








	CONSERVATION	1
	FARMING	2
	WOODLANDS	2
	FISHERIES & FISHFARMING	3
	MARINE	3
	POLITICS & PARLIAMENT	5
	GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	6
	ENERGY	7
	RECREATION & TOURISM	8
	NEW ORGANISATIONS	8

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

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CONSERVATION

BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

The Scottish Government has published its plans to meet the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy 2020 Challenge, launched two years ago [Jun 13]. *Scotland's Biodiversity – A Route Map to 2020* outlines 'Six Big Steps for Nature' which will guide Scotland towards meeting the crucial international Aichi Biodiversity Targets over the next five years.

These are:

- Ecosystem restoration – to reverse historical losses of habitats and ecosystems, to meet the Aichi target of restoring 15% of degraded ecosystems.

- Investment in natural capital – to ensure the benefits that nature provides are better understood and appreciated, leading to better management of our renewable and non-renewable natural assets.

- Quality greenspace for health and education benefits – to ensure that the majority of people derive increased benefits from contact with nature where they live and work.

- Conserving wildlife in Scotland – to secure the future of priority habitats and species.

- Sustainable management of land and freshwater – to ensure that environmental, social and economic elements are well balanced.

- Sustainable management of marine and coastal ecosystems – to secure a healthy balance between environmental, social and economic elements.

The Route Map was developed jointly by Scottish Government and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in collaboration with stakeholders.

Ian Ross, of SNH, said: "We're already making good progress towards the 2020 goals with, for example, more than 18% of land protected for nature, and important measures taking effect at sea. The Route Map identifies the big steps we and our partners need to take to restore damaged ecosystems, increase areas for nature in towns and cities, conserve wildlife, and much more. Current examples of the work include ambitious programmes to restore peatlands, increase native woodland extent, and control invasive non-native species, with more planned for the future."

Jonny Hughes, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), said: "The SWT believes first and foremost that we have a moral obligation to protect and restore nature in Scotland, but by also explaining that a healthy natural environment underpins a healthy, more equal and more prosperous Scotland, we may just begin to see the political buy-in we need to reverse ongoing wildlife loss. The natural capital debate helps explain that nature is directly relevant to everyone's daily lives."

See: <http://bit.ly/1SRWQc3>

ORKNEY STOATS

A report, commissioned by SNH from the University of Aberdeen, has been published concerning stoats on Orkney. Stoats have been introduced to the islands over the past five years. The report discusses the impact the stoats could have on the ecology of the Orkney islands and provides advice on potential solutions. There is some evidence that their presence could lead to significant dips in populations of native Orkney voles, short-eared owls and hen harriers. There have been 380 'reliable' sightings of stoats since 2010, with detections going up since initial records in that year.

The report concludes that management of the stoats is required to reduce or remove the population. SNH has established a technical advisory group to bring a management project forward, securing funding, and establishing a plan of action.

Graham Neville, of SNH, said: "Our maps of stoat records are a conservative estimate of the distribution of stoats on Orkney and we estimate that in reality the majority of mainland and connected islands will be occupied by stoats now, or in the very near future."

Stoats are established on Shetland but at moderate to low numbers and with no major impact on local species. This is thought to be due to the lack of equivalent species to the Orkney vole.

SNH Commissioned Report 871: Stoat (Mustela erminea) on the Orkney Islands – assessing the risks to native species. See: bit.ly/1dj3UPj

SMALL BLUE

The SWT reported that one of Scotland's rarest butterflies, the small blue, *Cupido minimus*, is thriving in Ayrshire, two years after a translocation project [Jul 13].

The small blue was locally extinct, having last been seen in Irvine in 1983. SWT and Butterfly Conservation Scotland collected 30 butterflies from a healthy population on a monitored site on the Moray coast. They were then transported to the SWT's Gales Marsh Wildlife Reserve where kidney vetch, a plant that the small blue is dependent upon, grows in abundance. Populations of this plant had been boosted on the reserve and the adjacent Dundonald Links golf course prior to the release.

BEAVERS

The Beavers in Scotland report was presented to Scottish ministers [Feb 15]. The report draws on 20 years of work on beavers in Scotland, as well as experience from elsewhere in Europe and North America. It provides a comprehensive summary of existing knowledge and offers four future scenarios for beavers in Scotland for ministers to consider. The report covers a wide range of topics from beaver interactions to natural and human environments, to legal issues and management considerations.

This report draws on work and experience generated through SNH commissioned projects, the Scottish Beaver Trial, the Tayside Beaver Study Group, the Beaver-Salmonid Working Group, the National Species Reintroduction Forum and a range of other studies from Scotland and abroad.

The reintroduction of a species, absent for many centuries, is a very significant decision for any government to make. SNH published the report to support the decision-making process, providing one of the most thorough assessments ever done for a species reintroduction proposal.

See: <http://bit.ly/1LrhVYF>; <http://bit.ly/1GAdSD4>; <http://bit.ly/1KeHNaz>

- A coalition of 22 environmental NGOs wrote to Dr Aileen McLeod, the minister for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, calling for the Eurasian beaver to be fully reintroduced and recognised by the Scottish Government as a resident, native species in Scotland [May 15].

The coalition calls for building on the current wild populations in mid Argyll and Tayside, and permission for further licensed releases across other appropriate areas of Scotland to viably restore this once widespread, native keystone species.

Alan Carter, of Reforesting Scotland, said: "In river catchments managed by beavers, fish stocks are higher, biodiversity is increased, flood peaks are reduced and pollution is filtered out. These are things that society spends millions on, but beavers do them for free. They can have negative impacts too, but experience from places as diverse as the Netherlands and the USA shows that these can be managed effectively. On top of this cost-benefit approach, we have a responsibility to bring back to Scotland a species that was made extinct purely through human actions in the past."

The group concurs that a positive outcome for beavers will help ensure that Scotland continues to position itself at the forefront of biodiversity conservation in an international context. The collective see beavers as a missing element in Scottish biodiversity, believing there is both an ecological and moral imperative to restore this keystone species to benefit Scotland's depleted freshwater ecosystems, as the reasons for their loss are no longer present. The group also believes that the majority of Scotland's people are ready and willing to live alongside beavers once again and that this strengthens Scotland's reputation as a modern society that truly values its environment.

There is sufficient, suitable habitat currently in Scotland to support a thriving and self-sustaining beaver population. The collective agree that, as a keystone species in wetland and freshwater ecosystems, the beaver will provide tangible and significant ecological benefits for a wide range of other species through the habitats and ecological niches they create, allowing other species to flourish. Beaver activity will have a net positive environmental and socio-economic effect on Scotland's human population and prosperity by providing multiple public benefits such as ecosystem services, including improved water quality, reduced downstream flooding, and increased eco-tourism.

PEATLAND ACTION

The Peatland Action Project, an SNH-led initiative, has received an additional £3m from the Scottish Government for major restorative works at 100 peatland sites [Sep 13]. Partners in the project include National Park Authorities; Forest Enterprise Scotland; RSPB, SWT, Moorland Forum; Scottish Water; IUCN; Tweed Forum, and the Crichton Carbon Centre.

A total area of 5,580 hectares has been restored, including exposed upland blanket peat, forest to bog conversion, and lowland bogs close to urban areas and farmland.

Peatland Action has also funded monitoring and surveys which include more than 38,360 hectares to help pave the way for future peatland restoration. More than 1,000 hectares of peat bog habitat has either been restored (trees cut down, drains blocked) or enhanced (drain blocking only on existing open ground) by Forest Enterprise Scotland on 24 sites in five forest districts.

Peat hag re-profiling has been undertaken on upland sites and gully erosion reduced in mountains. Peatland restoration on grouse moors and the associated improvement to the habitat quality can improve food availability for grouse, potentially boosting land value.

• Scotland's National Peatland Plan is due for launch 'early this summer.'



FARMING

CROFTING

The BBC News website reported that the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) said that severe weather and low temperatures had affected grass growth; crofters in the Highlands & Islands are facing a crisis due to lack of grazing for their livestock. Cows are losing weight and it is feared that breeding may be affected. Small producers are the source of calves for the Scottish beef system, which will in turn be affected. The poor weather has also led to a fall in tourism income, with many crofters being unable to afford extra supplies of hay, feed and straw.

SCF has written to the Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, to ask for emergency payments to be made. A spokesman for the Scottish Government said: "Support is already available for farmers and crofters through Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy and £12m in top-up payments distributed at the beginning of June should provide some interim help. In the future the new island rates for Beef Voluntary Coupled Support will also help farmers and crofters deal with the impact of external events, such as challenges presented by weather."

• The Press & Journal reported that the worst spring in 150 years has resulted in fields in Orkney being under water, with cattle having to be kept inside. Many of the beasts have been sold ahead of schedule, at a loss, as farmers could not afford the feed.

* The Scottish Farming Leader reported that headline figures from the Crofting Commission's first census has been published [Oct 14]. Census forms were sent out to over 16,500 crofts; crofters were legally obliged to complete the form with in the deadline. Of the 97% that responded, 76% kept or bred livestock, 43% cropped, 22% grew fruit and vegetables and 22% planted trees. 11% of crofts had diversified into campsites etc and 29% engaged in 'conservation activity.' 87% of crofters currently resided on their croft which suggests that 1,786 crofters may not be complying with new residency duties. A further 575 failed to cultivate their land, thus breaching their legal obligations under the 2010 Crofting Act, which attempts to tackle absenteeism.

SCOTTISH BERRIES

The BBC News website reported that the UK government is to fund three research projects, led by the James Hutton Institute, into Scottish berry production. The £1.3m research aims to identify traits in raspberries that make them more resilient to pests and diseases and also look at how blueberries can better adapt to Scotland's cooler climate. A combination of dry summers, fertile soils and better protection has seen strawberry and raspberry production in Scotland double over the past ten years. In 2014, 25,000 tonnes of strawberries and 3,000 tonnes of raspberries were produced, worth £81m.

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Organic Farming in Scotland, 2014 Statistics has been published by Scotland's chief statistician. The percentage of agricultural land used for organic farming has fallen by 8% to 136,000 hectares, 2.4% of agricultural land. The fall in area was seen in grassland & rough grazing (down 8%), cereals (down 17%), potatoes and vegetables (down 15%) and other land (down 20%). Pasture now makes up 93% of organic land. The number of organic cattle decreased by 35% and pigs by 9% but there were increases of 2% in the number of sheep and poultry (15%).

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/06/3129

ECONOMIC REPORT

The Economic Report on Scottish Agriculture has been published by Scotland's chief statistician. The report covers 2014, which benefited from good weather but a dip in prices. It contains charts, maps, tables and commentary, with sections on income, crops, livestock, and comparisons with the other UK nations. It also sets the data in the context of the last ten years.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01156; www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01157

AGRO-ECOLOGY

A study, commissioned by the Land Use Policy Group and funded by Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural Resources Wales, looked at agro-ecology, food production that makes the best use of nature's goods and services while not damaging precious resources. It was undertaken by the Organic Research Centre with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The researchers reviewed evidence for agro-ecological practices including processes that maintain closed cycles, using on-farm resources to limit inputs and reduce waste. They also studied the use of legumes (peas, beans, etc) for enhancing soil fertility, cover crops, minimum tillage, the use of beneficial insects to control pests, and agro-forestry. The report provides evidence about how higher environmental standards can be delivered alongside improved productivity.

See: www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A1652615.pdf

ALLOTMENTS

The Scottish Allotments & Gardens Association campaigned against the reduction in the standard size of allotment proposed in the Community Empowerment Bill [Jun 14]. It was feared that local authorities would offer smaller areas in order to reduce lengthy waiting lists. However, Scottish ministers accepted a series of changes to the bill before the final vote, which means that the standard plot remains at 250 m².



WOODLANDS

DEVOLUTION OF FORESTRY

Dr Aileen McLeod, minister for Environment, Land Reform & Climate Change, has confirmed steps towards completing devolution of the arrangements for the management of forestry in Scotland.

Dr McLeod confirmed that the Scottish and UK Governments have agreed to discuss options for the transfer of Forestry Commissioners' powers and duties as they relate to Scotland. She said: "Although forestry is devolved to Scotland, the management of our national forest estate and other forestry functions are still provided by the cross-border Forestry Commission. In order to devolve forestry powers fully to Scotland, we have agreed with the UK government that officials will work jointly to consider options for taking this forward."

WOODLAND TARGET

Forestry Commission Scotland reported that 7,600 hectares of new woodland was created in Scotland in the past year; the Scottish Government annual target average is 10,000 hectares [Mar 15].

Carol Evans, of the Woodland Trust Scotland, said: "Native broadleaf planting continues to make up a large part of the woodland that has been planted, and it is important to maintain this balance in the future." However, she said that more must be done to help meet the government's target for new woodland creation. Dr Aileen McLeod said that Scotland has delivered 75% of all new planting in the UK; last year marked a changeover between rural development programmes so the figures for

planting were expected to be lower than for the previous year. Scotland has £39.5m available in forestry grants.

• A University of Leicester analysis of satellite images, with consultancy Specto Natura, shows that 247,000 acres of coniferous forests, mainly in Scotland, were cleared between 2006 and 2012 to make way for windfarms and other industrial developments. Around half of these areas were regenerating or had been replanted. 7,400 acres of mixed forest were clear-felled.

KNOYDART WOODS

The John Muir Trust (JMT) has won the 'New Native Woods' award in the Scotland's Finest Woods Awards, for its work to regenerate the woodland on the Li & Coire Dhorrcail property on the Knoydart peninsula. John Gallagher, a member of the judging panel, said: "The JMT project clearly demonstrated an alternative model of land use that recognises the need to control deer numbers in a manner that allows habitat recovery to the overall benefit of the environment and deer themselves. For a number of reasons this project stands out as an exemplar of sustainable land management and one which the JMT can be truly proud of their achievement over the past 20 years."

• The Knoydart Forest Trust also won two awards – the 'Promoting Viable Livelihoods' in the Community Woodlands category and the 'Tim Stead Trophy for Community Woodlands.'

POLMAISE WOOD

Cambusbarron Community Development Trust have agreed a two year lease for Polmaise Wood in Stirling with landowners Dryrange Estates. The trust will take on the management of 66 hectares of woodland.

 **FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

LOCH ETIVE FISHFARM

Argyll & Bute Council's decision to grant planning permission to Dawnfresh for a fishfarm development on Loch Etive, known as Etive 6, has been upheld by the Court of Session's Outer Court [Feb 15]. Lord Burns' opinion rejects the Friends of Loch Etive's arguments. The council had stipulated that, in granting permission for a development at the Etive 6 site, through a section 75 agreement that this could only happen with the removal of the applicant's existing fishfarm equipment at the Etive 1 and Etive 5 sites, thus consolidating the amount of farming activity on the loch.

FISHFARM ESCAPE

16,000 farmed salmon escaped from Marine Harvest's fishfarm at Carradale in Argyll following a storm. It is the biggest escape from a mainland fishfarm since 2009. The Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland) said that the fish are mature, and so will migrate into important salmon rivers in the Firth of Clyde. However, Marine Harvest said that the fish were not mature, being of a slow-maturing stock, and that they would swim out to sea and not try to migrate into local rivers.

SOLWAY STAKE NETS

The BBC News website reported that Dumfries & Galloway Council has terminated the lease for fixed salmon nets on the Solway Firth near Annan, following concerns that the nets may be intercepting salmon en route to the River Eden in Cumbria. Stake nets are fixed into the ground at right angles to the shore, covering several hundred

yards; a number of traps are set into the lines of the net.

The Salmon & Trout Association (STA) Scotland said that the council could be breaching the EU's Habitats Directive and threatened a judicial review if the local authority did not agree to halt stake net fishing immediately. A spokesman for the council said: "We take our environmental responsibilities seriously and understood that to continue at this point in time without having conducted a proper scientific assessment with conclusive results would be in breach of the Habitats Directive. Our council maintained the stake nets licences for as long as possible in the face of challenge until the legal advice indicated that this position was untenable." He said that the matter will be kept under review and the decision will not affect traditional haaf and poke netting on the River Annan.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, of STA Scotland said: "Against a background of declining wild salmon stocks across almost all of the North Atlantic, the Solway rivers have been particularly badly affected with precipitous declines. The evidence from rod catches is compelling. In the circumstances there can now be no justification for any commercial salmon netting in the Solway."

The River Annan's rod catch of 317 in 2014 compared to a five-year average of 1,557; the rod catch on the Nith was 520, significantly lower than the 1,658 average. The River Eden's rod catch in 2014 was 40% of the five-year average.

RAZOR CLAMS

The Herald reported that the environment secretary, Richard Lochhead, is considering whether to apply for an exemption to EU legislation which bans electrofishing of razor clams. He said: "Scientific studies have been conducted and these suggest that electrofishing could be more environmentally benign than other traditional methods, but this study did not address the broader question of long-term sustainability of razor clam populations under various levels of commercial fishing activity nor the medium to long-term effects of electrofishing. Further study and research will be required on these issues."

However, a Marine Scotland report concluded that: "[Electrofishing] does not have immediate or short term lethal effects, or prolonged behavioural effects, on vertebrate or invertebrate species exposed to the electric field generated." [Oct 14].

Michael Russell MSP said that he now backed a pilot scheme which he said was supported by evidence. He said: "Science has supported this. The Marine Scotland report came to the conclusion that this practice did not cause environmental damage. The alternative is dredging, which is not desirable, so there really is a strong case for a pilot scheme. It's taking a bit of time for people to get their heads around it, as the previous school of thought was that this was not desirable, but if we can get this to work it could be very successful. The people who have been coming to me just want the chance to prove it can work. The conversation is ongoing, but I hope the Scottish Government will be willing to have a pilot scheme."

Approximately 40 Scottish vessels currently fish legally for razors. In 2013, 897.3 tonnes of razors were landed into Scotland, with a value of £3.1m. Between 2010 and May 2014, eleven vessels were issued with fixed penalty notices for electrofishing with maximum fines of £2,000.

Alex Kinninmonth, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "Crucially the law as it stands doesn't allow this practice in EU waters and we could only have confidence in any derogation if it was determined beyond any doubt that opening such a

fishery wouldn't be detrimental in the long term to either razor clam stocks or other seabed wildlife."

Chef Andrew Fairlie said: "I am puzzled about why they would apply for an exemption. Europe has banned this for a reason and I can't understand why the SNP would want to go back on that. I'm concerned about the impact on other species in what are such delicate ecosystems as well as long-term sustainability. I don't think it's worth the risk and we've been down the road so many times about the consequences of over fishing. If Scotland was to apply for an exemption, it will be open season. Then where does that leave us in ten or 15 years? It's a dangerous form of fishing and I don't think it's worth allowing for the sake of however many millions of pounds for fishermen's bank balances."

Alison Johnstone MSP said that she would make 'every effort' to oppose any relaxation in the law, which has been in force across Europe since 1998. An EU derogation already applies to some Dutch boats, however. She said: "Electrofishing is indiscriminate, makes non-target fish susceptible to predators, and there is a lack of research on what impact it has on electro-sensory animals such as sharks. The restriction on electrofishing was brought in for sound reasons, so it's alarming to hear that the Scottish Government is considering a derogation from EU law, and it's a concern to see a former minister [Michael Russell] promoting the idea. Animal welfare and sustainability must be paramount."

LUCE BAY

The Galloway News reported that Marine Scotland looked at three options for the Luce Bay scallop fishery on the Solway – a complete ban on fishing for conservation reasons, allowing mechanical dredging on a seasonal basis or imposing a curfew while banning trawls and suction dredges. Marine Scotland's preferred option is to allow seasonal dredging, but a consultation showed that the majority of respondents were against this, with 'broad and conflicting' views being expressed.

ICES ADVICE

Annual scientific assessments by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) state that North Sea cod, haddock and plaice numbers are rising, which should lead to significantly higher quotas next year. Haddock stocks are up by at least 30%, North Sea cod by up to 15% and plaice at least 15% compared to last year.

There are similarly encouraging figures for a number of west coast stocks including megrim and Rockall haddock. Other stocks have decreased, including North Sea nephrops (a decrease of 17% on last year) and whiting.

The ICES advice helps to inform the fisheries negotiations that will take place in the autumn to decide how much quota fishermen will receive in the coming year. This year, the advice is structured to allow the negotiations to decide how much additional quota should be made available for those stocks being brought into the discard ban from January 2016, in particular haddock, plaice and nephrops.

See: www.ices.dk/Pages/default.aspx



MARINE

BATHING WATERS

Scotland's official bathing water season started on 1 June, the first reporting period under the new EU Bathing Water Directive.

Samples will be collected by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) from 84 designated Bathing Waters until the end of the

season on 15 September. Electronic message signs will also display live water quality predictions at 23 locations, ensuring beach visitors are informed if bathing is not advised.

This is the first full year of the new Bathing Water Directive. Final water quality assessments will be based on SEPA's monitoring results over four years, indicating the quality status of the normal condition for each location, rather than the old system which relied on single day samples. Bathing Waters will now be classified as excellent, good, sufficient or poor class at the end of the season, based on the four year data set and using tighter performance criteria, as standardised across the EU.

All samples are tested for the water quality indicator bacteria *E coli* (EC) and intestinal *enterococci* (IE), and these figures will be displayed throughout the season as results are analysed. Single sample results above 500 EC and 200 IE are indicative that water was probably of low quality when the sample was taken. For inland waters the low quality boundaries are higher at 1000 EC and 400 IE.

• *The Sunday Herald* reported that SEPA has given 21 of 84 bathing waters all around the coast a 'poor' rating in an initial prediction under new European safety standards. Six of the bathing waters rated as poor are in Ayrshire, four in Dumfries & Galloway, three around the Moray Firth, two in Aberdeenshire, two in East Lothian, and one each in Edinburgh, Angus, Fife and the Scottish Borders.

Seven of the beaches, badly polluted by overflowing sewers and animal faeces, have previously been given Seaside Awards.

Andy Cummins, of Surfers Against Sewage, said: "The tougher standards have been introduced to offer the public better protection against a wide array of significant health risks. Those beaches that fail urgently need to adopt new actions and measures to ensure water quality is safe for the public."

A further 13 bathing waters across Scotland are rated as 'sufficient.' Nine of those have also been given Seaside Awards. 22 beaches were rated as 'excellent' with very low levels of contamination.

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "The way that Keep Scotland Beautiful and SEPA classify these beaches should be much more consistent."

Calum Duncan of the Marine Conservation Society Scotland (MCS Scotland) said that MCS was 'delighted' by the introduction of the new safety standards for bathing waters. Although water quality had been slowly improving, there was still some way to go. He said: "Malfunctioning combined sewerage overflows and diffuse pollution continue to impact on coastal water quality so we would urge continued investment to identify, monitor and fix problems."

According to SEPA, heavy rain is the biggest threat to water quality because it causes diluted sewage to be discharged from the sewerage overflows, and animal faeces to be washed off farmland into rivers and to the sea.

Calum McPhail, of SEPA, said: "Under the new directive, our estimates show over 75% of Scotland's existing bathing waters would already meet the 'excellent,' 'good' or 'sufficient' classifications. We expect further improvement this year, but some bathing waters are still unlikely to reach the 'sufficient' classification when we first report at the end of this bathing water season.

"The expected improvements are because these predicted classifications are only initial estimates of potential classifications. Specifically

these initial estimates use data from 2011, when parts of the new Bathing Water directive were not available for implementation, in particular the short term pollution provision. Additionally they don't reflect the more recent Scottish Water investment and our pollution control activities in prioritised rural catchments.

"All the bathing waters originally designated in 1988 and 1994 reached the mandatory or guideline standard in 2014 under the former Directive, a vast improvement from the first year of monitoring in 1988, when 13 of the then 28 designated sites failed. The improvement is testimony to our work with Scottish Water and the rural community.

"Our challenge, therefore, is to build upon the progress made under the previous Directive to achieve corresponding improvements in 2015 and beyond through further investment and infrastructure improvements."

• 60 beaches around Scotland have been awarded a Seaside Award by the Keep Scotland Beautiful Campaign. The awards recognise beaches for their environmental management procedures, water quality and safety. The scheme has been running for 23 years; both St Andrews West Sands in Fife and Gullane Bents in East Lothian have won ever since the awards were set up. See: www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/beachawards

STRANDING REPORT

A report by Scotland's Rural College, released by the UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), said that the noise from the explosion of four bombs underwater was likely to have damaged the hearing of 19 pilot whales, which died after becoming stranded at the Kyle of Durness, east of Cape Wrath [Jul 11]. Over 70 pilot whales swam into inlet near Europe's largest live bombing range with 39 left stranded by the tide. The 1,000 pound bombs were detonated at sea during the 24 hours prior to the mass stranding. A further 250 pound bomb was detonated after the stranding had begun.

The Royal Navy told DEFRA that munitions disposal had been carried out at Garvie Island for several decades without incident. The bombs were left over from military exercises.

Scotland's Rural College said that the Navy's whale-spotting safety practices were 'insufficient' and called for the services to use charges that 'burn out' bombs rather than cause explosions. The report said: "Given the potential damage to marine life from the 'high order' explosions of conventional disposal techniques, it is questionable why this method has not been used routinely in the past."

The Scotsman reported that Rob Gibson MSP said: "This report confirms what we already suspected but the Ministry of Defence (MoD) tried to cover up: the detonating of bombs led to the whales being deafened, forced off course and dying on the beach." He criticised the UK government for taking four years to deliver the report and has written to Defence Secretary, Michael Fallon, demanding that the MoD must give assurances that this will not happen again. He said that he wanted a commitment to ensure that the MoD cease exercises in this area and 'stop treating the wildlife and residents so appallingly.'

A spokesman said: "The MoD accepts the findings of the Durness Mass Stranding report which identified a number of possible factors that may have influenced events, one of which was the detonation of underwater explosives. The recommendations will be considered by the MoD and implemented where appropriate. Additional mitigation has already been put in place during munitions disposal activities conducted since 2011."

PILOT WHALES

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that 21 pilot whales were stranded at Brogaig Bay, off Staffin in Skye; a total of eight died. The pod is thought to have been protecting a calving female who got into difficulties. British Divers Marine Life Rescue (BDMLR) volunteers were able to refloat 18 of the whales but ten animals later re-stranded on rocks off Staffin Island and were given first aid by the BDMLR team before being coaxed back out to sea.

• The calf of a pilot whale was washed up on a beach on Tiree. The calf is thought to have been stillborn and is possibly related to the group of whales (above) stranded in Skye.

• A young pilot whale beached herself on Deerness on the east of the Orkney mainland. The mammal was successfully refloat.

HUMPBACK WHALES

The Sea Watch Foundation has recorded more reports than usual of humpback whales, all around Scotland's coast. Photographs and videos have been sent in from Aberdeen and the Sound of Raasay, off Skye.

• A humpback whale was spotted off Helmsdale in Sutherland, tangled in a rope.

MPAs & FISHING

The Scottish Government has proposed measures to prohibit fishing activities that harm the seabed in large areas of inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and marine Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The government proposed draft Marine Conservation Orders for four MPAs: South Arran, Wester Ross, Small Isles, Loch Sunart to Sound of Jura (including Firth of Lorn SAC but not Loch Sunart MPA/SAC). The draft legislation includes plans to exclude scallop dredging from the entire Wester Ross MPA, which covers the areas of Loch Broom, Loch Ewe and the Summer Isles [Jan 15].

The government is to develop further draft secondary legislation for fisheries management for the remaining sites during the summer. The legislation will be subject to parliamentary approval in September. See: <http://bit.ly/1FCKRWt>

The Scottish Government analysed the consultation responses on the Management of Inshore Special Areas of Conservation and Marine Protected Areas. Over 95% of the respondents to the consultation stated that they were in support of stronger measures than the Scottish Government initially proposed.

See: www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00479038.pdf

The government is to develop further draft secondary legislation for fisheries management for the remaining sites during the summer. The legislation will be subject to parliamentary approval in September.

Alex Kinninmonth, of SWT, said: "Site wide closure to bottom-dredging is a proportionate response to that uncertainty, is simple to comply with, will allow habitats to recover from historic pressures, and most importantly has public backing."

Kara Brydson, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Too often fishermen are blamed for the declining health of our seas, but here we see that by excluding the most damaging fishing activity from our most sensitive wildlife, fishermen are part of the solution."

Kenny MacNab, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), has asked to meet the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment, Richard Lochhead. He wishes to make clear that many fishing communities are 'deeply troubled' by the new management measures proposed for MPAs. His letter says: "We appreciate that the marine area around Scotland is a common resource with many stakeholders, each having their own

right to comment and input. However there is a concern over the level of exclusion felt amongst many fishing communities and the industry. Currently fishing representatives, and in turn their communities, have been left confused and let down. More than this the Scottish economy and brand for quality seafood could be impeded dramatically."

The Sunday Herald reported that the SFF said that restrictions on the £40m west coast langoustine industry and £8m scallop industry would close 880 km² of inshore waters in the South Arran and Wester Ross MPAs to scallop dredging and impose restrictions on a further 1,500 km² of prime fishing grounds. Ross Dougal, of SFF, said: "The areas that would be closed to mobile fishing gear [dredges and nets] go far beyond the compromise that we thought had been reached. We were completely taken aback as the implications for the industry could be immense."

The government said that the measure will affect less than 3.5% of Scottish territorial waters and will lead to a 1.6% reduction in income for scallop dredgers and 1% for prawn trawlers.

Mr Lochhead said: "Taking action to maintain or improve the marine ecosystem will deliver long-term benefits to society, including the fishing industry. We have already designated those marine features we need to protect such as maerl beds and fan mussel aggregations and now we are proposing management regimes, including limits on certain fishing activities, within each MPA. The impact in the vast majority of cases will mean modest changes to fishing patterns with very limited economic impact given the ability of vessels to fish elsewhere."

However, the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation (SCFF), believes that the government needs to go further to protect the seabed in inshore waters from damaging fishing practices; the interests of mobile gear fishermen and creelers are incompatible. Alastair Sinclair, of SCFF, believes that the government should consider reinstating a ban on dredging and trawling within three miles of the shore, which was abolished in 1984. Spatial management measures would create separate fishing areas for trawlers and dredgers, and for creelers and divers.

The new statutory measures giving protection to many vulnerable marine habitats will take effect from October. Written representations, to Marine Scotland, on the draft Marine Conservation Orders are requested by 12 July 2015.

SEAL SHOOTING

The Sunday Herald reported that Police Scotland said that reports have been sent to the procurator fiscal about three recent incidents involving Usan Salmon Fisheries and Sea Shepherd [Apr 15]. The company has been shooting seals to prevent them eating salmon caught in nets, while the activists have been trying to protect the seals.

One incident involved allegations of the killing of legally protected seabirds. A second incident in the same area concerned an alleged breach of the peace. The third incident was at Murkle Bay, near Castletown in Caithness, and involved alleged reckless conduct. Both Usan Salmon Fisheries and Sea Shepherd made complaints against each other.

Sea Shepherd said that they filmed three seals being legally shot in Gamrie Bay, and believe a fourth was also shot there. In Murkle Bay, they said that two seals were legally shot, and believe a further two were shot off camera.

The Hunt Saboteurs Association is running a parallel operation around Montrose, and claimed to show a guillemot trapped in a salmon net being killed.

Usan, which trades as the Scottish Wild Salmon Company, has a licence from the Scottish Government to shoot seals as a last resort to protect its salmon netting business.

Rob Read, of Sea Shepherd, said that fishermen should market their products at a premium for being 'seal-friendly' and alleged that they were not making enough use of acoustic methods to scare seals away from nets. He accused the Scottish Government of failing to monitor the seals shot under the licences it granted. Seal shooting was damaging Scotland's image as a haven for wildlife and harming tourism. Sea Shepherd is offering a £7,500 reward for information, photographic or video evidence which directly leads to the successful prosecution of any individuals or companies for deliberately and illegally killing seals or other endangered marine wildlife around the coast.

John Robins, of the Save Our Seals Fund, argued that the seals being shot weren't apparently interfering with salmon nets. He said: "It is sickening to see seals being shot for no good reason. If the seals shot at the netting stations were female common seals, it is likely that their new-born pups will now starve to death. I've asked the Scottish Government to fully investigate the shootings at the salmon nets as the protocol required under the seal licensing scheme does not appear to have been followed."

The Scottish Government said that the number of seals shot had fallen from 459 in 2011 to 205 in 2014. A spokeswoman said: "Since 2011, it has been illegal in Scotland to shoot a seal except as a last resort under strict licensing conditions, and the number of seals shot under licence has more than halved. It is an offence to breach any of the seal licence conditions. If members of the public observe someone shooting seals and are concerned that it may be illegal they should contact the local police who can investigate the circumstances.

"Our system strikes the balance between protecting seals and supporting our farmed and wild salmon industries. The vast majority of seals travel to feeding grounds at sea. However, a few individuals repeatedly target migrating fish entering freshwater river fisheries and coastal nets, or attack stocks in fishfarms."

She said that licences were needed to control these specific seals 'as a last resort measure after non-lethal alternatives have failed' and said: "Regular monitoring ensures the scheme does not adversely affect seal conservation."



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

LAND REFORM

The Scottish Government published proposals aimed at widening the ownership of land across the country [May 15]. It has been estimated that half of the privately-owned land in Scotland is controlled by 432 people. The Land Reform Bill includes measures to clarify information about land, its ownership and its value; encouraging better information and greater transparency on the ownership of land, through the land register; and improvements to both common good land and right to roam.

The land reform minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, said: "We cannot underestimate the crucial part land reform will play in contributing to the future success of communities. Through this bill we want to ensure that future generations have access to land required to promote business and economic growth and to provide access to good quality, affordable food, energy and housing.

"The introduction of the bill is a significant step forward in ensuring our land is used in the public interest and to the benefit of the people of Scotland. It will also end the stop start nature of land reform in Scotland that has limited progress. Tackling the causes and consequences of inequality is at the heart of this government's work. Land is one of our most valuable assets. Owning land can help realise the aspirations and potential of our communities, making a real difference to long-term sustainability and building stronger, more resilient and supportive communities."

The bill will end tax relief for shooting estates and force the sale of land if owners are blocking economic development. Landowners on sporting estates were exempted by the UK government from paying business rates in 1994. It is proposed that the additional money raised by ending the tax exemption be used to increase the Scottish Land Fund from £3m this year to £10m a year from 2016. The fund is used to help support community buyouts of land. The Scottish Government has set a target of doubling the amount of land in community ownership from the current 500,000 acres to one million acres by 2020.

David Johnstone, of Scottish Land & Estates (SLE), said that SLE had 'real concerns' about some aspects of the draft bill. He said: "[The bill] could have detrimental impacts on land-based businesses and rural areas without seeming to have clear objectives in mind ... We have been very disappointed that in this debate, private land ownership is pitted against community ownership and landowners are seen as being against reform. This is wrong. We support community ownership but dearly hope that as this bill goes through the Scottish Parliament, the major social, economic and environmental contribution of private landowners is also recognised."

The scrapping of the business rate exemptions could threaten the viability of some sporting estates, while the policy does not take into account the current voluntary payments made for river and deer management.

Other proposals in the bill include:

- measures to clarify information about land, its ownership and its value, with a Scottish Land Reform Commission being set up to make recommendations on future reforms
- encouraging better information and greater transparency on the ownership of land, through the land register
- strengthening regulations where land owners are failing to take their deer management responsibilities seriously
- improvements to both systems of common good land and right to roam.

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) welcomed the proposals to provide Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) with more powers to compel irresponsible landowners and occupiers to produce Deer Management Plans under the bill. SWT believes that such provisions are long overdue and that the Scottish Government should be commended in recognising the need for strengthened legislation on deer management.

However, SWT considers that the wording of the draft legislation falls 'well short' of what is needed if Scotland is to tackle the widespread and often severe impact that very high numbers of deer have on Scotland's woodlands, peatlands and uplands. The bill gives SNH more powers to require landowners to draw up and act on deer plans which could help tackle the problems associated with overpopulation of deer such as overgrazing, trampling and localised peatland erosion. Under the current draft bill, such powers can only be used when damage is already taking

place and it is unclear what, if any, consequences there are for owners and occupiers who fail to produce a plan.

Jonny Hughes, of SWT, said: "As currently drafted it is questionable whether we will see any measurable improvement in the health of those habitats in Scotland currently being severely overgrazed by deer, including internationally important Atlantic rainforests and peatlands. As a start, it is vital that SNH be given powers to draw up Deer Management Plans on behalf of those owners and occupiers that fail to do so in a timely manner. More worryingly, action by SNH can only be taken when damage has already occurred; the classic closing the stable door after the horse has bolted scenario.

"In reality, large parts of the uplands suffer from deer damage and we urgently need realistic targets to reduce densities in order to give our exhausted landscapes some chance of recovery. We have a chance with this bill to bring in sensible management for deer that could see the return of our once great Caledonian pine forest within a generation. Getting the wording of the bill right is paramount."

Alex Hogg, of the Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA), said: "We know what we do benefits Scotland's countryside, its wildlife and communities and we know the integral part we play, in the public interest. As we have said all along, the SGA's objective is to try to protect, as best as we can, the jobs of rural workers and their families and this remains the goal. Good can come from land reform but we must ensure that working people are not caught in the crosshairs of the negatives and we will continue to engage with Scottish Government on how the new ratings systems will work, with a view to preserving fragile employment."

The Scottish Green party expressed disappointment that a legal limit on the amount of land that one person could own was absent from the draft legislation.

CROWN ESTATE

The Rural Affairs secretary, Richard Lochhead, said in evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Environment & Climate Change committee, that the Scotland Bill's provisions on the devolution of Crown Estate administration go against the spirit and intention of the Smith Commission proposals and does not lead to the full devolution of the Crown Estate [Mar 15].

He confirmed plans to set up an additional stakeholder advisory group to work with the Scottish Government in developing future options for management of the functions of the Crown Estate, subject to consultation and legislation. He said: "The Scottish Government intend that communities will benefit once the Crown Estate has been devolved to the Scottish Parliament. We have committed to providing coastal and island communities 100% of the net revenue from marine activities out to 12 nautical miles."



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

MOUNTAINS & PEOPLE

The Herald reported that the Mountains and the People project has secured a grant of £3.26m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to protect 124.5 km of eroded upland paths in the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Parks over the next five years. Young people and volunteers will be trained to care for upland landscapes and habitats.

In addition, the Cairngorms Outdoor Access

Trust has committed £612,177 to the project, matched by contributions from the Cairngorms National Park Authority (£275,000); Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park Authority (£525,000); Scottish Natural Heritage (£200,000) and Forestry Commission Scotland (£525,000), with the remainder coming from corporate sponsorship and charitable trusts, swelling the total to £6.1m.

Paths will be monitored through an Adopt-a-Path programme, which will provide feedback on their condition, enabling problems to be tackled before they become a major issue.

HILL TRACKS

All landowners must now notify local authorities in advance of any new hill track construction [Aug 14]. Scottish Environment LINK is asking for help from the public to monitor new hill tracks. Please send a photo of the track plus its location and any other information to hilltracks@scotlink.org. LINK will then check that the planners have been informed of the track, and in that way monitor the effectiveness of the new legislation in advance of the Scottish Government's own review in December.

A96 WILDLIFE

The *BBC News* website reported that wildlife surveys will be undertaken along the proposed route of new dual carriageway on the A96 between Inverness and Nairn. Ecologists will gather information on species present and their habitats over the next few months.

RIVERWATCH

A Riverwatch scheme was launched in Ardnamurchan, Lochaber, which will provide additional surveillance and protection to the populations of pearl mussels in the burns of the Ardnamurchan peninsula. The populations of mussels are important as they lie in the extreme west of the population range on the mainland.

The Riverwatch initiative is part of the Pearls in Peril project which aims to safeguard freshwater pearl mussels, a critically endangered species threatened by illegal fishing across Scotland. The scheme relies on using the local community and river users as volunteers to protect pearl mussels by increasing awareness and vigilance. Over the past two years there has been evidence of suspected illegal pearl fishing taking place across northern Scotland.

QUARRIES

The Scottish Government has refused Cemex's planning application to extend the Hyndford Quarry, close to the New Lanark World Heritage Site [Jan 14]. Three million tonnes of sand and gravel were to have been extracted for road material. The plans were called in by the government and ministers have now ruled that the extension would be 'unacceptable.'

- Five new quarries are planned in the southwest of Scotland to help with the construction of electricity pylons. Consultants Wardell Armstrong suggest that a total of 1.65 million cubic metres of stone could be quarried from the sites. Scottish Power Energy Networks wants to use the rock to build temporary access tracks needed to construct overhead power lines for the South West of Scotland Connection Project, connecting windfarms to the National Grid. A total of more than 21 hectares (51 acres) of land would be excavated if the plans are approved.

- Patersons Quarriers has applied to Stirling Council for planning permission to revive quarrying at Murrayshall Quarry, on Gillies Hill near Bannockburn [Jun 10]. The quarries were last active from 1982 to 1996.

EMISSION TARGET

The *BBC News* website reported that Scotland has failed to meet its climate change target for the fourth year in a row. Scottish greenhouse gas emissions fell by 3.6% between 2012 and 2013 to 53 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (MtCO₂e). The Climate Change (Scotland) Act requires a minimum 42% cut in emissions by 2020 and 80% by 2050. The Scottish Government said that it was on track to achieving this target; there has been a 34.3% reduction in emissions since 1990.

Climate change minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, said that the figures showed that Scotland continues to outperform the rest of the UK as a whole. She said: "[The] figures show that if it had not been for successive increases to the baseline since the targets were established, Scotland would have met, and exceeded, our target for this year – and the three previous years too. Of course, if our targets were easy to achieve they would not be ambitious enough. And these are the level the international community needs to meet if the climate treaty to be agreed in Paris later this year is to stand a good chance of limiting global warming to less than two degrees Celsius."

Dr McLeod announced a package of measures to further reduce emissions in Scotland.

Patrick Harvie MSP said: "The Scottish Government has had since 2009 to put in place policies to live up to our much-heralded climate change targets, and they have failed spectacularly. Since the Act was passed we have put nearly ten million tonnes more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than the targets allow – demonstrating a staggering lack of ambition by this government. Scotland has a clear opportunity to be a greener and fairer country, and there is a wide range of voices growing hoarse calling for a speedier transition to the low-carbon economy we know we can enjoy."

Sarah Boyack MSP said that the figures showed that while progress had been made in energy supply, it was 'sadly lacking' in other sectors like transport and agriculture.

Tom Ballantine, of Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, said: "[The] figures are disappointing but show that the target was within reach."

GOLD DISCOVERY

The *BBC News* website reported that a 20 carat nugget of gold, found near Wanlockhead in the Lowther Hills, is thought to be the most significant discovery in Scotland in the past 70 years. The nugget, which weighed about 18.1 grams, has an estimated value of £10,000. It was discovered during a gold panning course at the Museum of Lead Mining.

PENTLANDS WILDFIRE

The *BBC News* website reported that a wildfire, spanning 500 metres, occurred near Glencorse Reservoir in the Pentland Hills in Midlothian. Controlled burning spread out of control and destroyed trees and heather.

MOORLAND STRATEGY

The Herald reported that the Scottish Gamekeeper's Association (SGA) has commissioned a strategy from independent consultant, Dr James Fenton, to devise a strategy for Scotland's moorlands.

Dr Fenton wrote in the SGA magazine, *The Scottish Gamekeeper*, that heather moors were previously seen as one of the country's main tourist attractions: "now it is as if moorland is slowly being made invisible, whether heather moors or the many other types of moor ... Moorland is the only realistic place where new trees can be planted. Forestry, of course, has its place but there is no Moorland Strategy to counter-balance the Forestry Strategy or guide new planting away from key areas of moorland."

Open moorland – grass moor, heather moor, wet heath, blanket peat – is the key habitat type of upland Scotland and action must be taken to conserve it.

The SGA said that it is not seeking to prepare a document with a ‘no trees’ policy but to frame a policy which recognises the ‘special nature’ of moorland.

The Scottish Government said that it is currently drawing up a National Peatland Plan [see CONSERVATION above] and that moorlands were among the habitats protected through the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy.



ENERGY

WINDFARM SUBSIDIES

The UK government announced that new onshore windfarms will be excluded from a subsidy scheme from 1 April 2016, a year earlier than expected; there will be a grace period for projects which already have planning permission, ownership of land or a lease and the installation of a grid connection; this could allow up to 5.2 GW of wind capacity to go ahead throughout the UK.

The *Sunday Herald* reported that there is continuing confusion over whether the qualifying date of 18 June for meeting the first two conditions would also apply to the third. Scottish Secretary, David Mundell MP, told the BBC that the grace period would apply ‘when there is any prospect of a grid connection being delivered.’ The confusion has led the Scottish Government to announce an emergency summit, to be held early in July, to discuss the impact of the UK government’s decision. Any onshore wind project completed after March 2016 would instead have to apply for support under the less generous Contracts for Difference Subsidy Scheme.

The *Sunday Herald* said that proposed windfarms in the Northern and Western Isles could be the only projects to be unaffected by the plans to cut subsidies. Niall Stuart, of Scottish Renewables, said: “The Secretary of State’s continued support for the islands projects has been one of the very few positives for the industry over recent weeks, but I think that nothing can be taken for granted.”

The Scottish Government believes that the decision would have a disproportionate impact on Scotland, as about 70% of onshore wind projects in the UK planning system are in Scotland. Scottish energy minister, Fergus Ewing is to seek clarity about whether wind projects already in development will still receive funding. He said: “The UK Tory government’s decision to scrap investment in onshore wind is completely wrong-headed, and makes no economic or environmental sense – but it is absolutely essential that developers know whether projects already in the pipeline are going to receive financial support or not.”

He said that he had warned the UK government that the decision could be the subject of a judicial review: “We want the two governments to work together, along with the industry, to decide between us the best way to proceed in relation to the future of onshore wind support, bearing in mind the promise made by the UK government to consult with the Scottish government ahead of any decisions being made. Onshore wind is the cheapest way of producing renewable electricity in the UK and it is important we continue to support this vital industry. We need to listen to the concerns of businesses and organisations who are integral to the future energy security of both Scotland and the UK, as well as to environmental organisations who recognise the importance of renewable energy in helping reduce emissions.”

The funding for the subsidy comes from the Renewables Obligation Certificate (ROC), which is funded by levies added to household fuel bills. Scottish Renewables said that the move was ‘neither fair nor reasonable’ and could cost Scotland up to £3 billion in business investment. It said that there were 850 turbines in 37 windfarms already with planning permission in Scotland, totalling 2,129 MW of generation capacity. Developers who had invested in bringing forward new schemes could decide to sue the UK government for ending ROCs earlier than expected.

Scottish Conservatives said that the target had been effectively surpassed with 7.1 GW currently produced; schemes totalling 9 GW have been given planning permission and 4 GW of other projects are already in the planning system. Murdo Fraser MSP said: “Now that the SNP has effectively surpassed this ridiculous target it set itself, it’s time to rein in yet more onshore wind developments. Rural Scotland has had enough, and so have businesses and consumers. The Scottish Government has rolled out the red carpet for windfarms for too long. We can see the visual damage that has caused, and it makes no financial sense for so much money to be ploughed into a form of energy that is unreliable and intermittent. The Conservatives in Westminster have pledged to end subsidies for windfarms, and it’s time for the Scottish Government to back this approach. Communities who’ve had their landscapes blighted by turbines will no doubt agree.”

- Local Energy Scotland said that windfarms contribute almost £9m per year in community benefits across Scotland.

WIND POWER

The Department of Energy & Climate Change released data which shows that in Scotland:

- in the first three months of 2015, wind generated 4,452 GWh of electricity, up 4.3% on the previous record quarter;
- 49.8% of all electricity used in 2014 came from renewables;
- installed renewables electricity capacity rose by 9% over the year to March 2015 to 7,383 MW.

See: www.gov.uk/government/collections/energy-trends

PYLON PROJECT

The *Galloway News* reported that Scottish Power is proposing to construct a 400 kv powerline from Auchencrosh, in Ayrshire, to Harker, near Carlisle. The Dumfries & Galloway Strategic Reinforcement Project would replace the existing 132 kv line between Newton Stewart and Glenlee, with new substations. Pressure group, Turbine Watch 312, is concerned that the line would be similar to the Beaul/Denny line in the Highlands and that it would result in an ‘explosion’ of both onshore and offshore windfarm applications as the theoretical capacity would be increased by 170%.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Dumfries & Galloway: Planning officials have said that there are no grounds to oppose plans for E.On’s 18 turbine Benbrack windfarm near Carsphairn. E.On originally wanted to build 27 turbines on the site but plans were scaled back due to ‘community and environmental feedback.’

- A planning application has been lodged by Glenmuckloch Renewable Energy for an eight turbine windfarm near Kirkconnel, next to an opencast coal mine. Two community wind turbines are already being put up on the site.

- Whirlwind Renewables is planning 80 150 KW turbines for Milldown Wood at Speddock, Crockettford. The turbines would have a

maximum height of 47 metres – no turbines of this type currently exist in the UK. The windfarm would have a maximum capacity of 12 MW.

- Councillors have refused permission for Falck Renewables’s eight turbine windfarm at Mochrum Fell, although council planners recommended approval [Apr 15]. Councillors said that the height of the turbines would exceed the height of Mochrum Fell, and the effect would be ‘overpowering’ as the fell is a significant local landmark.

Highland: The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Highland Council has lodged an objection to RES’s planned 20 turbine Cairn Duhie windfarm on Dava Moor north of Grantown. The council cited the detrimental visual impacts of the windfarm on the Drynachen, Lochindorb & Dava Moor Special Landscape Area, the effect on tourism and the cumulative impact of windfarms in the area in its objection. The application will be determined by the Scottish Government [Nov 13].

Scottish Borders: Councillors have refused plans for Infinis Ltd’s nine turbine Windy Edge windfarm, north of Hermitage Castle near Hawick. Planning officials had recommended refusal, saying it would be ‘incongruous and anachronistic.’ Opponents believed there would be adverse visual impacts on areas like Hermitage Castle and the wider landscape.

South Ayrshire: The local authority has granted planning permission for Scottish Power’s 11 turbine, 33 MW windfarm at Glen App, near Cairnryan in Dumfries & Galloway.

Chris Rollie, of RSPB Scotland, said: “We are concerned by the council’s decision to grant consent for this windfarm. We have made it clear from the start that this is a sensitive site. Hen harrier populations across the UK are really under threat and protected sites such as this one should provide safe refuges for this species. We are particularly surprised and disappointed by SNH’s decision to withdraw their objection.”

ABERDEEN OFFSHORE WINDFARM

The *BBC News* website reported that Donald Trump has lost a fresh legal challenge over an offshore wind farm near his golf resort at Balmadie in Aberdeenshire [Jan 15]. He wanted a judicial review into his claim that Scottish ministers acted illegally by approving the 11 turbine demonstrator scheme in Aberdeen Bay. A previous application had been dismissed. Lord Gill has now ruled that the earlier decision had been legal.

Mr Trump said that he will now appeal to both the Supreme Court of the UK and the European Courts. In a statement, he said: “The written judgment is no surprise – it’s impossible to have a fair hearing challenging windfarm applications in Scotland. The European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre (EOWDC) proposal has now languished in the planning system for more than ten years and has a long way to go before construction can actually commence. Vattenfall, AREG and Technip have long abandoned the project and it’s common knowledge that there is no money available for it to proceed.

“Onerous conditions must be purified and the legal challenge to its electrical substation, which is being fought by the entire village of Blackdog, is far from being resolved. Despite today’s ruling, with no available money and the current political movement to end windfarm subsidies, it’s impossible to envision how this ill-conceived proposal will ever get built.”

- Campaigners have lost an appeal at the Court of Session to stop the construction of electricity substations at Blackdog for the Aberdeen offshore windfarm. Developers had earlier won an appeal against an Aberdeenshire Council decision to reject the proposal [Jul 14].

HYDRO SCHEMES

Scottish Power has submitted plans to Dumfries & Galloway Council to build a 400 MW hydro electric scheme at Tongland Dam near Kirkcudbright. A feasibility study of the project is being undertaken.

• The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that the Cairngorms National Park Authority planning committee has raised no objections to RWE's revised plans for a hydro scheme on the River Pattack on Loch Laggan near Dalwhinnie [Oct 14]. The scheme will now be determined by Highland Council.

PETERHEAD CARBON CAPTURE

A planning application for the onshore elements of a carbon capture and storage (CCS) plant at Peterhead power station has been approved by Aberdeenshire Council [Feb 14]. Shell and SSE are in the running for UK government funding to develop a commercial scheme.

FRACKING

The Herald reported that a study by The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), *Options for Scotland's Gas Future*, said the Scottish public must be allowed to influence the decision-making process on fracking and other unconventional gas developments and be provided with meaningful information.

The report highlights the importance of considering unconventional gas development in Scotland within the context of the UK's need for gas to heat homes and for use in industry. It sets out the advantages and risks associated with importing gas or producing it domestically onshore or offshore.

GEOHERMAL ENERGY

£234,025 has been awarded from the Scottish Government's Geothermal Energy Challenge Fund, supported by the Low Carbon Infrastructure Fund, to five feasibility projects that will explore the technical feasibility, economic viability and environmental sustainability of geothermal energy [Mar 15]. The sites are at Aberdeen Exhibition and Conference Centre; Guardbridge, Fife; Polkemmet, West Lothian; Hartwood, North Lanarkshire and Hill of Banchory, Aberdeenshire.

The University of St Andrews is the lead partner in the Guardbridge Energy Centre site. The University is investing £25m at the site to generate power and pump hot water four miles underground to St Andrews to heat and cool the university's labs and residences. There are also plans for a six turbine wind power development at Kenly, which will help the university to become the UK's first carbon-neutral university.

SEAWEED & NUCLEAR POWER

The *BBC News* website reported that a reactor at the Hunterston B nuclear power station in Ayrshire was taken offline as a precautionary measure, due to high levels of seaweed in the waters around the plant, accompanied by strong winds and storm surges.

 **RECREATION & TOURISM**

LOCH LOMOND PARK

The Herald reported that Simon Miller, of Luss Estates, is backing the new bylaws currently under consideration at Holyrood which will create a camping-free zone around the west side of Loch Lomond [Apr 15]. Mr Miller said: "I am disgusted and dismayed at the appalling amount

of litter left by people wild camping. Each month we spend a morning picking up rubbish and last year we collected well over 350 bags of litter plus many larger items. It's a worse problem than ever and regrettably we're on course to beat last year's pickup.

"We support fully the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority's proposed extension of camping bylaws, not because it restricts access to the countryside, but because where roads and water are in close proximity, the level of irresponsible camping is unsustainable. The behaviour and littering of a significant minority of campers means that the only way to address this is to legislate, as proposed."

Mr Miller challenged groups such as Ramblers Scotland and others opposed to the new laws to join in one of the clean-ups.

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said that ramblers and wild campers were not the problem and were being blamed for the bad behaviour of others. She said: "Our ramblers groups take part in litter pick-ups, and this is not just a problem in the national parks. To blame campers is misleading as it ignores the huge numbers of day visitors, and people driving through throwing litter from their cars. Land managers themselves can be guilty of littering. Littering is a problem across the whole of Scotland, and the answer is to provide more bins and disposal sites. People should also take responsibility and clear up after themselves."

David Gibson, of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), said: "We welcome the call from Luss Estates and join their call to urge people to act responsibly, but we are firmly opposed to the proposed introduction of new bylaws which will not address the issue of rubbish dumped by irresponsible road side campers. The fact is that the Park and Police Scotland already possess the powers necessary to deal with irresponsible people. Draconian new bylaws would simply penalise the vast majority of innocent visitors to the Park who camp responsibly."

Dave Morris, formerly of Ramblers Scotland, wrote to *The Herald*: "If litter problems are as bad on the west shore of Loch Lomond as Simon Miller claims, it is obvious that bylaws to ban camping along the entire shoreline would not be the solution. The problems would be shifted to other locations which are far less able to deal with the resulting pressures, making the overall situation in Scotland much worse. What is now required is for the Environment minister, Aileen McLeod, to call a public inquiry into the bylaw proposals.

"The questions that need addressing in such an inquiry include: why has the National Park Authority and the Forestry Commission done so little in the 13 years since the park's establishment to provide new camping facilities; why is Police Scotland far less effective than its predecessor bodies in enforcing the criminal law in the National Park; why is the Park Authority failing to deal with litter problems when, in 2014, it was given new powers to issue on-the-spot fines; why does the park authority continue to make false claims for the so-called success of camping bylaws on the east shore of Loch Lomond when it has been told repeatedly that the figure of an 81% reduction in anti-social behaviour is invalid; why does it refuse to engage in constructive dialogue with outdoor recreation organisations to help resolve these problems?

"... Thousands of people have been camping responsibly every year, for decades, beside Loch Lomond and this must continue. Meanwhile the National Park Authority needs to be reminded that it is not some sort of nationally funded residents' association but has wider responsibilities to all

who enjoy Scotland's great outdoors."

Nick Kempe, formerly of the Mountaineering Council for Scotland, also wrote to *The Herald*: "It's hardly surprising Luss Estates are backing the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park's proposals for camping bylaws. A number of large landowners have always resented our world-class access legislation and Luss seems now to be using rubbish as an excuse to overturn these rights. The fact is that rubbish is a problem everywhere in Scotland. What's more, the National Park's own figures for east Loch Lomond (published in its report to ministers in March 2014) show that when the weather is hot and sunny, litter levels reach similar peaks as before the bylaws. This undermines the claims that a camping ban will address litter problems.

"If the National Park and Luss Estates really wanted to address littering they have the powers and resources necessary to do so. Last year the National Park was given the power to issue fines for littering but has not yet put in place any arrangements to do so. It employs large numbers of rangers but their efforts to educate the public are constantly undermined by the different arrangements in place for litter collection across the park, so Perth & Kinross provide lots of litter bins along Loch Earnside but Argyll & Bute none along the A82. Meantime, Luss Estates received £110,149.33 in 2014 under the Scottish Rural Development Programme which funds economic, environmental and social measures. Surely, until the park gets a proper preventive strategy in place, it could be using some of this to clear up litter more frequently than the once a month it says it does at present?"

SKYE WILDLIFE TOURISM

The Herald reported that a survey carried out by RSPB Scotland found that wildlife tourism on Skye created more than £4.2m between August 2013 and October 2014. It also determined that about 200 jobs on Skye are now supported entirely by wildlife tourism.

Sea eagles alone contributed £2.4m, an increase of £0.6m from a similar study undertaken in 2008.

RSPB Scotland and Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland are now trialling a sea eagle viewing platform at FC Scotland's Kylerhea site.

 **NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

CROFTING COMMISSION

Colin Kennedy has been elected as convener of the Crofting Commission after a secret ballot [May 15].

RSPB SCOTLAND

RSPB Scotland is to take over a nature reserve at the Black Devon Wetlands near Alloa in Clackmannanshire. The wetland and grassland is good for snipe, short-eared owls, teals and black-headed gulls. The wetlands, near the Forth and the Black Devon rivers, were created when soil was dug out to cap a nearby landfill area. Managed lagoons were formed by Clackmannanshire Heritage Trust, and later expanded in the mid- 2000s by the council's landfill project.

The Inner Forth is internationally recognised as an important place for birds, and the establishment of this reserve adds to a wider mosaic of habitats that are beneficial for a whole range of different species, as part of the Inner Forth Futurescape, RSPB's landscape-scale project.