

The study stated: "The vast majority [of sites] were on moorland managed for red grouse sport shooting. Peak numbers of at least 28 breeding pairs in the 1990s declined steadily to just three pairs in 2010–12, five in 2013 and one in 2014. Illegal persecution and grouse-management practices are believed to be the main causes of that decline, which occurred despite ample suitable habitat and prey."

The paper also discusses the history behind SNH's consideration of the Ladder Hills as a proposed Special Protection Area (pSPA) for hen harriers from the mid 1990s. Landowners had objected to the proposal, claiming there were insufficient numbers of hen harriers and questioning the authenticity of earlier data. Breeding numbers did not recover and the site was removed from the pSPA list following review in 2004. Concurrently, the site was designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive and is now also part of the Cairngorms National Park.

The paper's authors said that the Ladder Hills were one of the best areas in the UK for this species in the 1990s and contend that SPA designation should have been pursued using either the average hen harrier breeding figures from the 1990s, as had been done for similar notified pSPAs in Scotland, or on the basis of the suitable ecological conditions, with the expectation that harriers would re-colonise the area with protection. The habitat and prey availability at the Ladder Hills Site of Special Scientific Interest/SAC are still considered suitable for breeding hen harriers and if harriers were to recover in North East Scotland, the site should be reconsidered as a pSPA.

The authors discuss several potential solutions to help conserve hen harriers in north east Scotland, including the use of buffer zones around nest sites, the use of nest cameras, the use of supplementary feeding, and encouraging more golden eagles to reach natural densities in these areas as they're predicted to naturally suppress the hen harrier population. The authors pointed out that two projects to help harriers recover had failed, and a proposed legal protection area had stalled. The paper stated: "Levels of trust and cooperation between most raptor enthusiasts and grouse moor estates in northeast Scotland are at an all-time low. This is one of the most controversial conservation issues in the UK, and we suggest that SNH and Police Scotland are best placed to lead on overseeing a recovery plan for northeast Scotland."

The Sunday Herald reported that Tim Baynes, of SLE's moorland group, said: "There are serious problems with this report, most notably that there has been very little harrier surveying conducted recently in the area, with only 4% of harrier breeding areas covered in 2014. The authors identify 118 harrier breeding areas which they have traditionally surveyed but by 2012 only 38% of these were being covered, in 2013 it had decreased to 10% and by 2014 the number covered had halved again.

"We work with SNH and others in the 'Heads Up for Harriers' project partnership and in 2015, five grouse moor estates were asked by the project to host nest cameras to determine the causes of harrier nest failure, some of which were in the northeast of Scotland. In all cases nest failures were shown on camera to be due to weather or fox predation – nothing to do with human disturbance. Sadly, this seems to be another instance where raptor study groups have made little or no attempt to engage with land managers who could have helped their research. Even once data is produced, it often incomplete or only selectively shared in an attempt to besmirch grouse moor

management. Looking backwards in this way is really unhelpful when collaborative initiatives are being developed by other organisations to ensure a more positive future."

However, the *Raptor Persecution Scotland* website reported that the paper stated: "There was thorough coverage of all suitable hen harrier breeding habitat during 1980-2014, with the exception of one area where coverage was incomplete between 1980-1987... Annual coverage was thorough and the vast majority of hen harrier breeding attempts were believed to have been recorded."

The blog goes on to say that the data sources Mr Baynes used to refute the paper are the annual reports of the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme (SRMS), which do indicate that the number of checked hen harrier home ranges during this period is lower than the claims made in the paper. The data provided in these annual reports are grossly under-recorded, because not all raptor workers submit their data to the SRMS. The primary survey data used in the hen harrier scientific paper were collected by the papers' authors and they did not rely on the SRMS data for their calculations.

The blog said that the five grouse moors referred to by Mr Bayne were not driven grouse moors and neither were they raptor persecution hotspots. The results from these nest cameras therefore don't inform the debate about the impact of persecution on hen harrier breeding success on estates where hen harrier persecution is endemic. As the 'Heads up for Hen Harriers' project goes forward, the blog's authors would like to see nest cameras being placed on driven grouse moors in areas where persecution is known to happen.

RSPB Scotland highlighted five incidents since 2000 in which hen harriers in the northeast had been shot. Ian Thomson, head of investigations at RSPB Scotland, said: "It is depressing that in 21st century Scotland, in areas where intensive management for driven grouse shooting is the main land use, there still seems to be a complete disregard for the laws protecting our birds of prey. It is disappointing that efforts to tackle raptor persecution are undermined by some representatives of the land management sector, with continued efforts made to downplay the scale of the problem. We are calling for the Scottish Government to introduce a robust system of licensing of game bird hunting, similar to systems in place in other European countries."

See: *Rebecca G et al, 2016 British Birds V109, pp 77-95*



FARMING

NEONICOTINOIDS

The Sunday Herald reported that Science & Advice for Scottish Agriculture figures show that three neonicotinoids, clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam, were applied to crops covering 22,442 hectares of farmland in 2014 [Aug 14]. That included 11,477 hectares of winter wheat, 5,910 hectares of winter barley, 4,379 hectares of potatoes and 676 hectares of spring oats.

The EU restricted the use of three neonicotinoids in December 2013, and is now considering whether to end or extend the restrictions. However, the restrictions do not prevent the three chemicals from being used on crops that don't attract bees and other pollinators. In Scotland, this has allowed their continued use on potatoes, wheat, barley and oats.

Experts point out that the chemicals do not remain in the crops. Dr Penelope Whitehorn, of the University of Stirling, said: "Neonicotinoids can leach into the soil and contaminate wild flowers

growing in field margins, thereby impacting insects even if they are not foraging on the crop itself. There is very good, consistent evidence that neonicotinoids have serious impacts on a range of species such as bumblebees and solitary bees. These unintended impacts include a reduced ability to navigate and forage successfully and a lower breeding success. The evidence is not complete, but it is certainly compelling enough to make precautions necessary to protect our native pollinators – especially given the importance of these species to the environment and the economy."

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT), Buglife Scotland and other leading conservation charities in Scotland have written to the Cabinet Secretary, Richard Lochhead, calling for the two-year EU moratorium to be made permanent for all crops in Scotland.

Dr Maggie Keegan, of SWT, said: "SWT wants the Scottish Government to permanently ban the three neonicotinoids that are most harmful to bees and other wildlife from use on all crops grown in Scotland. The EU ban still allows these toxic chemicals to be used on crops that are not attractive to pollinators. But we now know these chemicals don't stay put as they are taken up by wildflowers, get into watercourses and persist in soils meaning there is no escape for bees, butterflies and other wildlife."

Matt Shardlow, of Buglife Scotland, accused the UK government of failing to act on neonicotinoids. He said: "The partial ban put in place by the EU has helped reduce the exposure of wildlife to these agrottoxins, but they are still being widely used as sprays and seed treatments for cereals."

If a permanent ban is put in place, the SWT and Buglife Scotland are calling for the government to recommend safe alternatives, both chemical and non-chemical, and to support research into integrated pest management systems that work for Scottish farmers. Cutting down on all pesticide use is 'ultimately the best option for all Scotland's wildlife and agricultural ecosystems.'

Andrew Bauer, of NFU Scotland, said: "Calls for blanket bans in the absence of scientific evidence are both premature and damaging. The European Union, who lead on such matters, view the use of some neonicotinoid products on certain crops as safe and their continued responsible use in Scottish agriculture is both legitimate and necessary."

The Scottish Government's scientific advisor, Professor Louise Heathwaite, has advised that neonicotinoids could cause 'harmful sub-lethal effects to honeybees.' But she thought there was not enough evidence on whether they affected the health of honeybee colonies. She said: "In general, landuse change and intensification, and the resulting loss of floral resources, are likely to be critical factors affecting pollinator decline."

A Scottish Government spokeswoman said: "The Scottish Government supports Europe's precautionary approach towards the use of neonicotinoids and the continuation of the current restrictions on their use. However, the European legislation allows the use of three neonicotinoids for example as a seed treatment on winter cereals and as sprays on potato crops... We will continue to take soundings from our beekeepers to see if they report any negative effects on their hives."

STARTER FARMS

The Rural Affairs Secretary, Richard Lochhead, has announced that more opportunities are to be created for the next generation of farmers using public land [Mar 14].

11 starter farms have been created on Scottish Government land since 2012, including several on the National Forest Estate, managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland. Highlands & Islands Enterprise

(HIE) and Scottish Enterprise are working to identify land on their estates suitable for starter farm opportunities. An expert group on starter farms, chaired by Henry Graham, will submit a formal report and recommendations this summer. Its work has already resulted in the creation of more opportunities for young farmers.

See: www.forestry.gov.uk/starterfarms



WOODLANDS

PLANTING TARGET

The Herald reported that the Scottish Government target of planting 100 million trees by the end of 2015 has been missed by more than 11 million [Jun 15]. The target was set in 2010, aiming to increase national woodland by 3.7%. The pledge was a part of an international drive by Climate Group to have one billion new trees planted across the world.

Forestry Commission Scotland figures showed that more than five million trees were felled to make space for the new trees but only 1.6 million trees were planted in their place.

When the planting target was announced, NFU Scotland said 'the blunt tool of diverting resources to planting trees on good agricultural land' was 'a trap we must avoid.' A major hurdle for the planting project was reported by the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs, Climate Change & Environment committee to be 'frustrating' encounters between the forestry and farming sectors. At that time, convener Rob Gibson MSP said that there was little positive evidence that farming and forestry interests are truly integrating and working together on the scale required to play their part in reducing Scotland's carbon emissions.



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

SHELLFISH

Following consultation, catch limits are to be set for key shellfish species to prevent and deter unlicensed fishermen from selling their catch without a licence. No licence is required by members of the public who intend to catch a small number of fish for their own consumption but they are not permitted to sell anything they catch for profit. There are particular hotspots of unlicensed commercial fishing activity around the coast and during spring/summer months. Marine Scotland Compliance has a recognised presence in all Scottish inshore waters with regular use of Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs).

The sea-going presence has been met well by industry particularly where inshore fishermen have taken the opportunity to discuss inshore concerns with Marine Scotland Compliance officers in the course of routine boardings. Officers also visit buyers under the 2005 legislation to ensure that companies are registered as buyers and that they only buy from vessels that are registered and hold a valid UK fishing vessel license.

Promoting Best Practice for Inshore Fisheries: Outcome Report on a Consultation on measures for Hobby/Unlicensed Fishermen in Scottish Inshore Waters.

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/01/1467

SHELLFISH CONSULTATION

A consultation has been launched by the Scottish Government on new management measures for Scotland's commercial crab and lobster stocks. The proposals include increasing the

minimum sizes at which each species is allowed to be landed, alongside a number of additional measures designed to conserve these valuable shellfish stocks.

Fisheries Secretary, Richard Lochhead, said: "The brown crab, velvet crab and lobster fisheries are highly important to many of Scotland's coastal communities, with landings worth £32m being recorded in 2014. However, the most recent scientific assessments show that some of these stocks are being fished above recommended levels. To ensure that our inshore fisheries are sustainably and effectively managed we are consulting on new management measures for shellfish. In the past year we have introduced new landing controls for the crab and lobster fisheries in the Outer Hebrides and Orkney, and I am sure these proposals for the rest of the Scottish coast will be well received by inshore fishermen."

The consultation closes on 20 May.

See: <http://bit.ly/1oMOeKI>; <http://bit.ly/1Uoz5uW>

WILD FISHERIES

A consultation on the Scottish Government's draft Wild Fisheries Bill and a draft Wild Fisheries Strategy has been launched. Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform, Dr Aileen McLeod, said: "The Scottish Government is committed to supporting our famous and valuable wild fisheries, to ensuring we modernise our fishery management structures and to establishing a more secure and sustainable future for this vital sector. This is why we are consulting on draft provisions for a Wild Fisheries Bill, these provisions adopt an all species approach, while promoting conservation and good management of our wild fisheries resources. The draft provisions and draft strategy have been developed collaboratively and have been informed by the report on the Independent Wild Fisheries Review and with a substantial contribution from a range of stakeholders." [May 15]

The consultation ends on 2 May.

See: <http://bit.ly/1QmE0q9>

WILD SALMON

Additional Scottish Government funding of up to £100,000 is being made available for angling clubs to help clubs in fishery districts where catch-and-release of wild salmon will be mandatory [Jan 16].

From 1 April, the killing of wild salmon will not be allowed in areas of Scotland where they are deemed to be most at risk. Clubs are facing declining membership numbers. 82% of wild salmon caught in Scottish waters by anglers are already voluntarily released.

Clubs will be funded for a two year programme to promote catch-and-release as a sustainable and responsible practice. Marine Scotland is to appoint a partner organisation to provide direct assistance and practical support to angling clubs.

SEALS & SALMON

Robbie Douglas Miller, newly appointed chairman of the Atlantic Salmon Trust (AST), wrote in a newsletter to supporters: "I am all too aware of the complex and emotional issues that surround the decreasing numbers of our favourite fish and the scale of the problem to reverse this trend. The AST's vision is for salmon and trout to return to and breed from their natural rivers of origin in sufficient quantity and quality to ensure stocks of both species are held at sustainable levels of abundance. Difficulties remain with not understanding the impact of predation by fish-eating birds and a burgeoning seal population, all enjoying protection from the law. International scientists recognise global warming and changing

sea conditions reduce the number of salmon returning to spawn. It is a shame that the AST has ignored this and the robust work going on between salmon farmers and local wild salmon groups to restore and restock failing rivers."

See: www.atlanticsalmontrust.org

INSHORE FISHERIES GROUPS

Following a review of the current Inshore Fisheries Groups (IFG), the four mainland groups have now been merged to form two larger regional IFGs. The North & East Coast regional IFG covers the whole east coast, Moray Firth and north coast to Cape Wrath, and the West Coast regional IFG covers the whole west coast.

YELL SOUND, SHETLAND

The Herald reported that the Shetland Fishermen's Association (SFA) has warned skippers of the dangers of trawling near Total's gas pipelines in Yell Sound [see ENERGY below]. Shellfish boats, in particular, have been urged to stay away amid serious concerns for vessel safety due to the almost four metres of rock dumped on top of the auxiliary pipes. These run adjacent to the main gas pipelines coming from the Laggan-Tormore field to the plant on the Shetland mainland. Total funded a series of trials in July 2015 which involved whitefish and shellfish boats and resulted in damage to gear; the company had proposed solutions but has yet to receive a response from the SFA.

Leslie Tait, of SFA, said: "A lot of our small scallop vessels fish this area, especially in winter and especially in bad weather, and the fear is that they pick up a lot of these boulders ending up with top weight and stability problems. There also can be issues with hydraulics and blown motors of winches due to over-stressing." He said that many inshore boats operated in Yell Sound because of the good quality fishing grounds. The local scallop fishery was worth around £1.9m to the inshore fleet. The SFA have asked Total to create safe crossing points for vessels.

A spokesman for Total E&P UK said: "As part of the Laggan-Tormore development, Total installed pipelines that pass through the Yell Sound. There was an extensive public consultation, which included the SFA, and no objections were raised."

MPAs & FISHERMEN

The *BBC Scotland News* website reported that Richard Lochhead said: "Marine Scotland Compliance has received reports of alleged incursions into Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). They have deployed enforcement officers, Marine Protection Vessels, and fast patrol craft to investigate these incidents and to deter and detect any illegal activity in MPAs." [Jan 16].

Elaine Whyte of the Clyde Fishermen's Association said: "I would stress that as much as fishermen don't agree with them [MPAs], they are respecting them. They are not taking vigilante action and breaching the areas. They are tying up and taking losses, not fishing MPAs."

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation (SFF), said that there was 'considerable unhappiness' about the new rules, but said there was 'quite simply no campaign of disobedience.' He said that protests against the MPAs were being conducted at a political level and were exclusively peaceful: "The SFF has participated fully in the MPA process and you will find no more conscientious stewards of the marine environment than those making their living from it. The difficulties with a small number of new MPAs has been created by the decisions made by the fisheries minister which overreached the evidence and advice from his own process, to the detriment of perfectly sustainable fishing carried out from delicately balanced communities."

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of the National Trust for Scotland and Scottish Environment LINK, said: "The majority of skippers understand that MPAs are in the best interests of local communities, the environment and their industry. Unfortunately irresponsible flouting of the regulations by a tiny minority could risk undermining all of these. Working with other environmental groups we would urge the fishing industry to stamp out any illegal fishing and encourage members of the public to report suspicious activity to Marine Scotland Compliance."

• Police Scotland has confirmed an investigation is under way following allegations of intimidation of creel fishermen by the crews of larger vessels on Loch Fyne.



MARINE

CROMARTY FIRTH

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) is opposing Cromarty Firth Port Authority (CFPA)'s application for a licence for ship-to-ship oil transfers in the Moray Firth [Jan 16]. SWT considers the transfer of up to 8.5 million tonnes of crude oil *per* year unacceptable because of the increased risk of oil spills, which could cause severe and long term environmental damage to internationally protected sites and species. More than 6,000 people have signed two petitions opposing the plans [Jan 16].

Dr Samuel Collin, of SWT, said: "Increasing crude oil activity in an area such as the Moray Firth, where the marine life is so diverse and exceptional, puts at risk not only marine wildlife but also local businesses and people that depend on and enjoy the marine environment. The Moray Firth boasts a range of internationally important marine life and we need to honour these recognitions by preserving and protecting the very features that make this area so special. Bottlenose dolphins, which would be at risk if the application is approved, are a much loved species in Scotland and the resident population in the Moray Firth attracts thousands of tourists to this area each year, contributing at least £4m to the local economy. The risks posed by ship-to-ship oil transfers are too great to be acceptable and this application represents a step in the wrong direction for marine conservation."

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

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) has also objected, based on ten key issues which highlight contradictions and uncertainties within the proposals, as well as the potential threat of environmental damage that could result in disastrous consequences for wildlife and the local economy:

Dr Richard Luxmoore, of NTS, said: "The proposals affect one of Scotland's most important marine designated areas which provides a habitat for internationally important populations of seabirds and dolphins. If enacted, the risk of oil spills would be massively increased by a growth in ship to ship transfers and a nine-fold increase in oil transport – spillages would threaten huge concentrations of seabirds and pods of bottlenose dolphins which live in the Moray Firth. Not only are they a source of wonderment, the subject of a university study centre, they attract thousands of visitors each year. Oil spills would also threaten the shoreline with waste oil that would pollute the coast and threaten the quality of life for local communities. Our beautiful, unspoilt coasts and communities and their fantastic wildlife are a massive draw to visitors, who come to this wonderful place and nearby attractions, all of which underpin the local economy. I do

understand the pressures the oil industry is under at present but to threaten such an important area with irretrievable damage for the sake of short-term efficiencies is totally irresponsible."

An objection has also been lodged by RSPB Scotland. Richard Evans, of RSPB Scotland, said: "In our opinion the application is quite inadequate and completely fails to show how the possible impacts of oil transfers are to be avoided in such a sensitive area. It is a huge concern and the risks are far too high. The firth has internationally important populations of seabirds. Thousands of birds spend the winter months sheltering along the coast and the intertidal mudflats are enormously important for the rich feeding grounds they provide for wildfowl and wading birds. This area is also very important for the famous bottle-nosed dolphins that attract so many visitors to this part of Scotland.

"We simply must see some proper risk assessments so that this application can be properly judged. This must include an honest appraisal of the effects of noise, oil spill risk and ballast water impacts on the environment and explain clearly how all of the different measures proposed as mitigation might actually work."

Steve North, of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), said that it agreed with CFPA's environmental statement identifying the key issues as the risks posed from oil pollution, ballast water discharges, increased shipping movement and underwater noise. He said: "However, we do not agree with the conclusion of the environmental statement that there will be no likely significant effect on European designated sites, so we have advised the UK Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) that further assessment is required.

"Whilst we consider that mitigation can reduce adverse effects, we do not think that the risks can be eliminated altogether. Risks to the bottlenose dolphins are particularly significant. The entrance to the Cromarty Firth is extremely important to the dolphins and a large proportion of the local population use these waters all year. Even small oil spills could have a significant effect on them."

He said SNH had not officially objected but the MCA was required to take its advice into account.

The Herald reported that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has lodged a holding objection to the plans, as it is attempting to resolve difficulties with the CFPA's application. SEPA's submission to the MCA stated: "SEPA note the port authority's strong track record in prevention of oil spills although it would appear that these are related to dockside transfers rather than open sea ship-to-ship transfers. Open sea transfers would seem to present more risk and greater difficulty in containing any oil spillage. Oil spill prevention is essential in a sensitive area such as the Cromarty Firth."

The port authority's modelling was based on just one tonne of oil escaping during the transfer of 180,000 tonnes between vessels in each session, four times a month. SEPA said there were doubts this was a realistic scenario. It said that the quoted rates are two tonnes of oil *per* second and tanker transfer pumps could not be switched off immediately but would require to be gradually slowed down for safety reasons. SEPA has asked the port authority to respond to the submission that an oil spill of 300 tonnes would be the worst case scenario, as this is a requirement of the ship-to-ship transfer regulations.

SEPA also questioned why the modelling used only high tide as a starting point. This would have the effect of keeping an oil spill out of the Cromarty Firth, as the falling tide would push water out of the area. SEPA's submission stated:

"It would seem appropriate to have run some models based on an incoming tide when oil would be swept in. This would also be applicable to the modelling of ballast water discharges ... The costs involved in mitigation, clean up, habitat recovery and compensation could be huge.

"An oil spill could have potentially serious consequences for sensitive habitats, nationally important species and economic activities in the area that depend upon the water environment."

Bob Buskie, of CFPA, said: "We are encouraged by the responses we've received as part of this stage of the consultation process and will work closely with all stakeholders to address their feedback and any concerns raised. Worldwide it is estimated that between 8-10,000 ship-to-ship operations are carried out every year. The port itself has undertaken this activity for years safely and without incident. As part of our legal responsibility to safeguard the environment of the Firth we have strict procedures in place to ensure that the operation does not go ahead unless all requirements and conditions are met. The current oil spill contingency plan was approved last year by the MCA following a period of consultation with Marine Scotland, SNH, Highland Council and SEPA."

• Environment Secretary, Richard Lochhead, renewed his call for decisions on ship-to-ship oil transfers to be devolved to the Scottish Government. He wrote to Patrick McLoughlin, UK Secretary of State for Transport, and asked again for the devolution of powers to ensure decisions can be taken by the Scottish Government in line with European obligations to protect the marine environment. He also insisted that should this again be refused, the Scottish Government is consulted prior to any decisions being made.

Ian Blackford MP lodged a parliamentary question asking if the UK Department of Transport planned to hold discussions with the Scottish Government over CFPA's application. Robert Goodwill, minister of state for transport, replied that the application was sent to Scottish Government officials directly through Marine Scotland and to SEPA, SNH and the Highland Council in order to seek their views.

Mr Blackford said: "The response from Whitehall brings into question the respect being shown to the duty of the Scottish Government to protect the precious Scottish environment." He called for a proper investigation into the risks posed by the plan.

However, Richard Lochhead said: "The Scottish Government is not aware of having been directly approached by the UK government during the consultation on the Cromarty Firth oil transfers. SNH and SEPA formally responded to the consultation, while Marine Scotland was made aware of the proposal through informal contact by the Port of Cromarty Firth. The views of SNH and SEPA are currently carefully being considered."

EMERGENCY TUG

The *BBC News* website reported that an Orkney-based emergency towing vessel (ETV) will continue to cover the north of Scotland until 30 September. UK government funding for the tug was due to end in March. UK transport minister, Robert Goodwill, said that the contract had been extended to allow time for a longer-term solution to be found. Ian Blackford MP renewed calls for the reinstatement of a second ETV.

Mr Lochhead had previously asked the UK Secretary of State for Transport that the decision to remove the ETV on March 31 should be revisited [Feb 15]. He highlighted a number of concerns about the potential impact on Scotland's marine life, environmental features, coastal communities and the safety of mariners.

GREY SEAL PUPS

A study, led by the Moredun Research Institute in Edinburgh in collaboration with the Sea Mammals Research Unit at the University of St Andrews, found that one in five grey seal pups in Scottish waters were infected by salmonella bacteria. Three strains of salmonella were identified: one usually found in cattle, one similar to a type found in garden birds and one which is also found in humans. Pups that had swum in the sea were four times more likely to carry salmonella than those that had not been yet been in the water. The presence of bacteria raises questions about marine pollution, possibly originating through run-off from farms or sewage being discharged into the water.

Dr Johanna Baily, of Moredun, said: "Finding these salmonella isolates in large marine mammals along our coastline raises concerns of land-sea transfer of both human and livestock pathogens. We need to know more about how these bacteria have spread to the marine environment and what threat they represent for our native marine mammals."

The University of St Andrews, SAC Consulting Veterinary Services, the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme and the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland were involved in the study.

ST ABBS SEALS

The *BBC News* website reported that monitoring by NTS has shown an increase of at least 10% in the number of grey seal pups born at its St Abbs property in Berwickshire. There were 631 pups born on the main pupping beach last year, compared to 556 in 2014. The total number of pups on this part of the coast was 927. Monitoring work will continue to see if the trend is short or long-term.

Lindsay Mackinlay, of NTS, said: "At this time, it appears that other grey seal colonies along the east coast of the UK have witnessed large numbers of seal pups being born in 2015, although we do not know for how long this trend will continue."

MPAs

14 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) came into effect in February, including the South Arran MPA and the St Kilda World Heritage Site MPA. The South Arran MPA prohibits scallop dredging but still allows bottom trawling in outer areas of the MPA. Apart from in the existing small No Take Zone in Lamash Bay, sea angling is permitted within the entire area as well as all other recreational activities.

Regulations for the Wester Ross and the Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura MPAs have been laid in the Scottish Parliament, and will come into effect in late March.

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Government has agreed to delay an order, at least until the summer, which would limit some forms of fishing in the Small Isles MPA [Jan 16]. Richard Lochhead met with representatives from Mallaig & North West Fishermen's Association and it was agreed that a delay would allow for further discussions. A new proposal will be brought forward for consultation.

PILOT WHALES

A pod of long-finned pilot whales were stranded in Fife in 2012, and 21 died [Sep 12]. A paper, now published in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*, describes tests led by the University of Aberdeen and the Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme. Very high concentrations of mercury was found in the brain of all the whales older than nine years and, in three whales, the concentration was higher than levels at which

severe neurological damage would occur in humans. The paper said that there was no indication that the mercury and cadmium levels in the brain caused disorientation, which in some cases can lead to strandings, but there was a potential for higher stress in the whales.

The report shows a clear correlation between the increased levels and the age of the mammals, suggesting toxic stress increases the longer the mammals live.

Dr Eva Krupp, from the University of Aberdeen, said: "We were able to gather an unprecedented number of tissue samples from all the major organs, including the brain, and as a result we can see for the first time the long-term effects of mammalian exposure to the environmental pollutants. This pod of whales provides unique new insights because we were able to look at the effects on a large number of whales from the same pod and how this varied according to age. Although the body has a natural defence mechanism in the form of the element selenium, which detoxifies these harmful chemicals, we found that the majority of selenium is not available for the synthesis of essential proteins in older animals. This indicates that the longer mammals live, the less able they may be to cope with the toxic effects."

- The *BBC News* website reported that a dead, five metre long basking shark weighing 'a few tonnes' was washed up at Skelmorlie, North Ayrshire.



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

SCOTLAND'S MOUNTAINS

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS) has written to all candidates in the forthcoming Scottish Parliamentary elections with a campaign briefing, *A sustainable future for Scotland's Mountains*.

The MCofS highlighted six key priorities:

- To develop a shared vision for Scotland's uplands, which should be treated as an irreplaceable natural, cultural and economic asset, respected and safeguarded for the benefit of all
 - To support sustainable economic development for mountain communities, which need support and investment to diversify and develop
 - To enforce existing legal powers and safeguard Scotland's access rights, which are so essential for the nation's health and wellbeing, but which are under threat of erosion
 - Guaranteed planning protection for Wild Land Areas, so that development is planned and regulated to enhance rather than diminish our mountain landscapes and wild land
 - To capitalise on the health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation, with these being promoted in both education and health services
 - A commitment to improving safety in the mountains: a sector-wide Mountain Safety Group, led by the MCofS, is developing a strategy for improving safety, encompassing services such as public information, mountain weather and avalanche forecasts, training and mountain rescue
- Mike Watson, of MCofS, said: "Our world-renowned mountains are cherished by hillwalkers, mountaineers and climbers from all parts of Scotland and beyond, so their future should be a concern for every MSP, regardless of where their constituency lies. Scotland's mountain landscapes are essential to our communities in so many ways: recreation, tourism, employment,

cultural identity, wildlife and biodiversity, peat conservation and carbon storage, energy production, water quality and flood mitigation to name but a few. Striking a balance between these is a challenge (and an opportunity) that we need the Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to take seriously."

SUSTAINABLE MANIFESTO

Scottish Environment LINK has published *Six Steps towards a Sustainable Scotland: The LINK Manifesto for the 2016 Holyrood Elections*. LINK and its members are urging Scottish political parties to put sustainable development at centre stage in their manifestos for the upcoming Holyrood elections in May.

Helen Todd, chair of LINK, said: "As a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Scotland – now more than ever – needs to start making progress towards achieving them. The elections provide a significant opportunity for our parties to tell voters how they will work towards achieving those goals. Sustainable development has environmental, social and economic components and this breadth is reflected in our manifesto which is built around the Shared Principles for Sustainable Development that Scotland signed up to more than ten years ago. In six steps we set out the key issue areas that LINK would like to see addressed in party manifestos and election debates, and by the incoming administration. Each step is accompanied by an example of a concrete action that would take us one step closer to a sustainable Scotland."

See: <http://bit.ly/1L0kOMY>

RAMBLERS MANIFESTO

Ramblers Scotland called for all political parties to support walking and to demonstrate their commitment to promoting active, healthy lifestyles, protecting the environment and improving access to the outdoors.

Measures put forward in the manifesto include:

- Investing in paths and bridges, signs and promotion
- Setting up National Recreation Areas around Scotland to showcase our world-class opportunities for outdoor recreation
- Setting up hut trails to enable people to experience a night staying in remote areas
- Protecting Scottish access rights, which are under threat of being eroded away by obstructions and lack of enforcement of the law
- Establishing Scotland's a new national park in Harris, the third park in Scotland

See: <http://bit.ly/1WS5ecM>

SCOTTISH BUDGET

The final Scottish budget was announced in the Scottish Parliament. Dr Sam Gardner, of WWF Scotland said: "There can be little doubt this budget is inconsistent with Scotland's Climate Change Act and fails to deliver on the Scottish Government's commitment to embed climate change across the budget. Just a couple of months ago in Paris, countries around the world agreed to step up climate action, yet this budget cuts back Scotland's funding for tackling this most critical issue by almost 10%. It's especially disappointing that the Scottish Government has chosen not to listen to the thousands of people who turned out for Scotland's Climate March in November or the many organisations who argued that increasing investment in insulating cold homes would have helped tackle climate change, cut fuel poverty and reduce fuel bills. With this budget, the Scottish Government has chosen to pass up the real social and economic benefits that come with taking action on climate change."

LAND REFORM

The Land Reform minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, announced that £9m has now been awarded from the Scottish Land Fund to help 52 communities across Scotland purchase land. More than 500,000 acres of land is now in community ownership in Scotland; of this over 90,000 acres has received from support through the Land Fund. 122 communities have successfully registered their interest in buying land local to their community in the Register of Community Interest in land. 70% of the population of the Outer Hebrides now live on community owned land. The Scottish Land Fund will be increased to £10m from 2016-20.



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

SEWAGE SLUDGE

The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & the Environment, Richard Lochhead, has published recommendations designed to improve guidance, practice and regulations relating to the spreading of sewage sludge on land in Scotland following the conclusion of a review.

The *Review of the Storage and Spreading of Sewage Sludge on Land in Scotland (The Sludge Review): Final Recommendations* includes;

- The requirements of the Safe Sludge Matrix should be incorporated into law in Scotland
- There should be an operator's licence including a 'fit and proper person' test for all operators who are involved in the handling, storage, transportation and spreading of material on agricultural land
- The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) should be the lead agency for incidents and complaints relating specifically to sewage sludge, with a single point of contact
- SEPA should have the power to have an 'exempt' activity, such as storage of sewage sludge, stopped immediately and the sludge removed
- Tighter monitoring of operator practice by SEPA

Sewage sludge is produced by Scottish Water (20%) and Public Finance Initiative contractors (80%) on a daily basis from sewage treatment works throughout Scotland. One of the long-established routes for sewage sludge is for it to be spread on land due to the potential to improve soil quality and provide nutrients for crops. By following guidance and ensuring suitable precautions are taken over the type of sewage sludge used, significant benefits can be derived whilst soil quality and the wider environment are minimised.

Mr Lochhead said: "The use of sewage sludge – when well managed – allows us to recycle valuable materials in a way that is safe and environmentally beneficial. I am confident that these actions will address the issues raised by communities and MSPs in relation to the spreading of sewage sludge, notably offensive odours."

See: www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/02/7034

GENERAL LICENCE RESTRICTIONS

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) applied General Licence restrictions to four properties in response to raptor persecution crimes that had occurred there, the first such restrictions to be applied [Nov 15]. The first order applied to parts of the Raeshaw Estate and parts of the neighbouring Corsehope farm near Heriot on the edge of the Moorfoot Hills in the Scottish Borders, and the second to parts of the Burnfoot Estate and neighbouring Todhalls Farm near Kippen in the

Gargunock Hills in Stirlingshire. Six days after the restriction orders had begun, SNH suspended both restriction orders because the estates appealed SNH's decision to enforce the restrictions.

The *Raptor Persecution Scotland* blog reported that the estates' appeals have now failed and SNH is now re-applying the restrictions for three years.

The *Sunday Herald* reported that the estates are now launching a judicial review of SNH's move. Raeshaw and Burnfoot estates strongly dispute SNH's findings, insisting they have not done anything wrong and pointing out they have not been prosecuted. David McKie, a solicitor representing both estates, said: "We have been instructed to seek a judicial review of the SNH decision and we have started preparing papers for court. Responsible game management practices are at the heart of what Raeshaw and its employees do. My clients are disappointed by this ruling. Burnfoot consider the decision of SNH to be unjustified and unfair. They note that the decision notice states that the restriction does not infer responsibility for the commission of crimes on any individuals."

A spokesman for SNH said: "Evidence of either illegal killing of raptors or attempts to kill raptors illegally was found on the land in question ... While it is very clear that offences have been committed, as is often the case with these types of crime, it hasn't been possible to gather the evidence to identify the person responsible." At Raeshaw and Corsehope, illegal traps had been set, and at Burnfoot and Todhalls there had been a poisoned red kite, a poisoned peregrine, and a red kite found injured in an illegal trap which had to be subsequently euthanised.

Andrew Bachell, of SNH, said that the police evidence was strong and that SNH had followed its published framework. General licences had been suspended where 'there may be a risk of more wildlife crimes taking place.' He said: "Land managers in these areas may still apply for individual licences. This will help to protect wild birds in these areas and still allow the land to be managed effectively, but with increased scrutiny of estate activities. We consider this is a fair and proportionate response to prevent further wildlife crime."

A spokesman for Scottish Land & Estates (SLE) expressed concerns about the quality of the evidence. He said: "There does remain a need to ensure that evidence presented by police is sufficiently robust in cases such as these where there does not appear to be sufficient proof to support a criminal conviction."

UNDERSTANDING PREDATION

A 382 page report, *Understanding Predation*, has been launched which identifies ways to resolve conflicts about predation. The report analyses the views of a large number of stakeholders in conservation and land management alongside the most up to date ecological research on predator-prey relationships and the best means of protecting declining populations of ground-nesting birds.

The Understanding Predation project was established to develop a basis for a common understanding between scientists, conservationists and those who work the land.

The report said that all six wild birds studied in detail (black grouse, curlew, golden plover, grey partridge, lapwing and oystercatcher) had shown widespread declines across Scotland since the 1960s. Importantly, stakeholders agreed that urgent action was needed to stop these population declines. The study recommends developing an adaptive, collaborative approach, linking scientific evidence gathering and stakeholders' knowledge, to guide the development of management practices.

This project was initiated by Paul Wheelhouse MSP when he was minister for Environment & Climate Change, and the novel feature developed for this work involves comparing scientific information with the local knowledge held by those who have a direct connection with the land. The scientific information was gathered by an independent research group. SNH oversaw the development of the project plan, the first time an approach like this has been used in the UK.

See: www.moorlandforum.org.uk/project-work/understanding-predation

WILDLIFE CRIME

The environment minister, Dr Aileen McLeod, has accepted recommendations from the wildlife crime penalties review group to introduce increased maximum penalties for those who commit crimes against wildlife [Nov 15]. Subject to the necessary legislative steps this could mean fines of up to £40,000 and 12 months imprisonment for certain offences.

The Scottish Government will take forward a number of other recommendations including the greater use of alternative penalties such as forfeiture of equipment used to carry out offences; greater use of impact statements in court to better explain the impact a wildlife crime may have and to explore the creation of new sentencing guidelines.

Douglas McAdam, of SLE, said: "It is right to bring up to date the maximum penalties available to judges for certain wildlife crime offences, and to take forward other measures such as a more systematic use of impact statements and alternative penalties appropriate to the crime."

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "[The] announcement from the Scottish Government on tough new maximum penalties for those who commit crimes against wildlife is a welcome step forward. Scotland has some of the strongest wildlife legislation in the UK but, ultimately, we need wildlife crime to be seen as completely unacceptable so that gamekeepers, landowners and countryside bodies do not tolerate it or turn a blind eye when they suspect it. Sport shooting bodies that are constantly seeking to reduce the safeguards afforded to highly protected species undermine the efforts to stamp out these crimes. The Scottish Government has said it will now bring together a list of relevant offences these changes will apply to and RSPB Scotland looks forward to working with the government to implement these measures."

See: <http://bit.ly/1QeSV9S>

LAND USE STRATEGY

The Royal Society of Edinburgh has published its response to the Scottish Government's consultation on the Land Use Strategy 2016-2021. See: <http://bit.ly/1nR07Nd>

• Scottish Environment LINK's response to the consultation can be seen at: <http://bit.ly/20InjIG>

PROSECUTION

Oran Environmental Solutions (OES) Ltd has been handed a confiscation order of almost £350,000 for licence breaches which resulted in numerous complaints from local residents during 2013. The confiscation order is the largest result under the Proceed of Crime Act to date for environmental offences in Scotland and was imposed in addition to fines amounting to £12,000 for waste related offences.

The charges related to the company's failure to remove waste materials from their Kilbagie Mill site following enforcement action by SEPA, storing controlled waste on land not covered by a waste management licence and failing to carry out adequate pest control measures at the facility. The backlog of waste resulted in SEPA receiving

numerous complaints from local residents regarding pest control at the facility, including the increased presence of vermin, flies and birds.

CONONISH GOLD

Scotgold, the company mining for gold in the central Scotland, has announced plans for an ore processing trial at its Cononish site near Tyndrum [Dec 15]. It wants to crush 2,400 tonnes of ore which has already been extracted, targeting ‘first pour’ production of 500 ounces of gold by the end of this year. The stockpiled ore is estimated to contain 7.9 grammes of gold *per tonne*, and 39 grammes of silver. If planning permission is approved, the work will start in May and run for six months.

SEVEN LOCHS

The Glasgow Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership has been passed to the second stage of the Heritage Lottery Funding bid process and hopes to secure £4.5m towards the development of the Seven Lochs Wetland Park at Gartloch/Gartcosh on the Glasgow/North Lanarkshire boundary. 4,300 homes will be created with walkways, cycle paths and natural play areas on Scotland’s largest urban wildlife site.

Max Hislop, of the partnership, said that the funding, if secured, would be crucial to establishing a ‘new, green infrastructure agenda’ that would continue the improvement and transformation of the Glasgow Clyde Valley. The partnership aims to bring urban life to green spaces with the aim of integrating the two and enhancing both the landscape and quality of life of communities.

 **ENERGY**

DUMFRIES & GALLOWAY PYLONS

The *BBC News* website reported that SP Energy Networks have completed a public consultation on building a new power line from South Ayrshire to Cumbria, most of it in Dumfries & Galloway [Jan 16]. A number of points about the scheme were raised, including the potential visual impact of the overhead line; preference for subsea or underground connection; the impact of an end to new UK government subsidies for onshore windfarms; objections to overhead lines in areas where they are not already in place and localised concerns about the sites for substations.

SP Energy Networks said that since the consultation was launched, there had been a ‘number of significant developments in the wider energy sector’ which could affect the scope of the project. However, it remained the case that investment was required to replace ageing infrastructure in the Dumfries & Galloway region. There will now be further analysis with National Grid to determine the extent to which changes to subsidy arrangements for onshore windfarms and the future mix of power generation in Scotland would alter proposed plans.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Scottish Borders: EDF Energy Renewables is proposing a 12 turbine extension for the 48 turbine Fallago Rig windfarm in the Lammermuir Hills north of Lauder [May 11]. If approved, the extension would effectively extend the 25 year operation of the windfarm by five years; the company argued that extending the life of the first phase would allow for the whole site to be decommissioned in ‘one simple, unified phase.’

Sutherland: The Highland Council opposed Muirhall Energy’s application for the 20 turbine Caplich windfarm in Wild Land Area 34 [Nov 15]. The decision now lies with the Scottish Government.

OFFSHORE WIND

Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult’s demonstration wind turbine has been inaugurated in Levenmouth, Fife. It is the world’s most advanced open access offshore wind turbine dedicated to research and the development of skills needed for the offshore wind industry.

HYDRO SCHEMES

Green Highland Renewables is building a 2 MW hydro scheme at Loch Eilde Mor, on the Rio Tinto estate above Kinlochleven in Lochaber. Part of the works access for the project will be via a bridge over the River Leven, which also forms part of the West Highland Way; a temporary diversion has been agreed. The scheme is due to be commissioned next summer.

- ScottishPower has completed a feasibility study into plans to more than double the size of the Cruachan hydro electric power station in Argyll, increasing its generating capacity from 440 MW by a further 400-600 MW [Feb 14].

ScottishPower has called for a secure, guaranteed floor price for its use from the government, in return for a cap on profits to justify its projected £400m investment. More energy storage capacity will be needed across the UK as more renewable energy comes online. Expanded pumped storage would be able to support peak demand and also be able to effectively store greater levels of electricity at times when renewable energy output is high but demand is low.

SHETLAND GAS

The *BBC News* website reported that gas from the Laggan and Tormore fields, at the edge of the continental shelf 125 km north west of the Shetland, is now firing Total’s Shetland Gas Plant. The fields will produce 90,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day. West of Shetland contains almost one fifth of the UK’s remaining oil and gas reserves. The Shetland Gas Plant has been built on a peat bog next to the Sullom Voe oil terminal. A pipeline from Shetland takes the gas to the UK mainland and into the national gas grid; it is expected to provide about 8% of the UK’s gas needs.

OPENCAST COAL

Hargreaves Services is to cease coal production at six of its seven opencast coal sites in Scotland over the next few months. The firm said that operations had become loss-making as a result of falls in coal and gas prices; the company had already been cutting output in Scotland in response to reduced demand for thermal coal from power stations. By mid 2016 it will focus on just one (unidentified) site, producing speciality coals.

The sites are Broken Cross (South Lanarkshire), Duncanziemere, House of Water and Netherton (East Ayrshire), Glenmuckloch (Dumfries & Galloway) and Muir Dean and St Ninians (Fife). However, Hargreaves announced that it would halt coal extraction at Muir Dean in March as a result of the ‘ongoing lack of demand.’

A Hargreaves spokesman said: “Since the announcement in December 2015 that forward mining plans would be reduced, a decision has been taken to target 350,000 tonnes of production. The group remains committed to completing all of its current restoration schemes and has made the decision to invest in new and enhanced coal processing facilities which will reduce the group’s exposure to loss-making thermal coal. The enhanced processing capability will improve yields of speciality coal from our production operations and help to support our valuable trading channels in industrial and domestic markets.”

Malcolm Spaven, of the Scottish Opencast

Communities Alliance, called on government and the coal industry to work together to restore abandoned opencast sites in Scotland ‘before it is too late.’ [Nov 15].

Mr Spaven said: “Weak companies in a dying industry won’t pay for restoration. We need all parties – Scottish and UK governments, local government, agencies like the Scottish Mines Restoration Trust, the Coal Authority and the Forestry Commission – to work together to pool all available money before this industry ceases to exist and communities are blighted forever. We urgently need to know the cost of the remaining restoration required at each site so that the scale of the task facing abandoned communities is understood.”

FRACKING RESEARCH

The Sunday Herald reported that Scottish ministers have announced the commissioning of three pieces of research into fracking [Sep 15]. The first, which will be carried out by the British Geological Survey, aims to better understand the levels of induced seismic activity that could be associated with fracking. Another objective is to understand the actions that can be taken to mitigate any noticeable effects on communities. The research must also consider each stage of an unconventional oil and gas development, such as exploration, appraisal and production.

The second piece of research, secured by AECOM, is to examine the steps that can be taken to ensure decommissioning, site restoration and aftercare can be done in a way that minimises the impact on communities and the environment.

The third research contract focuses on understanding community level impacts, including looking at traffic volumes in locations close to fracking sites. The contract was awarded to Ramboll Environ UK Limited, but later ended by mutual agreement; the impartiality of Ramboll’s senior consultant on fracking had been questioned.

Research on the economic impacts of fracking will also be undertaken by KPMG.

The Scottish Government currently has a moratorium on fracking but these research briefs will not be completed until 2017, well after the Scottish election in May [Sep 15].

Alison Johnstone MSP said: “Rather than commissioning this work the Scottish Government should be listening to climate science and concerned communities and banning fracking now.”

A Scottish Government spokesman said: “No fracking can or will take place while the Scottish Government’s moratorium on unconventional oil and gas remains in place. The Scottish Government has publicly committed to carry out one of the world’s most wide-ranging research programmes into fracking and an extensive public consultation which will allow interested parties to express their views. We appreciate there are strong views on the different sides of the debate on unconventional but welcome that both the environmental NGOs and the industry support our moratorium and plans for research and consultation. Research has been commissioned on the environmental, climate change, public health and economic issues associated with unconventional oil and gas in order to fully inform public debate.”

TORNES NUCLEAR PLANT

EDF has announced that the Torness nuclear power station, near Dunbar in East Lothian, is to have its life extended by at least seven years. Due to have been decommissioned in 2023, the plant will now be operational until 2030 at the earliest. Torness started generating electricity in 1988 and had originally been intended to have only a 30 year operational lifespan.

Vincent de Rivaz, of EDF, said: “Our continuing

investment, our expertise and the professional relationship we have with the safety regulator means we can safely prolong the operating life of our nuclear power stations. Their excellent output shows that reliability is improving whilst their safety and environmental performance is higher than ever."

Professor Paul Younger, of the University of Glasgow, said: "This is an announcement I was hoping would be made because Scotland is facing a meltdown in its ability to produce all the electricity it wants on demand. At the moment we have got 100% capacity for doing that but after Longannet closes in a month's time that will drop to about 60% below our peak demand and in 2023 it was going to be down to less than a quarter. This announcement means that, by then, it will actually be more like 45%.

"On average, more than a third (34%) of all the electricity used in Scotland comes from those two nuclear power stations (Torness and Hunterston). Their attribute is they are very low carbon and 24/7. They pump the electricity out steadily around the clock. As other things wax and wane, like the wind coming or not, it provides the bedrock. Without nuclear – which is where we are heading, this just delays the day – Scotland is going to have serious problems achieving its carbon targets and keeping its lights on."

The Scottish Government is opposed to new nuclear power stations being built in Scotland, but it has previously said that this policy did not include the operating life of existing nuclear power stations being extended to help maintain security of supply while the transition to renewables and cleaner thermal generation takes place.

ENERGY-FROM-WASTE

Glasgow City Council has refused planning permission for WH Malcolm's high rise energy-from-waste plant in Scotstoun [Jan 16]. The local authority received almost 1,000 objections, including concerns that the plant had the potential to cause air pollution and spread odour and dust over the surrounding area, adversely impacting on the health of locals.

Martin Kiely, of WH Malcolm, said that the firm was considering appealing the decision. He said: "As was made clear when the council officers recommended approval in their report, and with no objections from statutory consultees, the proposed facility would be firmly in line with planning policy at both a local and national level. The Scottish Government has published clear objectives on reducing the amount of waste going to landfill. This proven technology would help us achieve that target for Glasgow whilst creating energy from waste and ensuring the next generation of jobs continue at an existing waste processing site."

 **RECREATION & TOURISM**

LOCH LOMOND

The Herald reported that writer and broadcaster Cameron McNeish, writing on the *walkhighlands* blog, said that new byelaws which will ban camping from almost all of the west side of Loch Lomond have 'tainted' one of Scotland's most famous beauty spots [Jan 16]. He said that campers who respected the Scottish countryside were now being criminalised, and warned that many other outdoor pursuits could soon find themselves under pressure.

Around 300 dedicated campsites will be created before the ban comes into force, but Mr McNeish warned that these will be snapped up

by fishermen leaving few spots for hikers and campers.

Mr McNeish said: "Apart from anything else there seems to me to be to be a basic injustice in that. It's like banning everyone from driving because a few people insist on driving while under the influence of alcohol, or banning everyone from walking along Sauchiehall Street on a Saturday night because there are a few neds misbehaving ... SNP politicians need to get out more, to learn what is really going on in the countryside and to talk with those who have the knowledge and expertise to help them solve problems.

"For a government supposedly committed to equality of opportunity the Loch Lomond byelaws decision casts a very dark cloud over their land reform programme. Replacing a statutory right with a regulation system based on permits and criminal offences is a backward step, more in tune with Victorian Britain than modern Scotland."

Helen Todd, of Ramblers Scotland, wrote to *The Herald* letters page. She said: "Informal camping is an activity covered by access rights and the vast majority of people who camp in the park and across Scotland are doing so responsibly. It's a time-honoured, low-cost way of getting close to nature and engaging with the outdoors, especially for young people experiencing their first overnight trip or people on low incomes.

"Over the past decade the number of camping places within the national park has reduced significantly as holiday parks have upgraded to cater for caravans and campervans, or converted to chalet accommodation. This lack of camping infrastructure has contributed to the current situation.

"Rather than banning campers, the National Park should be welcoming the fact that so many people – up to 800 on busy weekends – want to come and enjoy the bonnie banks, and making it easy for them to act responsibly. This can be done by providing campsites, toilets and litter bins and by increasing education and traffic management measures while working with the police to make sure existing legislation on litter and so on is enforced.

"The 300 'new' camping places announced by the government will simply be space set aside within byelaw zones where campers can buy permits but with no new facilities provided. While being totally inadequate to deal with demand, this permit system fundamentally undermines Scottish access legislation and has not been the subject of any consultation with outdoor recreation bodies."

CAIRNGORM SCENIC ROUTES

Planning permission has been granted by the Cairngorms National Park Authority for new viewing points to be erected as part of the nationwide 'scenic routes' initiative [Feb 14]. Visitors will be able to stop at Creagan Nam Cam at the Devil's Elbow in Glenshee and at the Craighaulkie Quarry, outside Tomintoul. The installations are along the A93/A939, the highest public roads in Britain.

The Scottish Government's scenic routes initiative was launched after a similar project in Norway. It is designed to create unique viewpoints and enhance visitors' experience.



NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS

CLYDE MARINE

The Clyde Marine Planning Partnership (CMPP) has been established for the Clyde Marine Region, which will build on the work of the former Firth of Clyde Forum. The CMPP, through the creation of a regional marine plan, will assess the condition of the region, set economic, social, marine ecosystem and climate change policies and keep the policies under review. Marine Scotland is to nominate the CMPP as the delegate for pursuing regional marine planning in the Clyde.

GLENLIVET ESTATE

The Glenlivet Estate, part of The Crown Estate, has been awarded Dark Sky Discovery Site status, joining more than 100 others across the UK. These sites are free from light pollution, making them perfect places for star-gazing and astronomy. The estate is now working towards Dark Sky Park status through the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership Project, which would encompass a much larger area of land.

See: www.darkskydiscovery.org.uk

RSPB SCOTLAND

Dunnet Head in Caithness, the most northernmost mainland spot in Scotland, has been bought by RSPB Scotland with the aid of a £40,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. RSPB Scotland has been leasing and managing the 40 acre site as a nature reserve since May 2008, but has now come to an agreement with the previous owner. The headland includes a Site of Special Scientific Interest on account of the seabird colonies which nest on the red sandstone cliffs. The headland has 3% of Britain's kittiwakes and 1% of its guillemots as well as breeding puffins, razorbills and fulmars.

SCOTTISH WOODLANDS

Ralland Browne has been appointed managing director of employee-owned Scottish Woodlands, succeeding Colin Mann, who becomes deputy chairman. Tom Jones Jr will become chairman on the retirement of his father, also Tom Jones.

WDC

Whale & Dolphin Conservation has closed its Dolphin & Seal Centre at North Kessock near Inverness. Visitor numbers have decreased by 45% at the centre and a staff member will now be based part-time at Chanonry Point along the Moray Firth near Fortrose.