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## CONSERVATION

### FRESHWATER PEARL MUSSELS

873 metres of boulder bank protection are to be removed from sections of the River South Esk and its White Water tributary in Glen Clova and Glen Doll in Angus as part of the Pearls in Peril (PIP) project.

The South Esk is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), designated for its pearl mussels and salmon. An increase in illegal exploitation of freshwater pearl mussels has been reported in the area.

The bank protection was installed in the 1990s to limit riverbank erosion and channel movement. This reduced river habitat quality for freshwater pearl mussels, salmon and trout. The removal of the boulders will make the riverbank more accessible for water voles around one of the restoration sites.

PIP survey staff made the first record of these rare molluscs for this part of Glen Clova last year. Dr Lorna Wilkie, of PIP, said: "Freshwater pearl mussels in the River South Esk have been affected by pollution, illegal fishing, and river engineering. Habitat loss has made it impossible for populations to recover. But by increasing suitable habitat for juvenile mussels and spawning salmon PIP aims to increase their number and distribution. Although changes to the river environment will be immediately noticeable, we do not expect to see an increase in the mussel population for many years. Freshwater pearl mussels are very slow-growing – they don't start breeding until they are 15-20 years old and can live for up to 120 years. PIP is a project with long-term aims."

PIP is also working to increase awareness of illegal pearl fishing and has launched a Riverwatch Scheme for the River South Esk. PIP is funded through the European Commission LIFE Nature programme and 22 UK organisations. See: [www.pearlsinperil.org.uk](http://www.pearlsinperil.org.uk)

### TRESHNISH ISLANDS

*The Herald* reported that Calum MacLachlainn, from Mull, wants to see the Treshnish Isles (Fladda, Lunga and Dutchman's Cap) established as the first Human Exclusion Area in the UK.

He said: "Scotland's iconic Hebridean islands and seas are blessed with nature's bounty and unique combinations of flora and fauna and we must, I believe, offer appropriate areas of total sanctuary back to nature. In my opinion the Treshnish Isles and their immediately surrounding marine environment extending to half a mile of land would ideally be suited to establishing this Hebridean Sanctuary, an oasis apart from any and all human infringement and exploitation. Let Scotland's Hebridean communities proudly lead the way with this radical grasp of land and marine conservation."

### REWILDING

The *BBC News* website reported that a new campaign alliance, Rewilding Britain, said that lynx, wild boar, and wolves could all be reintroduced to Scotland. Rewilding Britain said that its plans would allow 'native forests to regenerate, while giving the seas a chance to recover from industrial fishing.'

*The Herald* reported that Rewilding Britain said that it wants to see at least three core areas of rewilded land by 2030, each of 100,000 hectares

or more, with a clear focus on Scotland. It said that the Scottish Government is ahead of its English counterparts in identifying likely areas. Ultimately, within a century, it wants one million hectares returned to their natural state, about 4.5% of Britain.

Rebecca Wrigley, of Rewilding Britain, said: "We hope we can gather a groundswell of support. We want to amplify the message that some pioneers have been putting out for decades, and attract new support. Rewilding is really for everyone who cares about our future. Our ecosystems need us."

Susan Wright, of Rewilding Britain, said: "A lot of our important animals were hunted to extinction, species like the wolf, the wild boar, the lynx. These are important keystone species which actually drive ecological processes and we should be looking a lot more seriously at bringing these animals back."

Andrew McCormick, of NFU Scotland, called on politicians and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to show stronger leadership on the issue of rewilding. He said: "Our countryside provides food, forestry, tourism, renewables, field sports and environmental goods. Recent history has taught us any species introduction, whether legal or illegal, can have an impact on the many benefits that the Scottish countryside currently delivers." He stressed the importance of the current 'managed' landscape of most of Scotland, with what its mosaic of biodiversity.

He said: "Farmers are justifiably concerned at what the introduction of predators could mean for their livestock, particularly the many thousands of sheep kept on Scotland's hills and uplands. However, new species will also affect Scotland's existing biodiversity and ecosystems. Many farmers and land managers are already working with other Scottish stakeholders on priority Scottish species such as wildcats, capercaillie and red squirrel and protecting and managing existing wildlife habitats."

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "We are supportive of its overall vision, especially the intention to allow native forests to grow once more on the hills. Scotland is known for its wide open spaces, moorlands and mountains but many of our uplands lack the rich biodiversity we should expect to see while out walking."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "We intend to consider the issues carefully before coming to a decision on the possible reintroduction of the beaver. However there are no plans to reintroduce other species, especially top predators such as lynx or wolves."

The Rewilding Britain board includes Sarah Robinson, of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, and Dr Mike Daniels of the John Muir Trust (JMT).

Andrew Bachell, of SNH, said: "We agree that many of Scotland's wild areas are heavily grazed and eroded and a rewilding approach in these places could offer significant biodiversity gains, in turn benefiting tourism, woodland production and employment for the people of Scotland by maintaining a rich and diverse natural environment. But rewilding isn't just about releasing large animals and, in fact, doesn't have to include reintroduced species at all. Rewilding is also about regenerating natural woodland or allowing areas of coast that flood naturally to

flood again, and creating wildlife corridors. The new organisation, Rewilding Britain, points out that only 12% of the UK is forested; there are already targets in Scotland to increase woodland.

“There are also already many upland estates, such as Quinag, Mar Lodge and Abernethy (run by JMT, the National Trust for Scotland and RSPB Scotland), as well as SNH National Nature Reserves, Beinn Eighe and Creag Meagaidh, where the principles of rewilding are already put into action. Many people and organisations work together to manage Scotland’s landscape and wildlife, so changes have to be discussed and agreed with our many partners, working with the public, land managers, farmers and others.

“We’ve already had a number of highly successful national reintroductions in Scotland, including sea eagles and red kites, as well as more local reintroductions such as the scarce woolly willow. The Scottish Government is also currently considering the possibility of reintroducing Eurasian beaver. We have no plans to reintroduce any more animals to Scotland at this time. If any third party – such as the Lynx UK Trust which are currently looking into applying for a licence – wants to pursue a reintroduction, they will have to go through the various steps required. We know, on the basis of experience, that reintroduction projects are complex and need considerable planning to ensure national and international guidelines are met.

“Scotland’s National Species Reintroduction Forum is a world leader in how reintroductions are determined and has produced the Scottish Code for Conservation Translocations specifically designed to guide project development. If we received an application to reintroduce a species, we’d look for the applicant to provide information on how the project would address ecological issues such as habitat availability, as well as the views of the public, livestock and land managers, the wider UK perspective, and any socio-economic impacts. The views of the Scottish Government would need to be taken into consideration.”

Fiona Mandeville, of the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF), said: “You can’t just turn the clock back and parachute species into a changed environment. Of course there are iconic species that need protection such as the red squirrel. But the re-introduction of large predators such as eagles and wolves, and destructive pests such as beavers, makes no sense as the environment has changed so much since they were last here. For example, when sea eagles used to populate Scotland there were plenty of inshore fish for them to feed on. They were then re-introduced when there is a severe shortage of their natural food so they prey on livestock instead.

“If you are going to re-introduce species, you need to re-create their natural environment first. I know traditional small-scale farmers in Sweden who find their livelihoods threatened by re-introduced wolves preying on stock. Some have given up farming as a result. There are enough threats already to crofting agriculture without this.”

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Ms Mandeville said: “The majority of what SNH called ‘wild land’ in their wild land maps are not wild at all; they only appear wild from an urban perspective. For people whom live there they are as well managed as a city park. They are cared for by crofters who depend on their extensive livestock. Crofters have been looking after the ‘High Nature Value’ environment for centuries and cannot be regarded as anything other than environmental caretakers themselves.”

See: [www.rewildingbritain.org.uk](http://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk)

**MUIRBURN**

Research led by the RSPB Centre for Conservation Science examined moorland burning in Scotland, England and Wales. Muirburning is undertaken to help increase numbers of red grouse on sporting estates and is carried out by landowners in Scotland in agreement with SNH. Using aerial photography and satellite images, 45,000 1 km squares were mapped across Scotland, England and Wales, and revealed that burning occurred across 5,245 squares in Scotland. In the ten year period covered by the study (2001 to 2011), the number of burns recorded increased rapidly by 11% each year. Other studies have found that the potential number of red grouse shooting days in some areas of Britain has risen over a similar period, and moorland management has also intensified. Burning was detected in 55% of SACs and 63% of Special Protection Areas (SPAs) assessed in the study.

These sites are designated under EU legislation for their conservation importance; governments are charged with protecting them from damage and ensuring that they are restored to the best condition. However, many SACs and SPAs are in unfavourable condition, with burning identified by governments and statutory agencies as a primary reason for this poor status. RSPB said that ‘significantly more burning’ took place within these EU recognised designated areas than on comparable moorlands outside, adding that moors inside the protected areas were being left in a poor state.

Dr David Douglas, of RSPB Scotland and lead author of the study, said: “Upland ecosystems are highly sensitive to burning practices. Knowing how much burning takes place and where, is crucial to developing sustainable land management policies for these precious environments.”

Duncan Orr-Ewing, of RSPB Scotland, said: “As 28% of the current moorland burning in Scotland overlies deep peat, and the Scottish Government has rightly set challenging targets to reduce climate changing emissions, it is essential that new burning guidance provides clear direction to sporting interests and farmers as to where burning can be damaging to peatlands and may now be inappropriate.”

The Scottish Moorland Group, part of Scottish Land & Estates, said in a statement that muirburning was a centuries-old method of regenerating moors and that well-managed muirburn is: “... a natural management tool that has been used for centuries and is highly effective. By regenerating heather in a mosaic pattern on a 10-25 year rotation, it makes it palatable to sheep and grouse and provides the right mixed habitat for a wide range of upland birds. Many of these birds, such as the lapwing and curlew, are in decline elsewhere in Scotland and managed moorland is a significant refuge for them. The golden plover also benefits, particularly from short heather. Birds such as red grouse need open areas in which to feed, dry off and shelter.”

The Scottish Government is currently reviewing its Muirburn Code. SNH is reviewing the scientific evidence which underpins its policies towards upland management through their Scientific Advisory Committee, including this research.

**RARE RECORDINGS**

The great otter spider, *Pirata piscatorious*, has been found in Scotland for the first time in 20 years. Last recorded near Crianlarich, it was rediscovered on a pool at RSPB Scotland’s Loch Lomond reserve near Gartocharn.

- The six-spot burnet moth has been recorded on the island of Tiree, Inner Hebrides, for the first

time by an RSPB Scotland team carrying out insect survey work. The moths have previously been found in the Outer Hebrides and in some coastal areas of Scotland.

- The *BBC News* website reported that white-faced darters, one of Britain’s scarcest species of dragonfly, has been spotted on an RSPB Scotland reserve in Strathspey. RSPB Scotland said that the Scottish populations are considered important to the species’ long-term survival.

- The narrow-bordered bee hawk has been discovered by Butterfly Conservation’s Bog Squad at Kingshill Local Nature Reserve near Allanton in Lanarkshire. The moth is nationally scarce and is rare in Scotland where it is typically found in Argyll and the Highlands.

- A pair of golden eagles in the eastern Highlands have, unusually, raised female triplets. Eagles usually lay only two eggs.

**AN CAMAS MÒR**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that a single pinewood mason bee has been recorded on the site of the An Camas Mòr new town development at Rothiemurchus near Aviemore in the Cairngorms National Park.

Dr Gus Jones, of the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group who discovered the bee, said: “To pretend options exist for construction of a new town here that are sustainable and leave natural heritage interests unscathed is to ignore ecological understanding of this special area. The presence of a rare bee like the pinewood mason bee offers vital lessons about the need for adequate baseline surveys at an appropriately early stage in the planning process. This is especially important in sensitive protected areas where avoiding damaging degradation of precious habitats is particularly appropriate and requires more than lip service.”

Craig Macadam, of Buglife, said: “Development of this site without understanding the full impact on this bee or the other threatened invertebrates could push these species closer to extinction in Scotland.”

Hamish Trench, of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, said: “The mason bee is one amongst many natural heritage interests that we are working to ensure are addressed through specific management and conservation measures incorporated in the masterplan for the long term development of a new community at An Camas Mòr.”

**GIANT HOGWEED**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Fisheries Trust (FNLFT) is using aerial drones, for the first time in the Highlands, to identify areas of giant hogweed, *Heracleum mantegazzianum*. Bob Laughton, of FNLFT, said that the pilot scheme was helping them map where invasive species were present on the river systems, and had given them a better insight into the worst affected areas.

**BREEDING BIRD SURVEY**

The latest Breeding Bird Survey report has been published. Population trends for 62 bird species in Scotland are shown. Golden plover has declined by 25% between 1995 and 2013. More than half of Scotland’s breeding populations of curlew and lapwing have been lost in the same time period, and oystercatcher have also declined by 29%. Kestrel have had a population loss of 67%.

However, between 1995 and 2013, siskin has increased by 51% in Scotland; chiffchaff by 472%; blackcap by 415% and willow warbler by 27%.

**FAIR ISLE PUFFINS**

A study, starting in 1986, of the Fair Isle puffin colony on Shetland suggests that numbers breeding there have halved from about 20,000 to 10,000 individuals. Dr Will Miles, of the Fair Isle Bird

Observatory, said: "We don't know exactly why they would fail to return to Fair Isle and settle to breed but it may be due to declining local fish stocks and poor feeding conditions for seabirds in Shetland waters. It is very difficult to find out exactly what happens to immature puffins after they have fledged because of the vast sea areas and the problems of tracing them within other colonies."

Researchers believe the most likely cause of the decline in the colony on the Fair Isle was young birds failing to return. This could be because of a lack of fish for the puffins to feed on.

The study suggests that, since the 1980s, the quantities of fish brought ashore by adult puffins for their chicks declined substantially.

Dr Miles also looked at the possible impact of great skuas on the puffin colony. Skua numbers have increased by about 300% on Fair Isle in the same period, to more than 400 breeding pairs. Despite this increase, adult puffin survival on the island has remained high and stable over the 30 years. The study is published in *PLoS ONE*.

**COMMON SCOTER**

The red-listed common scoter duck has around 40 pairs in the western Highlands; numbers have halved over the past 20 years.

It had been assumed that the ducks would migrate together to a similarly small area to overwinter on the sea. However, tracking tags showed that they went separate ways, from the Moray Firth to Morocco.

Scottish & Southern Energy and Forest Enterprise Scotland are working with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, RSPB Scotland and SNH on monitoring the nests and feeding areas.

**GLEN ROY NNR**

Lochaber Geopark is to deliver a petition to the board of SNH before the board meets in August to decide the fate of Glen Roy National Nature Reserve (NNR). The Parallel Roads of Glen Roy NNR is in danger of being demoted as SNH is discussing scaling back the scope of NNRs. The Glen Roy NNR was set up to protect the Parallel Roads after they were nearly planted over by the Forestry Commission in the 1950s. It is one of only a few NNRs designated in the UK for outstanding landscape. See: <http://bit.ly/1O7yJnb>

**BEAVERS**

Two three-month old beaver kits have been filmed at Lochan Buic in the Knapdale Forest of Argyll, the first young beavers to be spotted at the Scottish Beaver Trial site this year [Jun 15].



**FARMING**

**PACK REVIEW**

The vast majority of Brian Pack's 61 recommendations to reduce red tape in Scottish agriculture have been formally accepted by the Scottish Government [Aug 14]. Their implementation will be driven forward by the Scottish Government's Rural Affairs, Food & the Environment Delivery Board. Some recommendations will require action at EU level.

The formal response also sets out what action is to be taken regarding the very small number of recommendations not being taken forward at this time.

See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/doingbetter](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/Agriculture/doingbetter)

• The Scottish Government's Future of Scottish Agriculture discussion document was launched. See: [www.gov.scot/Publications/Recent](http://www.gov.scot/Publications/Recent)

**DAIRY CATTLE**

The Scottish Dairy Cattle Association has published statistics which show that the number of dairy herds in Scotland has decreased by 19 to 982 but the total number of cows has increased by 1,204 to 174,487 in the six months to 1 July. This is the lowest number of herds in Scotland since records began in 1903, but the average herd size of 178 is the highest on record.

**CEREALS**

The annual *AHDB Cereals & Oilseeds Planting and Variety Survey* reports that, in 2014, the estimated area of oilseed rape in Scotland remains largely unchanged at 37,000 hectares (1% higher than 2014). The area of wheat in Scotland has increased by 3,000 hectares, which partially offsets a 6% decrease in the estimated total Scottish areas for both winter and spring crops of barley.

At 258,000 hectares, the Scottish spring barley area would be the lowest since 2010. The swing is possibly a consequence of the Common Agricultural Policy's (CAP) three-crop requirements [Sep 14].

**HONEY BEES**

Low temperatures have resulted in the worst honey yield since 1985 with as little as 15% of normal production. The Scottish Beekeepers Association has recommended that beekeepers feed colonies now with syrup, something that is not usually done the autumn. May and July are the key months for honey production, however, but had particularly bad weather this year.

• American foulbrood has been detected at a honey bee apiary near Alyth in Perthshire. The infected hives have been destroyed, as there is no permitted treatment for the disease in the UK. The movement of bees and related equipment in and out of the affected apiary is under strict control by Scottish Government bee inspectors.

**LFA**

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that the Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020 has been officially approved by the European Commission. Scotland's Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS) will effectively run in its current form until 2018. The total spend on LFASS will be around £459m, accounting for a third of the overall budget of LFASS. The annual budget of £65.5m is paid to 11,500 crofts and farms on a non-competitive basis.

However, it will be replaced by a new Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) scheme; Scotland will have to designate new ANCs by 2018 [May 14]. The key requirement for an ANC is that the payment rates must be calculated on additional costs and/or income foregone with a minimum payment of €25 per hectare; this could be unaffordable to the Scottish Government as if all land currently designated as LFA were to be paid €25 per hectare, it would cost in excess of £100m per year, well over budget. NFU Scotland considers that different payment rates should be applied to different categories of land with natural constraints.

**RODENTICIDE**

The Health & Safety Executive has announced that new rules on the purchase and use of professional rodenticide bait to control rats and mice will come into force from 1 June 2016

In a move designed primarily to reduce the risk of non-target species – such as barn owls, red kites, buzzards and kestrels – being inadvertently exposed to rodenticide, anyone wishing to buy professional bait (but not fumigants) will need to hold certified 'proof of competence' in rodent pest control.

**ORKNEY GEESE**

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has confirmed that the Orkney greylag goose adaptive management pilot is set to enter its fourth year [Jul 14]. Local people can control the resident goose population by licensed shooting before migratory birds from Iceland arrive in October. In 2014, 6,525 resident greylags were shot; the target for this year is 6,600. This will keep the population down to reduce the impact on farming while preserving the species' conservation interest. The licensed sale of wild goose meat will resume.

**SEA EAGLES & LAMBS**

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that a freedom of information request showed that SNH has spent £210,415 on deterring sea eagles from preying on lambs, with several techniques on trial [Dec 14].



**WOODLANDS**

**LOCH LOMOND ISLAND**

The *Herald* reported that hundreds of native beech trees, up to 300 years old, were poisoned on Inchtavannach Island, Loch Lomond, by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)

Sir Malcolm Colquhoun, of Luss Estates, has written to Susan Davies, chief executive of SNH, to demand an explanation of 'this act of wanton vandalism' and asked SNH to explain why it did not comply with the management agreement to fell the mature beech trees. It has also asked if SNH had a felling licence to kill the mature trees from Forestry Commission Scotland, and, if not, whether the decision to poison them was taken in order to get around the need for a felling licence.

In 2013, SNH entered into an agreement with the tenant of Inchtavannach Island to remove rhododendron from the island. The agreement also provided for the mature beech trees to be felled gradually over a five year period, but the decision was taken by SNH to inject them with poison instead because it was 'more cost effective.' Luss Estates said that this has created a 'dead canopy' which will shed branches and endanger visitors.

Simon Miller, of Luss Estates, said: "We want to know what measures SNH proposes to undertake to replace the tree cover on the island, having killed such a large number of mature native beech trees. We are assessing the scale of the destruction, valuing the trees killed and instructing a tree surveyor to assess the public liability risks and remedial costs. We expect SNH to foot the bill for this work."

In a statement, SNH said: "Inchtavannach is internationally important for its oak woodland but the condition of the woodland has been affected by a lack of regeneration, a lack of dead wood and the spread of non-native plants. We have worked with Luss Estates and the tenant over a number of years to improve the condition of the woodland and our latest five year management agreement with the tenant in August 2013 included measures to remove non-native beech and rhododendron from the island. ... We didn't appreciate the impact that this would have on the landscape of the island and we are now in discussion with the estate and tenant regarding felling of the dead trees to reduce this impact."



**FISHFARMING & FISHERIES**

**FISHFARM GUIDANCE**

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has published updated guidance on how fishfarms are regulated in Scotland. The licence

review document for marine cage fishfarms was originally published in 2011 and has now been revised to include more detailed information on how SEPA works to improve performance at failing sites and to protect the environment. SEPA issues licences for fishfarms with conditions including a limit to the biomass (weight of fish) held on a site; restriction of medicine and chemical releases and the monitoring of seabed conditions.

#### SKYE FISHFARM

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Kames Fish Farming Ltd plans a 12 cage salmon and rainbow trout farm on Loch Pooltiel in Glendale in northwest Skye. Similar plans were withdrawn in 2014 following local opposition.

#### SALMON NETTING

The Scottish Government has announced a consultation on plans for a complete ban on catching wild salmon using coastal nets, following a consultation. The prohibition on killing salmon outside river estuaries would only be in force until the true state of wild salmon stock becomes clear. A licensing scheme is also proposed for the killing of wild salmon caught in rivers [Feb 15].

Hughie Campbell Adamson, of the Salmon & Trout Association (Scotland), said: "The proposed banning of coastal salmon netting is a milestone – indeed the most significant change to the regulations on the exploitation of salmon in the last 200 years."

Usan Salmon Company, commercial netters, said that it was confident it would be allowed to start catching salmon and sea trout again once accurate salmon stock measurements have been taken [May 15]. Views on the regulations must be submitted by 19 August.

#### RIVER DEVERON

The River Deveron District Salmon Fishery Board in Banffshire has put new conservation guidelines in place to help increase fish numbers over the next three years. There is a continuing problem with poachers illegally fishing on the river, which has 'fragile' stocks of salmon.

#### SCALLOPS

New conservation measures for Scottish scallop stocks have been announced by the Scottish Government, following a consultation [Oct 14]. These will take effect in the spring of 2016 and will be kept under review to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

The minimum landing size of scallops will be increased from 100 mm to 105 mm for most of the Scottish coast. This is expected to help protect the breeding stock of scallops and lead to an increase in yield and egg production.

Restrictions will also be placed on the number of dredges that scallop vessels are allowed to tow in inshore waters. The standard restriction will restrict vessels to eight dredges per side in inshore waters, helping to limit the effort of scallop vessels in this zone. There will be no change to the current restrictions outside 12 nautical miles.

These new measures are due to take effect in the spring of 2016 and will be kept under review to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fishery.

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

#### ALGAL TOXINS

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that shellfish gathering has been closed at Loch Sligachan, Loch Ainort, Loch Eishort and Loch Slapin on Skye, because of algal toxins.

#### FORTH LOBSTERS

1,000 lobsters, each the size of a 50p piece, have been released into the Firth of Forth, having been reared from eggs at North Berwick's Firth of Forth Lobster Hatchery.

#### MPAs

The *Herald* and *West Highland Free Press* reported that Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, along with the Western Isles Fisherman's Association (WIFA), Orkney Fisheries Association and the Shetland Fishermen's Association have formed a joint working group to oppose the imposition of Marine Protected Area (MPA) and inshore Special Conservation Area (SAC) designations [see MARINE].

They have produced a ten-point action plan which will help to make the industry more sustainable at a local level. The fisheries associations want the Scottish Government to recognise traditional fishing grounds. The islands are fisheries-dependent, and if the three island groups are officially designated as 'small offshore islands which are dependent on fishing' the CFP states that such islands 'where appropriate, be especially recognised and supported in order to be able to survive and prosper.'

The three island groups seek an 'opt-out' for locally based vessels from fisheries regulations and management powers devolved to the Scottish Government, for example the new MPAs. A 12 mile management boundary is also one of the recommendations, which could be altered for inshore groups.

Duncan MacInnes, of WIFA, said: "The figures produced by Marine Scotland greatly underestimate existing fishing activity in these areas and proposed management measures will have a huge impact on the fishing and processing sectors with potential jobs losses the result. We believe the designations will decimate coastal communities already on the margins of long term sustainability.

"From a fishing community perspective there is a total lack of confidence in the data being used by Marine Scotland to demonstrate the minimal impact of the designation management measures and a belief that this is at the heart of a fundamentally flawed and undermined process."

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), said that the proposed designations threaten the viability of inshore fisheries on the west coast and could devastate fragile communities that rely on fishing [Jun 15]. He said that the measures were a total overreach of the objectives set out in the agreed MPA process. Writing on the letters page of *The Herald*, he said: "MPAs were never meant to be 'no-take zones' for any specific gear type; management measures are supposed to be placed case-by-case, taking account of features to be protected. For reasons still unexplained and after four years of hard work by all, Mr Lochhead's final decisions placed restrictions well beyond what was necessary to meet the biodiversity aim.

"There is a sustainable place in the inshore fishing industry for both mobile (prawn trawling and scallop dredging) and static (prawn creeling and scallop diving) methods. These serve different markets, neither can displace the other and neither should be dismissed."

Alisdair MacLeod, of the local authority, said: "In the strongest possible terms, the comhairle requests that the existing proposals for environmental designations around the Outer Hebrides are withdrawn immediately and that the proposed consultation on the MPAs is halted."



## MARINE

#### MPAs & SPAs

Scottish ministers are considering the introduction of 14 draft marine Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and four Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) following consultation this summer [Jun 15].

Orkney Islands Council (OIC) has called on the Scottish Government to put proposals for the new marine SPAs on 'immediate hold' rather than go out to consultation. Two draft SPAs are proposed for Orkney, Scapa Flow and an area to the north of the Orkney mainland. The council said that the proposals are unnecessary and prioritise conservation objectives ahead of new, or in some cases existing, human activity.

Steven Heddle, of OIC, said in a letter to Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & the Environment: "We see this as the biggest threat currently facing the council and our local community. The proposed conservation designations cover a massive area and, if imposed upon us, could effectively sterilise Scapa Flow, our prime harbour area, from future development. This is also the case for the Pentland Firth and Westray Firth, areas widely recognised as Scotland's great resources for tidal energy. [The SPA] restrictions come into immediate effect as soon as the consultation commences and before there has been a chance for full and proper scrutiny of the scientific case. The projection of wildlife and our local environment is of great importance to us.

"Scapa Flow, under the stewardship of the council, has served as a major oil port for four decades and has a marine environment widely regarded as pristine. We understand that these matters rely on scientific evidence. But at this stage we have yet to see up to date scientific evidence that these proposed designations are necessary or will be effective in delivering the conservation objectives which the government intends."

'Unnecessarily draconian designations' could thwart the aspirations of the council and the Scottish Government to see marine renewable energy production develop. Mr Heddle said that Orkney took its environmental responsibilities very seriously, but saw the proposed SPAs as an unnecessary step too far which would have a 'devastating impact on Orkney.'

A government spokesman said: "The aim of the SPAs is not to prevent development, and with suitable mitigation, assessment and monitoring the Scottish Government is confident that development can continue in Orkney waters alongside an SPA."

#### SEALS & SALMON

The Scottish Information Commissioner has instructed ministers to release figures for the number of seals shot under licence at salmon farms [May 13]. The Scottish Government had withheld the information, claiming its disclosure 'would substantially prejudice public safety' in particular that of fishfarm workers, netmen and their families. The Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture appealed twice to the information commissioner.

The forms submitted by salmon farms for the years 2013 and 2014 have now to be published by 21 August, although the Scottish Government may still exercise a right of appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law.

Salmon farms and netting operations can apply to Marine Scotland for a licence authorising shooting of a limited number of seals within a specified area and period. The Scottish Government publishes a summary of the total seal licences granted *per* area annually.

The Scottish Government had submitted that aggressive confrontation was being pursued by



campaigners and by a number of hunt saboteur groups, which carried a serious potential risk to public safety [Jun 15].

The commissioner concluded that 'there was insufficient evidence from ministers of an increased threat to public safety if the information about seal shootings at salmon farms carried out under licence was disclosed.'

Don Staniford, of the Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture, said: "This is a landmark victory. [The] decisions are a shot in the arm for freedom of information and a shot across the bows of the bloody Scottish salmon farming industry. Now the public will be able to boycott salmon from lethal salmon farms. It is shameful that the Scottish salmon farming industry continues to kill seals and shocking that supermarkets still source seal-unfriendly farmed salmon."

John Robins, of the Save Our Seals Fund, told the *BBC's Good Morning Scotland* programme: "It's an environmental issue, it's an animal welfare – an animal rights issue. It's also a consumer issue, the consumer has the right to know. All we want to do is compare the information we have with the information that the government gets. Then we can tell the public where the seals are being shot, which companies are doing the shooting and the public can decide whether or not they want to pay for bullets to shoot seals."

Libby Anderson, of Onekind, said that claims that killing a seal was only a last resort when all non-lethal methods have been tried and failed need to be independently monitored.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisation said: "The number of seals shot by salmon farmers has declined dramatically over recent years. We have championed deterrence techniques that are designed to keep seals away from our fish, and shooting is always a last resort."

#### TOXIC ALGAE

A health warning has been issued for Loch Nan Ritheanan on Lewis which has toxic blue-green algae.

- Blue-green algae and cyanobacteria have been discovered in Loch Awe in Argyll. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) noticed the bloom during routine surveillance.

#### STARFISH

The *Scotsman* reported that a spiny starfish, over three feet across, has been found in Oban Bay in Argyll. It could be the largest of its kind ever spotted. An average starfish is 4.7 to 9.4 inches long, usually weighing around 11 pounds.

#### STAFFIN PIER

A consultant's report for the Staffin Community Trust in north Skye has put the cost to upgrade slipway facilities and upgrade the harbour at £18.6m. This includes additional studies, construction, dredging and installation of services. Skye Sea Harvest Ltd wants a suitable location for a new seafood processing facility; funding for initial feasibility studies was provided by the company and matched by the European Fisheries Fund. It is planned to build a fish processing unit with a dedicated pier for wellboats servicing local fishfarms, better landing facilities for local fishing and cruise boats and pontoons for visiting yachts, with access at all states of the tide.

#### HUMPBACK WHALE

An adult humpback whale, larger than 12 metres, was sighted in the Firth of Clyde – the fifth such whale to be seen off western Scotland in the past month, in locations from the Isle of Lewis to the Firth of Clyde. Normally, just one or two *per year* are seen off Scotland.



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### CROWN ESTATE

MPs at Westminster debated the devolution of the Crown Estate to the Scottish Parliament as they further scrutinise the Scotland Bill [Jun 15]. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) intends to reserve direct control over Crown Estate land in Scotland that is used for key military purposes, which includes land around the Faslane nuclear submarine base, military training camps and firing ranges such as Cape Wrath.

The UK defence secretary, Michael Fallon, said that there would be an agreement drawn up with the Scottish Government about how the creation of any future developments would work so that the operation of MoD facilities would be safeguarded. He said that it was key that the power over the Crown Estate used by the armed forces was a reserved one because the defence of the realm as a whole was reserved to Westminster and it was important that Britain's nuclear deterrent continued as it had done for the last 50 years. Military assets should not be compromised by any adjacent developments.

### LAND REFORM

Community Land Scotland is preparing a strategy for MSPs to strengthen the Land Reform Bill [Jun 15]. One particular area of weakness in the bill is that it makes no specific provision for ministers, with the backing of parliament, to ask the question whether the ownership of a particular area land is in the public interest or not. Only a community can pose that question. But given there are few if any communities in areas which suffered in the Highland Clearances, it would mean the bill, as it stands, could do little to help the resettlement of that land.



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### ALYTH FLOODS

Flash floods damaged parts of the village of Alyth, in Perth & Kinross. Beavers have been held partly to blame by residents for the floods; they built dams upstream which were washed downstream [Sep 14].

Alex Stoddart, director of the Scottish Association for Country Sports (SACS) said that several members had reported seeing wood in the Alyth burn which bore tooth marks from beavers. He said: "SACS is concerned by reports from local residents and members affected by the flooding that beaver lodge material may have been an exacerbating factor. From our knowledge of Canada and Europe they can have an effect on flooding but if they had an effect on Alyth is not known."

Residents also claimed that felled trees left lying in a bid to encourage biodiversity also aggravated the raging torrent.

Paul Ramsay, of Bamff Estate on which some beavers live, said: "There could conceivably have been a twig or two that had come from beavers, I wouldn't deny that was a possibility, but the catchment area of the Alyth burn covers about 36 km<sup>2</sup>. The contribution from Bamff to that is tiny. As for the debris, as the water flowed down through the Den of Alyth it picked up an enormous amount of wood. It is exaggerated out of all proportion."

### BLUE TITS

The *Herald* reported that 500 nest boxes for blue tits were established at five sites – two in woodland near Loch Lomond, one on farmland near Clydebank and two in Glasgow. The nest boxes were observed last year and this year. Dr Davide Dominoni, of Glasgow University, said: "This year was very bad year for the birds in Glasgow – much worse when compared to last year. There were the same number of breeding pairs as last year but 90% of the nests completely failed, with not a single chick. More than half of the 100 urban nests would have been expected to produce chicks which fledged, but of those nests where a chick or chicks hatched, most died before they could leave the nest."

### MOSSMORRAN PEAT

Everiss Ltd applied for planning permission to extract peat from a site near Mossmorran in Fife [Oct 14]. Fife Council has turned down the application, saying that the company had failed to provide enough information and that the proposals were contrary to the nationwide planning policy.

### WILDLIFE CRIME OFFICERS

The *Herald* reported that an ex-civilian wildlife officer with Strathclyde Police, Joe Connelly, has said that a specialist team of wildlife officers must be established in cities as well as rural areas; more wildlife crimes are reported from urban areas than from the country.

Mr Connelly said: "It doesn't matter how many extra wildlife crime officers there are if they are not given the time and knowledge to investigate any reports properly. What is needed is a dedicated, highly trained team of around a dozen specialist wildlife crime officers which could be deployed anywhere in Scotland." He said that wildlife crime was no longer properly recorded by the police.

Police Scotland said that cities and towns do not require a full-time wildlife officer. Detective Chief Superintendent Sean Scott, head of wildlife Crime at Police Scotland, said that the number of recorded wildlife crimes had increased slightly, up ten on the previous year. The detection rate had also increased over the same period by 13% to a 77% detection rate. He said that wildlife crime awareness training was recently provided to an additional 38 officers, complementing the part-time officers of which there is one in each of 14 divisions. Each division has a wildlife crime liaison officer, an increase from one in each of the eight legacy forces to 14 across Scotland. He said: "Our detection rate is increasing but investigations into wildlife crime can be difficult and prolonged and the areas can be vast and remote."

### EDINBURGH GREEN BELT

170 acres of green belt will be developed under Sheratan Ltd's plans for the Edmonstone Estate at Little France outside Edinburgh. It is proposed that 70% of the green belt land will be retained as greenspace including parkland and cycle and pedestrian links. 680 homes, including 25% affordable housing, and a new primary school are planned.

- A residential development on the estate in the walled garden at Edmonstone and adjacent site has recently been approved, with over 500 homes.

### GLENBOIG & GARTCOSH

Banks Property's plans for a 1,000 home new village at Glenboig in North Lanarkshire have been given planning permission. The Gartcosh Nature Reserve will be extended and new underpasses created to help protect great crested newts, which will be moved before construction and then re-sited afterwards. The development is part of a regeneration project in the wider Gartcosh & Glenboig Community Growth Area.

**WASTE PROSECUTION**

Ernest McPherson, of Wester Cartmore Farm near Lochgelly in Fife, was given a £15,000 confiscation order at Dunfermline Sheriff Court. He had previously been sentenced to a six month restriction of liberty order after pleading guilty to operating an illegal landfill site containing an estimated 85,500 tonnes of unlicensed waste, including demolition waste. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) said that there was potential for 'significant environmental harm' from his operations.

**SWINTON QUARTER QUARRY**

The *BBC News* website reported that Hutton Stone has made a scoping request to the Scottish Borders Council to reopen the Swinton Quarter Quarry. The company said that the rock there has 'very good qualities' and some of it could be used on Historic Scotland properties. The proposals would see an average of 1,000 tonnes of stone extracted over a period of about 20 years.

**T IN THE PARK**

RSPB Scotland said that it was pleased with the success of T in the Park at Strathallan Castle in Perthshire in avoiding disturbance to local breeding ospreys [May 15]. The ospreys were monitored over the weekend and both adult birds were still present at the nest site with their chicks, and behaving normally, after the festival.

**HILLTRACKS**

The *BBC News* website reported that a track and bridge built to give access to the Beaully/Denny upgraded electricity line at Kinloch Laggan in the Cairngorms will remain in place [Mar 15].

SSE was required to leave the landscape as it found it at the end of the project, but a planning application from Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland to leave the temporary infrastructure in place has been approved by the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA). The track and bridge, which crosses the River Pattack, give FC Scotland staff and visitors improved access to Laggan Woods.

**ENERGY****SUPERGRID**

The *Sunday Herald* reported that the EU energy commissioner is to use European funds to pump prime the North Sea Electricity Grid project, the 'supergrid.' It would be the world's largest subsea electricity system. The project would allow green energy to be transmitted from areas of high electricity production but relatively low demand to the more densely populated parts of Europe. Nine countries bordering the North Sea committed to the project in 2009, but it has effectively been on hold since then, pending negotiations between EU member states on new emissions targets.

The grid would allow green energy produced in Scotland to be stored in Scandinavian pump storage hydro schemes until demand peaked elsewhere in Europe. It is expected that the grid would give confidence to investors to proceed with the five offshore windfarms proposed off the east coast.

- Planning permission has been sought for the 1.4 GW North Connect cable, the first interconnector between Scotland and Norway, running from Peterhead.

**WINDFARM SUBSIDIES**

A meeting, chaired by energy minister Fergus Ewing, was held to discuss the impact of the UK government's plans to end onshore windfarm

subsidies in April 2016 [Jun 15]. The UK government said that ending the Renewables Obligation subsidy scheme was likely to mean about 2,500 planned onshore turbines would be cancelled, many of which were in Scotland.

Mr Ewing said: "We fundamentally disagree with the UK government's decision and [this] meeting is an opportunity to hear about the impact this will have. This is exactly the sort of meeting the UK government should have held before making their announcement, which ignored the concerns of many businesses, organisations and communities across Scotland. There are many communities and companies who have invested significant amounts of money in renewables schemes and have now found the goalposts have been moved, putting crucial investment and jobs at risk."

The *Sunday Herald* reported that economist, Tony Mackay, claimed that the subsidies paid to onshore windfarms in Scotland are 'unnecessarily high' – on average two or three times what was required to expand windfarm capacity to meet the Scottish Government's emissions targets. He said: "There is no doubt that these subsidies have been very generous and led to the construction of a large number of windfarms in Scotland."

In a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said that as 70% of planned windfarms are set for Scotland, it would be disproportionately affected by the cut in subsidies. She said that those firms which had spent millions of pounds planning new windfarms in Scotland should still be allowed to qualify for subsidies and quoted the Confederation of British Industry, which has urged a grace period for developers whose plans are already in the planning system. The subsidy cut would put at risk Scotland's renewable energy targets and have implications for the Paris UN climate talks.

- Anti-windfarm campaigners claimed that, with windfarm subsidies ceasing, it is doubtful as to whether the Beaully/Denny upgraded transmission line needed to be built at all as the anticipated large windfarms would not be built. At £600m it has cost the consumer nearly twice as much as expected [Feb 14].

- The *BBC News* website reported that a survey, carried out by the Association for Public Service Excellence for Scottish Renewables found that, following the announcement of the policy changes, five local councils have been left 'in limbo' having spent more than £650,000 of public money for windfarm projects totalling 25 turbines.

**WINDFARM NOISE**

The *Herald* reported that a study, carried out by ClimateXChange into the visual, shadow flicker and noise impacts of wind turbines at ten sites in Scotland, found that in some cases what was set out in planning applications did not match the actual impact. The test sites included windfarms at Dalswinton in Dumfries & Galloway, Achany in the Highlands, Drone Hill in the Borders, Hadyard Hill in South Ayrshire, Little Raith in Fife and West Knock Farm in Aberdeenshire.

The report stated that more care should be taken to identify noise issues, and that more consideration should be given to its impact on people living nearby. It also found that efforts to engage with the public had not always adequately prepared residents for the visual, shadow flicker and noise impacts of a development. The information was gathered through a combination of residents' surveys and assessments by consultants.

The report found that Scotland's wind-powered renewable energy sites met with current planning regulations, but suggested that these should be

reviewed to ensure that future developments achieve consistency in future.

Project leader, Ragne Low, said: "As the study has focused on issues relating to the planning process, we are confident that the findings will feed into improved practice in measuring the predicted impacts of proposed windfarms and in communicating this to decision-makers and those likely to be affected. The findings point to several possible improvements in planning guidance and good practice. Some have been implemented in the time between the case study windfarms being planned and built, and the present. The study will contribute to building on these improvements."

Linda Holt, of Scotland Against Spin, said: "This study is the first of its kind in the world to put the experience of people living near windfarms at its heart. For too long, people who have complained about wind farms have been dismissed as nimbies. The recommendations show that the planning system is ill-equipped to address potentially adverse impacts on wind farm neighbours, and we urge the Scottish Government to lose no time in implementing them. For too long, decision-makers on windfarms have been asked to determine applications while blind-folded about the true impacts of placing enormous industrial machines near people's homes."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "We welcome the publication of the windfarm impacts study report which is the first of its kind in the world and presents the findings of a two-year study involving a wide-range of interest groups. The report shows improvements have already been made in our planning system, which is rigorous and ensures appropriate siting of windfarms, and studies like this will make sure this improvement continues, and we look forward to considering the recommendations carefully. Our policy on windfarm applications strikes a careful balance between maximising Scotland's huge green energy potential and protecting environmental interests and residential amenity."

**WINDFARM UPDATES**

**Caithness:** Infinergy's 24 turbine Limekiln windfarm near Reay has been refused consent by the Scottish Government following a public local inquiry [Aug 14]. Helen McDade, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said that the windfarm would have been constructed close to the East Halladale Flows wild land area. She said: "This is a landmark decision of national significance. The refusal explicitly states that significant weight should be attached to the policies protecting wild land. It sends a clear message to developers that Scotland's wild land is a national asset which merits protection."

**Dumfries & Galloway:** Banks Renewables has amended proposals for Knockendurrick community windfarm following consultation. Revised plans are for six shorter turbines, which will now be sited to the east of the site, further away from a National Scenic Area. The output of the proposed windfarm will decrease from 23.8 MW to 14 MW.

- The *Galloway News* reported that an appeal against the rejection by the council of Renewable Energy Systems' five turbine windfarm at Barclay Hill has been refused [Oct 14]. The Scottish Government reporter concluded that the turbines would have a 'detrimental effect' on the character of the landscape and visual amenity.

- North Galloway Wind Energy has submitted a scoping report for the 44.8 MW Knocknalling windfarm between St John's Town of Dalry and Carsphairn.

**Highland:** The Scottish Government has refused consent, following a public local inquiry held in 2012, for the 31 turbine windfarm at Allt Duine near Kinraig [Feb 15]. It was concluded that: "The plan does not represent sustainable development as

it would result in significant and unacceptable landscape and visual impacts on the Cairngorms National Park, an area of national importance for its natural and cultural heritage, and on wild land."

Chris Townsend, of the Save Monadhliath Mountains campaign, said: "This is a victory for common sense, the safeguarding of the wild land in the Monadhliath Mountains and the absolute protection of the Cairngorms National Park. When the application was lodged five years ago it was pushing the boundaries of plausibility. With national planning policy dramatically changing over that 2,000 day period, it was clear that only one sensible conclusion could be drawn." He said that the windfarm scheme 'was simply the wrong development in the wrong location.'

- wpd's plans for the six turbine Beinn Mhor windfarm at Guisachan, near Cannich in Glen Affric, have been refused by a Scottish Government reporter [Sep 14]. In refusing consent, the reporter made 28 separate references to wild land and concluded that the safeguarding of such land was a 'significant national objective.'

The reporter said that the enjoyment of people walking along the mountains on the northern periphery of Glen Affric, a National Scenic Area, would be seriously affected. He noted that many of the objections to the proposal contained 'passionate arguments' about the importance of this asset for recreational visitors, tourism, and as part of Scotland's national heritage. He concluded: "The very modest contribution that would be made to renewable energy generation falls well short of justifying acceptance of the various significant adverse effects that would be caused to local residents, recreation visitors, the visual and wild land qualities of the ridge along the north side of Glen Affric and on Beinn Mhor itself."

Helen McDade, of JMT, said it was a victory not just for those local communities who had campaigned strongly against the proposal, but also those who believed wild land was a precious national asset worthy of protection.

David Gibson, of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), said: "This is positive news for Scotland's wild land. We welcome the Reporter's decision to dismiss the appeal and refuse planning permission, particularly his recognition that the safeguarding of wild land is a significant national objective. We are also pleased that he has accepted that this development would have had a serious adverse effect on the enjoyment of the wild land character of the area by recreational users."

The developers said: "The extent to which the Reporter has veered from expert advice of the Scottish Government's own statutory consultees and of Highland Council professional officers in reaching this decision is remarkable. Instead, the Reporter frequently states in his report that he shares the concerns of objectors in regard to the possible impacts on the landscape and local road system. This has resulted in an enormous loss to local supporters, charities, and national renewable energy and community ownership targets." See: <http://bit.ly/1eLVpwE>

- The *Press & Journal* reported that Force 9 Energy has applied for planning permission for the Cnoc an Eas windfarm near Loch Meikle, Glenurquhart. The number of turbines has been reduced from 17 to 13, following consultation.

- Vattenfall is appealing against Highland Council's decision to refuse consent for two wind measuring masts on the Ourack Wind Energy Project on Dava Moor [Feb 15].

**Lewis:** Developer International Power has made payments of £1.9m to community groups

which were set to benefit by around £1m a year for 25 years before the company announced that it was cancelling plans for 39 turbines at Eishken Estate [Oct 14]. The company blamed its decision on endless delays in installing a subsea cable to the mainland to export the electricity it wanted to produce at the planned windfarm. It is not known if payments have also been made to the Paic Estate, due to a confidentiality agreement.

**Scottish Borders:** Community Windpower has withdrawn plans for a 24 turbine windfarm at Girthgate, between Lauder and Stow near the Southern Upland Way. The local authority opposed the application and it was referred to the Scottish Government's directorate of planning appeals. A hearing was due to take place in September but the firm has now withdrawn their appeal.

**South Lanarkshire:** The Scottish Government has announced that PNE Wind UK's 19 turbine, 64.6 MW Glespin windfarm near Kennoxhead has received planning consent.

#### GLENMUCKLOCH RENEWABLES

A 100 MW pumped storage hydro scheme is planned at Glenmuckloch, a former opencast mine near Kirkconnel in Dumfries & Galloway. The land is owned by Buccleuch Estates, and the scheme is part of a project to redevelop the opencast mine as Glenmuckloch Energy Park [Jul 13]. The project has been planned by Hargreaves, 2020 Renewables and Buccleuch Estates.

A reservoir would be created from the existing opencast void, while a second, upper pond will be excavated at the head of Halfmerk Hill.

The collapse of surface mining firm Aardvark TMC in 2013 left a shortfall in the money needed for site restoration. Buccleuch Estates and Hargreaves are working to implement a rolling programme of restoration in parallel with coaling operations.

Two community wind turbines are to be built to the west of the hydro site. Glenmuckloch Renewable Energy has now lodged plans for a further eight turbines on the mine site [Jun 15].

#### GLENDOE

SSE Generation has won the right to pursue a £130m compensation claim against contractors, Hochtief, after a tunnel collapse at the Glendoe hydro scheme near Fort Augustus in Invernesshire [May 13]. The collapse halted electricity generation for two years.

Hochtief Solutions and Hochtief (UK) Constructions have a counterclaim for almost £10m. This figure represented profits lost from having to investigate the collapse and not being given the job to carry out the repairs.

#### ARDESSIE BURN

The planning application for a 2 MW hydro electric scheme at Allt Airdeasaidh, Ardesie, Dundonnell in Wester Ross has been refused by Highland Council, using delegated powers [Feb 15]. The proposed development would have been on the Ardesie Burn, recognised as important for its waterfalls, and would have included the creation of a track, damaging the fragile upland environment.

The development was seen as contrary to both Scottish Planning Policy and the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. It was turned down primarily for landscape reasons: the site is within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area (NSA) and it was concluded that the NSA's special qualities, which includes the Ardesie waterfalls, 'would be significantly affected by the proposed development.' The site is also within the Fisherfield-Letterewe-Fannichs Wild Land

Area where it would similarly have 'significantly detrimental impact.' It is in the An Teallach Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) where it would have 'an unacceptable impact' on the natural heritage interests associated with the area's geomorphology.

#### GEO THERMAL ENERGY

*The Herald* reported that initial trials of geothermal heating are to be undertaken in the Hill of Banchory area on Royal Deeside. Hot water flowing round granite rocks underground would be pumped to the surface and used for a district heating project.

#### SOLAR FARMS

The *BBC News* website reported that Green Hedge Renewables is planning a 20 MW solar farm on a 53.8 hectare (133 acres) site at Baldoon disused airfield near Wigtown, in Dumfries & Galloway. The site borders RSPB Scotland's Crook of Baldoon reserve and it is close to Wigtown Bay and the Cree Estuary SSSI. Sheep would continue to graze the land beneath the panels.

- Green Energy UK has submitted plans for a 5 MW solar farm near Kelso to Scottish Borders Council. The panels would be sited on 12 hectares of land at Wooden Farm with 70% of the site remaining vegetated. The company is also scoping a further two 5 MW solar farms in the Borders at Newmills Farm, near Lauder and the other at Calaburn Farm, near Hawick.

- *The Courier* reported that Green Energy is planning a 30 MW, 162 acre solar farm at Ardgarth Farm in the Sidlaw Hills near Dundee; it would be the largest commercial farm in Scotland.

- The UK government has announced proposals to cut subsidies for small scale solar farms, up to 25 acres (10 hectares) in size, from April 2016. Closure of subsidies for solar farm schemes above 5 MW has already been announced.

#### SHALE GAS

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Ineos is to apply for planning permission to undertake seismic surveys and test drill at four or five sites for shale gas in central Scotland. However, community and environmental groups insist that test drilling would breach the Scottish Government's temporary moratorium on fracking and destroy public trust [Jan 15]. They are demanding that ministers block Ineos's applications.

Energy minister, Fergus Ewing, ordered local authorities and regulators not to permit developments while health risks were investigated and a public consultation was held. The timescale for the investigation and consultation have yet to be announced, and they are now expected to extend beyond the Scottish election in May 2016.

Bill Frew, of an alliance of communities across Scotland opposing fracking and other unconventional gas developments, argued that test drilling was covered by the moratorium and urged ministers to ensure that test drilling did not take place while the moratorium was in force.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, argued that Ineos should be told to await the outcome of the forthcoming consultation. Dr Richard Dixon, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, said: "Communities across the central belt will be up in arms if test drilling turns out to be allowed while Scotland is supposedly still reviewing the health and environmental evidence on unconventional gas and fracking."

Tom Pickering, of Ineos, said that the company did not yet know if the shale gas under central Scotland could be economically exploited. He said: "This is fully consistent with the Scottish Government's desire for further research and would not involve fracking."

**UCG**

*The Herald* reported that Cluff Natural Resources said that it planned to submit a planning application early next year for underground coal gasification (UCG) developments under the Firth of Forth.

Ministers have admitted for the first time that they have the power to block UCG. However, the Scottish Government has given no indication that it plans to step in, despite having called a moratorium on 'granting of planning consents for all unconventional oil and gas developments.' [Feb 15]. The government initially suggested that it had no powers over UCG as it was technically offshore, meaning that it was controlled and licensed by Westminster.

Alex Neil, the Cabinet Secretary with responsibility for planning, responded to a parliamentary question by Lewis Macdonald, Labour's energy spokesman. He said that Scottish ministers would have the power to determine any planning application for onshore infrastructure related to UCG projects, effectively handing Edinburgh a veto as land-based plants are essential.

Dr Richard Dixon, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, described UCG as the most risky form of unconventional gas extraction and called on the Scottish Government to extend the moratorium. He said: "Shale gas and coal bed methane were stopped by ministers telling councils and SEPA not to let them proceed. While the licensing for underground coal gasification is different it could be stopped just as effectively by the same route. The lack of a legal definition of unconventional gas has let the SNP give the impression that they have put a stop to it when UCG has so far escaped."

Lesley Laird, of Fife Council, said that the Scottish Government may also be able to block the development as permission for offshore activity would have to be granted by Marine Scotland.

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said licensing for onshore developments was being devolved, but that this would not be the case for UCG which will remain under the control of the Coal Authority.

• The *BBC News* website reported that a freedom of information request showed that letters had been exchanged between Cluff Natural Resources and Scottish ministers in January. Algy Cluff, of the company, said that he wanted assurances from ministers that the moratorium on unconventional oil and gas would not apply to underground UCG. He said that the moratorium would have a 'potentially devastating' impact on his company's 'ability to operate and invest further in Scotland' worth £250m of investment. Alex Neil replied that the moratorium was: "Specifically about the onshore exploration, appraisal, and production of coal bed methane and shale oil and gas. The moratorium does not apply to the offshore underground gasification of coal."

A Cluff spokesman said: "We wrote to seek clarification on our project as it is not fracking and there would be no scientific or public interest in including deep offshore UCG in any moratorium. Ten years of publicly funded independent research was commissioned by the UK Department of Trade and Industry and concluded in 2009. Its message was that there are no inherent risks associated with the process or the technologies employed in deep offshore UCG so long as site selection and process-management procedures are in place. The point of the fracking moratorium is to make an equivalent assessment of other technologies quite different to deep offshore UCG."

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said: "No company should ever be allowed to hold Scottish ministers or Scotland's environment to ransom like this. This latest revelation again highlights why plans to burn coal under the sea should be a non-starter, and why the Scottish Government must extend its moratorium on unconventional gas extraction to include UCG. The science is clear, to protect our climate the vast majority of fossil fuel reserves must remain unburned. In a worst case scenario, proposals such as these could even extend our use of fossil fuels, locking us into a high-carbon world."

Professor Stuart Haszeldine, of Edinburgh University, said: "Underground coal gasification is environmentally a more sensible way to access the energy from the coal than opencast or deep mining. The best use of this gas is as feedstock for Grangemouth and it's a way of keeping high value jobs in central Scotland for the next 50 years. But finding a way to capture and store the CO<sub>2</sub> produced will be essential."

**COMMUNITY ENERGY FUNDING**

*The Herald* reported that £500,000 has been awarded by the Local Energy Challenge Fund to 23 demonstrator projects throughout Scotland to encourage the use and local ownership of renewable energy. One third of the projects are specifically focussed on town and city areas, building on the already established trend for community ownership of renewable energy sources in more rural areas.



**TOURISM & RECREATION**

**PITLOCHRY DAM**

SSE is to build a £4m visitor centre overlooking its hydro dam in Pitlochry at the head of Loch Faskally in Perthshire. The dam and its fish ladder already attract 50,000 visitors each year. The centre will open in the autumn of 2016 and is expected to double the number of visitors.

**DALKEITH ACCESS**

Dalkeith Country Park, by the Edinburgh city bypass, is owned by The Duke of Buccleuch, *The Sunday Herald* reported that the park is now charging dog walkers £20 for an 'annual pass' and charging ramblers and cyclists £1. CCTV and electric controls have been installed on the main gate, and access restricted at other entrances. Local people said that they have been walking in the park for free for decades.

Dave Morris, formerly director of Ramblers Scotland, accused the duke of taking a 'hostile attitude' to public access. He said that land reform law was being breached by ignoring the free use of Dalkeith Country Park by local people over many years: "[The duke] needs to abandon his charging plans or face legislative action in the Scottish courts to secure public rights of access. The best way for him to have due regard to his access responsibilities is for him to charge only for car parking."

East Lothian Council, which covers part of Dalkeith Country Park, said: "The council is working with Buccleuch to see if the aspirations of the estate can be met while at the same time asserting free right of access from Old Craighall for walkers, riders and cyclists." Midlothian Council, however, said that Buccleuch might be complying with land reform legislation because the estate had previously charged for access in the summer months between 1000 and 1600. The council said that most residents knew they could walk for free outwith those times.

The Buccleuch Estate said that the new security measures were being introduced to prevent anti-social behaviour and the killing of deer but these 'should not deter walkers.'

**GALLAN HEAD**

A community buy-out of a derelict radar station, at Gallan Head, Aird Uig on the Isle of Lewis has been agreed. The Ministry of Defence (MoD)'s former Cold War surveillance station will be used as a whale listening station and dark skies space observatory. The MoD is being asked to help with the restoration costs of the land.

**MARINE SURVEY**

Marine Scotland has launched a national survey of recreation and tourism around the Scottish coast and seas to support the National Marine Plan. See: [www.marinercreationandtourism.scot](http://www.marinercreationandtourism.scot)



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**SRUC**

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) has consulted on the future of the veterinary laboratory in Inverness as part of a review of animal disease surveillance services across Scotland. Part of the SRUC organisation in Inverness is to relocate to the new Inverness Campus at Beechwood on the outskirts of Inverness, but no provision has been made for relocating the laboratory. Closure of the unit would result in dead animals (both wild animals and livestock) having to be taken to Perth, Aberdeen or Thurso for examination and postmortems.

**WES**

Wildlife Estates Scotland (WES)'s first annual report has been published. WES was founded by Scottish Land & Estates with support from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, RSPB Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority. It is supported by the Scottish Government and 250 estates have pledged to become fully accredited members of the initiative.

WES seeks information on 70 named species 'which allows a range of insights including the benefits of conservation efforts and even climate change indicators.' The number of estates reporting populations of red squirrels is increasing, while raptor numbers are growing and numbers of ground nesting birds appear to be largely stable. However, the report found that capercaillie numbers may be dwindling, as are those of the Scottish wildcat. Just under six out of every ten species and habitat designated sites on accredited properties are in predominantly 'favourable condition.'

More than 689,000 visits were made to accredited properties, for activities such as walking and cycling, wild camping, water sports and horse riding.

A further eight Scottish estates have been awarded accreditation by WES, recognising their ongoing work in wildlife management and conservation [Jun 13]. The estates are: Horseuppleuch, Glenfalloch, Glenmuick, Edinglassie, Tulchan, Hopetoun, Altyre and Dalhousie.

The total number of accredited farms and estates across Scotland is now 28, covering nearly 750,000 acres and collectively carrying out around 350 conservation projects related to forestry, farmed landscape, upland management and predator control.

WES is the national version of the EU Wildlife Estates (WE) initiative, endorsed by the European Commission's directorate-general environment, whose objective is to 'protect, preserve and improve the environment for present and future generations.'