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## CONSERVATION

### RED SQUIRRELS

Development funding of £37,800 has been awarded by the Heritage Lottery Fund to help the Scottish Wildlife Trust develop plans to apply for a full grant of £2.46m at a later date for the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project. This project has been running for the last seven years, led by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Land & Estates, RSPB Scotland and the Red Squirrel Survival Trust. The project has proved that it is possible to halt the decline of red squirrels by coordinated grey squirrel control and a sustainable programme will be designed to deliver this work over the long-term. The Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels network covers north east Scotland, Tayside, southern Scotland and Argyll, the Trossachs and Stirling.

- The second red squirrel census was undertaken by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS) on its land across Scotland. This census showed that reds occurred on 29 NTS properties, and grey squirrels at 32. Red squirrels were spotted at Branklyn Garden in Perth and Falkland Palace in Fife, having been absent for five years. The survey showed the near disappearance of grey squirrels from Crathes and Drum in Aberdeenshire, after years of population increase.

At the House of Dun in Angus, red squirrels have been captured on trail cameras, but a grey squirrel was also filmed for the first time recently. NTS properties such as Killiecrankie, Crathes, Threave and House of Dun are all located on the 'front line' of grey expansion.

However, the NTS said that the future is still far from secure for red squirrels and is looking at its north west properties to see if they would be suitable for red squirrel introductions, and is encouraging other landowners to do the same. This could provide a longterm refuge for red squirrels should grey squirrels and the squirrelpox virus keep heading northwards.

### NATURE OMNIBUS

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Nature Omnibus Survey, carried out annually for SNH has been published. It surveys public attitudes towards Scotland's wildlife.

Red squirrels were the survey's top conservation concern, followed by deer, wildcats and birds of prey. The proportion of survey respondents' concerns about bumblebees has risen from a low of 1% in 2013 to 9% this year. See: <http://bit.ly/1nqrfnQ>

### WILDCATS

A winter survey of Scottish wildcats is underway with more than 300 trail cameras being used over a 60 day period. The survey focuses on five of the wildcat priority areas of Scotland, including Strathpeffer, Strathbogie, Strathavon, North Strathspey and the Angus Glens. Work will be continuing in Morvern later in the year. Volunteers are checking the cameras, supported by an award from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This is the first wildcat survey on this scale.

The chief threat to the wildcat is continued interbreeding with domestic cats. Many wildcats in Scotland already contain some domestic cat ancestry and wildcats will continue to become

less distinctive if this is left unchecked. Scottish Wildcat Action is committed to reducing the risk of interbreeding between wildcats and domestic cats or obvious hybrids. Once the situation in the priority areas is better known, the project team can determine appropriate follow-up actions. This includes working with local communities and estates to protect remaining wildcats and a coordinated programme to Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate & Release un-owned domestic cats and obvious hybrids before being returned to the wild, under licence from SNH.

See: [www.scottishwildcattaction.org](http://www.scottishwildcattaction.org)

### DUNDREGGAN ESTATE

Trees for Life asked on its *Facebook* page for local help on a conservation day to help remove the few remaining Sika deer inside a specific enclosure at Dundreggan. Volunteers would beat the deer out of the plantation blocks with 'whistles and drums' towards a deer stalking team. The plans generated considerable controversy. See: [www.facebook.com/treesforlifefuk](http://www.facebook.com/treesforlifefuk)

### BEAVERS

The *BBC News* website reported that the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) has carried out *post mortem* examinations on 23 beavers from Tayside, found dead since 2010 [Nov 15]. It concluded that 21 had been shot, although other sources have said the total number of animals killed in this way is higher.

A freedom of information request by BBC Scotland showed that:

- Two pregnant animals were shot. The size and weight of the fetuses indicates they were very near full term
- Two other females which were shot had recently given birth and were feeding their young; these kits most likely later died through starvation
- There were concerns about the length of time it would have taken some of the 21 animals to die
- At least one animal contained lead shot. It is against the law to use lead shot to kill an animal in water
- Three were shot with low-calibre guns, or from too far away to ensure an instantaneous kill

An RZSS statement said: "In our capacity as advisors to the Scottish Government on beaver management, RZSS has written both to Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Government to raise welfare concerns over a small number of deceased beavers sent in by landowners. This specifically relates to how they were shot, the distance they were shot from and, most significantly, the timing of dispatch, particularly of females with dependent young still in the lodge. We are currently awaiting a response from the minister before making any further comment."

Nick Halfhide, of SNH, said: "We share welfare concerns about beavers shot with inappropriate firearms and ammunition, and those with dependent young. We have asked land managers not to shoot beavers in Tayside but instead seek advice from us on mitigation, such as protecting trees and discouraging dam building. However, if they choose to use lethal control, we have offered them advice on how

to do so humanely. We have contracted RZSS to give advice to land managers in Tayside on how to manage beaver impacts on their land. This service is freely available, and we strongly encourage farmers and other land managers to use it."

The Scottish Government's decision to trap beavers on Tayside was reversed and a final decision delayed, pending a decision on the Knapdale beaver trial [Mar 12]. A decision on both the Tayside and Knapdale beavers is still awaited and may be some time away [Jun 15].

NFU Scotland believes that a decision is long overdue; beavers have no place in the largely flat, fertile farmland of Tayside which is susceptible to flooding. Andrew Bauer, of NFU Scotland, said that the failure to remove illegal beavers from Tayside had pushed the responsibility onto farmers. Farmers had been refused permission to trap the animals, and mitigation methods had not proved effective. He said: "They have therefore had to carry out legal lethal control as a last resort in order to protect very productive farmland from damage due to drainage systems being blocked by beaver activity. In the vast majority of cases, those beavers that have been shot have been killed humanely. In a very small number of cases, beavers may not have been killed humanely – a sad outcome and one that no farmer would wish for ... If somebody has used a gun to shoot and the animal has moved out of range and the animal has been wounded, that's sad. But that unfortunately is the product of a situation where a lack of action by the authorities over the years has effectively left the farmers being the only ones doing the management in that area."

Alison Johnstone MSP said: "Animal cruelty is simply wrong, and there can be no excuses for inhumane killing of wild creatures in 21st century Scotland. Scottish ministers need to get off the fence, accept that beavers have a positive role to play in terms of biodiversity, and that they deserve legal protection. The poor treatment of these amazing creatures will shock many people, and it suggests that animal welfare is not a Scottish government priority."

The *Sunday Herald* reported that because the Tayside beavers were not legally introduced, there are no rules preventing them from being killed in the breeding season, or specifying the type of firearms that should be used. Such rules, including closed seasons for shooting, are common to prevent unnecessary cruelty when culling other wild animals.

Scottish Land & Estates criticised the Scottish Government for failing to issue advice on controlling beavers.

Libby Anderson, of OneKind, said that the beavers were not to blame for their unauthorised presence on Tayside. She said: "Further delay in deciding their legal status only exposes more animals to suffering due to mis-shooting or killing during the breeding season. We urge the Scottish Government to step in and give them legal protection as a matter of urgency, before the next season's kits are born."

Internal emails released under freedom of information law to BBC Scotland reveal that RZSS has been unsuccessfully urging the introduction of a closed season for beavers since last summer. RZSS told the *Sunday Herald* that it had raised 'welfare concerns' directly with the Scottish Government, but was still awaiting a response.

A government spokeswoman said: "There is currently no legal protection for beavers in Scotland. We are aware that farmers on Tayside are experiencing issues with beavers and encourage land managers to consult with SNH

on mitigation measures rather than resort to lethal control."

• The *Daily Record* reported that a beaver, thought to be part of a family group living in the River Tummel in Perthshire, was spotted in the mill pond in Pitlochry. SNH constructed a trap to capture it, as it was said to have blocked a watercourse with branches leading to a fear of flooding. Beavers have also been seen on fields at Strathallan in Perthshire on the site of the T in the Park music festival.



## FARMING

### BIRD FLU

A suspected case of avian influenza (H5N1) has been identified in chickens at a farm near Dunfermline in Fife. A temporary control zone of one kilometre has been put in place around the farm and 40,000 birds were culled. Restrictions have been imposed including on the movement of poultry, carcasses, eggs, used poultry litter and manure, and restrictions on bird gatherings.

### CAP REFORM

The *Herald* reported that UK farming minister, George Eustice, has committed to a review of the allocation of the UK's €230m convergence dividend before the end of 2016 [Apr 14].

European Union money was given to the UK in 2013 as part of the political effort to 'converge' all of Europe's farmers onto a more or less equal rate of support payment per hectare. The expectation had been that Scottish farmers would receive most of this convergence money as they lagged behind English, Welsh and Northern Irish farmers on the 'per hectare' basis. Scotland has the third lowest direct support payment rate per hectare in the EU, and was the reason why the UK received this dividend due to Scotland's below average area payment rates. However, the money was shared across all of the UK's farmers on the basis of historic allocations. NFU Scotland has been campaigning to have that allocation reviewed.

### COMMON GRAZINGS

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that the Crofting Commission has produced a standard set of regulations and detailed guidance for Grazings Committees on how to regulate the use of common grazings. Grazings Regulations detail the management and use of a common grazing and provide details of each person who is entitled to use the common grazing and the amount of stock they are allowed to graze. Crofting Commissioner Murdo MacLennan said: "The role of common grazings is central to the contribution crofting can make to the sustainable development of crofting communities and properly constituted grazings committees are the most effective way to safeguard the future common grazing land for the benefit of all crofters."

There are more than 1,000 common grazings covering over 500,000 hectares across Scotland. The land is shared, mainly by crofters, predominantly for grazing stock but also peat cutting. See: [www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/commongrazings.asp](http://www.crofting.scotland.gov.uk/commongrazings.asp)

### DEER DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

The *Scottish Farming Leader* reported that the two year Deer Farm & Park Demonstration project at five farms has now finished [Sep 13]. The project was supplemented by a parallel study, funded by Interface Food & Drink, by the James Hutton Institute, the University of Aberdeen and the Scottish Venison Partnership to better understand the barriers to entry in deer farming in Scotland. A new dedicated deer abattoir has been opened at Downfield in Fife. See: <http://bit.ly/23iLMuL>

### FARMING INCOME

Scotland's chief statistician has published *Total Income from Farming Estimates for Scotland 2013-2015*, which contains near-final estimates of Total Income from Farming (TIFF) for 2014 and an initial estimate of 2015 TIFF. The figures show income fell by 9% in 2014 compared to the previous year, and initial estimates for 2015 suggest a further drop of 15%.

This is only the second time since the 1990s that TIFF has fallen in two consecutive years.

Agriculture was worth £777m to the Scottish economy in 2014, down from £837m in 2013, with subsidies, potatoes and barley all seeing big falls. Although not all the data are yet in, TIFF for 2015 may have fallen back to about £667m, which, once inflation is taken into account, is the second lowest in the past decade.

The main Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) subsidies were also down, though income from fruit increased considerably.

Overall, livestock saw a small decrease in value in both years. The largest sector, the beef industry, saw a small decline in 2014 followed by a partial recovery in 2015. Output from slaughter or sales of cattle amounted to an estimated £732m in 2015. The dairy sector suffered from the large drop in price; the average milk price fell 23% in 2015, resulting in a drop of 21% in the overall value, to £364m.

There was a 10% increase in sheep income in 2014 followed by an estimated 4% fall in 2015 to £202m. Likewise the pig industry saw an increase in 2014 followed by a fall in 2015 to £85m. Poultry however saw large falls in both years, from £118m in 2013 to £62m in 2015. Eggs increased an estimated 14% during 2015 to £94m.

Cereals fell 13% both years, with barley now worth an estimated £198m and wheat £119m. Potatoes also saw two drops, of 24% and 12%, now down at an estimated £167m. Vegetables saw a steady 2015 after a 14% fall in 2014, and now stand at £115m. Fruit was one area that saw growth in 2015, with increases in volume and price leading to an estimated 39% increase in value to £128m.

Total costs were estimated to have fallen slightly in both years. Feed costs are estimated to have fallen as much as £70m in 2014, and may fall further in 2015 (due to the poultry industry) to an estimated £594m. The cost of fertiliser is estimated to have fallen 9% in 2014 which if, as estimated, is repeated in 2015 will give a value of £169m. Fuel costs fell 10% in 2014 and look like they will fall further in 2015, to an estimated £115m. However labour costs look like they will be up about 5% in 2015, to £373m.

Subsidies, including coupled support, amounted to £510m in 2014 and £490m in 2015. The reduction in 2015 was due to CAP Direct Payments (Basic Payment Scheme, Greening and Young Farmer Payments) being down 13% on Single Farm Payment, due to both a less favourable exchange rate and a 6% reduction in the original euro payment. Subsidies remain an important factor in the profitability of farming, accounting for 14% of gross income and 74% of TIFF in 2015.

On a per hectare basis, the highest level of income from farming is in the south west. This is mainly due to income from milk, accounting for about 30-40% of the region's output, and beef production. The north east is the second highest, with beef and cereals being its strength. Highlands & Islands has the lowest income from farming, where agriculture is estimated to have made only a very small profit once support is included. Eastern Scotland has the most balanced distribution of output, with cereals, potatoes, horticulture, cattle, poultry and other income each producing more than 10% of the region's output, with none of them above 20%.

See: [www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01197](http://www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01197)

**ORGANIC ACTION PLAN**

The Scottish Organic Forum is working on a major revision of the Organic Action Plan produced in 2011 and revised in 2013: *Organic Ambitions: An Action Plan for Organic Food and Farming in Scotland 2016–2020*. The proposed revision will take account of changing economic and regulatory positions, and be set in the wider context of new Scottish Government policy together with the new CAP Pillar II priorities.

Contact: email: [wseel@organicgrowersalliance.co.uk](mailto:wseel@organicgrowersalliance.co.uk); [scottishorganicforum@sac.co.uk](mailto:scottishorganicforum@sac.co.uk) See: [www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120636/scottish\\_organic\\_action\\_plan](http://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120636/scottish_organic_action_plan)

**WOODLANDS****PHYTOPHTHORA RAMORUM**

*Phytophthora ramorum* has been discovered at the National Trust for Scotland (NTS)'s Inverewe Gardens in Wester Ross. The pathogen is also known as 'sudden oak death.' Larch trees and other susceptible host plants are being felled. NTS estimates that it will cost more than £20,000 to eradicate the blight by felling affected trees and rhododendron within a radius of 250 metres as part of a containment zone.

Kevin Frediani, of NTS, said: "Responsible landowners, like the National Trust for Scotland, undertake regular visual checks from the ground. Fortunately, the affected larch are not in a core part of the garden, though the shelterbelt will have to be re-planted with a less susceptible species in order to ensure the garden continues to be protected from harsh winds in future, which is essential for the microclimate that garden enjoys."

Felling will be completed at Inverewe by the end of February and the wood will be disposed of using approved methods. Monitoring will continue afterwards to enable prompt action can be taken if the disease is found to have spread.

**FLOW COUNTRY**

RSPB Scotland has escaped prosecution after felling 46 hectares of trees in Forsinard, Sutherland without the necessary licences; it said that the issue was the result of an 'administrative error' [Mar 15]. The work was carried out at the Dyke and Forsinain commercial forestry plantations in Sutherland as part of a long-running deep peatland restoration project which was removing conifer plantations from the Flow Country bogs. The work at the site, containing an estimated 40,000 trees, was carried out after the licence had expired. RSPB Scotland faced a fine of twice the £15,636 value of the felled trees. The Crown Office said it was not in the public interest to prosecute RSPB Scotland.

A Forestry Commission Scotland spokesman said: "In line with normal practice when there is an unauthorised felling of this scale and significance, a thorough report was produced and submitted to the procurator fiscal. It is for the procurator fiscal to decide whether or not to take forward any prosecution and in this case they decided not to do so. We have issued formal warning letters to the parties involved and met senior staff from both RSPB and Tilhill to ensure their procedures are revised to avoid such incidents in the future."

Dr Pete Mayhew, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We welcome the decision by the procurator fiscal and look forward to moving ahead with our important peatland restoration work under a forest plan agreed with Forestry Commission Scotland. To ensure there is no repetition of this unfortunate incident, we have undertaken a complete and thorough review of our operating procedures and strengthened them significantly so that we can

focus on our work restoring the internationally important peatlands of the Flow Country. RSPB Scotland is proud of its record in removing thousands of inappropriately planted trees over the last two decades and we deeply regret that, in this instance, felling took place without the proper documentation in place."

**FISHFARMING & FISHERIES****WILD SALMON CONSERVATION**

The Environment minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, has confirmed a number of changes to regulate the killing of wild salmon in Scotland, including the Tweed district, which will come into force on April 1, running on immediately from the existing spring conservation regulations which conclude on March 31 [Sep 15].

Key aspects are: killing outwith estuary limits will be prohibited for three years due to the mixed stock nature of the fishery and limited data on the composition of the catch; the killing of Atlantic salmon in inland waters will be managed on an annual basis by categorising fishery districts by their conservation status and there will be a requirement for a Conservation Plan irrespective of the conservation status.

Alasdair Laing, of the Association of Salmon Fishery Boards, said: "Most river systems already have voluntary conservation measures in place which would need only modest adjustment to comply with the new regulation. The conservation status principle will help identify areas where specific management challenges existed while offering the flexibility for improvements to be recognised."

The *BBC News* website reported that Tom Florey, manager of the Caerlaverock Estate, said the ban would affect the ancient tradition of haaf netting, dating back to Viking times, on the River Nith. He said: "Haaf netting goes back to the days when employees were promised they wouldn't be fed salmon more than three times a week because the numbers were so high. But we have all seen the dwindling numbers and the haaf netters themselves have been very good at agreeing restrictions on the hours and the times they practise this very old, ancient art."

"I can see this being a further restriction and possibly for quite a lot of haaf netters a restriction too far and they will not be taking their permit out next year, even though they can still fish for sea trout, the other migratory fish that comes into the Nith system. There are dwindling numbers of haaf netters partly because of the restrictions that have been put in over the years. I can see that number going down into single figures but we won't let it die out. We will by one way or another keep practising, even if it is using estate staff and allowing visitors and tourists to have a go at haaf netting."

The numbers of haaf netters on the Caerlaverock Estate have fallen from 60 to under 20 in recent years.

Elaine Murray MSP described the move as 'an attack on the region's fishing industry.' She claimed that there was no genuine research behind the regulations but the ban was being forced through anyway; the response of local angling and fishing clubs had been brushed aside.

Alex Fergusson MSP said that he believed the ban could have been delayed; a delay for a year would have helped local fishing interests to prepare for the move.

See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Salmon-Trout-Coarse/fishreform/licence)

**MARINE****WHALE ENTANGLEMENTS**

A killer whale (orca) was found dead, stranded on Tiree. It has been identified as 'Lulu', a member of the West Coast community of orcas which is Britain and Ireland's only known resident population of killer whales. There may be as few as eight individuals remaining in this population, which has not produced calves since studies began in 1992 and is feared to be at risk of extinction. A Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme *post mortem* examination established that the orca had become entangled in fishing gear.

- Dr Paul Jepson, of the Zoological Society of London, published a paper in Scientific Reports which said that polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) had a marked effect on breeding success and were probably the cause of the West Coast population's decline.

- A 12 metre humpback whale became entangled in creel pots in Loch Eriboll near Durness, Sutherland; it was unable to open its mouth. Specialist disentanglement gear was flown in from London. British Divers Marine Life Rescue successfully freed the whale.

**BASKING SHARKS**

The final report has been published by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) for a joint project with the University of Exeter on basking sharks in the Sea of the Hebrides [Jul 12]. Between 2012 and 2014, some 61 basking sharks were satellite tagged near the islands of Hyskier, Coll and Tiree, where each summer large numbers can be seen feeding near the surface. The sharks return each year to feed in the area's plankton-rich seas. The sharks' behaviour suggests the waters could also be important for other reasons and that they could benefit from a proposed Marine Protected Area (MPA) off the west coast.

Suzanne Henderson, of SNH, said: "It's been really exciting to learn that the same individual basking sharks return in consecutive years to use Scottish waters. It's something we thought happened – but we now have the first proof that this occurs. It really does emphasise that the Sea of the Hebrides is highly important for this migrating species. As well as cruising around and feeding at the surface the sharks can be seen showing courtship-like behaviours, such as jumping clear of the water, known as breaching and swimming around nose-to-tail. These social behaviours suggest that the sharks return to the area not just to feed on the plankton bloom but for other reasons too, perhaps even to find a mate."

She said that protecting highly mobile species, such as basking shark and whales, was difficult due to the large areas they covered. Identifying and managing areas where the animals gather to feed, or for important life-cycle events, such as courtship, could therefore play an important role in their conservation. From autumn onwards the tagged sharks dispersed widely, leaving the shallow coastal waters for deep sea. SNH has recommended that an area from Skye to Mull be designated an MPA to protect the basking sharks, and also minke whales. Scottish ministers are currently considering the proposal.

*SNH Commissioned Report 908; Basking Shark Satellite Tagging Project: Insights into Basking Shark Movement, Distribution and Behaviour Using Satellite Telemetry.* See: <http://bit.ly/1OBDyX2>

**MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

The *BBC News* website reported that Holyrood's rural affairs committee considered a motion from Jamie McGrigor MSP that sought to remove

certain restrictions from the forthcoming legislation governing 30 proposed MPAs [Dec 15]. Mr McGrigor sought an annulment of the Omnibus Fishing Orders which would restrict bottom-towed fishing in 13 inshore MPAs and Special Areas of Conservation, and a Marine Conservation Order for South Arran MPA. The committee voted against the motion.

Scottish Environment LINK had urged the committee not to support the motion and said that well-managed MPAs were 'essential' to boosting and protecting marine habitats. It said that these conservation measures must be adopted without delay; they have been widely consulted upon over a long period and have the support of many stakeholders. MPAs are a long-term investment to safeguard the future of Scotland's marine biodiversity and the industries that rely on them; further delay to implementing management will risk potential further damage to the features they are designed to protect. There has already been too much delay. The proposed management measures are estimated to reduce revenue for some affected scallop dredgers and trawlers by approximately 1.7% in the short-term. However with adequate protection, mid to long-term increases in number and size of commercial species as a result of the management measures are likely.

Environment secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "The Clyde Fishermen's Association and mobile sector are among many voices in the debate. I also have to listen to the voices of the creelers and hand divers, as well as many other sectors who have an interest in this debate and to the people living in the communities of the west of Scotland. It is a very passionate debate and many people who have spoken to me have said they are too scared to speak out publicly and make their views known, and I have urged them to do so."

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF) said the restrictions proposed for the South Arran MPA went far beyond what was agreed during the initial consultation and urged MSPs to support local communities on the west coast by rejecting the government's proposals. Bertie Armstrong, of SFF, said: "It is entirely possible to allow limited and carefully controlled fishing within parts of MPAs where there are no features of conservation importance, and to impose a blanket ban over a whole area is totally irrational and unnecessary. One of the founding objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy is to enable the continuation of fishing whilst ensuring environmental sustainability – a principle the Scottish Government is completely ignoring. It is also ignoring the widespread local community opposition to these proposals."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "The consultation involved individual fishermen and their representatives, and included local engagement. There is a need to balance the interests of protecting Scotland's marine environment with wider interests, particularly those of the fishing industry, but failure to protect coastal areas would result in permanent damage to habitats and the fish stocks they support."

**HARBOUR PORPOISE**

The UK government has announced a public consultation on the creation of five new marine protected areas in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, designed to protect harbour porpoise populations. However, Marine Scotland is consulting again on four proposed protection areas: the Moray Firth, the Minch between the Isle of Lewis and the coast around Ullapool, and around the islands of Mull, Jura and Islay. A

fourth area has been halved, with the section next to Northern Ireland retained but the area off the southern coast of Galloway removed.

Catherine Weller, of ClientEarth, said: "It's disappointing the Scottish Government has stalled its consultation regarding at least three further areas, reducing the potential for comprehensive protection for the harbour porpoise in UK waters."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The Scottish Government remains fully committed to having harbour porpoise special areas of conservation in Scottish waters, where they are fully justified and supported by the evidence. However, the four proposals received for Scottish waters did not fully meet the scientific requirements, which is why Marine Scotland has begun a new selection process which will progress as quickly and methodically as possible."

All of the porpoise areas were proposed by the UK Joint Natural Conservation Committee (JNCC). The *Sunday Herald* reported that internal emails, from April to November 2015, obtained by Whale & Dolphin Conservation (WDC) and released by JNCC suggest that the Scottish Government delayed the proposals for harbour porpoises to enable new offshore windfarms to go ahead. 48 pages of detailed email exchanges reveal that officials were worried about a significant risk that the two windfarms planned for the Moray Firth could fail.

Marine Scotland launched a review of the proposed designations, and questioned aspects of the science behind them. Mark Tasker, of JNCC, said: "It was very obvious that the so-called impartial review has been designed with particular policy objectives in mind."

A WDC spokesperson said: "The Scottish Government appears to be allowing concerns for the success of offshore wind to drive decisions about conservation designations. Offshore windfarms and marine wildlife may not be incompatible, but the uncertainty created by Scotland's delay in designating porpoise conservation areas must be a bigger risk to industry."

**CROMARTY FIRTH**

Two petitions have been launched opposing Cromarty Firth Port Authority's (CPFA) decision to apply for a licence to the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) to transfer nearly nine million tonnes of crude oil a year between tankers at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth [Dec 15]. Five mooring points for tankers have been identified beyond the Sutors headlands at the Cromarty Firth entrance. The closest is about a mile from the shore. This area is just in the larger Moray Firth but under CPFA control and regularly visited by the North Sea's last resident colony of bottlenose dolphins. Wildlife spotting boat trips, local fishing boats, leisure craft and cruise liners would also have to observe a 500 metre exclusion zone round the tankers, projected to be there for 24 hours, four times a month.

Ship-to-ship oil transfers (STS) at the nearby Nigg Oil Terminal jetty have been carried out safely under licence for years. Between 2009 and 2014 there were over 85 STS transfer operations at Nigg, with over 6.5 million tonnes transferred.

John Finnie MSP appealed to the public to sign a new *Save Our Dolphins* petition. He said: "The proposal for ship-to-ship oil transfers puts the priceless environment of the Moray Firth – including our iconic bottlenose dolphins – at risk. The plan means that instead of loading and offloading oil in the safety of Nigg harbour, oil would be pumped between ships at the mercy of the waves out in the Firth. It's little wonder that this risky procedure is seen as a real threat by

campaigners like Whale & Dolphin Conservation."

An online petition, *Tell the Cromarty Firth Port Authority NO to ship to ship transfers in Moray Firth*, has also been launched.

Bob Buskie, of CPFA, said: "Due to the interest in this application we agreed to extend the consultation period to allow interested parties more time to express their views. This type of 'ship to ship' transfer has been carried out within the Port for many years without incident."

Stuart Black, of the Highland Council, said that the council's draft response raises a number of concerns. He said that the council had been liaising with SNH, the MCA and Marine Scotland. Cromarty Community Council has objected to the plans.

Dr Greg Fullarton, a local environmental consultant, said: "The people of Cromarty clearly have no confidence in the port authority's modelling which takes no account of the risk of ships colliding; of the fact that the wind can blow from the east up the firth for days; or of the strong tides. It bases its calculations only one to tonne of oil escaping despite 180,000 tonnes are planned for every visit."

The consultation has been extended till February 8. The final decision will be taken by the MCA.

**SALTMARSH SURVEY**

Results from Scotland's first comprehensive national survey of saltmarsh have been published by SNH and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

The three year long joint survey has mapped in detail, and assessed the condition of, all known saltmarshes larger than three hectares, or longer than 500 metres, across the Scottish mainland and offshore islands. 249 sites were visited and more than 5,800 hectares of saltmarsh recorded and mapped. Saltmarshes are found at the top of the sea shore with the largest areas in the Solway Firth. They are exposed at low tide and covered by seawater at high tide to varying degrees. Upper marsh is not covered on every tide, and forms a transition area into terrestrial habitats.

Professor Stewart Angus of SNH, said: "The Scottish Saltmarsh Survey report gives us a really valuable 'snapshot' of a habitat that is likely to change considerably in coming years as a result of climate change. We now have detailed mapped information on four of Scotland's most important coastal habitats – saltmarsh, machair, dune and shingle – known as 'soft coasts.' This work also helps the Scottish Government to meet its European reporting obligations.

"One of the most interesting findings of the study was that saltmarsh appears to be much more dynamic than previously thought, and we identified more change in extent than had been anticipated. This was particularly true of the Solway, where pioneer saltmarsh had been replaced by Atlantic saltmarsh over a significant area, and much of the remaining pioneer vegetation was a lot sparser than before. This suggests that saltmarshes are not only keeping pace with relative sea level rise, but they are actually outpacing it at lower levels, by increased sedimentation."

Dr Clare Scanlan, of SEPA, said: "Saltmarsh is a sensitive habitat that could play an important role in relation to coastal flooding, and we are using the results of this national survey to help us in reporting the ecological status of saltmarsh for the EU Water Framework Directive."

The condition of saltmarsh was assessed against UK targets, which are set at a level beyond that which is needed to achieve Favourable Conservation Status under the European Habitats Directive.

The report found that the main reasons why some sites didn't meet the targets set related to the presence

of man-made structures, such as embankments, and a lack of transition habitats between the saltmarsh and land. These are issues which are not easily addressed through site management. Negative impacts of grazing were recorded more frequently on non-designated sites. Further work is now required to separate natural variability from any trends associated with climate change.

See: *SNH Commissioned Report 786: Scottish Saltmarsh Survey Report*. See: <http://bit.ly/1ZV0ORc>



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### LAND REFORM

The Scottish Government moved 49 amendments to the Land Reform Bill [Dec 12]. The Land Reform minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, said that the changes would make the bill 'the most radical and ambitious land reform legislation possible.' Many of these amendments are in response to suggestions from the parliament's Rural Affairs Environment & Climate Change Committee (RACCE) and other stakeholders.

Dr McLeod also confirmed that she plans to amend Part 3 of the bill, during stages two and three, to give the Scottish Government the power to make regulations to create a public register to increase the transparency around who controls land in Scotland. She said: "More work is required on complex legal issues, such as what information should be disclosed and how to protect the privacy of individuals. So I will put in place the necessary powers to allow further work to be done and ensure that this bill delivers a framework that gives, subject to parliamentary scrutiny, detailed information about who controls land in Scotland."

*The Herald* reported that, under the original bill, rights to information on those who control land, not necessarily its owner, were to be granted to 'interested parties.' The Scottish Green Party tried to amend the bill by restricting ownership to legal entities registered inside the European Union in a bid to exclude tax havens and improve transparency. An estimated 750,000 acres of land in Scotland are owned by companies and trusts based in offshore tax havens.

Ministers said that this could breach EU law on the free movement of capital, could prompt landowners to use ever more complex structures to conceal ownership, and noted some EU countries such as Luxembourg were also seen as tax havens. The Scottish Government said that the change would not achieve the desired aim of more transparency.

The Scottish Greens also tried to amend the bill to include a requirement that Scotland's 27,000 acres of derelict land be taxed to raise £300m a year for housebuilding.

Andy Wightman, of the Scottish Greens, said: "Improving transparency is vital to understanding who benefits from our land. The government's refusal to include an EU registration clause in the bill is deeply disappointing. Our amendment would put a stop to all further landownership by secretive companies in tax havens. By confining ownership to EU-registered companies we can ensure that moves being made in Europe to tackle laundering and secrecy are much more effective since, to date, many secrecy jurisdictions have refused to co-operate. That has to be better than the *status quo*."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "Our proposal for a public register is a much better approach to improving the transparency of land ownership in Scotland, as restricting ownership to EU legal entities would be easy to

circumvent and will not allow communities or individuals to establish the name of an individual with control over the land. More work is required on the complex legal issues involved with a public register of who controls land, such as what information should be disclosed and how to protect privacy."

• Dr McLeod informed the RACCE committee that she intends to refer the issue of Common Land to the new Scottish Land Commission, when established, and invite them to conduct a review as part of their programme of work. This work reflects concern, shared by the Scottish Government, that there may be insufficient protection for common land in Scotland and that individuals could use existing legislation and procedures to claim common land against the wider interest [see FARMING above]. The Scottish Government intends that the review by the Scottish Land Commission will also cover common good land.

Dr McLeod also wrote to the Scottish Law Commission to ask that they review the Division of Commonties Act 1695 with a view to repeal. The Scottish Law Commission has ongoing work relating to the repeal of obsolete legislation and the government is asking the Scottish Law Commission to review the Commonties Act to ensure that there would be no unexpected consequences from its repeal.

### EU NATURE DIRECTIVES

Dr Aileen MacLeod said in an answer to a parliamentary question that the Scottish Government does not wish to renegotiate the EU Nature Directives, like the UK and Welsh governments. She said: "Scotland provides the largest component of the UK's contribution to the European Union's Natura 2000 network." She said that the Scottish Government is continuing to participate in the European Commission's 'fitness check' of the EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the conclusions of which have yet to be determined.

Deborah Long, of Plantlife Scotland and convener of Scottish Environment LINK's Land Group said: "Given the Scottish Government's support of the EU Nature Directives, we are now looking for effective government leadership on halting the loss of biodiversity by delivering on the ambitions of the 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity. We need clear commitments from our government to lead and resource effective action across Scotland to halt the loss of biodiversity including through continued full implementation of the Nature Directives. LINK's forthcoming manifesto for the 2016 election outlines what we expect to see political parties commit to as we go into the election, in order to enable Scotland to live within environmental limits. Scotland's environment and its landscape underpin our economy, our culture, and as such the habitats and species that make it what it is need protection through law as well as conservation through partnership working."



## GENERAL COUNTRYSIDE

### FLOOD PLANNING

A £235m Flood Risk Management plan to protect homes, businesses and communities from flooding has been launched by the Scottish Government. A strategy is available for each of the 14 Local Plan Districts in Scotland and there are proposals for 42 flood protection schemes or engineering works planned for 2016-21 and a range of other flood alleviation measures.

£12m funding will also be made available to help areas affected by severe weather across Scotland.

Terry A'Hearn, of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), said: "December 2015 was the wettest on record with 50 of our gauging stations recording their highest ever levels. The Flood Risk Management Strategies have been developed to help reduce the damage which flooding can cause, and are more important than ever given the recent flooding. We have been working closely with local authorities to identify the most suitable actions to manage flood risk, and this is targeted towards areas where it will be most effective based on improved knowledge of the sources and impacts of flooding. The strategies coordinate the efforts of organisations that tackle flooding and concentrate this work to where the risk of flooding and the benefits of investment are greatest. Through this risk-based and plan-led approach the strategies aim to improve flood management for individuals, communities and businesses at risk in Scotland."

Local Flood Risk Management Plans are being developed in parallel and will provide additional local detail on the funding and delivery timetable for actions between 2016-2021. The publication date for Local Flood Risk Management Plans is June 2016. See: <http://apps.sepa.org.uk/FRMStrategies>

• December 2015 was by far the wettest Scotland has seen since records began in 1910, with 351.4 mm of rain. Scotland's second wettest December was in 2013, with 300.7 mm of rain. Average rainfall in Scotland for December between 1981 and 2010 was 153.5 mm. 50 of the river gauges run by SEPA measured record levels in December. Six of SEPA's river gauges in northeast Scotland have measured record levels in January. In January, the River Don, just upstream of Aberdeen, reached a peak over 1.3 metres higher than any levels recorded since 1988.

• *The Natural Flood Management Handbook* has been published by SEPA to help local authorities and landowners implement natural flood management measures. These methods can contribute, as part of a suite of measures, to help reduce the impact of frequent flooding on a smaller scale. A key element of sustainable flood risk management involves finding ways to manage flooding at its source, rather than solely focusing on traditional engineering further down the catchment. This can include, for example, riparian planting, reinstating flood plains, restoring coastal areas or returning watercourses back to their natural shape.

See: <http://bit.ly/1Qp7aJx>

### HIGHLAND PLANNING

*The Herald* reported that The Highland Council is updating the Highland-wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP) which was adopted in April 2012. It was the local authority's vision for how land could be used by developers in its area (excluding the Cairngorms National Park which has its own plan) for the next 20 years. A consultation on the Main Issues Report element of it has just ended.

Community Land Scotland (CLS) praised much of the report, but said: "There are many parts of the fragile and other areas of Highland (council area) which, by historic standards, hold significantly less population than was the case 200 years ago. There are many parts of Highland which once supported strong populations within an ecologically richer and more diverse environment, where today there is no human population and a significantly degraded environment. Ruinous empty settlements are a feature of the Highland landscape, sometimes falling within what are now described as 'wild land' areas."

CLS called for 'explicit policies' which make possible the resettlement of land which lost its people during the Highland Clearances of the

19th century. This may not be welcomed by recreational and conservation interests who cherish Scotland's wild land. Trying to restore communities on land made wild only by the actions of man should not be viewed in the same way as windfarm developments.

**NORTH KELVIN MEADOW**

New City Vision's plans to build 60 flats on North Kelvin meadow in Glasgow have been given approval. Glasgow City Council, which owns the site, also approved an opposing plan submitted by the Children's Wood for a community woodland and park. The Clouston Street site was formerly playing fields; the derelict land was transformed by the North Kelvin Meadow group. Scottish ministers are to decide whether to call in the application/s.

**AUKS**

Thousands of wind-blown little auks appeared in Scotland during the month, driven from wintering grounds off Scandinavia by stormy easterly winds. RSPB Scotland said that the event was on a massive scale and unprecedented; auks found shelter on the Moray Firth, some as far inland as Lentrane near Beaulieu. While large numbers of birds have survived, others have been found dead including at Rosemarkie on the Black Isle.

The Scottish SPCA is caring for more than 100 of the auks at its National Wildlife Rescue Centre in Fishcross.

**BEAN GEESE**

A study was undertaken between October 2013 and February 2014, to monitor the population of the wintering flock of bean geese, *Anser fabalis fabalis*, which uses the Slamannan Plateau area in Central Scotland. The monitoring work is, in part, a continuation of field research which started in January 1990, presented in a series of annual reports. This report provides details of the findings of the 2013/2014 formal SNH monitoring programme. See: *SNH Commissioned Report 889: Bean Geese on the Slamannan Plateau: Monitoring Report for 2013/2014* See: [www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned\\_reports/889.pdf](http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/commissioned_reports/889.pdf)

**GLENFIN QUARRY**

The BBC News website reported that plans to expand the Glenfin Quarry near Cockburnspath in the Borders have been approved. The archaeological officer at Scottish Borders Council and Historic Scotland originally opposed the quarry extension, because of the impact on the Ewieside hill fort but amendments to the scheme have now seen them withdraw their opposition. The proposals would increase the size of the current quarry by more than 50% to more than 34 hectares. The site lies between the Berwick Coast Special Landscape Area (SLA) and the Lammermuir Hills SLA. Planning officers had recommended approval with 29 conditions.

**VALLAY SAND**

The Scottish Government has approved plans to extract 5,000 tonnes of sand from the island of Vallay off the north coast of North Uist. Builders' merchants in the Outer Hebrides said that no sand was available locally and that they would have to bring in material from Ireland at greater cost.

Western Isles Council refused permission; the matter was referred to the Scottish Government for a final decision, and ministers have now allowed the appeal saying that they were satisfied by evidence of overriding need. The reporter said that there is an overriding public interest in using sand from a local source because of the extra costs of transporting sand from further afield, as well as an operational need for an economical source of mortar sand for local building projects.

He said that it would be an acceptable modest and low key development in an unobtrusive location that would have a minimal effect on the local landscape, transport and road safety, the amenity of residents, and the enjoyment of those visiting the area for recreational purposes.

However, the remote island is not part of the land bank of sand reserves identified in the area's minerals plan. The sand will be extracted at a rate of 500 tonnes per year over a ten year period. On completion, the site would revert to rough grazing using seaweed and a machair seed mix.

A spokesman for Western Isles Council said: "The Comhairle has been notified of the decision of the reporter and notes that it is predominantly based on the statements of the builders merchants which lack the independent scrutiny that the minerals planning policy required. A planning approval exists for a nearby sand source in North Uist and as scientific tests on both that and the sand from Vallay revealed no difference in character, the 'over-riding need' test to be satisfied for it to permit for extraction from another site was not objectively proven and it was on that basis that the Comhairle did not grant a planning approval."

**LAND USE CHANGES**

The Scotsman reported that new interactive maps from the National Library of Scotland (NLS) have been published. They detail changes to Scotland's landscape over the last 85 years, particularly afforestation and urbanisation.

The maps use the Land Utilisation Survey maps of the 1930s and compare them to the 2015 Historic Land-use Assessment layer from Historic Environment Scotland. The interactive land use viewer can be viewed in full on: <http://bit.ly/1P3vEUJ>

**RUM EARTHWORMS**

The BBC News website reported that earthworms, *Lumbricus terrestris*, found on Rum are more than three times the weight and length of the average earthworm. University of Central Lancashire research, between 2006 and 2011, found that some of the island worms are almost 15 inches (40 cm) in length. A lack of predators and fertile soil have helped to boost their size. Optimum conditions on Rum also mean that worms could live for up to ten years; worms elsewhere in UK have a lifespan of about two years.

The research is published in *The Glasgow Naturalist*.

**AIR POLLUTION**

The BBC News website reported that environmental law organisation, ClientEarth, has said that the Scottish Government faces the threat of court action if it fails to tackle illegal levels of air pollution. ClientEarth won a Supreme Court ruling against the UK government [Apr 15]. Glasgow is one of four areas in Scotland identified as having illegal and harmful levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), which comes mostly from diesel vehicles. ClientEarth lawyer, Alan Andrews, said: "With Glasgow a key city in our case against the UK government, we know that air pollution is causing a huge public health issue in Scotland. In the next few months we will be taking the UK government back to court for its failure to protect people across the country from toxic air pollution. Air quality in Scottish cities is in our sights as much as the rest of the UK and the Scottish government should be aware that it could face legal action should it fail to act."

The Scottish Government has urged all of the country's local authorities to carry out roadside emissions testing; only 13 out of 32 local authorities are currently implementing current

regulations. Glasgow tests about 3,000 vehicles a year but Edinburgh City Council tests none, despite holding the powers to do so. The council blamed a lack of funding but the Scottish Government said that money was available to pay for roadside testing.

Lesley Hinds, of City of Edinburgh Council, said: "We have made significant use of Scottish Government funding to put towards sustainable, long-term projects for improving air quality, including the installation of electric car charging points around the city and support of the ECOSTars scheme to reduce fleet energy consumption. While vehicle emissions testing is one way of tackling air pollution, there are a range of alternative, effective methods which we have chosen to focus on. As a council we have chosen to invest in environmental-friendly transport options, such as the millions spent on 'green' hybrid buses for Lothian Buses, a 1% increase in spending on cycle infrastructure year-on-year (9% in the current year), upgrading the council fleet to include electric vehicles and £200,000 spent on upgrading the traffic signals at Newbridge roundabout to reduce traffic queuing by 80%."

Councillor Chas Booth, of the Scottish Green Group, said: "If Edinburgh doesn't want to use its roadside testing powers it needs to come forward with alternative suggestions to combat the problem, including looking at low emission zones, which we suggested as long ago as 2013. More fundamentally, the city needs to start looking at the causes of air pollution when it is weighing up major planning or development proposals. We need consistency of planning and environmental policy: there is no point going to great lengths to reduce emissions from transport if our planning decisions force more and more people to use the private car."

The Herald reported that 13 urban streets exceeded the annual average limits for NO<sub>2</sub> or PM10 particulates, or both, in 2015. This is fewer than the 23 streets in 2014, but Friends of the Earth Scotland said that last year's wet weather masked the true extent of the pollution. The most polluted street in Scotland is St Johns Road in Edinburgh, followed by Hope Street in Glasgow. The City of Edinburgh Council disputed some of the pollution figures, arguing that actual exposures to people were lower. It listed 14 moves it was making to improve air quality, and pointed out that 97% of city streets met required standards.

Glasgow City Council said that 95% of the city now met air quality targets. Levels of NO<sub>2</sub> at Hope Street had reduced over the last five years.

See: [www.scottishairquality.co.uk](http://www.scottishairquality.co.uk)

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

The environment minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, published a summary of funding for climate change mitigation measures in the Draft Budget 2016/17, including significant investment for energy efficiency – despite the challenges from UK government actions in the early closure of the Green Deal Home Improvement Fund – sustainable travel, waste reduction and natural carbon capture. The Scottish Government implemented a £13.3m overall increase in budgets across other areas.

See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/climatechange/DraftBudget2016-17](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Environment/climatechange/DraftBudget2016-17)

- WWF Scotland said that an analysis of the Scottish budget shows that overall spending to tackle climate change will fall by £45.8m in the next financial year, a cut of almost 10%.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, said that cuts in support for renewable power and energy efficiency schemes, a National Infrastructure Priority, have undermined Scottish Government claims to have put climate change at the heart of its policy making, and called for sweeping changes to the budget before it is approved by MSPs in February.

The Scottish Government figures show that climate change funding is set to fall from £502m this year to £456m next. The biggest single reduction, of nearly £30m, is in cash to develop new green community energy and heating schemes, develop offshore wind power and insulate homes. Scottish Enterprise has also had its renewable energy budget cut by £2.6m.



## ENERGY

### RENEWABLES

WWF Scotland analysed data from WeatherEnergy and said that Scottish wind and solar power experienced a record breaking year in 2015; wind output generating enough electricity 97% of Scotland's homes. For six months, the amount generated was greater than 100% – equivalent to 41% of Scotland's electricity needs for one year. In December, turbines produced enough power to supply more than 100% of Scottish households on all but two days that month; wind power generated in Scotland exceeded household electricity demand by 48%. Overall, yearly wind output was up by 16% on the previous year, with the highest two months being January and December.

For homes fitted with solar PV panels, there was enough sunshine in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Inverness during April and May to generate an estimated 100% or more of the electricity needs of an average home. For properties with solar hot water panels, there was enough sunshine in the same cities in May to generate an estimated 100% of the hot water needs of an average home.

### RENEWABLES TARGETS

Scottish Renewables launched a 'manifesto' for political parties to adopt ahead of May's Holyrood election. The paper calls on the next Scottish government to expand community and local ownership of renewable energy projects, ensure good practice in the public sector and expand provision for low-carbon vehicles.

Niall Stuart, of Scottish Renewables, said: "Scotland's ambitious climate change and 2020 renewable energy targets have signalled a clear intent for the country to lead the way in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Together, renewables now produce the equivalent of 15% of Scotland's energy use across electricity, heat and transport. But with only four years to go, it is now time to look beyond 2020 and for Scotland to set a stretching target for renewables to produce the equivalent of at least 50% of all energy use across electricity, heat and transport by 2030 ... Achieving this new target will require strategic leadership from the next Scottish Government. The development of a comprehensive and joined-up energy strategy will allow the sector to maintain its competitiveness as well as spearheading the development and deployment of new technologies."

### DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY PYLONS

Dumgal Against Pylons (DAP) opposes Scottish Power's plans for 109 mile powerline in Dumfries & Galloway from Auchencrosh, South Ayrshire, to Harker near Carlisle on 50m high pylons, twice the height of the existing transmission line it would replace. The existing electricity transmission network in Dumfries & Galloway is up to 80 years old in places and needs to be upgraded, and also requires increased capacity.

Alan Jones, of DAP, said: "Dumfries & Galloway is wholly dependent on tourism, it has no other forms of income – the rural economy is collapsing. Tourism accounts for 11% of income

to Dumfries & Galloway, while in Scotland it's only 8.5%. Over 7,000 full time equivalent jobs rely on it."

DAP has proposed an alternative that will make use of a sub-sea cable to the English coast which would alleviate the impact on the landscape and reflects the need to protect the natural, cultural and historic heritage of the region. This would allow powerlines in the east to carry electricity at a lower voltage, meaning the pylons would need to be 26m high, rather than the proposed 50m.

DAP has commissioned independent research into the costs and benefits of the proposed plan to the region and will submit the findings to the Scottish Government.

Scottish Power envisages submitting a planning application in 2019.

### WILDLAND & WINDFARMS

*The Herald* reported that nine windfarms have been refused or blocked in the past 18 months because they were planned for areas which are designated as wildland [Jun 15]. The developments would have seen more than 192 more turbines erected. There are 42 areas of wildland, covering almost four million acres of Scotland; planning policy has to take account of wildland to ensure there is inappropriate development.

Stuart Brooks, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said: "We congratulate the Scottish Government for standing by its promise to protect these areas and we'd encourage it to continue to safeguard these special wild places into the long-term future. We also believe there is now an opportunity to spread the benefits down to local communities. Advertising the existence of these Wild Land Areas to the wider world, for example could boost visitor numbers in places which are off the beaten tourist track. And in some areas, woodland and peatland restoration projects could help repair damaged ecosystems, while creating jobs and sustaining local communities."

There are still four windfarm applications outstanding for wildland and a further 20 proposals are being contested because of their impact on wildland areas, although the developments would be outside of the designated zones.

Rob Gibson MSP has tabled questions for ministers on a possible review of wildland areas, amid concern that the designation may hamper future development. He said: "What is today considered wildland supported human communities not so long ago, and we hope could do so again one day. I think it very telling that those who live and work on the land are worried about how the concept of wildness could now threaten their future ability to develop."

He said that the desktop operation which produced the map meant windfarms supported by local communities were now being refused and millions of pounds in community benefits were being lost

Joss Blamire, of Scottish Renewables, called for balance. He said: "More than 20% of Scotland – our National Parks and National Scenic Areas – is already deemed a no-go for windfarm developments, with the full support of industry. If this balance is wrong, Scotland will lose out on sites which will ultimately help us meet environmental objectives while benefitting our economy." He said that wildland did not rule out further development but meant increased protection to ensure developments do not have unacceptable impacts.

### WINDFARM UPDATES

**Highland:** Nanclach Ltd's revised plans for the Tom na Clach windfarm on the Cawdor Estate near Tomatin have been rejected by councillors [Dec

15]. Highland Council officials had recommended approval of the new plans to 'repower' with 13 turbines, instead of the initially consented scheme for 17 smaller turbines. Infinergy, on behalf of the partners forming Nanclach, is considering appealing the decision, and said that there was an opportunity to generate more renewable energy from an already consented site. Four local community councils and RSPB Scotland objected, citing the windfarm's potential effect on golden plover. The JMT also objected, concerned about over-development and the 'ringing effect' along the Cairngorms National Park boundary.

**Scottish Borders:** Kilrubie Wind Farm Ltd has lodged an appeal over the council's failure to deliver a decision on its plan for seven turbines near Eddleston 'within a reasonable timescale.'

- Partnership for Renewables is planning a 90 turbine windfarm between Carter Bar and Newcastletown along the English border. Wauchope Forest and nearby Newcastleton Forest, on Forestry Commission Scotland land, have been identified for the three-pronged development – two of 20 turbines and one of 50.

**Sutherland:** SSE has sought planning permission to add 16 more turbines to the Gordonbush windfarm near Brora. The site, operational since 2012, already has 35 turbines. The Scottish Wildlife Trust and JMT have objected to the extension and said that it would affect blanket bog and wild land. Councillors have deferred making a decision on a planned extension until after they visit the site; planning officials have recommended that councillors raise no objection, subject to several amendments including the removal of one of the planned turbines and reducing the height of another.

- E.on is planning a 22 turbine windfarm at Golticlay, north of Lybster. The Wildcat Haven is investigating the presence of wildcats in the area.

### HYDRO SCHEMES

The *Arran Banner* reported that the National Trust for Scotland's plans to develop hydro power in Brodick Country Park have been put on hold. The UK government's reduction in the subsidy regime for renewable projects, and the discovery of protected bryophytes in one of the water courses have affected the viability of the proposals.

- DHG Hydro has confirmed that it is resubmitting plans for a 2 MW hydro scheme on the Ardesie Burn in a National Scenic Area of Wester Ross [Sep 15]. The plans were rejected by Highland Council because of the 'significant detrimental impact' that would be caused to the An Teallach Site of Special Scientific Interest; the plans were again rejected by a review body in December. However, a planning official said that the council would support a new proposal if the visual impact of the scheme could be mitigated. Local residents are to start a fresh campaign to protect the site from development.

### UCG

Cluff Natural Resources had planned an underground coal gasification (UCG) plant at Kincardine, Fife. Coal reserves under the Firth of Forth were to have been ignited and gas siphoned off to the surface [Oct 15]. Cluff has now said that it had stopped all further expenditure on the project, and will instead focus on England and Wales where it believes the 'political situation is more favourable' and 'considerable support exists for investment in energy and industry with a view to regeneration.'

Cluff blamed the Scottish Government moratorium on UCG, despite previous assurances the company had received from the government.

Lang Banks, of WWF Scotland, had opposed

the plans. He said: "We'll only be satisfied when the company hands back its licences. Burning coal under the sea should have no place in Scotland's energy future, which is why the Scottish Government was right to extend its moratorium on unconventional gas extraction to include underground coal gasification. We hope in time this moratorium will become an outright ban."

Cluff said that its decision was despite the expectation that the moratorium on UCG would ultimately be lifted after a government study and consultation on its potential impact ends in spring 2017 [Oct 15].

**SOLAR ENERGY**

Construction has begun on Elgin Energy's solar farm on 70 acres of the Errol Estate in the Carse of Gowrie on the River's Tay. The 14 MW scheme, the largest in Scotland, is anticipated to be operational by March.

The Scottish Government announced it would retain a 'grandfathering guarantee' where a solar project is guaranteed the same level of subsidy for its lifetime, despite the UK's Department of Energy & Climate Change proposals to end the protection in England and Wales [Sep 15].

**SCOTSTOUN ENERGY-FROM-WASTE**

Plans for a major high-rise 'energy-from-waste' plant have been submitted to Glasgow City Council. W H Malcolm's scheme, which would be built at an existing facility at Scotstoun, would be an energy recovery facility, recycling waste destined for landfill sites to generate power and heat. The proposed chimney would be 230 foot

W H Malcolm said that the proposed plant would be similar to the facility at Polmadie handling domestic waste for Glasgow City Council, would not generate odours or major traffic increases, while the chimney would be 'in keeping with the character of the industrial backdrop of this part of the Clydeside.'

 **TOURISM & RECREATION**

**LOCH LOMOND PARK**

New seasonal byelaws are to be introduced in environmentally sensitive areas covering 3.7% of Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park [Dec 15]. The camping management byelaws are being introduced as part of plans to invest in better camping places and introduce measures to manage camping in four 'hot spot' areas, where the environment is suffering from damage caused by a combination of high volume and antisocial camping. The new byelaws will 'regulate' camping in three zones in the park - West Loch Lomond, Trossachs (West) and Trossachs (North). There will be a ban on wild camping in areas on the west side of Loch Lomond; north Loch Long; strips around Loch Ard and Loch Venachar; and the road side of Loch Lubnaig, Loch Earn and Loch Voil.

The byelaws would be in force for seven months of the year, one month less than for the existing area at East Loch Lomond. The byelaws will come into effect on 1 March 2017 to allow the initial provision of 300 low-cost camping places as part of the Park's longer-term camping development plans. Some of the sites will be new or improved camping facilities and in other areas permits will be issued which will allow 'informal' lochshore camping at 'sustainable levels.'

David Gibson, of the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, said: "While the decision by the minister to approve byelaws is most

disappointing, she does acknowledge that steps must be taken by the Park Authority to manage lochside issues more effectively. We felt that Police Scotland and the Park Authority already had those powers and that the new byelaws were completely unnecessary. There is some positive news in that the Park Authority is required to accelerate the well overdue introduction of new camping facilities prior to the implementation of the byelaws.

"We believe that an outcome of the byelaws will be that they will criminalise those who would otherwise wish to exercise their rights to wild camp responsibly under the terms of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. As such, this decision goes against the rights to responsible access provided in the Act. While we do not consider this to be a positive day for access rights in Scotland, we will continue to work with the National Park Authority and others to protect the rights of walkers and climbers."

Jess Dolan, of Ramblers Scotland, said: "The National Park itself has admitted that most of the anti-social problems arising from some camping activities are caused by a lack of infrastructure and enforcement of existing legislation. Therefore we are disappointed that the minister has decided to approve byelaws, albeit with a short delay before they come into effect. We are aware of very strong feelings on this matter from our members, visitors to the park and others enjoying outdoor recreation in Scotland.

"The vast majority of people who camp in the park and across Scotland are doing so responsibly and they will now be penalised by this byelaw. We don't condone anti-social behaviour and believe that there is existing legislation which should be properly implemented to tackle any problems arising from any anti-social behaviour in the park. It's important to ensure all visitors to our countryside understand their rights and also their responsibilities in terms of camping, whether in a tent on top of a mountain or by the side of a road in a campervan. We are therefore calling upon both of our national parks, Scottish Natural Heritage, the Scottish government, local communities and recreation bodies to work together to devise a national strategy to promote these messages and stop the blight of litter and anti-social behaviour which has led us to this situation. We do not want to see any more byelaws restricting access in Scotland and will be working to ensure that these byelaws are not renewed in three years' time when they come up for review."

*The Herald* reported that Kim Atkinson, of the Scottish Sports Association, said: "Our Outdoors Pursuits Group (OPG) members have always acknowledged that there are significant problems arising from certain roadside camping activities which take place along loch shores within the National Park. However, our OPG remains unconvinced that byelaws are the solution, and remains concerned that they will undermine Scotland's much-prized access legislation."

Richard Graham, of St Fillans Community Council, said: "This is great news, not only for the communities who have had to put up with environmental degradation and anti-social behaviour for years, but also for the visitors who have been put off spending time in these 'no go' zones. We've seen the restorative effect that dealing with the similar issues had on east Loch Lomond and look forward to seeing families, responsible campers and visitors return to areas like ours, which have been blighted by these problems for too long."

The measures in place on east Loch Lomond will now see a 'slight adjustment' to make them consistent with the new legislation.

**COUL LINKS**

*The Northern Times* reported that 'another world class' golf course is planned by an American entrepreneur at Coul Links, near Embo in Sutherland. The £7m project is within the Dornoch Firth & Loch Fleet Special Protection Area and the Loch Fleet Site of Special Scientific Interest.

**BALNAGOWN QUARRY**

Natural Retreats is planning to build tourist lodges within the disused Logie quarry on Balnagown Estate, Kildary in the Highlands. Guests and the public would be offered access to outdoor pursuits. It is hoped to start building in 2017 if plans are approved.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**CAPTURING OUR COAST**

A citizen science project, Capturing Our Coast, has been launched to collect information about marine species around the UK coast. There are training hubs at seven universities, research centres and conservation organisations around the country; the Scottish hub is at the Scottish Association for Marine Science near Oban which has support staff for volunteers and organises training days.

The project will:

- Provide a detailed distribution map of species
- Explore how climate change and other human impact is affecting our seas
- Investigate if conservation policies are effective
- Study how species interact, including marine invasive species
- Explore local issues on the coast

Contact: *Dr Hannah Grist*, telephone: 01631 559313; email: [Hannah.Grist@samsac.uk](mailto:Hannah.Grist@samsac.uk) See: [www.capturingourcoast.co.uk](http://www.capturingourcoast.co.uk)

**NTS**

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has announced major restructuring in order to reduce costs by 10%. It said that it needs to find £47m for the upkeep of its property and land portfolio, and is considering leveraging money from users of wilderness, as opposed to its charges for entrance to buildings and gardens.

An NTS spokesman said that access legislation prevents the charity from charging on its wild lands yet the often vast areas are central to their conservation work. He said: "Even if people don't want to join the trust, we can ask them to contribute to the conservation costs of the place they enjoy so much. The trust owns a significant amount of wild land but gets little credit for its work in conserving it and ensuring that people are able to access it. We have been perhaps timid in the past about shouting about what we do or even having some signage to show people they are on land that the NTS cares for."

NTS is responsible for coastlines, which along with 400 islands and islets, provide habitats for over one million seabirds; 190,000 acres of countryside; 46 Munros; 394 miles of mountain footpaths; 10,000 archaeological sites; 35 major gardens nurturing 13,500 plant varieties; seven national nature reserves; 45 Sites of Special Scientific Interest; St Kilda, which is Britain's only dual World Heritage Site, and also battlefields.

**TREES FOR LIFE**

Alan Watson Featherstone has stepped down as Trees for Life executive director to take up a new role as Founder & Visionary, with Steve Micklewright as the new chief executive officer.



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