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CONSERVATION

FITNESS CHECK

Farming Scotland reported that NFU Scotland wrote to the European Commission regarding the 'Fitness Check' for the EU Habitats and Birds Directives [May 15]. NFU Scotland argued that the focus should be on delivering a natural environment that is in balance with rural land uses such as crofting and farming. Such an approach would be a marked change from the current protectionist and precautionary approach, but would better suit both nature and its custodians. NFU Scotland made six key demands:

- EU nature legislation should require member states to set aside sufficient funds to pay farmers any income forgone or additional costs above other legal requirements associated with keeping designated sites in favourable condition status or hosting protected species.

- There must be a more balanced weighing of interests in EU nature legislation, especially when species are assessed as being of least concern on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

- Given that several of the most 'contentious' species (such as sea eagle, barnacle goose and beaver) are assessed as being of 'least concern' the list of species given protection via the directives must be accurate and reflect the situation in different parts of the EU.

- Article 41 (Right to Good Administration) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union should be enshrined in EU nature legislation via a requirement for meaningful and substantial consultation with land managers prior to any species reintroduction.

- The provision in the Birds Directive to derogate in order to 'prevent serious damage to ... livestock' is particularly challenging to evidence when dealing with the extensive sheep farming that typifies much of Scotland. There should be scope to derogate on the basis of factors that are applicable in such situations.

- EU nature legislation must be reformed to include clear obligations on member states to have proportionate and responsive plans in place for the management of negative impacts on agriculture and the long-term funding to implement such plans.

Andrew Bauer, of NFU Scotland, said: "Some have chosen to misrepresent criticism of current EU nature legislation as an attack on nature. Quite the opposite is true. NFU Scotland and others have argued that farmers and crofters want to do more for nature, but are often held back by insufficient funds and rigid rules. Furthermore, current rules that protect one species at the expense of all others are neither sensible nor sustainable. We need reforms that will allow us to be more adaptable, with a move away from a protectionist mindset towards one that is focused on building a rich and healthy environment that is in balance with farming, crofting and other landuses."

RED SQUIRRELS

The Herald reported that the Heritage Lottery Fund has granted £1.2m to Red Squirrels United, a coalition led by The Wildlife Trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels partnership. Funding will support a four-year programme to secure the future of the native red squirrel across the UK.

Grey squirrels will be culled to preserve existing areas which are free of the non-native species and conifer woodland habitat protected where red squirrels thrive and greys do not.

PENTLAND PARK

The Herald reported that a Holyrood select committee's consultation, into plans to extend the southern boundary of the Pentland Hills Regional Park to include the whole of the Pentland Hills range, has concluded [Aug 15].

NFU Scotland claimed that over recent years, funding and resources for the existing park have been under increasing strain as local authority budgets have been tightened and services cut. With local authorities warning that additional funding will not feature in future budgets, it is claimed that the bill has overlooked the funding requirements that an extended park will require. The bill could lead to the incorporation of approximately 20 further farm businesses unequipped to take on the unofficial stewardship role bestowed upon them to finance essential maintenance, including repairs to paths and fencing.

Scottish Borders Council has objected to plans to extend the park. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS) are in favour of the extension.

PINE MARTENS

Woodland Trust (WT) Scotland reported that pine martens have colonised a new woodland, planted between 2001 and 2010, in the Ochils. The woodland includes Geordies' Wood, Glen Sherup and Glen Quey between Stirling, Alloa, Kinross and Perth. Black grouse have also risen in number and established new lekking sites, and breeding long-eared owls have been recorded this year.

ASSYNT DEER

The *BBC News* website reported that crofters have renewed their criticism of the John Muir Trust's (JMT) decision not to fence off woodland on its Quinag Estate in Assynt against deer and to cull instead [Oct 12]. The *West Highland Free Press* said that the JMT wanted to quadruple their stag cull to protect a small area of designated woodland. The local deer group proposed a fence to balance conservation needs with neighbouring stalking incomes.

JMT said that cull targets should be set by government and not cooperatively by local groups. The Scottish Gamekeepers Association (SGA) said that private and community landowners' sporting rights are being ignored. However, the Scottish Parliament's rural affairs committee elected to continue the cooperative approach, ordering deer management groups to produce management plans by 2016. The Assynt Peninsula sub-group said that this has now been completed for its area.

SNH helicopter counts between spring 2013 and November 2014 found 693 deer 'un-accounted' for. The SGA said that official deer counts showed there were 881 deer whereas there were 1,419 some 18 months ago.

RUM DEER

Commercial stag shooting on the island of Rum has been leased to a sporting business run by

Gallanach Lodge on Muck, which offers shooting to its guests. The Lodge will now be in charge of carrying out the stag cull on behalf of SNH during 2015 and 2016 in line with the National Nature Reserve (NNR)'s objectives. There are thought to be around 1,000 red deer on Rum NNR which is managed by SNH for Scottish ministers.

Chris Donald, of SNH, said: "It is a novel concept for us as it allows paying guests to be responsible for conservation management and helps bring a new sort of visitor to Rum to experience the fantastic wildlife and landscape. And red deer welfare is very firmly at the heart of what we are doing."

He said the contract was rigorous in applying the principles of good animal husbandry and ethical shooting practices within the reserve.

GLENFESHIE DEER

The *Sunday Times* reported that a record 1,400 red deer were shot on the Glenfeshie Estate on Speyside. Estate owner, Anders Povlsen, defended the cull as unavoidable because animals were intruding from neighbouring land. Staff on the estate have warned that deer from Atholl Estate and Mar Lodge, where higher deer populations are tolerated, are frustrating efforts to rewild the land with plantations of native Caledonian pine. There are also concerns that flora and fauna protected under EU law are being trampled.

Mr Povlsen has proposed that a 1.6m high fence is erected along a 40 mile boundary between the Glenfeshie and Atholl Estates; he doesn't want it on his land but is willing to contribute towards the estimated cost of £1m.

Eight conservation bodies wrote a letter to the *Sunday Times*: "Your article discussed the difficulties of agreeing and achieving joint objectives for deer management and protecting important natural heritage sites. Deer fencing to resolve competing objectives is not a long-term solution. The red deer population is estimated at more than 400,000. In the absence of predators such as the wolf and lynx, deer populations require to be managed. The Glenfeshie Estate holds one of the most important remnants of Scotland's native Caledonian pinewood, specially protected under European law, and which had previously been heavily damaged by deer browsing.

"Anders Povlsen has taken the bold and positive step of reducing deer numbers on Glenfeshie to a level that will allow the native pinewood and other important habitats to recover. It is a tried and tested method of native woodland restoration that deer numbers first need to be reduced before effective tree regeneration can occur. After 15-20 years, deer populations can be allowed to increase gradually to sustainable levels, as deer browsing is an important component of a healthy woodland ecosystem. SNH has published its code of sustainable deer management. Glenfeshie Estate is following this, restoring some of the finest native woodlands, and thereby contributing to wider landscape-scale conservation efforts in the Cairngorms National Park. Deer stalking is still taking place, with healthier deer, and a wildlife rich habitat."

Signatories were RSPB Scotland, JMT, The Scottish Wildlife Trust, The Cairngorms Campaign, Trees for Life, WT Scotland, Ramblers Scotland and the Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group.

GEESE & WINDFARMS

SNH has published a commissioned review which contributes to the assessment of windfarm applications by measuring the amount of goose flight activity at different distances from goose roosts in Special Protection Area (SPAs). It provides data which will allow calculation of the

mean level of goose flight activity to be expected at the site of a proposed windfarm.

There are currently many applications for small-scale windfarms, often in areas associated with significant levels of flight and/or feeding activity by greylag and pink-footed geese. Even if the predicted number of collision casualties is low at any given windfarm development, the cumulative impact could become significant if large numbers of turbines were to be built in areas with high densities of geese. See: www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/735.pdf

WILDCATS

The *BBC News* website reported that two cases of feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) has been confirmed for the first time in Morvern, one of the last remaining strongholds for the species. The feline form of HIV has been confirmed by Edinburgh University's Royal Dick School of Veterinary Studies and the National Museums Scotland. There is no vaccine. FIV is transmitted when adult male cats fight; neutering is key to tackling the disease. The virus was found in cats with mixed domestic and wildcat ancestry.

• Wildcat Haven has launched a crowd-funding plan to help support land purchases and ongoing fieldwork for a network of wildcat reserves in the West Highlands. Dr Paul O'Donoghue said that linking up with landowners will be critical to creating a haven large enough to home a sustainable population of wildcats. He said: "We need reserves where the wildcat is the absolute priority, oases acting as strongholds for wildcat populations that can never be developed, deforested or covered in windmills."

NATIONAL PARKS

A joint research report, *Future National Parks in Scotland – Possible Governance Models*, published by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks (SCNP) and the APRS states that creating more National Parks need not be unduly complicated or expensive [Mar 15].

Ross Anderson, of SCNP, said: "This is the second in our series of research reports building on our *Unfinished Business* report published a couple of years ago which called for the creation of more National Parks. It clearly shows that future National Parks in Scotland would cover smaller areas and would have fewer staff, smaller boards and lower budgets than either of our two existing National Parks."

John Mayhew, of APRS, said: "The flexibility built into the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000 provides significant scope for a variety of approaches depending on the character and needs of the area concerned, whilst maintaining the balance between national significance and local accountability."

The report argues that as the seven additional National Parks proposed by SCNP and APRS extend into only one or two council areas, they could each cost as little as £1.5m to £3.0m per annum to run, with no more than 10 to 30 staff and 8 to 13 board members. See: <http://bit.ly/1Vb3hf2>

GALLOWAY RED KITES

RSPB Scotland has confirmed that there are 91 nesting pairs of red kites in Dumfries & Galloway, with at least 112 chicks this year. Nearly 85% of nesting pairs were successful, resulting in the high number of chicks. The Galloway reintroduction project started in 2001, with a feeding station set up at Belymack Hill Farm in 2003.

Calum Murray, of the Galloway Kite Trail, said: "There is clear evidence that our population is slowly spreading as was intended, with some pairs now nesting up to 25 miles from the feeding station. However, red kites are gregarious and like

many social species, spread slowly over time. For this reason, they will take time to repopulate other parts of Scotland. Most of the population do not use the feeding station but rather, hunt and scavenge naturally, many of which will benefit from silaging, haymaking, harvesting and ploughing as well as finding roadkills."



FARMING

SUPPORT PAYMENTS

Farmers can now apply for share of a £38.8m fund to support beef and upland sheep. The support for beef producers, £32.7m, replaces the old Scottish Beef Scheme and will reward farmers for calves born on or after 2 December 2014. The Upland Sheep Support Scheme is new and will provide support to help maintain flocks in some of the most challenging agricultural land in Scotland. Payments under both schemes are due in 2016.

In order to be eligible for the £6.1m sheep scheme, a sheep producer must have homebred ewe hogs, no more than 200 hectares of payment region 1 land and 80% of the holding must consist of land in payment region 3. Payment will be restricted to one ewe hogg for every four hectares. The scheme is targeted at sheep production on the poorest quality land; other sheep producers are not eligible for this scheme but will receive higher payments under the Basic and Greening Payments schemes.

• The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the new ewe hogg scheme has opened for applications. Common grazings have had their allocation under the Basic Payment scheme based on the activity of the grazings as a whole rather than for each individual producer. This averaging can result in neighbours with a lower stocking density directly affecting a crofter who has been more active.

NFU Scotland (Skye branch) has asked the Scottish Government to look again at the rules which will make some crofters unable to access the new scheme. Some crofters have been allocated payment region 2 on their in-bye rough grazings but payment region 3 for their common grazings; this has disbarred them from the ewe hogg scheme as 80% of the land must be in payment region 3 – an unintended negative consequence for active livestock producers on common grazings.

HILL FARMING

The *BBC News* website reported that a group of Sutherland crofters has appealed to the Scottish Government to introduce a fairer subsidy system for hill farmers. They accused the government of favouring arable farming and want similar levels of subsidy payments as their English and Welsh counterparts, where hill receive up to almost 13 times more per hectare.

Richard Lochhead, cabinet secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment, said that the government had come up with a subsidy system that supports a range of farming types. He said that payments to crofters overall would go up from £20m a year to £33m by 2019.

GM CROPS

The *Herald* reported that the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has said that the decision to ban the cultivation of genetically modified (GM) crops in Scotland was not based on scientific evidence [Aug 15]. Ministers were unable to consult the Scottish Government's chief scientific adviser because the post has lain vacant since last year. Ms Sturgeon said: "The science and the decision on the suitability of a GM crop for a particular area [in the EU] are quite distinct. The decision that the Scottish Government took, therefore, was not one based on scientific considerations but, rather, one which took into account the potential wider economic

ramifications that growing GM crops might have for Scotland.”

She failed to clarify whether Professor Louise Heathwaite, the lead scientific adviser to the Rural Affairs & Environment department, had been consulted.

The *BBC News* website reported that the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) was one of almost 30 scientific bodies which subsequently signed an open letter to Richard Lochhead criticising the decision [Aug 15]. In a new response, RSE called for a rational debate on the issue of growing GM crops in contrast to the ‘emotive language’ used by Mr Lochhead. It claimed that the ban was not imposed on the basis of scientific advice and that the Scottish Government risked being branded ‘anti-science’ by imposing the ban without apparently taking any scientific advice or carrying out a public consultation. It said that Mr Lochhead’s announcement was ‘likely to fuel negative public perceptions about GM and related technologies (and) assumes a degree of public hostility to GM that is not supported by recent public attitude surveys.’

An RSE spokesman said: “The RSE is strongly of the view that expert scientific advice should be available to government ministers and civil servants when considering policy issues related to science. From the ambiguous government responses to the question of whether the Chief Scientific Adviser (Rural Affairs, Food & the Environment) had been involved in the decision to ban the growing of GM crops, it would appear that she was not, despite her evident expertise in this area. It is also unfortunate that the Scottish Government’s announcement was made at a time when the post of Chief Scientific Adviser had been vacant since the start of the year and there are many vacancies on the Scottish Science Advisory Council.”



WOODLANDS

CHALARA ASH DIEBACK

New cases of Chalara ash dieback, *chalara fraxinia*, have been found within the sheltered area of north west Scotland to the west of a buffer zone established diagonally from the Moray Firth to the Clyde and in which all infected trees were to be removed [May 15]. The sheltered area covers most of the Highlands and Islands. It was hoped that this sheltered area could remain disease-free for up to 20 years, allowing new approaches to be developed. Chalera was found at different sites within a series of a dozen 10 km squares from central Sutherland to the forests west of Inverness, from the Great Glen to Wester Ross, and Morvern down into Argyll.

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland has now confirmed that it will no longer be issuing Statutory Plant Health Notices requiring the removal of Chalara-infected, recently planted ash trees in the sheltered area of north-west Scotland and its associated buffer. This change in approach has the support of the Scottish Tree Health Advisory Group comprised of representatives across the Scottish Government, FC Scotland, environmental bodies and the land use and commercial sectors.

The sheltered area and buffer were established in 2013 in a bid to slow the arrival and spread of the pathogen in the wider environment to help protect its high nature conservation value ash woodlands in that area [Mar 13].

Dr Anna Brown, of FC Scotland, said: “Evidence available at the time the sheltered area was established suggested ash at this location was least likely to be at risk from airborne spores.

Statutory action requiring the removal and destruction of recently planted, infected ash, was therefore one of the principal tools that we could use to try and slow the spread of Chalara. Now that the disease has been detected in the wider environment these measures are no longer appropriate. However, the fight against Chalara continues with an increasing focus on adaptive actions such as collecting ash seed for future use, surveying ash trees for signs of potential disease tolerance, and monitoring of environmental changes in a sample of high nature conservation value ash woodlands.”

Already underway, the adaptive actions complement existing guidance on preserving the environmental benefits of Chalara-infected woodlands, which advises to keep the ash trees for as long as possible. Infected trees are not felled unless there are public safety concerns, because they can help research into the disease. In addition, further guidance on managing high nature conservation value ash woodland is in development. The Chalara Action Plan for Scotland has been fully revised to reflect the change in circumstances.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

FARMED SALMON

The *BBC News* website reported that the *Scottish Fish Farm Production Survey 2014* has been published by Marine Scotland Science. Production of Scottish farmed salmon rose to a record level last year, with 179,022 tonnes of farmed Atlantic salmon produced – 10% more than in 2013. Production tonnage of rainbow trout increased by 4.8% in 2014 to 5,882 tonnes. Brown trout/sea trout production increased by four tonnes to 48 tonnes in 2014.

The survey also reported that the number of jobs in the fishfarming industry rose from 1,625 in 2013 to 1,796 last year. Aquaculture revenue in Scotland is now estimated to be worth £1.86 billion annually to the economy, an increase of £110m year-on-year, supporting over 8,300 jobs.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said that the fishfarming industry should commit to protecting the environment from harm as a result of its activities. He said: “Scotland’s salmon farming industry must be about quality, not just quantity. It must be about protecting the environment, not putting it at risk. With the environmental impacts of salmon farming under close scrutiny once again, more of the industry needs to commit to independent labelling schemes – such as that run by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council – which will improve transparency and allow consumers to know that their salmon was produced to the very best environmental standards.”

See: www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FHI/surveys

SALMON NETTING

George Pullar, of Usan Salmon Fisheries Ltd, has been replaced as the representative of the Salmon Net Fishing Association of Scotland (SNFAS) on the Scottish Government Wild Fisheries Reform Stakeholder Reference Group (WFRSRG) after Usan was fined for breaches of wildlife conservation legislation [Aug 15].

John Robins, of Animal Concern, said that Usan is still a member of SNFAS and will be able to influence government policy through their input to the WFRSRG.

KILL LICENCES

The Scottish Government is to consult further on revised proposals on salmon kill licences for wild salmon fisheries, after extensive consultation over

the past six months. The government has moved away from the idea of an individual licensing system and will not be pursuing the introduction of any charging regime. However, the concept of a conservation plan will be introduced in areas where salmon fail to achieve good conservation status. The following salmon conservation measures are now proposed:

- The killing of salmon will be managed on an annual basis by categorising fishery districts and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in relation to their conservation status;
- Fishing outwith estuary limits will be prohibited for a period of three years followed by a review;
- Steps to reduce killing of salmon will be required in areas where salmon are in moderate conservation status;
- The killing of salmon will be allowed in areas in good conservation status;
- Conservation plans will be required in areas where salmon fail to meet good conservation status;
- Fishing will be restricted to catch and release only, ending deliberate killing, in areas where salmon are in poor conservation status.

The Herald reported that Hughie Campbell Adamson, of the Salmon & Trout Conservation Society Scotland, said: “We have long advocated that any exploitation of salmon should be limited to rivers and fisheries with a clear sustainable surplus. There is little point in creating a burdensome administrative system for rivers with healthy stocks. In such circumstances it makes sense to maintain the *status quo*.”

Katy Dickson, of Scottish Land & Estates, said: “The measures appear to be more targeted and there is an appreciation that one size does not fit all when it comes to wild fisheries policy.”

The *BBC News* website reported that Duncan Ferguson, of the Scottish Gamekeeper’s Association (SGA) Fishing Group, said: “The environment minister deserves praise for listening and acting. The kill license concept would have been very difficult to enforce and police and, in some cases, may have led to more fish rather than less being killed, especially given the high level of voluntary catch and release being operated already by rod anglers. The SGA Fishing Group believes the ideas now up for discussion could help to strike the right balance between salmon conservation, which is necessary, and the needs of the workers and communities that depend on anglers coming to our rivers to fish, and the benefits that brings.”

See: <http://bit.ly/1FztU6g>

SALMON DEATHS

Over 100 wild salmon were found dead in the Allan Water, near Dunblane. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency was called in amid fears the fish could have been poisoned, but said that stress due to low water could be to blame.

FIRTH OF LORN SAC

The *Sunday Herald* reported that Marine Scotland has seized fishing gear from an un-named boat and submitted a report to the Procurator Fiscal accusing fishermen of illegally dredging for scallops in the Firth of Lorn SAC in Argyll. The Scottish Government has banned scallop dredging, which pulls toothed rakes across the sea-floor, in the SAC [Mar 07].

The Firth of Lorn is monitored by satellite, aerial surveillance and at sea by Marine Scotland. A spokesman said: “Over the last twelve months four intelligence reports of activity in the closed area have been received, all of which have been followed-up and investigated. In the past month a report has been submitted to the Procurator

Fiscal after enforcement officers detected a vessel allegedly fishing illegally in the Firth of Lorn SAC. The fishing equipment was also seized under powers granted by the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010."

However, a map of vessel movements in the firth logged by satellite and recently published by the Scottish Government showed 'high' and 'very high' densities of scallop dredging between 2007 and 2013. Scottish Environment LINK suggested that this showed a 'possible breaching of the existing regulations, which needs urgently addressed.'

Calum Duncan, convenor of LINK's marine taskforce, said: "The report of alleged illegal fishing in the Firth of Lorn further underlines the need to effectively monitor scallop boats in places where they are prohibited from dredging. In April last year, vessel monitoring evidence prompted a dredging ban in Loch Alsh near Skye to protect fragile reefs. Safeguarding these habitats is vital for the health of our seas."

Bertie Armstrong of the Scottish Fisherman's Federation (SFF) disputed that there was a high level of scallop dredging in the Firth of Lorn. He said that the monitoring system only showed that boats were present, not that they were fishing, and so was 'inaccurate and open to misinterpretation.' He claimed that Scottish Environment LINK was guilty of 'constructive mischief.' He said: "It is really disappointing that they have chosen to draw conclusions which are not supported."

David Ainsley, a marine biologist who runs a wildlife watching business in the Firth of Lorn, argued that dredgers shown circling islands in the area could not be explained as 'just passing through.' He said: "It is of great concern that the current policing system is not effective at preventing illegal fishing in protected areas."

ELECTRO-FISHING

The *Sunday Herald* reported that enforcement officers from Marine Scotland caught a fishing boat illegally electrocuting razor clams in the Sound of Jura [Jun 15]. Fishing gear was thrown overboard by the fishermen as Marine Scotland approached, but it has since been recovered by divers and confiscated. The razor clams were being harvested in an area that had not been licensed for shellfishing.

The fisheries minister, Richard Lochhead, said: "It is vital that our reputation is not damaged by produce caught in waters which have not been classified as fit for human consumption. Unsuspecting consumers could catch shellfish poisoning from eating the illegal razor clams from unclassified waters. That is why catching those involved in this illegal activity is vitally important."

Electro-fishing is not currently permitted in Scottish waters. Recorded catches of razor clams have fallen from 915 tonnes worth £3.1m in 2013 to 423 tonnes worth £1.6m in 2014. Since 2008, there have been 32 cases of alleged illegal electro-fishing around the Scottish coast. Of those, 18 have been fined, five have not been punished, four cases are with the Procurator Fiscal and five are still under consideration by Marine Scotland.

David Grieve, a shellfish merchant on Loch Leven, has been campaigning to make electro-fishing legal, by requesting a derogation under European law. He said: "With the amount of illegal fishing still going on, I can't see Lochhead going to Brussels for a derogation."

SCOTTISH SEA FISHERIES

Scotland's chief statistician has published the final *Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics 2014* which shows that the value of fish landed by Scottish

vessels increased by 18% in real terms from 2013. The quantity of fish landed increased by 31% from 2013 [May 15].

481,000 tonnes of sea fish and shellfish were landed by Scottish based vessels in 2014, with a value of £514m. The increase in the overall value of landings was driven predominantly by an increase in value of pelagic species – pelagic landings values increased by 42% to £220m; demersal landings values increased by 1% to £143m and shellfish landings values increased by 8% to £151m.

Mackerel is the most valuable stock to the Scottish fleet, accounting for 38% (£195m) of the total value of Scottish landings. In 2014, mackerel landings increased in value in real terms by 52%, driven by the quantity of mackerel landed increasing 79% from 2013. Nephrops are the most valuable shellfish species to the Scottish fishing industry, accounting for 15% (£75m) of the total value of all Scottish landings. The value of nephrops landings by Scottish vessels increased by 14% in real terms from 2013, driven by an 11% increase in the quantity landed and a 3% increase in the price *per tonne*.

North Sea cod, North Sea monkfish and west of Scotland monkfish saw close to 100% uptake of the quota available in 2014. Uptake for both North Sea haddock and west of Scotland haddock exceeded 100%. North Sea nephrops quota uptake reached 78%, higher than the uptake in 2013. This is due to a lower quota being set in 2014 as well as an increase in quantity landed. Quota uptake for North Sea herring and west of Scotland mackerel exceeded 100%, similar to 2013.

The number of active fishing vessels based in Scotland was 2,030 at the end of 2014, representing an increase of ten vessels. At the end of 2014, there was a rise of 21 vessels in the 10m and under fleet to 1,447 vessels and a reduction of 11 vessels in the over 10m fleet to 583 vessels. Demersal sector vessels reduced by ten to 194 vessels; shellfish sector vessels increased by one to 368 vessels and the pelagic sector reduced by two to 21 vessels. The number of fishermen employed on Scottish based vessels was 4,796 at the end of 2014, 196 fewer than in 2013.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01171

DISCARD BAN

Under the Scottish Government's interpretation of the new Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), from January 2016 fishermen will have the cost of storing and then transporting unwanted catch to one of Scotland's two fishmeal plants in Aberdeen and Lerwick unless other means of getting rid of the fish are found and agreed. The discard ban now forces fishermen to land their entire catch, instead of throwing unwanted and undersized fish overboard; larger boats based on the west coast might – if they were fishing in the North Sea – decide to land their catches at ports close to the two fishmeal plants rather than their usual home ports to save on road transport costs. Fishermen are unlikely to earn more than £100 *per tonne*, or £5 for each box of fish sent to a fishmeal plant, while it would cost around £8.50 a box to send the fish from Mallaig to the nearest fishmeal plant in Aberdeen.

Tom Bryan-Brown, of the Mallaig & North-West Fishermen's Association, said that the 'astronomic' storage and transport costs could put some smaller boats out of business.

Ian Duncan MEP, who helped draft the EU landings obligation regulation, said that the legislation requires member states and not the industry to pay for the onshore storage and transport of unwanted fish but that the Scottish Government has 'chosen to interpret the regulation

in the manner most detrimental to fishermen.'

The phased discard ban, first introduced for pelagic fish like herring and mackerel in January 2015, has so far had little impact in Scotland. Fishing for these species, which swim in concentrated shoals, does not create a large by-catch of unwanted fish. From January 2016, and for the following three years, the ban will be gradually extended to all fish species including demersal whitefish species such as cod, haddock and whiting.

Duncan MacInnes, of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said that the small quantities of unwanted fish that would be landed at the smallest ports on the west coast would make the building of storage infrastructure financially unviable, regardless of whether the EU, or the Scottish Government or the industry was paying. In addition to the cost of storing and transporting unmarketable fish, he said that fishermen will also be hit by the additional cost of having to 'lease quota' for unwanted fish which the discard ban will now force them to land. He said: "The most fragile and peripheral areas are going to be hit the hardest by the new landings obligation. Certainly we don't believe the cost of implementing this should fall on fishermen. In most cases, the added fuel costs of transporting the fish will outweigh the price of the fish. There are still huge question marks around the whole implementation of this."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "EU member states have a responsibility to facilitate the disposal of undersized or unmarketable fish and the Scottish Government has issued guidance to the industry and early indications suggest this should not be a major issue. Where fishermen do bring undersized fish ashore, we are working with both the fishing and onshore industries to explore all viable disposal options for its use such as fishmeal, bait or compost.

"In addition to this we are considering how we can support the development of new markets for species which are not currently commonly landed but may appear more frequently as a result of the landing obligation. We are also developing mechanisms to ensure that financial support is available through the European Maritime & Fisheries Fund and the Scottish Government to fund the necessary investment both within the fleet and onshore to deal with unwanted landings."

SUBMARINE RANGE

Ian Blackford MP said that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) was continuing with its proposal to double the size of the torpedo range off Raasay without proper public consultation [Apr 15]. He said that the proposed change to the British Underwater Test and Evaluation Centre (BUTEC) in the Inner Sound, between Applecross and Rona, could threaten the livelihood of around 140 fishermen in the area.

Mr Blackford wrote to Michael Fallon, the UK Defence Secretary, calling for him to make an urgent House of Commons statement on the issue when the UK parliament returns from its party conference recess in October. A notice to change local byelaws appeared in the *West Highland Free Press* during the parliamentary recess. Mr Blackford said: "Despite repeated requests for a public consultation to be carried out before any attempt was made to adopt new byelaws, this has clearly not happened and the MoD seem determined to ride roughshod over the communities of the western Highlands & Islands."

An MoD spokesperson said: "The consultation is already underway with a range of stakeholders, including local communities and sea-users, regarding the proposed expansion of the Raasay Ranges. We have been clear that we are committed to proper engagement as part of the MoD byelaw review and no decision on the ranges will be made until this is complete."

QinetiQ has already undertaken a separate consultation process with local fisherman explaining the likely impact of range change layouts. Fishing is prohibited in the current area and fishing boats and other vessels can only remain in the BUTEC test area for as long as it is necessary for them to pass through the Inner Sound.

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that the consultation will begin on 30 September, when the byelaw changes would be available to view on the gov.uk website.

According to Marine Scotland figures, £1.7m will be lost to the local economy every year if the expansion plans for the Raasay Range go ahead. A spokesman for the North West Responsible Fishermen's Association said: "This loss would have a long-lasting effect on the area, and the displacement of vessels would be felt north to Gairloch and south to Mallaig with a 'domino effect' as gear was moved from the new range area. There will also be an increase in gear conflict. As it is, creel boats lose thousands of pounds annually because of trawl activity, this in the form of lost creels and lost days looking for them. The existing area open to trawlers would also be under pressure from the static gear sector."



MARINE

GHOST GEAR

The Global Ghost Gear Initiative has been launched in Orkney. The term ghost gear refers to any fishing equipment or related litter that has been abandoned or lost, such as nets and floats. An estimated 640,000 tonnes of fishing gear is added to the world's oceans annually. The initiative's first project was to clean up Scapa Flow. Divers from World Animal Protection, Healthy Seas and Ghost Fishing were involved.

Christina Dixon, of Sea Change, said: "The lost and abandoned fishing gear is a significant risk and environmental hazard. Discarded pots can cause the unnecessary suffering and death of many marine creatures as they continue to 'ghost fish' and places additional strain on fishing stocks."

BASKING SHARKS

The Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT) has had 88 reports of basking sharks so far this year, compared to 48 in all of 2014, one of the worst years on record; the HWDT's best year for sightings was 2010, with 162 seen. Since 2007, the average group size reported has decreased from seven to three. The largest group this year was 40 animals, seen off Eriskay in June.

- A Marine Scotland deepsea survey has identified a new species of shark in Scottish waters, a false catshark sometimes known as a sofa shark, *Pseudotrachias microdon*. Marine Scotland, the Shark Trust and the Scottish Shark Tagging Programme have produced a list of Scottish elasmobranchs (sharks, rays and skates), which now stands at 72 species.

SPERM WHALE

The *BBC News* website reported that a lone sperm whale has been spotted north of Portpatrick, Dumfries & Galloway. The Sea Watch Foundation said that this may be one of the most southerly sightings of a sperm whale on the west coast of the UK, but it was unverified as no photograph was taken. They are more commonly spotted in waters off the northwest coast of Scotland.

ORCA OCEAN WATCH

The crews of three Caledonian MacBrayne ferries reported cetacean sightings for the first UK Ocean

Watch survey by the marine wildlife charity Orca. The routes included Oban to Colonsay, Oban to Coll, Tiree & Barra, and Mallaig to the Small Isles. 50 sightings of whales and dolphins were made between 25 July and 2 August. The data will be used to determine the conservation status of the animals and the health of their environment.

MARINE ENERGY

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has produced new guidance for the marine renewables industry which has gone out to public consultation. The guidance supports developers undertaking collision risk assessments, describing three models which can be used to estimate the number of animals likely to collide with tidal arrays. It also provides a step-by-step process of estimating animal densities at collision risk depth. Current knowledge of how marine wildlife interacts with tidal turbine arrays is limited.

See: <http://bit.ly/1QmSsj6>

INVASIVE MARINE SPECIES

The *BBC News* website said that a report commissioned by SNH recommended that marinas, fishfarms and navigation buoys should all be regularly monitored to help provide early warnings of the spread of invasive marine species. An estimated 58 invasive species cause at least £40m worth of damage a year to UK marine industries, the report said.

Several techniques for monitoring non-native species were tested at sites including Loch Fyne and Firth of Lorn, and the Firth of Forth. The report has recommended that a network of sites could be surveyed for the presence of invasive plant and animal life.



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

MPAs

The Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change and Environment committee wrote to Richard Lochhead, the fisheries minister, asking him to postpone issuing six statutory instruments, bringing 30 Marine Protected Areas (MPA)s into force, until after they heard new evidence from fishermen's groups [Aug 15]. The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Government agreed to the delay and that the committee heard opposing views from the fishing industry on MPAs, which are due to be introduced in October. Organisations representing trawler owners and crews from the Clyde and up the west coast to Lochinver said restrictions on fishing grounds in winter would deny boats sheltered waters during stormy weather. They also criticised Marine Scotland's consultation on MPAs.

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Duncan MacInnes, of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said that fishermen were not opposed to protecting the seabed, but had concerns about how MPAs would be managed. He asked that the Marine Scotland statistics, being used to justify the closure/restriction of several key fishing areas, be looked at again. Fragile communities would suffer huge economic losses with 'no environmental gain.'

Alistair Sinclair, of the Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation, told MSPs that his sector welcomed the introduction of the protected areas, with scallop divers welcoming limits on some fishing methods such as scallop dredging.

Councillor Uisdean Robertson, of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, said: "Islanders have been living in harmony with the environment for hundreds of years. We have been fishing these grounds for

decades and have seen no decline in scallop stocks: indeed many of the areas earmarked for closure are showing increased populations of mature scallops."

LAND REFORM

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) made a submission to the Scottish Parliament Rural Affairs committee call for evidence on the recently published Land Reform Bill. SCF said that it is in favour of land reform but that there needs to be better provision made for creation of crofts.

Russell Smith of SCF said: "We will be pushing for the enactment of all the recommendations made by the Land Reform Review Group in their excellent report *The Land of Scotland and the Common Good*. But we need to see more people managing smaller units of land and greater parity and transparency in the way our land is administered, to achieve this vision. There are welcome provisions within the bill to allow existing and newly-formed community bodies to buy land from private owners to put it to community use.

"But this assumes there is a community. There are vast tracts of rural land that no longer have a resident community, it having been cleared centuries ago. It seems that a very important part of the policy intention is being missed from the bill. For centuries the wealthy and the powerful have cleared communities off the land that supported them and it is time the land went back to supporting many families rather than the few.

"SCF therefore suggests consideration be given for Scottish ministers (or their delegates) to be able to force the sale of privately-held land where the land is being neglected or misused, on behalf of the public in order to restore the land to community benefit. The necessary use of compulsory purchase is shameful for the large land-owning entities that have shown no interest in helping to bring communities back by re-creating crofts on the land that they control. The creation of small units to maximise community numbers and use would be highly recommended. We would, naturally, suggest that these units come under crofting legislation as this has evolved, and is evolving, as a framework of rights and responsibilities envied by many outwith Scotland.

"Crofters must disclose who owns or rents croft land, must live on or near the land and must put the land to purposeful use. They must be responsible custodians of the land. The contrast with the 'landlord' is stark: a crofter on ten hectares is obliged to fulfil all these requirements, whilst a landlord of an estate of thousands of hectares is permitted to hide ownership, reside abroad and not put the land to purposeful use. Land reform in Scotland should be working towards it

"Being mandatory that landlords and non-croft land-owners should also disclose ownership, live on or near their land and make good use the land. This is at the heart of 'common good.' The bill falls short of some of the land reform review group's recommendations, such as there being a maximum amount of land one person or company can own, or that any entity wishing to own Scottish land should be registered in the EU. We hope that any further amendments of the bill will bring increased public benefit from Scotland's land resource, more transparency of land ownership and use, and, vitally, the increase in diversity and number of people managing and occupying Scotland's land through small units such as crofts, woodland crofts, small-holdings and allotments."

- *The Scottish Farming Leader* reported that NFU Scotland has made its written submission to the Scottish Government's call for evidence on the bill. NFU Scotland believes firmly that the use of the land, rather than physical ownership, should

be the focus of this bill. In addition, it believes that the bill should be renamed the Land Reform & Agricultural Holdings Bill. As the foremost land use in Scotland, it is vital that any Rights & Responsibilities Statement specifically includes regard for agriculture and food production. It is vital that the Scottish Land Commission ensures that there is a level of practical land management and agriculture expertise amongst the commissioners; the remit of agriculture cannot be totally represented by the tenant farming commissioner alone.

Farmers are an integral part of rural communities, which is not reflected in the bill. NFU Scotland does not understand why the right to buy land to further sustainable development is contained within the bill, as compulsory purchase powers have existed since 1973. The proposal is unnecessarily harsh, and does not give due consideration to the balance of landowner or occupier rights. There is no level of accountability for communities which is totally at odds with increasing accountability for landowners and occupiers earlier in the bill. NFU Scotland is concerned that the provision for deer in the bill is pre-empting a review which is due to report in 2016 [Jun 15]. See: <http://bit.ly/1G6A3S8>

CROWN ESTATE

The first meeting of the Crown Estate Devolution Stakeholder Group took place, including representatives from councils, NFU Scotland, Oil and Gas UK, Scottish Renewables, the Scottish Salmon Producers' Organisations and others. The group brings together all those with an interest in the Crown Estate to involve them in discussions about devolution of the management and revenues of Crown Estate assets in Scotland, interim arrangements for those functions and a long term framework for management of assets.

Rural affairs secretary, Richard Lochhead, said that current UK plans are needlessly complex and limit devolution.

- *The Herald* reported that farming tenants of the Crown Estate are seeking assurances that devolution of the land asset to Scottish Government control under the Scotland Bill would not mean disruption for their businesses. NFU Scotland has a significant number of members who are tenants on Crown Estate land, particularly on the Glenlivet, Whitehill, Applegirth and Fochabers Estates.

Allan Bowie, of NFU Scotland, said: "Fixed asset investment is essential and can only be justified if looked at in a ten to 20 year time frame. The Crown Estates have been able to invest in their rural assets by using funds generated by other parts of the estate. If the Scottish estate is allowed to be fragmented this may no longer be possible and support will need to be pumped into the parts that earn least or they may fail.

"While appropriate that it report to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, it must be able to control its own strategy and budget. We contend that, in general, the farming industry and rural estates have been good custodians of Scotland's land. A responsible balance must be maintained between traditional industries and industrial, environmental and recreational facilities, if they are to be enjoyed by the many even if they are managed by the few."

GREAT GLEN

The *BBC News* website reported that Holyrood's petitions committee has agreed not to give further consideration to a petition calling for increased protection to the Great Glen against development. Friends of the Great Glen said that a total of 500 wind turbines are in the planning process for sites near Loch Ness and the wider area.

Kenny MacAskill, a member of the committee, said that Highland Council was 'across the situation' and turbines were not now planned for protected areas. The committee agreed to close the petition, which had been signed by more than 3,000 people; it led to MSPs to call for evidence from public bodies on the matter of development in the Great Glen.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

WILDLIFE CRIME

The Scottish Government's *Third Wildlife Crime Annual Report* reports that there were 255 recorded wildlife crime offences in Scotland in 2013-14, compared to 319 in 2012-13, a decrease of 20%.

Since 2010-11, the numbers of confirmed pesticide poisoning abuse incidents have decreased from 34 *per year*, to 13 in 2013-14. Fish poaching remains the most commonly recorded type of wildlife crime, but there has been a reduction in these offences from 135 in 2012-13 to 90 in 2013-14.

The report brings together data from the Scottish Government, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, Police Scotland and other sources. See: <http://bit.ly/1KL9QNe>

- A red kite died, two weeks after it was found injured near Tomatin in Inverness-shire at the end of August. The *BBC News* website reported: 'Police said its injuries did not appear to have been as a result of natural causes.' The *Press & Journal* reported that Police Scotland is 'unable to disclose the nature of the bird's injuries' but that it was likely that the raptor had been shot.

WILDLIFE PROSECUTION

Gamekeeper William Dick has been fined £2,000 at Dumfries Sheriff Court for killing a buzzard on the Newlands Estate in Dumfriesshire [Aug 15]. An appeal against the conviction has been lodged.

Newlands Estate is a member of Scottish Land & Estates and accredited by Wildlife Estates Scotland; memberships/accreditations have been suspended voluntarily pending further inquiries and ongoing legal proceedings.

PESTICIDES DISPOSAL SCHEME

The pesticides disposal scheme operated between 23 February and 29 May 2015, with the support of stakeholders in the Partnership for Action against Wildlife Crime (PAW) Scotland [May 15]. It offered a free and confidential service for those in possession of certain illegal pesticides to have them collected and professionally disposed of. A total of 191 requests for disposal of illegal pesticides were fulfilled, some involving more than one type of pesticide.

The scheme was run anonymously to encourage those in possession to come forward. However, the first half of the postcode for each collection was recorded. This showed that the highest number of collections were carried out in Aberdeenshire and Moray, the Highlands, Perthshire and the Scottish Borders.

Amongst the substances disposed of through the scheme were 68 stocks of strychnine; nine stocks of mevinphos, eight stocks of chloralose or alphachloralose and five stocks of aldicarb. Sodium cyanide accounted for 47.6% of all the stocks collected, weighing 482 kg, followed by strychnine at 29.4%. Ten stocks of carbofuran, weighing 107 kg, (4.3% of total stocks) were collected.

LEWIS RABBITS

The *BBC News* website reported that islanders on Lewis have called for a rabbit cull. Kenny MacLeod, a local councillor, said that rabbits posed a serious threat to machair, coastal meadows used for grazing and making fodder. He said the rabbits could be reduced by 75% but would not be eradicated: "The problem is so bad – there are tens of thousands of them in the Ness area. Over the last six to eight years nothing much has been happening to reduce their numbers."

Mr MacLeod said that if action was not taken to control the rabbits there would be no land left for grazing sheep and cattle. Grass around houses was also being lost to rabbits. Shooting and ferreting by a skilled rabbit catcher could bring down the estimated 28,000 animals to a more manageable number.

KINGSTEPS QUARRY

Highland Council ordered a survey of the former Kingsteps Quarry at Nairn following 'word of mouth' suggestions that 1,000 World War Two planes were broken up, burned and buried there; aircraft instruments were illuminated using radioactive paint [Apr 15]. Although some naturally occurring radiation was identified, there was no indication of radium recorded. Wider ground investigations and general site survey of any possible impact from historical fly-tipping in the area are ongoing.

ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

Key Scottish Environment Statistics 2015 has been published by Scotland's chief statistician. It provides key datasets on the state of the environment in Scotland, with an emphasis on trends over time. It contains chapters and datasets on public attitudes to the environment, global atmosphere, air quality, water, radioactivity, waste, land, conservation and biodiversity. See: <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/4066>

NORTH WEST GEOPARK

The North West Highlands Geopark, established in 2004, has received confirmation that it will have its UNESCO-recognised geopark designation revalidated for a further four years.

The geopark has also been awarded a £54,000 grant from the Scottish Land Fund, which will be used to buy land on which a visitor centre will be built, displaying the Shelley Collection of rocks and gemstones. See: nwhgeopark.com

AIR POLLUTION

Scotland's chief statistician has announced the release of a report, *Air Quality Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 1990 – 2013*. The main findings are that over the long term there have been reductions in emissions for all the pollutants in Scotland. Since 1990, there have been decreases of 28% for ammonia, 53% for sub-10 micron particulate matter (PM10), 66% for non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOCs), 67% for nitrogen oxides, 81% for carbon monoxide, 87% for sulphur dioxide and 99% for lead. See: http://naei.defra.gov.uk/reports/reports?report_i829

- The Scottish Government launched a new public consultation on plans to tackle illegal levels of air pollution in cities, following the Supreme Court ruling requiring the UK government to take urgent action [Apr 15]. Responses to the consultation are invited by 9 November. See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/6040

GUGA CULL

The Herald reported that the guga hunters of Ness, on Lewis, asked SNH for permission to increase the cull of gannet chicks; SNH has now ruled against them [Aug 11]. The men of Ness have permission to kill 2,000 chicks *per year* but said that the population was healthy enough to withstand a bigger cull.

An SNH spokesman said: "We recognise the hunt's cultural and historical significance. This tradition can be maintained without increasing the number of gannets harvested from this internationally important site. Our duty is to recognise the conservation objectives of the site while being mindful of the cultural significance."

PLANNING REFORM

An independent panel has been set up to carry out a review of Scotland's planning system. A panel, chaired by Crawford Beveridge, will be tasked with bringing together ideas to achieve a quicker, more accessible and efficient planning process. The review is due to report in spring 2016.

FIFE WILDLIFE MEADOWS

The *BBC News* website reported that more than 12 hectares of wildlife meadows are being created across Fife by Buglife, Fife Council and Woodland Trust Scotland to encourage pollinators such as bees, butterflies and hoverflies. By the end of the three year project, there will be 16 meadows in parks and green spaces across the kingdom.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Rosemary Agnew, the information commissioner, has called on public bodies to respond properly to Freedom Of Information (FOI) requests in her 2014/15 annual report. The proportion of complaints about public bodies withholding information about environmental issues has almost doubled in the last five years, amounting to 14% of total appeals.

The Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations (EIRs) gives the public rights to environmental information. Last year, Scottish public authorities reported receiving 66,753 information requests, 7,196 of which they responded to under the EIRs.

Ms Agnew said: "Our experience suggests levels of awareness of the EIRs in authorities is lower than awareness of FOI law. Why does all this matter? Well, information that might be withheld under FOI may be disclosable under the EIRs which contain fewer circumstances where information can be withheld, and, significantly, all decisions taken to withhold information under the EIRs are subject to a public interest test. If authorities are failing to use the correct legislation, they may be inadvertently denying requesters access to information they have a right to see."



ENERGY

TRANSMISSION UPGRADE

The *BBC News* website reported that Scottish Power Energy Networks is to upgrade 100 miles of overhead power lines in Dumfries & Galloway, constructing a new high voltage line between Auchencrosh in South Ayrshire and Harker in Cumbria.

Richard Arkless MP said that the upgrade was necessary but he was not convinced that environmental concerns have been adequately addressed; undergrounding part of the route was suggested. The National Trust for Scotland has objected to the proposals, saying that the scheme could harm the local environment.

WINDFARM SUBSIDIES

The *Herald* reported that Fergus Ewing, the energy minister, stated that the Scottish Government does not have the resources to take over funding the Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROC) scheme for onshore windfarms, a reserved matter, that is being stopped by the UK government a year early [Jul 15]. Labour MSPs had called on Scottish ministers to continue the subsidy scheme

through the transition year by using its own budget [see SCOTTISH SOLAR below].

WINDFARM UPDATE

Argyll: A Scottish Government reporter has rejected RWE Innogy's plans for a 45 MW windfarm on Sir Jamie McGrigor's Ardchonnell Estate on Loch Awe [Sep 14]. The reporter said that the 15 turbine project would create 'unacceptable significant adverse landscape and visual effects' and that concerns expressed by Argyll & Bute Council, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and other objectors were 'well founded.'

Dumfries & Galloway: Councillors rejected Community Windpower's plans for the 14 turbine Spango windfarm, north of Sanquhar, because of its 'unacceptably adverse impact.' Local community councils had given their support to the project. RSPB Scotland had objected, as the windfarm would impact on a part of the Muirkirk & North Lowther Uplands Special Protection Area, which is designated for its importance for species such as hen harrier, peregrine, merlin, short-eared owl and golden plover. The developers claimed that revised plans could enhance 'ecological and ornithological' conditions.

- Falck Renewables has appealed against the decision to refuse the 8 turbine Mochrum Fell windfarm near Corsock [Jun 15].

Highland: Wpd is appealing to the Court of Session following delays by Highland Council in considering the application for the six turbine Beinn Mhor windfarm near Cannich in Glen Affric [Jul 15]. A Scottish Government reporter found against the development, which was opposed by the John Muir Trust, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS), two local community councils and over 1,000 members of the public. 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.'

- Infinergy has submitted a fresh planning application for the 'repowering' of the Tom nan Clach windfarm, near Tomatin [May 15]. The firm said that renewable energy output from the site would be increased by 26% whilst the number of turbines would be reduced from 17 to 13. Consent has been given for 17 turbines; the turbines in the redesign would be 15m higher.

- The Scottish Government has upheld Vattenfall's appeal to erect two anemometry masts at the Ourack Wind Energy Project on moorland north of Grantown-on-Spey [Jul 15].

Morayshire: vento ludens¹ proposed 12 turbine Brown Muir windfarm, between Fogwatt and Rothes, has been rejected by councillors. Planning officers had recommended refusal mainly on the grounds of visual impact on the landscape.

Scottish Borders: Infinis has dropped plans to site seven turbines at Cummings Hill, close to the Carter Bar border crossing. SNH and Northumberland National Park had opposed the application.

- Infinis has appealed to the Scottish Government over the council's rejection of the nine turbine Windy Edge windfarm near Hawick [Jun 15].

ABERDEEN OFFSHORE

Trump International is to appeal against the Court of Session's ruling over permission for a proposed offshore windfarm in Aberdeen Bay [Jun 15]. The appeal will now take place in the UK Supreme Court. Mr Trump claims that the offshore windfarm would ruin the view from the golf course at Menie Estate.

The appeal centres on a dispute over the class of person entitled to construct an electricity

generator and whether the decision by the Scottish Government is void due to a lack of mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with the windfarm's design statement.

OFFSHORE TURBINES & SEABIRDS

The *Herald* reported that a study by Glasgow, Leeds and Exeter universities, published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, has analysed the flight of seabirds in three dimensions using loggers attached to bird's tails. Gannets had previously been thought to fly well below the 72 feet minimum height above sea level permitted for the sweep of turbine blade. While the gannets typically flew at around 39 feet when commuting between their nesting site and feeding grounds, the typical flight height when actively searching and diving for prey was 89 feet, potentially taking them into collision with wind turbine blades. The research also found the seabirds' feeding grounds overlapped extensively with planned windfarm sites in the Firth of Forth, raising the risk of collisions [May 15].

Dr Ewan Wakefield, of the University of Glasgow, said: "For the first time we've been able to track birds accurately in three dimensions as they fly from their nests through potential windfarm sites. Unfortunately, it seems that many gannets could fly at just the wrong heights in just the wrong places. Increasing the distance between the tips of the spinning turbine blades and the sea would give gannets more headroom – so we strongly urge that the current minimum permitted clearance turbine height be raised from 22 metres to 30 metres (98 feet)."

The analysis showed that 12 times as many gannets than forecast originally could be killed by turbines at sites which overlap with their feeding grounds, based on current typical turbine sizes, which could be different to those actually installed. Around 1,500 of birds nesting on Bass Rock off North Berwick could be killed each year by collisions with turbines at two proposed offshore windfarms in the Firth of Forth.

Dr Ian Cleasby, of Exeter University and the lead author of the study, said: "There's a lot of uncertainty over how many birds would actually be killed this way. But our predictions, if realised in the field, are high enough to cause concern over the potential long-term effects on population size."

Professor Keith Hamer, of Leeds University, said: "Our study highlights the shortfalls in current methods widely used to assess potential collision risks from offshore windfarms, and we recommend much greater use of loggers carried by birds to complement existing data from radar studies or observers at sea."

Previous analysis had been done by surveyors on boats estimating heights by eye, or by radar, both of which had limitations.

An RSPB Scotland spokesman said: "This is an enormously useful and scientifically sound contribution that highlights how little we know about what seabirds do when they are out at sea and away from their nesting sites around our coast. RSPB Scotland is currently involved in a Judicial Review of the four offshore windfarm projects in the Firths of Forth and Tay. Given the ongoing legal proceedings, it would not be appropriate for us to comment further on the implications of this research in relation to these cases."

Hannah Smith, of Scottish Renewables, said: "It's important to put this research into context. It focuses on developing a new method using a tiny sample of less than 1% of the total gannet population that can be found at the Bass Rock. Offshore windfarm developers in Scotland spend up to three years collecting detailed data on bird populations which is then scrutinised by various nature conservation bodies as part

of their planning application. I am sure that the Scottish Government will look at this latest piece of research, along with all the other work by academic researchers, renewable energy developers and environmental agencies and assess if it is relevant to how they consider any future applications for offshore wind projects.”

The *BBC News* website reported that RSPB Scotland said that the size of the gannet colony on Bass Rock meant that the scientists would have had to study 800 individual birds if they were to achieve a sample size of only 0.5% of the population.

The study was funded by the Natural Environment Research Council and the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change.

HYDRO POWER

MCofS has written to heads of planning in ten local authorities and Scotland’s two National Parks, expressing concern at the significant impact on upland areas due to the extent and pace of development of hydro development. It says they must take enforcement action, if necessary. It warned that any rush to get hydro projects off the ground before financial incentives are cut should not result in the Scottish landscape being permanently scarred [Aug 15]. Cuts in the Feed-in Tariff of around one-third to a half of the subsidy are proposed for small-scale hydro power schemes.

The MCofS recognises that any civil engineering project in a rural landscape will give rise to possibly significant short-term landscape effects, and accepts that this is a temporary effect of a transition to a lower-carbon economy. However, the letter highlights the key concern which lies with the long-term effects, and specifically with the restoration of pipeline routes and access tracks.

David Gibson, of MCofS, said: “It is up to planning authorities to ensure that developers’ keep their word and achieve optimal reinstatement of pipeline routes and blending in of narrowed vehicle tracks. We have therefore called on the planning authorities to confirm that they will act to ensure that developers’ keep their word and achieve optimal reinstatement. We believe that planning authorities must act by requiring that developers specify high quality restoration, then by monitoring completed schemes on an ongoing basis to ensure this is achieved, accompanied by a readiness to take enforcement action where it is not.”

• DHG Hydro is to appeal Highland Council’s decision to refuse the 2 MW Ardesie Burn hydro scheme near Dundonnell in Wester Ross [Jul 15]. The proposed scheme lies within the Wester Ross National Scenic Area, the Fisherfield-Letterewe-Fannichs Wild Land Area and the An Teallach Site of Special Scientific Interest.

OPENCAST COAL

Westminster MPs debated how ‘orphaned’ opencast coal mines across the UK can be restored, where operators have failed to set aside the millions needed for clean-up after operations have ceased. Some Scottish mines are within areas protected for wildlife and were consented under strict conditions that quality restoration would be delivered [Apr 15].

RSPB Scotland called for a ‘Restoration Investment Fund’ to be set up using existing revenues from coal power stations, to support restoration at priority sites and to deliver sustainable benefits for the environment, communities and local jobs.

Hargreaves, the opencast operator, put forward an alternative model using tax breaks for new

coaling at ‘orphaned’ sites. RSPB considered that tying restoration to new extraction would put pressure on local authorities to consent coaling in already sensitive, damaged areas, and could push the industry to progress economically marginal sites, risking further industry collapse. Low, declining coal prices mean that coaling has already ceased at most sites in Scotland.

Lloyd Austin, of RSPB Scotland, said: “The consequences of the collapse of the opencast industry are still being felt by Scotland’s communities and wildlife, yet it seems we are not learning from our mistakes. A sustainable response is needed that does not use taxpayer funds to perpetuate coal extraction without a ‘polluter pays’ accountability and creating real benefits for the environment, local communities and jobs.”

UNCONVENTIONAL GAS

The *BBC News* website reported that Biggar Economics compiled a report for Cluff Natural Resources outlining the predicted benefits of pioneering underground coal gasification (UCG) in Scotland. It suggested that up to 11,900 direct and indirect jobs could be created as well as supporting thousands more in the chemicals industry.

According to the report, an initial project at Kincardine could contribute about £603m extra to the UK economy, 71% of which could be retained in Scotland, providing up to 830 jobs in its creation and supporting about 350 jobs over a 30-year lifetime.

Cluff’s plans for the Kincardine project have been opposed by WWF Scotland, the Scottish Green Party and SNP Members Against Unconventional Gas.

• Dr Maggie Keegan of the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) said: “Climate change is the biggest threat to wildlife we’ve ever faced. We must move towards clean, green energy generation as soon as possible – a renewable energy future is the only energy future. The SWT believes that the Scottish Government should focus its attention and resources on fostering the development of well-designed renewables located in the right place, rather than diverting investment towards the extraction of a ‘transition gas’ such as methane ... unconventional gas extraction could pose a range of serious environmental risks and the SWT strongly believes there are certain areas, such as protected sites, which must be completely off limits. The Trust takes an evidence-based approach and will object to any proposed extraction of shale gas or coal bed methane where there would be significant impact to wildlife, habitats or ecosystems [Aug 15].”

CARBON CAPTURE

A study by CO₂MultiStore, led by the British Geological Survey, concluded that carbon storage within a single geological formation could be optimised by injecting carbon dioxide (CO₂) at two points simultaneously [Jun 15]. Researchers based their conclusions on a UK North Sea case study and estimated that the Captain Sandstone, an extensive sandstone formation beneath the Moray Firth, could securely store at least 360 million tonnes of CO₂ in just one sixth of its area. The figure, which is estimated to equal the amount of CO₂ emitted by Scotland’s energy supply sector over 23 years, is based on CO₂ being injected at a rate of between six and 12 million tonnes per year over 35 years.

The CO₂MultiStore project includes Scottish Carbon Capture & Storage, the Scottish Government, the Crown Estate, Shell, Scottish Enterprise and Vattenfall.

WWF Scotland, however, cautioned against

relying on the technology to achieve climate change targets because its development so far had been slow.

SCOTTISH SOLAR

The Scottish Government has confirmed that solar PV projects below 5 MW will continue to receive support following the UK government’s decision to close the Renewables Obligation in 2016 [Jul 15] [see also WINDFARM SUBSIDIES above].

The UK government wants to exclude such projects from the policy that guarantees the same levels of support for the lifetime of the project, known as grandfathering. However, the Scottish Government has devolved powers over grandfathering policy and has confirmed it will retain support for solar PV projects in Scotland for 20 years.



RECREATION & TOURISM

GROUSE

The Herald reported that a study by Scotland’s Rural College and the University of the Highlands & Islands’ Centre for Mountain Studies at Perth College undertook a survey of sporting estates, focusing on the Angus Glens and the Monadhliaths around Stratherrick and Strathnairn south of Inverness. This indicated that many view government agencies and emergent land reform policy as a ‘threat’ but predicts that estate-led investment in driven grouse is likely to continue in the short term at least.

This is due to the prestige associated with grouse moors attracting new owners, the high value of the product, increasing international market demand and the potential for subsidising moorland management through other land uses such as renewable energy projects. The report concludes: “However, the marginal nature of grouse shooting and landowner concerns relating to time and financial pressures resulting from compliance with legislation and political pressure, indicate that uncertainty exists around investment in the longer term.”

26 moorland estates were surveyed, covering around a quarter of a million acres and included 266 households and 18 businesses, the majority of which benefited from spending by the estates. Dr Ros Bryce, from the Centre of Mountain Studies, said: “The research broadly demonstrated a high level of support for grouse shooting with a majority in both areas supportive of the continuation or expansion of grouse shooting.”

See: *Grouse Shooting, Moorland Management and Local Communities*. <http://bit.ly/1iYYTPo>

SPEYSIDE WAY

The *Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that a six mile extension to the Speyside Way has been opened through part of Kinrara Estate [Mar 14]. Major Robin McLaren, of Kinrara Estate, had objected to the planned route.



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

RAMBLERS SCOTLAND

Ramblers Scotland has re-located its office from Milnathort to: *Caledonia House, 1 Redheughs Rigg, South Gyle, Edinburgh EH12 9DQ; telephone: 0131 472 7006; email: scotland@ramblers.org.uk*

RESILIENCE CENTRE

Scotland’s National Centre for Resilience is to open on the Crichton campus in Dumfries in March 2016. It will help improve the response to a wide range of weather-related emergencies.