS), shows that many of the 42 areas, covering 3.8 million acres, identified by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as ‘core wild land’ were once the sites of communities which were cleared of their people largely in the 19th century to make way for sheep and sporting estates [Jul 14]. CLS said that SNH’s wild land map ‘overlaps with many areas purposefully and shamefully cleared by past generations of landowners.’

Rob Gibson, MSP said: “Alas in my view, clamour for ‘wild land’ protection is a response to a predominantly urban view of wildness focused on by a well-publicised anti-development lobby. This has led to a vocal minority railing loudly against wind turbine building.”

He has matched a map of clearances sites which were identified over several editions of his book, *The Highland Clearances Trail*, with SNH’s wild land map and that there was a striking overlap. He said: “It pointed to the need for a map of settlements across rural Scotland that used to exist to see the places where human communities lived and thrived. Today access to land is even more a key to rebuild fragile populations in harmony with the natural environment. Fencing off so-called wild land in the minds of people and planners is a disservice to the needs of a biodiverse Scotland and the human need for sustainable modern life in a climate change aware

nation. This map suggests that the place of people in our landscape must not be erased.”

SNH defended its map, saying it recognised virtually all of Scotland had been influenced by human activity over time, but many areas continued to have strong qualities of wildness that were highly valued today.

FLOOD RISK

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and local authorities have launched joint consultation plans on the future direction and delivery of flood risk management throughout Scotland. It has been divided into 14 Local Plan Districts (LPD).

In December 2015, following feedback from this consultation, SEPA will publish a flood risk management strategy for each of the districts. Each strategy will confirm the immediate priorities for flood risk management as well as set out the future direction to be taken by all responsible authorities. This co-ordinated approach to Flood Risk Management Planning has been driven by the Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act 2009 which has encouraged more partnership working between public bodies. Each LPD has a lead local authority. They are: Aberdeenshire Council, Angus Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Dumfries & Galloway Council, City of Edinburgh Council, Glasgow City Council, Highland Council, Moray Council, North Ayrshire Council, Orkney Council, Perth & Kinross Council, Scottish Borders Council, Shetland Council and Stirling Council.

The lead local authority will co-ordinate and support the production of the Local Flood Risk Management Plan, publishing delivery plans in June 2016 which will set out how to manage flood risk between 2016 and 2022. The consultation is open until 2 June. See: <https://frm-scotland.org.uk>

CAIRNGORMS HOUSING

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a report, commissioned by a coalition of nine Scottish environmental organisations, has concluded that a highly unusual directive giving approval for building at Carrbridge issued by the Scottish Government to the Cairngorm National Park Authority (CNPA) should be withdrawn [Feb 15].

John McNairney issued the directive for consideration by CNPA to reverse a previous decision not to zone woodland at Carrbridge for housing in its local development plan. This could mean that land available for new homes in the village will double, increasing the number of houses from 36 to 72 or maybe more. The coalition wrote to McNairney: “The direction and the whole basis for it is wrong. The direction is therefore flawed and should be withdrawn.”

Gus Jones, of the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, said: “The park authority and two sets of government reporters have unanimously recognised that this woodland should not be allocated for development. The direction provides no reason why the local plan in the Cairngorms National Park should be hijacked.”

Carol Evans, of the Woodland Trust Scotland, said: “The Scottish Government’s latest demand that a large area of woodland that was previously safeguarded from development be earmarked for development is unreasonable. Any further loss [of ancient woodland] is unacceptable, particularly within our national parks where the protection of natural heritage should be of paramount importance.”

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: “Scottish ministers need to provide a transparent explanation of how the environmental implications of this decision were reached if confidence in their environmental credentials is not to be damaged.”

The Scottish Government said a 'factual error' had been made, wrongly suggesting that there were no live planning permissions in place for Carrbridge. This was what had prompted ministers to issue a direction to the park authority.

Murray Ferguson, of CNPA, said that ministers had exercised their right to modify the local development plan: "This is a relatively small change, but of great significance to Carrbridge. The other policies in the plan have not been changed and many of these will be relevant when it comes to considering any development proposal on the site."

- The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the CNPA has refused planning permission for up to 117 new homes on a site at Carrbridge in Strathspey [Feb 15]. The CNPA said that although the land involved was zoned for housing in the park's current local plan and emerging local development plan, the developer's three planning applications for the project were 'not deemed to meet with a range of other planning policies.'

Aviemore & Highland Developments Ltd had sought approval for the scheme, which has been going through the planning process for more than ten years; it had outline planning permission. The planning committee said that the environmental impacts had not been fully assessed.

CAIRNGORMS SHOOTING RANGE

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Craggan Outdoors shooting range near Grantown had its reinstatement of planning permission approved by a Scottish Government reporter. The CNPA had refused permission, concerned that the range would disturb wildlife in woodland at Lower Gaich and pose a threat to users of the River Spey. Planning conditions include stipulating use of non-lead, non-toxic shot.

GREEN BELT

The *Herald* reported that St Andrews Environmental Protection Association has lost a legal bid to put aside planning permission for the new Madras College to be built on green belt land to the north of Pipeland Farm.

- Graham's the Family Dairy has announced plans to build a £20m dairy, research and training facility at Craigforth near Stirling. The firm hopes to finance the new facility via a development of 600 houses, community amenities and a primary school on greenbelt land at Airthrey Kerse, which drew local opposition and is currently awaiting planning permission from the council [Nov 14].

NEW TOWN

The Hometown Foundation first sought planning permission in 2009 to build the Owenstown new town in the Douglas valley in South Lanarkshire – a planned community of 3,200 new homes near Rigside that would have been owned and managed by its residents with any surplus funds being reinvested in the community. The Scottish Government has now dismissed an appeal, following a public hearing, against an earlier refusal by South Lanarkshire Council; planning officers had said it would be against planning policy. The application was rejected because of its scale, its impact on roads, limited public transport, and objections from Forestry Commission Scotland and SNH.

VICARIOUS LIABILITY

Ninian Johnston Stewart, the first landowner to be convicted under vicarious liability legislation in Scotland, has forfeited some of his subsidy payment as a consequence [Jan 15]. The *Legal Eagle*, RSPB's Investigations newsletter, reported: "In 2012, Johnston Stewart's business received nearly £120,000 in Single Farm Payments. Under

'cross-compliance' there is a requirement to comply with a number of conditions in order to receive payments. The poisoned bait and buzzard were found on land used for agriculture by the business and consequently he lost nearly £66,000 of the 2012 payment."

RAPTOR CRIME

The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland published the annual poisoning and persecution maps relating to crimes against raptors in 2014. Reported raptor crimes (incidents) have dropped from 23 in 2013 to 19 in 2014. Species targeted included red kite, buzzard, peregrine falcon, goshawk, golden eagle, hen harrier and tawny owl.

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog said that at least 27 raptors were poisoned (17 red kites; seven buzzards and one peregrine). Two of these cases are not included on the maps as they remain under live police investigation and no further details have been released. According to PAW, only 16 raptors were poisoned in Ross-shire (12 red kites + 4 buzzards) – although 22 birds were found dead, there may only be toxicology reports for 16 of those victims; Police Scotland has not yet released the cause of death.

There were eight reported shootings, two reported trapping offences, one reported disturbance incident and two listed as 'other.' *Raptor Persecution Scotland* said that incidents where satellite-tagged raptors have disappeared in known persecution hotspot areas have been excluded from the figures.

Ian Thomson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "While we acknowledge that numbers of detected poisoning incidents continue to be at relatively low levels, this is only part of the story. While occasionally there are high-profile incidents such as that on the Black Isle, there continues to be a campaign of illegal killing against our protected birds of prey in some areas, as evidenced by the recent film released by Police Scotland showing the systematic targeting of a goshawk nest, and the absence of successfully breeding hen harriers, peregrines and golden eagles in many areas of our uplands."

See: www.PAW.Scotland.gov.uk

SCOTGOLD

Scotgold Resources has said that option agreements with the Crown over five parcels of land in the southwest Grampians have been renewed for a period of up to six years, with a review and appropriate area reduction after one and three years [Oct 14]. The company has added 300 stream sediment samples to the 750 already taken from a wider area, with 187 to be taken.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The UK Committee on Climate Change (CCC), in a progress report for Scottish ministers, confirmed that Scotland missed its target for emissions in 2012, the third time an annual target has not been met. Net emissions in 2012 were 55.67 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO2e), compared to the target of 53.226. The report found that Scotland performed better than the UK as a whole and made good progress in areas including renewable electricity generation capacity and installing community and locally-owned energy projects.

However, transport emissions accounted for 21% of Scotland's total; plans to cut air passenger duty by 50% when it is devolved to Holyrood could lead to increased carbon emissions. The committee said that the Scottish Government should consider other options to drive the figure down; stronger policies are also needed in areas renewable heat, agriculture and forestry if targets

are to be met in future. Plans to cut air passenger duty by 50% when it is devolved to Holyrood could lead to increased carbon emissions; a re-evaluation of vehicle speed limits is also called for and congestion charges could be imposed.

The CCC also found Scotland is not on track to meet its renewable heat target to source 11% of demand from renewable sources by 2020. Among its recommendations are effective energy efficiency schemes for flats, which make up 38% of the Scottish housing stock, and CO₂ reduction targets for government buildings.

PEAT CONSULTATION

Scottish Environment LINK has submitted its response to the SNH *Carbon Rich Soil, Deep Peat & Priority Peatland Habitats* consultation [Jan 15]. The consultation proposes that land Classes 1 and 2 should be the basis for mapping carbon-rich soil, deep peat and priority peatland habitats *i.e.* areas of significant protection under Scottish Planning Policy. LINK does not agree with this approach, as it means that areas of deep peat which currently do not support dominant peatland vegetation, or 'Class X', are excluded from areas of significant protection, which LINK believes to be a serious flaw in the approach.

LINK is concerned that this would steer development towards damaged but recoverable peatland resulting in more pressure on these sites. Class X areas will include sites which are prime candidates for restoration, where siting a windfarm could result in significant emissions and prevent full restoration of the site. LINK thinks this is incompatible with Scottish Government policy and targets for peatland restoration, which the draft SNH National Peatland Plan highlights as 'a key area for investment ... for meeting climate change targets in 2013 – 2027.'

Whilst windfarm development may be possible within some Class X areas, the presence of deep peat is likely to always be a significant environmental constraint, requiring careful consideration. Therefore LINK considers that Class X areas, where capable of restoration, should be included in areas of significant protection. Peatland hydrology requires consideration. Peatlands are necessarily wet and hydrological connections have great importance in maintaining their integrity. Disruption to hydrology can result in degradation of surrounding areas. Hydrological units in the final document should be included, informing the siting of developments.

SSSIs

SNH has combined two Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)s near Loch Lomond – Endrick Mouth & Islands and Aber Bog, Gartocharn Bog & Bell Moss. The resulting site will continue to be known as Endrick Mouth & Islands SSSI.

HILLTRACKS

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Forestry Commission Scotland has applied for planning consent for the retention of a section of track and a bridge over the River Pattack in Kinlochlaggan, constructed as part of the Beauly/Denny powerline project [Feb 15]. All temporary tracks were to be reinstated under the terms of the planning permission. The North East Mountain Trust has strongly objected to changes in the policy.



ENERGY

RENEWABLE GENERATION

The UK Department of Energy & Climate Change has published provisional *Renewable Electricity Generation 2014 National Statistics* which show that Scotland has 'almost' met its 50% renewable electricity target a year ahead of schedule.

49.6% of gross electricity consumption (18,959 GWh) came from renewable sources in Scotland last year, an increase from 44.4% in 2013. This included an increase in hydro, bioenergy and wind generation with hydro generation up 26% per cent from 2013 to 5,503 GWh, and wind output 4% from 2013 to 11,592 GWh. See: www.gov.uk/government/collections/energy-trends

WINDPOWER POLL

The Herald reported that a YouGov survey for Scottish Renewables found that 71% of 1,008 Scottish adults, polled online, want the continued development of wind power as part of Scotland's energy mix, compared to 64% in February 2013. 81% of those aged 18-24 backed wind power, compared to 65% of over-55s.

Support was lowest in south Scotland (64%) and the Highlands and Islands (66%), and highest in Glasgow and the Lothians (both 79%).

Onshore wind capacity in Scotland has risen by 20% over the same time period.

HIGHLAND WINDFARMS

Highland Council has published a new interactive map which shows the locations of windfarms in the Highlands, the number of turbines, generating capacity, operator etc, and planning reference number. It currently shows the windfarms already constructed and those under construction. It is planned plan to add those that are approved, refused and still in the planning system somewhere. See: www.highland.gov.uk/windmap

RESTORATION OF WINDFARM SITES

The Press & Journal reported that Aden Beresford, a graduate student on placement with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in 2013-4, wrote a report on the restoration of onshore wind and hydro power sites in Scotland. He concluded that: "There are poor acceptable standards of quality in which developments are being left following construction work." He said that 'good practice construction improvements' are required to redress problems such as access tracks and drainage management. At some sites, habitat management plans and restoration improvements are required.

SNH admitted that 'things do not always go to plan with on large civil engineering projects.' It had now revised its good practice guidelines for developers. Linda Holt, of Scotland Against Spin, said: "It's common knowledge that wind developers get away with flouting planning conditions, leaving sites environmentally and ecologically degraded."

WINDFARM UPDATES

Easter Ross: Highland Council's elections office organised a postal vote on the Black Isle which rejected plans for Black Isle Community Energy's proposed three turbine windfarm in Millbuie Forest near Mount Eagle [Feb 15]. 57% of the eligible electorate voted with 46% in favour, below the target figure needed for the project to go ahead.

Inverness-shire: Highland councillors have opposed WPD's plans to build six wind turbines on the slopes of Beinn Mhor, near Tomich in Glen Affric [Feb 15]. Planning officials had recommended approval, with a long list of conditions that should be met. The developers had appealed to the Scottish Government on the grounds of non-determination; the final decision will now be made by the Scottish Government. Objections were received from three local community councils, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and over 1,000 individuals.

Perthshire: Perth & Kinross Council rejected an application for a 13 turbine windfarm at Creag a' Bhaired. The development would have been

sited near the existing Griffin and Calliachar wind developments and the Beauly/Denny power line. The John Muir Trust, local residents and community councils had objected to the scheme, concerned that it would lead to the further 'industrialisation' of Highland Perthshire; Aberfeldy and Dunkeld rely very heavily on tourism for employment. The windfarm would have added to the visual impact of wind turbines from Schiehallion, within nationally-recognised Wild Land Area 10.

Scottish Borders: The local authority has voted to oppose Community Windpower's revised plans for the Aikengall Iia scheme near Cockburnspath, on the border with East Lothian. The application had been reduced from 27 turbines to 19 [Sep 14]. Planning officers had advised councillors not to object to the scheme. However, they voted to object to the scheme because of its landscape and amenity impact. The final decision on the development will lie with the Scottish government.

- Councillors rejected plans for a six-turbine extension to the 11 turbine Glenkerie windfarm site near Tweedsmuir. Two community councils as well as walkers and hill-running groups had objected to the proposals. Planning officials had advised approval but councillors turned down the plans. Infinis has now lodged an appeal with the Scottish Government.

- The planning committee has unanimously rejected plans for Airvolution Energy's seven turbine windfarm at Muircleugh, in the hills between Lauder and Stow. Councillors decided that its impact on the Southern Upland Way, the Eildons and Thirlestane Castle would be unacceptable.

Shetland: A public consultation is expected after Peel Energy acquired the rights to develop Beaw Field Wind Farm, northwest of Burravoe on the Isle of Yell. The number and size of turbines will then be decided.

Skye: The 14 turbine, 42 MW Glen Ullinish windfarm has been recommended for approval by Highland Council. The proposed development is between Ose and Struan at Allt Dughail, on land owned by the Scottish Government, and developed as a partnership between Kilmac Construction and local crofters. The Cullins Special Protection Area (SPA), designated for the golden eagles nesting within it, lies 7.5 miles to the south-east of the development site. SNH did not object to the plans.

South Lanarkshire: Planning officers rejected the application for Falck Renewables' 14 turbine Leadhills windfarm, north of Sanquhar, on several grounds, including the significant adverse effects on the character of the landscape in the Leadhills & Lowther Hills Special Landscape Area in addition to the cumulative effects of turbines in the area.

WAVE ENERGY

The Sunday Herald reported that Aquamarine Power has delayed plans to build Scotland's first wave energy farm for at least five years. The firm had planning consent for a 40 MW wave power site 500 metres off the west coast of Lewis, where it planned to install 'the world's first ever' fully consented array of up to 50 wave devices in 'some of the wildest seas in the world' [Jan 15].

Aquamarine is in discussion with other parties regarding the potential future of the Lewis site, and a smaller site in Orkney. Future plans could include developing the Lewis site as a multi-technology pre-commercial test zone, or co-developing the site with other interested parties. Aquamarine's prototype device, installed at the European Marine Energy Centre in Orkney,

suffered repeated technical failures, proving unable to generate electricity for a sustained period of more than about 24 hours. The Outer Hebrides also lack a grid connection to the mainland, with the company seeing no prospect of one being installed before 2020.

MULL HYDRO

Green Energy Mull's 400 KW hydro scheme, which is scheduled to open in spring 2015, is being built on the Allt Achadh na Moine burn in the Garmony Forest on the Isle of Mull, on a 40 year lease under Forestry Commission Scotland's National Forest Land Scheme.

OPENCAST COAL

The UK Chancellor announced, in the Budget Red Book, that the UK government would work with the Scottish Coal Taskforce to deliver a solution for restoration of abandoned opencast coalmines in Scotland. An exemption on the Carbon Price Support Duty, set on coal used for electricity production, would make it economical for coal companies to restore landscapes ruined by past opencast developments as well as to extract coal from brownfield sites [Jan 15].

The UK's largest coal operator, Hargreaves, has announced that it is facing financial difficulties and proposed that a number of sites can now only be made viable with new coal tax exemptions, through the exemption where their sites support additional restoration of derelict areas.

RSPB Scotland is uncertain that funds would actually be used for restoration of derelict sites; it called for the Scottish and UK governments to instead work together to establish a new Restoration Fund to support restoration of derelict sites. The fund would be controlled by government and local authorities, allowing for funds to be spent directly on restoration where it is most needed.

Alexa Morrison, of RSPB Scotland, said: "A new tax exemption for the coal industry, essentially to enable it to pay to clean up the mess it should have already cleaned up, and helping to prop up the industry in the process, is not a signal that government should be giving to any industry. Restoration of open cast coal sites in Scotland is an urgent issue, but a much more effective and simple way of supporting restoration would be to create a Restoration Fund, using revenues from coal generators, which would allow tax payers' money to be used at sites where action is most needed.

"Open cast coal is a declining industry, under pressure from the market and from environmental regulations as we move to cleaner energy. Directly funding legacy restoration would support those employed in the sector, without artificially sustaining fossil fuel extraction where it is simply no longer viable. The UK government needs to avoid giving the message to the industry that we should 'just keep digging' at all costs, and that the taxpayer will come to the rescue where industry fails to pay its clean up costs."

In a joint letter to *The Herald*, Stuart Housden of RSPB Scotland, Lang Banks of WWF Scotland and Richard Dixon of Friends of the Earth Scotland, wrote: "Existing tax revenues on the burning of coal could be put towards repairing the damage the coal industry has caused across Scotland. We need a responsible approach to funding the necessary repair and enhancement of the areas that have been open cast in Scotland, which both supports jobs and uses taxpayers funds for the benefit of local communities and the environment. The last thing we need is a tax break that encourages more unsustainable and irresponsible coal extraction."

POWER STATIONS

National Grid's tender for transmission constraint management services for Scotland in 2016/17

was awarded to SSE's Peterhead gas-fired power station. The power station will keep capacity open when other sources, such as renewables, cannot meet Scottish demand. The contract allows National Grid to call upon 385 MW of Peterhead's 1180 MW capacity to provide voltage support.

Scottish Power's bid for this contract was rejected by National Grid and as a result the company has said that in all likelihood it will be forced to close coal-fired Longannet power station in Fife by March 2016. Scotland will lose 2.5 GW of generating capacity, and resilience, from the system, with no replacement on the horizon.

Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, said: "Of course there has been broad consensus that the electricity system in Scotland will be less resilient if Longannet closes prematurely. It is vital therefore that these discussions also explore all possible options for averting the premature closure of the site, such as possible action to address discriminatory transmission charges, whether additional National Grid contracts could be available and whether the restoration coal proposal – mentioned in the UK Budget – could help the station's economics."

Neil Clitheroe, of Scottish Power, said: "The issue regarding punitive transmission charges has not changed, and this still negatively impacts the future of the station. Beyond that, the current transmission charging regime is a major barrier to any future investment in flexible thermal power generation in Scotland. In any future scenario for Scotland, it is vital that the network here is supported by flexible generation to complement renewables." He also blamed the cost of EU environmental taxes.

Thomas Docherty MP said: "For six decades coal power stations have operated in Kincardine, powering hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses across central Scotland. We have known for sometime that Longannet would cease generating due to the age of the station, the decision by its owners not to make the necessary investment and the SNP's obsession with renewables driving Longannet out of the Scottish market."

Murdo Fraser MSP said: "The SNP is anti-fracking, anti-nuclear and obsessed with developing intermittent windpower. This approach will have serious issues in relation to security of supply and could mean we will have to import power from England unless we find a way to plug the gap."

Gina Hanrahan, of WWF Scotland, said: "While Longannet has served Scotland well for over 40 years, it is Scotland's single biggest source of climate emissions and a combination of EU air pollution rules, carbon pricing and factors such as transmission charging have made the ageing plant's closure inevitable. However, National Grid have made clear that this does not pose problems for security of supply in Scotland and has taken very prudent steps to ensure grid stability with this short-term voltage control contract for Peterhead ... the Scottish Government and others now need to focus on attracting new low carbon employment to the area so that we can secure a just transition to a clean-energy future."

The Scottish Parliament's Economy, Energy & Tourism committee is to hold an inquiry into the security of Scotland's energy supply. The committee is seeking views on whether there is enough generation in the system to meet demand until the end of the decade, and how peak demand might change over that timeframe. Convener Murdo Fraser MSP said: "The security of Scotland's energy supply has been brought into urgent focus due to the recent developments

at Longannet. It is imperative that this inquiry starts a debate in Scotland about how we can secure Scotland's energy supply and looks at the implications of the likely early closure of Longannet. There are a number of wider issues at play here, from the move away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, significant reform to the UK electricity market as well as the capability of the UK transmission network to meet demand."

CCS PLANTS

The Scottish and UK governments have committed a total of £4.2m to researching a proposal for a new 570 MW coal-gasification power station in Grangemouth, using carbon capture storage (CCS) technology. Detailed research for the Caledonia Clean energy project will be carried out by Summit Power Group. The proposed facility would be the first time carbon capture technology would be combined with a coal-gasification power generator in a single facility. Up to 90% of carbon dioxide emissions from the plant would be captured and transported through under-sea pipelines to be stored under the North Sea.

- A planning application for a CCS plant at Peterhead power station has been officially lodged with Aberdeenshire Council. Shell and SSE are applying for UK government funding to develop a commercial scheme at the site.

ENERGY-FROM-WASTE

A £111m recycling and energy-from-waste plant is to be built at Levensat, near Forth in South Lanarkshire. The facility is forecast to recycle more than one million tonnes of materials over its lifetime. The project includes a 12.5 MW energy-from-waste plant and an adjacent materials recycling facility which will recover plastics, metals, paper and card for recycling. The plant will be fully operational by mid 2017. It aims to generate 75 GWh of electricity per year; electricity will be supplied to the national grid, with the heat output assisting the operation of the recycling plant. The UK Green Investment Bank is co-funding the project.

SUBWAY HEAT EXCHANGE

The Herald reported that heat pumps have been installed at St George's Cross and Bridge Street stations on Glasgow's subway network to extract heat from waste water, at 10-14°C, which leaks into the tunnels [Oct 13]. Humid air which collects in the tunnels will also be captured as used a heat source as part of the same pilot scheme, to test which method is more effective. If successful, the devices could be rolled out across all 15 stations.

The pumps have been developed by Glasgow Caledonian University. The Glasgow Subway is vulnerable to water ingress because it intersects the rivers Clyde and Kelvin. The operator, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), continually pumps water back out of the tunnels to prevent flooding.

A £130,000 study, which has been partly funded by SPT, is expected to deliver its first results by the end of May.

GEOTHERMAL ENERGY

A challenge fund to support research into exploring Scotland's geothermal capacity to meet the energy needs of local communities has been launched by the Scottish Government.

Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, said: "I have taken the advice of the Geothermal Energy Expert Group to build on the findings of the study undertaken in 2012-13 by supporting exploration of the significant potential for geothermal energy in naturally occurring groundwater and the water collecting in our abandoned mines. Now is the time to take the experience of the housing projects

in Shettleston and Fife and take the first steps towards the development of a delivery model which reduces carbon emissions, is self-sustaining and is economically viable."

The maximum grant award available for each feasibility study is £50,000. The deadline for applications is 30 April.

See: www.scottish-enterprise.com/geothermal



RECREATION & TOURISM

MARINE TOURISM

A campaign, *Awakening the Giant*, has been launched to grow the total value of Scotland's coastlines and canals by 25%, from £360m to £450m by 2020. The plans include measures to improve the experience of visitors, enhance facilities and skills within the sector, while promoting the huge range of events and activities available on and around the nation's sailing grounds, including wildlife tourism.

NATIONAL NETWORK

The National Long Distance Cycling & Walking Network is designated as a national development in Scotland's National Planning Framework 3. 30 new long distance routes are to be added to Scotland's network of trails, cycleways and canal towpaths, extending the network by 500 miles over the next five years. The new routes will join up and improve existing routes. The project plan sets out a strategy for the network over the next 20 years.

Feasibility studies are underway for a North Solway coastal path, parts of a 'Pilgrim's Way' across Scotland between St Andrews and Iona, and to extend the Clyde walkway in Lanarkshire. Major improvements on canal towpaths have begun and there are also plans to improve existing long distance routes such as the Cowal Way and the Clyde Coast path.

Project partners are Scottish Natural Heritage, Sustrans and Scottish Canals.



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

PLANTLIFE SCOTLAND

The qualities of 47 places identified as Important Plant Areas (IPAs) have been detailed in a new report to mark Plantlife Scotland's 25th anniversary. The report highlights the biodiversity of the sites and also the threats to them, which include overgrazing by animals, burning and non-native invasive plant species. The IPAs cover a total of almost two million acres.

See: www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/IPA_Sco_009.pdf

SNH

Susan Davies has been appointed as the acting chief executive of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH); she is taking over for two years whilst the previous incumbent, Ian Jardine, is seconded to Brussels as a National Expert at the European Commission.

CORRECTION

The January issue of *SCENES* (325) stated that the Mountaineering Council for Scotland (MCofS) and the John Muir Trust (JMT) were to leave umbrella group Scottish Environment LINK. It has been pointed out that the MCofS had already left LINK and that the JMT decision is to be finalised at an upcoming trustees' meeting. Apologies for the misinformation.