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CONSERVATION

SNH REVIEW

The Sunday Herald reported that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is carrying out a major review of the way all 1,800 protected wildlife areas, which cover 18% of Scotland, are managed. A report to the SNH board suggested that the management of protected areas should be more 'adaptive.' Global warming meant that some changes were inevitable, and would have to be accepted. The report said: "It will be necessary to accommodate change by moving towards less prescriptive management which allows for a range of possible outcomes. Under these circumstances management would tend to default towards minimum intervention".

The SNH report admitted that the review had prompted concerns that it was 'underpinned by cost-cutting or de-regulatory agendas.' It said: "There are significant risks associated with this project, due primarily to potential adverse reactions from some stakeholders."

RSPB Scotland, in its initial response to the review, said: "Progressing with any one of these dilutions of the protected area system would be a mistake. The proposals are neither evidence-based nor logical. If read in isolation and implemented without wider analysis, they constitute a threat to the most treasured elements of the Scottish natural heritage and, unchallenged, they would undermine future efficacy of biodiversity conservation in Scotland ... We would rather see SNH make a stronger case for nature in the face of austerity than lower their ambition."

SNH pointed out that there were limits to what protected areas could achieve in the face of pollution, rising sea levels, and growing levels of consumption. It suggested that there was a need for a willingness to consider new approaches. Andrew Bachell, of SNH, said: "Protected areas for nature have been an essential tool in nature conservation and the management of our countryside for 60 years. These areas will always play a key role in our conservation approach. However, in the face of climate change, changes in land use and growing interest in how nature supports tourism, health and other benefits it is always important to make sure that we consider the wider role played by protected areas. Through this review our aim is to better understand how we can all work together to tackle the challenges that Scotland's nature will face in the coming decades."

Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said that the purpose of the SNH review was 'a mystery.' He said: "We are currently in challenging economic times but a high quality natural environment will be critical to the economic recovery of the nation, and provide an invaluable building block in shaping Scotland's future. We need to concentrate on highlighting the fundamental importance of these amazing places to Scotland, now and in the future, and use the limited resources at our disposal on better implementation of our existing protected areas network."

Dr Deborah Long, of Scottish Environment LINK and Plantlife Scotland, said: "Future generations will thank us for continuing to conserve today's nature and in making space for it to thrive and become more resilient in the face on environmental change. They won't thank us if we give up on conservation now."

Dr Maggie Keegan, of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, said: "Whatever the outcome of SNH's review, the biodiversity value of these sites must not be diminished."

NATIONAL PEREGRINE SURVEY

The sixth UK breeding survey of peregrine was carried out by the British Trust for Ornithology in 2014, providing a provisional estimate of 1,480 pairs in the UK and Isle of Man. The final report will be published in 2016 but this initial figure indicates that the peregrine population in the UK has remained largely stable since the last national survey in 2002. However, this overall stability belies marked variation in the trends of peregrine populations in different parts of these survey areas over the past 12 years.

Peregrines are now distributed more widely and evenly than ever through the UK, due to decreases in Scotland, Wales and Isle of Man, and increases in England and Northern Ireland. For the first time, the estimated number of breeding peregrines in England is greater than that in Scotland.

The country-level changes described above, together with regional trends in peregrine breeding numbers and territory occupancy, suggest that, broadly speaking, peregrine numbers have decreased in upland areas, remaining stable or increasing in many lowland and coastal areas.

Illegal persecution continues to restrict numbers and productivity of breeding peregrines in some regions, particularly where pigeon racing is practised and where there is intensive management for red grouse shooting. In contrast, decreases in lowland persecution during the 20th century and the ban on organochlorines have had positive influences on numbers, and allowed peregrines to expand into many areas where they were previously absent.

But more work is needed, particularly on food supply and its role in limiting Peregrine numbers, in order to diagnose the cause of regional declines, and identify measures to halt or reverse them.

• A paper, stemming from the 2014 National Peregrine Survey, on the status of breeding peregrines in North East Scotland has been published. Compared with previous studies there was an increase in coastal breeding peregrines, but a decline in the uplands in the traditional breeding places, trends persistent since 1991. Overall, fewer peregrines were recorded in 2014, but their breeding performance was relatively high. Low occupancy of nesting ranges, with more singletons than pairs, was associated with intensive management for driven grouse shooting; only two pairs and four singletons were found there. The results document a further decline in the breeding population in the eastern Cairngorms National Park. The eastern portion of the park has 53 known peregrine nesting ranges and in 2014, 51 of these were visited, but only 17 were occupied, 12 by pairs and five by singletons.

See: *North East Scotland Raptor Study Group (2015). Peregrines in North East Scotland in 2014 – further decline in the uplands. Scottish Birds 35(3): 202-206.*

IUCN RED LIST

The latest revision of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species for birds includes Atlantic puffins and Slavonian grebes, both important in Scotland. The addition of four new species means the number on the critical list has now doubled to eight; a further 14 UK species are considered to be 'near threatened.'

Although the Atlantic puffin population is still in the millions, fewer young birds are surviving to breed. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee said that a recent decline in the population of puffins' prey, such as the sandeel, and vulnerability to pollution such as oil spills, were probably responsible. Puffins have been listed as 'vulnerable to extinction.' The decline in Slavonian grebes in the UK is in part due to a reduction in successful breeding pairs, although specific reasons for this are unclear.

Shetland has been listed as the best destination for watching puffins, according to a recent National Geographic list of the top ten places to see wildlife globally.

BATS

The *BBC News* website reported that SNH-commissioned research by the Bat Conservation Trust showed that the common pipistrelle bat is estimated to have grown in population by around 79% over the last six years. Data from the National Bat Monitoring Programme showed the increase in numbers, probably due to the introduction of legal protection for bats, fewer roost losses due to development and less harmful timber treatment chemicals now being used in roof voids. However, the populations of ten other species of bat in Scotland have remained stable since 1999.

RESPONSES FOR NATURE

A coalition of 26 UK environmental organisations has compiled the *Responses for Nature* report as a follow up to the 2013 *State Of Nature* UK-wide report, which warned that 60% of 3,148 species studied had declined in past 50 years, and 31% had declined strongly.

More than one in ten of all species assessed were under threat of disappearing from the UK's shores altogether. Response for Nature reports for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales made key recommendations that governments must make to help restore nature in the UK.

The group has now called on the Scottish Government to take urgent action:

- Deliver an inspiring vision for nature – nature needs to be a part of our lives. The Scottish Government must set a trajectory for nature's recovery so that, by 2040, we have a country richer in nature with more people connecting with wildlife in their local environment

- Fully implement and defend the laws that conserve nature – our most important laws that safeguard species and special places, the Birds and Habitats Directives, are under threat. We must resist attempts from Europe to weaken our laws and ensure the full implementation of legislation that aims to reduce pressures on nature

- Deliver a network of special places for nature on land and at sea – we need special places to be protected and well managed, and linked within a wider landscape where wildlife can prosper

- Recover threatened species targeted through programmes of action – we must halt species extinction, but more than that, we should be restoring priority species to favourable conservation status, where populations recover to a healthy state

- Improve the connection of young people to

nature for their health and well-being and for nature's future – today's young people will be the next stewards of the natural environment. Our long term vision must include action for them to learn about, and connect with wildlife and enjoy the natural environment

- Provide incentives (or other financial measures) that work for nature – support and enhance sustainable High Nature Value farming and forestry systems, discouraging either intensification or abandonment

- Support people working together for nature – we all have a part to play in saving nature. Each and every one of us needs to take care about, and take action for, nature – before it's too late

The report is based on a year's interactive research with a wide range of experts in wildlife ecology and in policy development and delivery

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The *Response For Nature* report makes a valuable contribution to the debate about how best to improve biodiversity and help our natural environment to flourish. We have already set out in *Scotland's Biodiversity – a Route Map to 2020*, which was developed in partnership with environmental bodies in Scotland, how we intend to deliver against the challenging biodiversity targets. We look forward to continuing to work with environmental organisations as we implement the route map."

Dr Deborah Long, of LINK, said: "We must thank all those who contributed – whether in responding to the online questionnaire or participating in workshops. The analysis of all those contributions have been distilled to a 'top 10' which include a properly managed network of protected areas both on land and at sea, actions to improve access to justice for nature, more species restoration initiatives and improved incentives for land managers. All 23 organisations who are signatories to this report call on the Scottish Government to heed this call – and for all political parties to have them in mind when formulating manifestos for next year's Scottish elections."

WILDCATS

Scottish Wildcat Action reported that the Angus Glens have the 'most quality wildcats' of the six areas designated as Scottish wildcat priority areas [Dec 14]. The five other priority areas are Strathbogie, Aberdeenshire, Strathavon, Moray, Morvern, Strathpeffer and northern Strathspey.

Scottish Wildcat Action is a partnership project involving more than 20 organisations including Scottish Natural Heritage and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland. It is funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and the Scottish Government. See: <http://bit.ly/1OPuzDj>

LYNX

The *BBC News* website reported that the Lynx UK Trust has asked farmers and landowners for their views on a proposal to bring back lynx to Aberdeenshire and Argyll [Apr 15].

MONTROSE BASIN GEESE

The SWT said that there are a record breaking number of pink-footed geese at the Montrose Basin Visitor Centre and Wildlife Reserve. As part of the Icelandic Breeding Goose Census, which aims to count all of the geese in the UK, the team recorded 85,632 geese. On average, 60,000 pink-footed geese migrate from Iceland to Montrose Basin each year. In 2014, 78,970 geese arrived at Montrose Basin, beating the previous record of 65,060 set in 2010. Last year's Icelandic Breeding Goose Count estimated the pink-footed geese population to be 393,170, 90% of which were recorded in the UK. Almost 25% of all the pink-footed geese in the UK are at Montrose Basin.

**FARMING****PESTICIDES**

Scotland's chief statistician has published three reports: *Pesticide Usage in Scotland: Arable Crops and Potato Stores 2014*, *Soft Fruit Crops 2014* and *Rodenticides on Arable Farms 2014*.

98% of arable crops were treated with pesticides, with a total combined application weight of 1,510 tonnes. Herbicides and fungicides were the main pesticide types encountered, applied to 95% and 94% of the crop area respectively.

47% of stored seed potatoes were treated with a pesticide in 2014, an increase from the 20% treated in 2012. Conversely, 11% of ware potatoes were treated with a pesticide, a decrease from the 35% treated in 2012. Fungicides and plant growth regulators were the only pesticides encountered.

This is the first time that pesticide use has been reported together for both soft fruit crops grown in the open and under temporary and permanent protection. Overall, 94% of the soft fruit crop was treated with pesticides with a combined application weight of 24.5 tonnes. Insecticides/acaricides and fungicides were the main pesticide types encountered, applied to 87% and 85% per cent of the crop area respectively.

Rodenticides were estimated to have been used on 87% of Scottish arable farms in 2014. Approximately 113 tonnes of rodenticide bait, containing less than six kg of active substance was used, 13% lower than in the previous survey in 2012. The rodenticides encountered were almost exclusively second generation anticoagulant compounds, primarily bromadiolone and difenacoum. Use of first generation anticoagulant rodenticides has been declining over time and this is the first survey in which their use has not been encountered.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletin/01180 (arable & potato); www.gov.scot/stats/bulletin/01181 (soft fruit); www.gov.scot/stats/bulletin/01182 (rodenticides)

BOVINE TB

New legislation to further protect Scotland's livestock from Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) has come into effect. Bovine TB is a serious infectious disease of cattle that can be passed on to other animals. Under the new rules, specified non-bovine animals – alpaca, llama, vicuna, guanaco, deer, goats, sheep and pigs, and the carcasses of wild deer – will now be subject to a regime of TB controls where incidents are disclosed. The measures are designed to protect Scotland's official TB-free status; Scotland has been officially TB free since 2009 [Sep 09].

The Scottish Government has no plans to introduce a routine TB testing regime for non-bovine animals. The new powers will only be used where a TB incident is disclosed, for example through *post mortem* examination or where animals have been traced from a known herd. While there have been no confirmed Scottish outbreaks of bovine TB in these specified non-bovine species since 1992, tuberculosis outbreaks have been frequently disclosed in these species in England and Wales. See: <http://bit.ly/1G6lYcV>

SILAGE

The *BBC News* website reported that Scotland's Rural College analysed silage samples from beef herds and flocks of sheep, and found 'disturbingly low levels of protein.' Almost half of the silage analysed had a protein content below 10%, with a quarter 'insufficient for even a dry beef cow.' In a normal year, silage will have a protein content of 13% to 14%. Researchers said that this could cause stock to slowly starve, even though they might look full, and urged farmers to have their silage tested and to supplement feed.

HEATHER HONEY

The Herald reported that rural estates in Tayside, the Lammermuirs and the Angus glens have reported a rapid increase in honeybee populations on grouse-managed heather moorland. Heather is an essential part of grouse diet despite the inclement summer.

Ian Elliott, of Hopes Estate, said: "The moorland heather, which is maintained to the highest standard as part of the integrated management of the estate, is favoured by beekeepers due to its rotational renewal. The heather is burned in strips in accordance with the Muirburn Code, which leads to its regeneration and more vigorous flowering and pollination which is perfect for the honeybees to access. We have hosted hives on the moor for decades and it adds another layer of biodiversity to the estate."

NORTH RONALDSAY

The repair of an historic sheep dyke on North Ronaldsay, Orkney is being considered by a working group, led by Scottish Business in the Community (SBC). The 13 mile-long stone dyke, dating from 1830, keeps the rare North Ronaldsay sheep on the foreshore of the island, where they graze on seaweed, but is now in need of urgent repair. The dyke was historically maintained by the island population, but the population has fallen from 500 to 48, too few to provide the skills for repairs after storm damage in recent years. Potential solutions include using volunteers, creating training and employment opportunities in traditional skills and further promoting North Ronaldsay mutton and wool.

Mark Bevan, of SBC, said: "Remote and vulnerable communities are a key part of our country's heritage, and we hope to be able to find a solution that restores the historic dyke, protects the rare breed of sheep, and provides a sustainable future for the island."

CEREAL HARVEST

First estimates for the 2015 cereal and oilseed rape harvest indicate that Scotland has had the highest cereal harvest yield for 20 years. Farms are thought to have produced 3.3 million tonnes of cereals, a rise of 24,000 tonnes on 2014's figures. The overall increase is due to a 5% rise in yields, despite the total area planted having fallen by 4% overall. Peter Loggie, of NFU Scotland, said: "Away from our main arable areas, those growing crops in the west, Caithness, Sutherland, Orkney and Shetland will have seen yields hammered by a cold and wet summer and there are parts of Scotland where harvest has still to be completed due to the late season."

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/8048

HIGHLAND ORCHARDS

The BBC News website reported that Highland Council's Apple Map has 151 sites of orchards or individual apple trees with more than 70 different varieties represented, with some trees more than 80 years old. The map started out, four years ago, as an effort to track down surviving specimens of Coul Blush, a variety of apple at Coul House in Contin, Ross-shire, planted in 1827. However, the council's biodiversity officer received additional information from the public about historical apple cultivation in the Highlands.

GREENING

NFU Scotland said that the Greening Guide for 2016 has missed a crucial opportunity to introduce simplification to the EU Common Agricultural Policy CAP reforms. As a result, it claims that Scottish growers remain at a competitive disadvantage compared to English farmers. However, the guide commits to the

introduction of equivalence measures for the crop diversification element, the 'three-crop rule.' For Scottish growers, a third management prescription around nitrogen-fixing crops means that this is no longer a viable Ecological Focus Area option; in England, nitrogen-fixing crops are viewed as a greening option. New nutrient management plans for permanent grassland introduce more paperwork.

Allan Bowie, of NFU Scotland, said: "With the Scottish Government going beyond the measures required by Europe, it had an obligation to ensure that any additional requirements were also compatible with profitable agriculture."

See: www.ruralpayments.org

FARM CENSUS

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest results from the June 2015 Agricultural Census. Dairy cattle numbers continued to show growth, up 3,700 (1.4%) to 278,000, though the number of beef cattle also fell by 3,700 (0.5%) to 710,000. There was, however, a 3% increase in calf numbers to 544,000.

Sheep numbers increased for the second consecutive year, the first time that has happened since the 1990s, though the increase this year was only 0.1% to 6.7 million. Although the numbers of both breeding ewes and lambs fell, there was a 9% increase in other sheep. Pig numbers also saw a small increase of 1,500, or 0.5% to 318,000.

Poultry saw an 11% fall, down 1.7 million to 13.1 million. The reduction was in the broiler sector, which saw a fall of 2.1 million birds (27%) to 5.7 million. This fall was partially offset by a 7% increase in layers, to 6.1 million, and a 7% increase in fowls for breeding, to 1.2 million. The number of broilers is now the lowest on current records.

Potatoes were also down, 2,700 hectares (10%) to 26,000 hectares, with reductions in both ware and seed. The area is now the smallest on current records.

The area of cereals decreased by 4% from 462,000 to 444,000 hectares, with a reduction in the area of barley, down 19,000 hectares to 308,000, and only very small increases in wheat (540 ha) and oats (560 ha). The area of oilseed rape decreased by 1,300 hectares (4%) to 36,000 hectares. The area of fallow land almost trebled to 33,000 hectares.

The amount of agricultural land that was rented for one year or more fell again, by 6,000 hectares or 0.5%, to 1.32 million hectares. This means that 23% of agricultural land is rented compared to 30% in 2003. There were an estimated 6,616 holdings with tenancy arrangements, down 109 or 1.6% since 2014.

The area growing strawberries rose by 30 hectares to 940 hectares (a 3% increase), and raspberries increased by 40 hectares (13%) to 350 hectares. There were 65,400 people employed on agricultural holdings. About 78% per cent of the area of Scotland is agricultural land, in 52,160 agricultural holdings.

Limousin is the most common cattle breed in Scotland, followed by Aberdeen Angus, Simmental, Holstein Friesian, and Charolais. These five breeds accounted for 76% of cattle in Scotland.

See: www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01186



WOODLANDS

URY GOLF COURSE

The Herald reported that FM Group is planning a golf development on Ury Estate, near Stonehaven in Aberdeenshire. The company is to address

concerns raised by objectors. 3,000 new trees will be planted to 'protect' part of an ancient woodland removed near the eighth hole. Jonathon Milne, of FM Group, said: "We are very sensitive to the natural environment. Ury is fortunate to contain a huge amount of biodiversity and we want to protect that. In some areas, the sycamores are taking over and threatening this biodiversity and where this is happening, we will be felling those species."

CELTIC RAINFOREST

The woodland on the National Trust for Scotland's Balmacara Estate in Lochalsh is to be included in a Plantlife project to promote the Celtic rainforest. Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Scottish Natural Heritage, the project will introduce conservation grazing to the Collie Mhor Site of Special Scientific Interest to improve the woodland structure and protect rare lichens, mosses and liverworts. Opportunities for greater oak regeneration in the Special Area of Conservation for Atlantic Oakwood will be increased by removing *Rhododendron ponticum*.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SEALS & FISHFARMS

Marine Scotland data shows that the number of seals killed for salmon farming in the first half of 2015 has risen by 20%. 49 seals were killed by fishfarmers in the first half of this year.

Grieg Seafood has brought in new econets to protect the salmon and keep seals out, and have said they have cut the shootings from four in the first half of last year, to just one so far this year. Hjaltland Sea Farms reduced shootings from 32 to six between 2013 and 2014; by autumn 2016, all their sites will be fully protected by the anti-predator nets.

The Global Alliance Against Industrial Aquaculture (GAAlA) campaign group is concerned that not all have invested in the special nets and that the 'shoot-to-kill policy' is continuing; Marine Harvest shot 15 seals in the first half of this year; Scottish Sea Farms shot 12 and the Scottish Salmon Company shot seven.

The downward trend in seal deaths seems to have been reversed after the numbers shot annually declined steadily in the past four years. There were 176 seals killed in the past two years, 95 in 2013 and 81 last year.

GAAlA said that the price for seal-friendly farmed salmon is the installation of predator nets and that could be £1m for each salmon farm. There are currently 143 active salmon farms in Scotland and 87% of salmon farms do not have predator nets installed.

The Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation said: "The Scottish salmon farming industry takes very seriously its responsibility to animal welfare, both to the fish in its care and to the wider marine population, including wild seals in Scottish waters. It is our ambition to have enough techniques throughout the whole industry to avoid the need to shoot seals. In other words, it is our clear intention to reduce the number of seals shot to zero."

Scottish Sea Farms said that they have 'an aspiration that we will have no impact on seals.' The firm said it had invested over £1m million on seal resistant 'sapphire nets' for sites where there has been a history of seal attacks. "This is a significant spend that shows our determination to find alternative methods to protect our stock and eliminate the need for last resort control. These measures have been increasingly successful in allowing our farms to co-exist with the seal population in the areas where we farm, to the

extent that no seals have been harmed on our sites in the last six months.”

ARRAN FISHFARM

The Scottish Salmon Company has applied to extend, by 20%, the St Molios salmon fishfarm in Lamlash Bay. The fishfarm is within the South Arran Marine Protected Area.

SOUTH SKYE FISHFARM

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Grieg Seafood has submitted revised plans for two fishfarms on Loch Eishort in Skye [Aug 14]. The Scottish Environment Protection Agency described the latest benthic impact study as inadequate. Sleat Community Council reiterated its opposition to the resubmitted application. It said: “The introduction of these aquaculture developments will inevitably lead to reduced fishing grounds. The council fully supports existing local employment and it should be noted the inshore fishing industry jobs are far in excess of what is being offered by the fishfarm development.”

SALMON RIVER CLASSIFICATION

The *Herald* reported that Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland (S&TCS) said that the Scottish Government’s newly published classification of the country’s salmon rivers puts all those in the West Highlands and Inner Hebrides in the worst-performing category; stocks in these river systems are not reaching ‘conservation limits’ – a measure of the overall health of the population. No single river on the west coast had a sufficient stock of wild salmon for any sustainable fishing.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, of S&TCS, said: “This new analysis by Marine Scotland should ring alarm bells. Fisheries scientists have long warned of the impact of sea-lice and escapes emanating from salmon farms. Regrettably, the Scottish Government has until now habitually downplayed studies by third parties, but we believe it cannot ignore its own fisheries scientists’ analysis. The contrast between western Scotland and the rest of the country is clear to see and the only major or substantive distinction between the east and west coasts is, of course, the presence of salmon farming in the west. We call on the Scottish Government to halt any further growth in salmon farming until the industry can definitively prove itself to be environmentally sustainable.”

Roger Brook, of the Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board, said: “Marine Scotland’s analysis must call into question Scottish ministers’ repeated claims that salmon farming, as it is currently practised, is inherently sustainable. While the majority of east, and north coast rivers are ‘category one’, indicating that wild salmon populations are reasonably healthy, all the rivers in the West Highlands and Inner Hebrides are designated as ‘category three’, indicating that they are in very poor health.”

He said that on the one hand Scottish Government was claiming that salmon farming was sustainable, whilst on the other hand it was categorising all wild fisheries in salmon farming areas as unsustainable.

The Scottish Government pointed out that the grade three areas also covered significant parts of Scotland where no salmon farming takes place.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation, said it was of course, regrettable that the status of these rivers was so poor, but said: “The industry’s joint working with wild fisheries organisations has shown a productive and co-operative relationship looking at restoration and restocking projects. Work

has focused on the importance of maintaining and improving river habitats and encouraging catch and release rather than depleting the river populations.”

Martin Jaffa, of the fishfarming consultancy Callander McDowell, said that west coast rivers were generally very short and a handful of fish could make a difference to the calculations. The much longer rivers of the east had much greater stock ‘and thus the maths allows a much greater margin for error.’

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

SOLWAY FIRTH SALMON

The *BBC News* website reported that a report to the Annan common good fund sub-committee outlines a draft response to the proposed ban on catching and killing wild salmon except under licence to protect vulnerable stocks [Sep 15]. There are fears for the future of unique traditional fishing methods which have been used on the Solway for centuries such as poke and haaf netting. Haaf netting is thought to have been introduced to the area by Viking settlers in around 900 AD and uses a net mounted on a large rectangular frame supported by three legs. This frame is placed across the current by a fisherman standing behind the net who then walks out into the flat, shallow waters to catch the fish. The report calls for the stake netting and poke netting traditions to be maintained, arguing that these methods should be considered ‘exceptional’ and that local salmon conservation management should be allowed. It also points out that licences for these fishing activities provide the main source of income for the Annan common good fund and any reduction would affect its ability to support local community groups and projects.

ORKNEY SHELLFISH

The Scottish Government is to introduce measures developed by the Orkney fishing industry to improve the management of its local shellfish stocks [May 15]. The minimum landing sizes for two of the area’s key shellfish species are to be increased over two years: velvet crab from 65 mm to 70 mm and lobster from 87 to 90 mm.

A minimum landing size will be introduced for green crab to be set at 70 mm, and a restriction placed on the landing of berried (egg bearing) velvet crab. The new measures will begin in early 2016 to help protect the breeding stock and increase yield and egg production.

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/10/4614

DISCARD TRANSFER

The *BBC News* website reported that UK Fisheries minister, George Eustice, has announced the chance to bank or borrow quotas instead of throwing dead fish back into the sea (discards) as part of the Common Fisheries Policy reforms. He said: “If we want a profitable fishing industry and thriving coastal communities in the future it is vital that we fish sustainably today. That is why the reforms we have secured to the Common Fisheries Policy, which will put an end to the shameful practice of throwing perfectly good fish overboard, are so important. It is essential that we ban the practice of discarding fish, but we are also committed to introducing new flexibilities to help fishermen manage their quotas.”

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation (SFF), said that the measures were welcome, but warned there was still a lot of hard negotiating to be done.

Scottish Fisheries secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: “No-one wants to see dead fish being thrown back into the sea – least of all our fishermen. That’s why we are working closely with the industry to ensure the discard ban is implemented effectively

and proportionately in Scotland, and to help make sure fishermen are fully prepared. We published a consultation paper in June about the allocation of the ‘discard transfer’ – the additional quota that fishermen will receive when the landing obligation commences for each species. We will announce the outcome of that soon.”

MACKEREL QUOTA

Talks between the EU, Norway and the Faeroe Islands agreed a 15% reduction in mackerel quotas for 2016. Opening discussions had considered advice which suggested cuts of 37%. The Total Allowable Catch for 2016 will be now be 10% higher than five years ago. All parties committed to a much needed long-term management plan for the stock which establishes the rules for setting catch levels over the coming years. The new plan acknowledges the importance of future survey work required on the stock.

The European Fisheries Council decided to continue ‘banking’ a proportion of this year’s quota for pelagic stocks for another year to help respond to the difficult market conditions created by the Russian trade sanctions. The proportion of mackerel that may be banked this year compared to last year is reduced, however.

The 2015 UK quota for mackerel is around 243,000 tonnes. This means that fishermen could potentially reserve up to around 42,500 tonnes (17.5%) for use in 2016 and 25% for herring, western horse mackerel and sprat.

ICES ADVICE

Annual scientific advice from the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas (ICES) has said that monkfish, megrim and West of Scotland langoustine stocks are increasing. The ICES advice helps to inform fisheries negotiations to decide how much quota fishermen will receive in the coming year. Increased quotas for these high value stocks could potentially provide an additional £11m to the Scottish fleet.



MARINE

ROCKALL DEEP

Marine Scotland has found a unique ecosystem, made of unique bacteria, corals, unusual anemones and clams that eat methane-munching microbes, on the sea floor near Rockall [Jun 13]. It is thought to be the product of a process known as a ‘cold seep’, where gas from deep in the earth leaks onto the sea bed creating an environment capable of supporting rare and specialist bacterial communities that then form the basis of the food chain. The area, the first to be found in this area of the North Atlantic, was first identified in 2012 when scientists spotted previously unknown creatures brought up from the seabed, and has now been confirmed following an expedition by the research vessel, *Scotia*.

The project was a collaboration between Marine Alliance for Science & Technology for Scotland (MASTS) and Marine Scotland, Oceanlab, British Geological Survey and the Scottish Association for Marine Science.

BATHING WATERS

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) expects that of the 84 designated bathing waters in Scotland, 17 will be rated as ‘excellent’, 38 will be classed as ‘good’, and 12 will be rated as ‘sufficient’ when confirmed classifications are issued by the EU in spring 2016. However, 17 bathing waters are expected to be classed as ‘poor’ after this season, due to the much tighter water quality standards of the new Bathing Water Directive and problems associated with runoff during the poor summer.

BASKING SHARKS

The Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust reported 108 reports of basking sharks this year, totalling 321 individuals, compared to 48 (142) in all of 2014.

Dr Conor Ryan, of HWDT, said that since 2007 the average group size reported had fallen from seven to just three. Of this year's records, the biggest single group was of 40, two miles south of Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides. He said: "This has been a much better year for sightings of basking sharks. This summer has been poor, limiting the numbers people from getting out on the water and seeing them – so there may have been many more sightings that have gone unrecorded. By contrast last year was a good summer weather-wise but it had few sightings – one of the worst on record. We need to know what affects their distribution and numbers of basking sharks to help better protect them. We need to know why their habitat changes and how they react to those changes."

August is the peak month for sightings, which tail off and usually end during October.

KILLER DOLPHINS

Bottlenose dolphins are thought to have attacked and killed a three-year old female pilot whale which was found stranded on a beach at Dunvegan, Skye. Teeth marks were found on the whale's body, flippers and dorsal fin.

MPA RECOVERY

A report, *A review of the recovery potential and influencing factors of relevance to the management of habitats and species within Marine Protected Areas around Scotland*, has shown that once damaged, nationally and internationally important marine wildlife and habitats may take tens or even hundreds of years to recover.

The study was commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and reviewed factors that may help or limit the recovery of habitats and species. It also considered ways to help address any declines. There is potential for recovery to occur if the conditions are right. It also found that there is a lack of basic knowledge about the biology of some habitats and species, which is important for understanding how they might be able to recover.

Restoration techniques, such as reintroduction could help a limited number of species, particularly bivalves.

To maximise chances of recovery, any management should target the known causes of decline and take account of physical and biological factors which may be limiting recovery. For these reasons management may have to be applied at a range of scales – within parts of sites and across whole MPAs. In some cases, the relationship with management of the wider sea area may also need to be considered. See: <http://bit.ly/1Pa8vCs>

**POLITICS & PARLIAMENT****MPAs**

Additional submissions from some fisheries stakeholders were heard by the Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment Committee (RACCE) at the Scottish Parliament, a process which the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST) contended has delayed draft Marine Conservation Orders (MCOs) by at least three months [Sep 15].

RACCE has now written to fisheries minister, Richard Lochhead, insisting that a 'full implementation of MPAs is brought into effect as soon as possible' and no later than by the end

of this parliamentary session (March 2016). The Scottish Government has a legal duty under Scottish, UK and EU legislation to have a well-managed network of MPAs in place by 2016.

COAST urged RACCE to give Richard Lochhead its full support in passing the MPA MCOs into law without further delay [Sep 15].

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that Duncan MacInnes, of the Western Isles Fishermen's Association, said at the hearing in the Scottish Parliament that the process involved in the creation of MPAs was the worst example of consultation he had experienced in over 40 years. He told the RACCE committee that fishermen were not opposed to MPAs in principle but rather the draconian management proposals and the fact that Marine Scotland had rejected the compromise solutions which fishermen had initially proposed. He said that environmental considerations had eclipsed the interests of the fishermen and their livelihoods. Mr MacInnes challenged the economic data used by Marine Scotland to justify total bans on mobile fishing gear in MPAs.

Richard Lochhead, at an Inshore Fisheries conference, said: "Scotland's seas are not owned by any one individual or vested interest."

COAST said: "Representatives from a particular sector have no right to turn public policy on its head. In fact, at the outset, MPAs were delineated by Marine Scotland in a way that minimised impact on mobile fishers. Arran has been asked to accept trawling in 36% of its MPA; Upper Loch Fyne will nearly all be open to trawlers. Many compromises are already built into the network which can only succeed in creating a healthier marine environment if it offers real protection within the small areas designated. Further watering down and delays will turn MPAs into paper parks rather than a source of pride. Coastal communities need healthy biodiverse seas that support a diversity of marine jobs, not vulnerable monocultures benefiting only a few. MPAs have a critical part to play in marine recovery and in creating jobs for young and old ... Marine Scotland has held over 100 consultations since 2011. Our descendants will not thank us if, we once again, cave-in to narrow interests who care little about a shared marine future."

COAST stated that the proposed inshore MPAs will constitute 3.5% of Scottish inshore waters and management measures under the MCOs are expected to impact less than 3% of mobile fishing turnover (a worst case scenario which assumes no displacement of fishing effort to other fishing grounds). The locations of MPAs were carefully chosen to maximize conservation objectives and minimize the impact on current fishing activity. MPAs are expected to have a positive spill-over effect on fisheries by protecting complex seabed areas which serve as spawning and nursery grounds for wider seas. They will also reduce gear conflict between the mobile and static sectors and boost the diversity and resilience of local economies by encouraging sustainable fishing and bolstering marine tourism and leisure industries.

The *BBC News* website reported that Angus MacNeil MSP has called on the Scottish Government to delay its planned introduction of MPAs to allow additional powers to be agreed for island communities. He said that there were significant disagreements between the fishing industry and Marine Scotland about the management of MPAs. He said: "At a time when new powers are being considered, when more control of the marine area could be one of them, it seems prudent that this process is delayed. Therefore one aspect of my response to

Nicola Sturgeon's wise call to consult over island powers, is to urge caution on the draconian MPA plans as these will be economically damaging to islands and are an example of something better dealt with in the islands where their effects will be felt. I remain very concerned about the possible economic impact of proposed management plans for the MPAs and I think the Scottish Government should take its time in coming to a final decision when so much is at stake."

• *The Herald* reported that Dr Magnus Course of Edinburgh University said that measures such as MPAs imposed by government to protect the environment against the wishes of local people, do not work. He said that the MPAs would restrict or forbid fishing in several important areas around the Western Isles and the west coast; island fishermen predict significant job losses as a result. Dr Course said that the Scottish Government should be aware that 'decades of anthropological research from around the globe have made clear environmental designations are most effective when carried out in cooperation with local communities.' He said that there was a voluntary ban on fishing in the Eriskay straits after the completion of causeway to the island in 2000: "Local fishermen understood the importance of the straits as a safe ground for fish and shellfish and agreed not to fish there."

LAND REFORM

The Herald reported that Scottish Land & Estates (SL&E) gave evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs & Climate Change Committee on amendments to the forthcoming Land Reform bill [Sep 15].

Douglas McAdam, of SL&E, gave evidence to the committee and said that further due diligence was needed to prevent 'perverse outcomes' from the legislation. In its written evidence SL&E said: "The Scottish Government has failed to undertake an economic impact assessment and therefore cannot show that the reintroduction of sporting rates would raise funds or that it would not have a serious detrimental impact on rural businesses and land management. It is hard to see what the Scottish Government is trying to achieve with this policy and we believe it is unfair to single out one of the three main rural land uses of sporting, agriculture and forestry without a clear view of how it is justified, how it will be applied and what consequences it may have. We have seen no evidence that reintroduction of sporting rate will achieve economic growth and we are concerned it may actually decrease investment and employment, and have a detrimental impact on conservation efforts while raising no net funds. We hope that the scrutiny that these proposals are being subject to in the Scottish Parliament will address these very significant issues."

• Delegates at the SNP annual party conference backed calls to make the proposed Land Reform Bill more 'radical and robust.' The legislation is currently going through Holyrood.

Dr Aileen MacLeod, the minister for land reform, said: "This bill is not an end in itself and as a government we are committed to taking forward the recommendations of the land reform group. The bill will put to an end the stop-start nature of historic land reform. I want to give you my reassurance that I am listening as to ways in which we can strengthen the bill further."

FRACKING

Members of the SNP narrowly rejected a bid for an outright ban on fracking at the party's conference in Aberdeen [Jul 15]. Iain Black, one of the founding members of SMAUG (SNP Members Against Unconventional Gas), said: "We believe that the evidence and the science absolutely and overwhelmingly supports a ban. There's science

and then there's science that's paid for by big business with research grants."

• A YouGov poll for *The Times* found that 59% of Scots were opposed to fracking.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL FUND

A new £10m Environmental Co-operation Action Fund is jointly funded by the Scottish Government and the European Union under the Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. It is the first ever scheme specifically developed to fund the facilitation of landscape-scale projects that meet the Scottish Government's environmental priorities. The first application round will close on 15 January 2016.

The fund will support collaborative projects made up of farmers, foresters and/or other land managers. Funding is targeted to deliver the following priorities, which are most effectively addressed at a landscape scale and contribute to meeting Scotland's targets for biodiversity, climate change and water environment: habitat and degraded ecosystem restoration; conservation of vulnerable priority species; control of invasive non-native plant species; deer management; catchment management for water quality; physical restoration of water bodies; natural flood management and woodland creation.

The fund will support the costs of planning, facilitating and overseeing cooperative projects, principally by the funding the activities of a facilitator. Applications can then be made to the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme and/or Forestry Grant Scheme, or an alternative source of funding to support the costs of on-the-ground management to implement these environmental projects.

The fund encourages a local proactive approach to identifying and delivering opportunities for landscape-scale environmental action.

• Forestry Commission Scotland will, in addition, run a Forestry Co-operation Option as part of the Forestry Grant Scheme. This will cover woodland creation and woodland management co-operative projects up to a limit of 40 man days of facilitator time.

See: www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP

WILDLIFE CRIME

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog commented on the Wildlife Crime 2014 annual report published by the Scottish Government [Sep 15]. The blog pointed out that the period covered by the report is only the 2013/14 financial year, ending in March 2014 and so the majority of the crimes reported are from 2013. Offences which took place in the remaining nine months of 2014 are not included. The report claims a 20% reduction in wildlife crime but this is almost entirely due to one particular area, fish poaching.

The Scottish Government has used only crime data that has been recorded by Police Scotland; separate sections are included on data collected by Scottish Badgers, Scottish SPCA *etc*, but these data are not included in the overall analysis of wildlife crime trends because these incidents were not included on the police national crime database.

For example, the report accepts that 69 cases investigated solely by the SSPCA, as opposed to cases where the SSPCA has assisted the police, are not included in the official crime figures. 50% of all wildlife cases taken by the SSPCA during the period covered by this report were undertaken in partnership with the police.

• The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported Dave Thompson MSP has written to the Chief Constable of Police Scotland to urge him to issue an interim report on the first stages of the Police investigation into the deaths of 22 raptors in Easter Ross [Oct 14].

VICARIOUS LIABILITY

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that, following the conviction and imprisonment of George Mutch of Kildrummy Estate in Aberdeenshire for various wildlife crimes, no vicarious liability prosecution has been made by the Crown Office [Jan 15].

The Crown Office said: "Wildlife and environmental crime is a priority for the Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). Such cases are investigated and prosecuted by our specialist Wildlife & Environmental Crime Unit, WECU ... Mr Mutch pled not guilty but was convicted of the offences after trial and in January 2015 he was sentenced to four months imprisonment. Despite further investigations including investigations which focused on establishing vicarious liability, no-one else has been reported to COPFS in relation to the events which took place in Kildrummy Estate in 2012 and accordingly, no further prosecution, including any prosecution for a vicarious liability offence, has taken place."

GROUSE MOORS

A report, *The Intensification of Grouse Moor Management in Scotland* has been published by the League Against Cruel Sports Scotland. Written by Andy Wightman and Dr Ruth Tingay, the report looks at the issue in the context of Scottish Land Reform and provides an overview of grouse moor management. It includes a discussion of the legal framework of grouse shooting, land ownership & tenure, peatland and burning, tracks and roads, medicated grit, tick management, fencing, lead ammunition, disturbance, raptor persecution, and economics and finance.

The report shows that the industrialised over-management of grouse moorlands is reducing biodiversity and is in direct conflict with conservation best-practice. It highlights the negative environmental and conservation-related impacts of grouse moors, including:

- Annual burning of heather, which reduces biodiversity and releases carbon into the atmosphere
- Mountain hares, crows, foxes and stoats culled on 'an industrial scale', and a suspicious breeding absence of endangered birds of prey
- Sheep used as 'tick mops' to attract ticks away from the grouse
- Medicines are spread around the moors to reduce disease in grouse
- Moors covered in snares and traps that wound and maim indiscriminately
- Roads built on moorland to make life easier for shooters

The report stated that, while some landowners are being subsidised by up to £300,000 a year, presumably for forestry and farming (*ed*), their grouse shoots contribute very little to local economies. The whole industry provides less than 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs with an average salary of £11,401 – which is less than the minimum wage. Despite being subsidised by taxpayers, more and more land is being fenced off and made inaccessible to the public.

Andy Wightman said: "The evidence we have uncovered is a shocking indictment of a land use that is out of control. I hope this comes as a wake-up call to Scotland's politicians. The methods being deployed to maximise grouse numbers

are damaging the environment and are subject to no effective regulation or oversight by the Scottish Government and other public authorities."

The League Against Cruel Sports Scotland calls for an end to tax-payer-funded subsidies to grouse estates; burning heather should be further regulated; road building on moors should be subject to the same planning permission as any other road; the use of snares should end; shooting of endangered mountain hares should stop and the indiscriminate use of medicines should be banned.

See: <http://bit.ly/1RF3x0h>

FOREST DEER CULLS

The Herald reported that Forest Enterprise Scotland (FE Scotland), which is responsible for more than 20% of the deer culled in Scotland, is shooting them at night. A Scottish Gamekeepers Association spokesman said: "Shooting at night is supposed to be for emergency situations. We are concerned that it seems to be more of a first, rather than a last, resort." David Quarrell, of the South Lanarkshire deer group, accused Scottish Natural Heritage of granting lamping licences too freely.

FE Scotland said that night shooting was used for health and safety reasons, because estates tended to be busy during the day. However, critics said that lamping makes it impossible to avoid hitting females with young, and abandoned fawns are being left to 'die a slow death from starvation.'

ABERDEEN DEER

The *Press & Journal* reported that at least 61 roe deer had been killed after being hit by vehicles in Aberdeen over the past 12 months. A population survey is to be completed by the city council and practical non-lethal measures looked at, before taking a decision on culling some deer.

MOSSMORRAN

The Herald reported that the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) called for ministers to refuse Everris Ltd's appeal to the Scottish Government concerning the rejection of planning application to extract peat from Mossmorran [Jul 15]. Fife Council said that the proposals were contrary to nationwide planning policy. John McTague, of SWT, said that the site could become a 'fully functional bog habitat' again.

AIR QUALITY

The Scottish Green Party has called for urgent action on air quality levels after St John's Road in Corstorphine, Edinburgh was named as the country's most polluted by Friends of the Earth Scotland. Scottish Government figures from Air Quality Scotland show that air pollution levels on the road had 'dramatically worsened' during the first half of 2015; there were a recorded 35 'spike' incidents between January and June where pollution levels soared over 200 microgrammes per cubic metre in one hour. The air pollution monitoring station recorded a nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) average level of 72 microgrammes per cubic metre in the first half of 2015, set against a 2011 figure of 65; the legal limit of 40. Hope Street in Glasgow recorded average NO₂ levels of 60 microgrammes per cubic metre.

Edinburgh councillors have refused a planning application for a new supermarket on the street, with a car park.

Emilia Hanna, of FoES, said: "Priority should be given to walkers, cyclists and public transport users, and car use should be restricted through a low emission zone, which would require vehicles to meet cleaner emission standards or pay a fine ... These results show that levels of air pollution, which were already at illegal levels, are reaching appalling new heights. John's Road is now Scotland's most polluted road, and traffic congestion is the reason why. These worrying figures further the case for

refusing planning permission for the supermarket. The developer's plans would see 3,000 new vehicle visits to heart of the Pollution Zone each day, worsening traffic congestion and further adding to the soaring levels of pollution."

CARBON EMISSIONS

Scotland has missed its target to cut carbon emissions for the fourth year in a row. Environment minister, Dr Aileen Macleod, said that the latest missed target was down to statistical revisions. She said: "In each of the years from 2010 to 2013, the percentage reductions we have achieved have exceeded those set out along the trajectory to meet the 42% reduction in 2020. In fact, Scotland's emissions have fallen by 38.4% from the 1990 baseline, leaving just a 6% reduction to meet the 2020 target over the next seven years."

BROOM QUARRY

Hoddam Contracting has applied for planning permission to extend the workings of Broom Quarry in Dumfries-shire for a further 24 years. The quarry is part of a 51 hectare (126 acres) site on a former Ministry of Defence complex between Powfoot and Annan. The extraction area is estimated to contain 2.2 million tonnes of sand and gravel. Dumfries & Galloway Council planning officials have recommended that the plans are approved.

PLANNING

A nation-wide review of the planning system has called for written evidence. An independent panel has been tasked with bringing together ideas to achieve a quicker, more accessible and efficient planning process in Scotland.

The panel will consider six key issues as part of the review; development planning; housing delivery; planning for infrastructure; improvements to development management; leadership, resourcing & skills and community engagement.

The review panel is due to report back in Spring 2016, following which Scottish ministers will take forward a reform programme that will be informed by the findings of the review.

Contact: planningreview@gov.scot; see: www.gov.scot/planningreview

HILL TRACKS

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has objected to Culachy Estate's application to retain a large section of hill track which was granted temporary permission as part of the Beauty/Denny power line project [Jul 15]. The estate, near Fort Augustus, has sought permission from Highland Council to make permanent nearly 8 kilometres of temporary access track and two bridges, running almost parallel to the Wade Military Road through the Corrieyairack Pass in the Monadhliath.

Scottish Hydro-Electric Transmission Limited (part of SSE) was granted permission on the condition that the track be removed once construction of the line was complete. The estate claims that retention of the track would enable the expansion of sporting activities on the estate. However, it is also seeking permission for a windfarm. The track extends into an area of wild land.

The MCofS said that the application is another example of nationally decided planning conditions being eroded by piecemeal applications to local planning authorities.

POWER LINE CONSULTATION

Scottish Hydro Electric Power Distribution has launched a six month consultation to identify 48 km of its overhead power transmission lines

across National Parks and National Scenic Areas that could be undergrounded. The company will work with planning officers to compare and prioritise the nominated sections. The coast of undergrounding, which varies according to the voltage, length of circuit and geography, will be considered when selecting the final areas. The public can nominate an area on SHEPDs website: www.ssepd.co.uk/undergrounding

PROTECTED SITES

The Protected Nature Sites web page provides a visual analysis of the condition of Scotland's most important nature sites. The data is provided by Scottish Natural Heritage and it is possible to search by habitat or species type within a local authority or National Park, by the condition of features, by a single site or group of sites.

See: <http://bit.ly/1Pa9VNI>

LANDSCAPE FUNDING

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded £7.5m to three of Scotland's most iconic landscapes for 'conservation and reconnecting communities with their natural heritage.' It is awarded as part of the HLF Landscape Partnership programme.

The North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme, covering 23 Orkney islands has been awarded £2,998,600 to protect the isles' natural heritage and support the island communities. Orkney College will provide training and a new heritage trail will be created.

The Callander's Pass community-led project, on the eastern edge of the Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park, will include a new cycling and walking network.

The Galloway Glens Landscape Partnership has benefited from £2,915,700 funding to conserve and restore the fragile landscape. Work will include allowing fish to negotiate a power station, the restoration of peatland and the restructuring of forestry.



ENERGY

FIT SUBSIDY

The *Sunday Herald* reported that small and medium sized hydro projects across Scotland are being stopped following changes in the UK Feed in Tariff (FIT) subsidy arrangements [Sep 15].

The UK Department of Energy & Climate (DECC) consulted on the removal of preliminary accreditation from the FIT scheme. Pre-accreditation provided developers with the security of knowing what they would be paid for the power they generated from their new development, as long as it was built within two years. The pre-accreditation has now been removed, with effect from 1 October.

Developers had only had a few weeks to get all their paperwork in place, including planning permission, grid connection and a licence from the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Business & energy minister, Fergus Ewing, said that he was shocked by this and knew of at least 12 schemes that will not go ahead as a direct result; many schemes would now not be economically viable because of the new risk and uncertainty introduced.

The DECC also announced another consultation on the future of the whole FIT scheme, which closed during the month. Its funding has been progressively cut in recent years, but the UK government is now considering its total closure to new entrants from January.

• UK ministers are to reduce the 50% tax relief offered to investors in renewable energy

projects. Share offers will now need to be closed and all finance in place by 30 November. Small-scale hydro schemes and small community wind projects are at risk.

Stephanie Clark, of Scottish Renewables, said that a growing number of announcements from the UK government in the last four months had left 'a pall of uncertainty hanging over the renewable energy industry.' She said: "But in this case there is no doubt: the removal of tax relief from these valuable co-operative schemes is likely to lead to a dramatic decline in the number of towns and villages which will benefit from green energy in future."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "This most recent development takes away one of the competitive aspects of community energy in terms of being able to raise capital cheaply. It also further undermines getting new electricity generation onto the grid, which is foolhardy given National Grid's recent assessment of a further tightening of the gap between electricity supply and demand. We will work with all our community groups who are seeking to raise capital in this way to get share offers completed before the deadline."

WINDFARM UPDATES

Dumfries & Galloway: Buccleuch Estates and 2020 Renewables are planning a 20 turbine windfarm at Hopsrig, between Langholm and Bentpath.

• Muirhall Energy plans 13 wind turbines within a commercial forestry plantation at Loganhead, between Lockerbie and Langholm.

Perth & Kinross: A 17 turbine windfarm is proposed at Dulater Hill near Butterstone. Scottish Natural Heritage, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Scottish Rights of Way have all opposed the plan, with the Scottish Wildlife Trust expressing concerns over the potential impact it might have on various forms of wildlife, including ospreys and short-eared owls.

Officials recommended refusal of the plan, stating that the magnitude of the adverse effects associated with the windfarm are 'significant and environmentally unacceptable.'

• The 24 turbine Talladh-a-Bheithe windfarm on Rannoch Moor has been rejected. At the time of the application, Talladh-a-Bheithe Wind Farm Limited was not incorporated under the Companies Act 2006. Scottish ministers therefore returned the application as not competent [May 15]. The application had been seen as a major test of the government's new planning guidance on wild land; the proposal was sited two kilometres north of the Loch Rannoch & Glen Lyon National Scenic Area.

Scottish Borders: A second legal challenge to Wind Direct's plans for two wind turbines near Cockburnspath has been rejected [Mar 13]. The project was granted permission by the local review body of the council and then the decision was unsuccessfully challenged at the Court of Session.

Now three judges have refused the 'reclaiming motion' of objector Sally Carroll. They said that the local review body's decision was lawful and complied with relevant statutory requirements. The legal challenge concerned the location of the turbines on 'highly sensitive' coastal farmland near the Berwickshire Coast & Lammermuir Hills Special Landscape Areas and the Southern Upland Way.

• The *BBC News* website reported that RES is planning a 13 turbine windfarm south of Chesters, near Hawick.

UGC

The Scottish Government has put in place a moratorium on underground coal gasification

(UCG) in Scotland in addition to the existing moratorium on onshore unconventional oil and gas, including hydraulic fracturing [Sep 15]. Ministers are clear that these are two separate technologies, subject to different licensing regimes, and hence will be considered separately.

The government will carry out a wide-ranging research process into the potential impacts of such onshore techniques which will include seismic monitoring research and climate change impacts research.

A public consultation will begin once the research process has been finalised and the results published. Detailed evidence-gathering will now take place with the consultation phase due to conclude in spring 2017.

The Scottish Government has appointed Professor Campbell Gemmill to lead an independent examination of the issues and evidence surrounding UCG.

While powers to award onshore unconventional licences are being devolved to Scottish ministers, powers to award operators exclusive rights to exploit coal resources for UCG rest with the UK government/Coal Authority and there are no live proposals to devolve these to Scotland. As a result, the moratorium on UCG will be implemented at Scottish planning authority level.

HYDRO SCHEMES

The Highland Council has approved Raasay Development Trust's plans for two micro hydro schemes on the Inverarish River, generating around 140 kw in total, but finance is still to be secured [see FIT subsidy above].

- Loch Broom Community Renewables Ltd's 100 kw Lael Forest hydro scheme on the Allt a'Mhuillinn has been granted planning permission by The Highland Council. The scheme just secured the feed in tariff in time, but needs to raise money through a community share offer by 30 November [see above].

WASTE-TO-ENERGY

A £120m 'waste to energy' plant is planned by Aberdeen City Council at East Tullos. Aberdeen which would process 150,000 tonnes of rubbish each year from Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray.

WORMIT SOLAR

Fife Council has granted planning permission for Green Hedge Renewables' Wormit Solar Farm. The 30 acre, 4 MW solar farm, will be located to the south-east of Wormit.

ICELAND INTERCONNECTOR

A 750 mile undersea electricity interconnector is proposed to export geothermal electricity from Iceland to northern Scotland. A UK-Iceland Energy Task Force has been set up to examine the feasibility of the £3 billion scheme and will report back within six months.

DOUNREAY

The University of the Highlands & Islands' North Highland College Environmental Research Institute at Thurso is testing spent grain from distilleries as well as seaweed, crab shells and coffee grounds for use in absorbing Strontium-90 during the cleanup of radioactive nuclear waste at Dounreay in Caithness.

CHAPELCROSS

Scotia Global Energy plans to build an experimental green energy park at the former Chapelcross nuclear plant near Annan in Dumfries & Galloway [Feb 15]. The plans for the 90 hectare site include a hybrid power station intended to radically reduce carbon dioxide

emissions, laboratory space for integrated energy system research and a development zone allocated for four community energy projects. The site has existing electricity grid connection, proximity to the gas grid and water abstraction facilities. A spokesman for Dumfries & Galloway Council said that it was working with Scottish Enterprise and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority on the regeneration of the Chapelcross site.



RECREATION & TOURISM

FIFE PILGRIM WAY

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has awarded £406,000 to the Fife Pilgrim Way [Nov 12]. Fife Coast & Countryside Trust will now employ a development officer. The route, once completed, will enable people to walk from North Queensferry and Culross to St Andrews taking in over 50 medieval sites *en route*. A stage 2 application will be made to the HLF. See: www.fifecoastandcountryside.co.uk

CAIRNGORM CLOSED SYSTEM

The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald reported that Fergus Ewing, the minister for tourism, has called on the Scottish Government for an impartial review of Cairngorm's closed system, which limits access to the plateau from the funicular [Oct 13]. He said: "The closed system was a necessary compromise at the time but it is now time for it to go."

Aviemore Community Council has also called for the 'ludicrous ban on open access to be scrapped' and said that it was counter to the Land Reform Act. Ray Sefton, of the community council, said: "It is the only time that a planning regulation has been bought in to control people."

LOCH LOMOND

The Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park has proposed new by-laws which would create a camping-free zone around the west side of Loch Lomond [Jun 15]. In a joint letter to *The Herald*, Helen Todd of Ramblers Scotland, David Gibson of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Eddie Palmer of the Scottish Canoe Association said: "[Camping by-laws] proposals would expose responsible and otherwise innocent citizens to criminal charges when camping in the National Park where by-laws applied, even if they were abiding by the requirements of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. There is already existing legislation designed to combat the problems it's hoped the by-laws will address, such as littering and anti-social behaviour. By-laws should only be used as a last resort when all other measures such as camping provision have been implemented and their impact subsequently assessed.

"More camping facilities are unlikely to be established, however, while local landowners appear to be refusing to cooperate unless by-laws are in place on other land to prohibit informal camping, even when done in accordance with best practice. We therefore encourage the minister, Dr Aileen Macleod, to be bold in her decision and take account of the ambition inherent within the current land reform debate to uphold the public interest in land, for example by the use of compulsory purchase powers to secure land for campsites."

Nick Kempe, also writing in *The Herald*, said: "In 2013, in it's submission to the Land Reform review group, the National Park proposed amending access rights and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code to create a ban on camping close to roads throughout Scotland. The review group explicitly considered and rejected the Park's proposals. The current by-law proposals are simply an attempt

by the National Park to criminalise campers by the back door ... the decision before the minister is whether she wants to take land reform back to 1865 [the repealed Trespass (Scotland) Act] which before repeal had previously been used by landowners to remove anyone who they did not like camping on their land. In doing so she should consider human rights and whether Scotland really wants by-laws which, if we were in eastern Europe would have criminalised not just outdoor recreationists but all those refugees sleeping by the roadside."



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

HWDT

The Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT)'s yacht, *Silurian*, is shadowing Operation Joint Warrior off the west coast. The research boat has been equipped with video range tracking equipment to help monitor changes in marine life behaviour during the NATO exercise. Changes in the speed and direction of whales and dolphins will be calculated and whether they are fleeing from military activity will be assessed. The Joint Warrior exercise is held in April and October every year.

JMT

The John Muir Trust (JMT) has won £18,000 funding to repair paths on Suilven in Assynt (731m). The JMT project was the only UK entry in the alpine category of the European Outdoor Conservation Association competition. The path restoration work will be carried out by the JMT and the Assynt Foundation, under the umbrella of the Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Partnership.

SCOTTISH SEABIRD CENTRE

The Scottish Seabird Centre in North Berwick, East Lothian has been awarded a £290,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop plans to expand into a new National Marine Centre. The new centre, costing £3.5m, will include a new education and interactive exhibition space.

SRUC

The *BBC News* website reported that Richard Lochhead, Rural Affairs Secretary, has proposed a new veterinary laboratory in Inverness to replace Scotland's Rural College facility threatened with closure in a consultation on the future of animal disease surveillance in Scotland [Jul 15].

The current laboratory is responsible for animal disease surveillance and carrying out *post mortems* on livestock for a large area of northern Scotland. Staff there also investigate the deaths of marine mammals such as whales, dolphins and porpoises. Mr Lochhead said that SRUC was exploring the proposal to retain the laboratory until a new facility in Inverness could be made available.

ST ABBS MARINE

The St Abbs Marine Station, in Berwickshire, is to become base for studies aimed at boosting marine conservation in a joint project between the station, a registered charity funded by private donors, and Napier and Heriot-Watt Universities. Senior research staff from both universities will be seconded to the marine station as part of a new research programme.

SWT

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has published '*50 for the Future*' which lists 50 changes over the next 50 years that could restore Scotland's natural environment. It is divided into five sections: uplands, lowlands, urban, marine and Scotland-wide and covers a wide range of issues, species and habitats.