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**CONSERVATION**

**PROTECTED SITES' CONDITION**

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has released the latest figures tracking the proportion of Scottish protected natural features in favourable condition. The main findings show that of 5,271 Scottish natural features on 1,866 protected nature sites, 80.4% are either in favourable condition, or unfavourable but recovering towards a favourable condition. Features protected are species, habitats and earth science features considered to be important at the national (Sites of Special Scientific Interest), European (Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area) and international (Ramsar) levels.

This figure represents a 1.1% rise in the proportion of natural features in favourable or recovering condition between 2015 and 2016. There has been a 9% increase since assessment reporting began in 2005.

There are three broad types of protected features: earth science, which covers geological outcrops and landforms, fossil beds and caves (98.1% in favourable condition); species (76.3% in favourable condition) and habitats (79.4% in favourable condition). All saw an increase in the proportion of features in favourable condition since last year (species 0.1%; earth science 0.5%; and habitats 2.1%).

Of the individual feature types which are monitored, some feature types showed an increase in the proportion of features in favourable condition, some remained stable, whilst others decreased. Of particular note were wetland features where the proportion of natural features in favourable condition rose from 81.2% in 2014/15 to 85.3% in 2015/16.

Invasive species and over-grazing are the main challenges to improving condition from unfavourable to favourable. The proportion of assessments recording invasive species as a negative pressure has risen for the past four years to 20% in 2015/16. This includes both non-native species, such as rhododendron in woodlands, and native species, such as birch encroaching on to raised bog habitats.

The proportion of assessments recording over-grazing by wild herbivores and/or domestic stock in 2014/15 fell to 18.1%, but in 2015/16 it increased again to 18.4%. A small, but apparently growing influence on natural features, is the influence of changing climate. In the marine environment there are changes in prey species distribution for birds, and in rivers there are more regular and bigger floods.

*The Sunday Herald* reported that the proportion categorised as simply 'favourable' is 66.6%, down from 67.5% in 2007. 601 natural features are classified as 'unfavourable declining' while 430 are 'unfavourable no change.' It defines a further 399 features as 'unfavourable recovering due to management change' and 327 as just 'unfavourable recovering.' However, SNH summarises the totals and re-classifies the latter two 'unfavourable' categories as 'favourable.' Ministers can therefore claim that targets to get at least 80% of natural features in a favourable condition by 2016 have been met. A previous target, to achieve 95% of protected areas in favourable condition by 2010, was missed.

Lloyd Austin of RSPB Scotland, said: "We really are concerned that the benefits claimed for management change have not actually resulted in any overall improvement of these sites on the ground. In effect this is just like saying that a sick patient is cured because their name is on a waiting list, while the reality is that their condition continues to deteriorate. In truth this is nothing more than a bureaucratic conjuring trick when what is needed is adequate resource provision and targeted management at these sites. Scotland's protected nature sites deserve a whole lot better than this."

He pointed out that the condition of sites had remained 'almost static' since monitoring began more than ten years ago. "

An analysis by RSPB Scotland shows that 61% of upland ash, 55% of raised bog and 54% of oak features are being damaged by invasive species, such as rhododendron and Sitka spruce. Upland habitats are under severe pressure from overgrazing by deer and livestock. Poor water management is impacting 74% of golden plover and 68% of greenshank features, while significant proportions of salmon, hen harrier and loch features are suffering from agricultural and forestry operations.

SNH's own figures show a marked decline in some major natural features over the last year, including terrestrial and marine mammals, fish, insects and mosses. The SNH's report said that seabirds in many areas are declining because the fish they feed on are being taken by the fishing industry or shifting due to climate change. It said: "There is no immediate action that can be taken to relieve these wider pressures." The report therefore considers these features favourable when it reports on the state of Scotland wildlife.

Dr Deborah Long, of Plantlife Scotland, said that it was 'unhelpful' to describe unfavourable features as favourable. "With the exceptionally low level of resources available to support Scotland's nature it is difficult to see how, or when, 'unfavourable recovering' might actually become favourable. If we are serious about retaining our magnificent biodiversity and the natural habitats that draw people and business from across the world, we need more action and commitment to protect the nature that makes Scotland so special."

She pointed out that valuable grasslands were in decline. She said that grassland features on some protected areas were in such a poor condition that they were being officially de-designated, such as Kenmure Holms just south of New Galloway and at Swallow Craig in Fife.

Craig Macadam, of Buglife in Scotland, said that a quarter of species and one in ten insect features were in unfavourable condition. "Behind the spin the reality is more worrying. More needs to be done to address the pressures that are hampering the recovery of these and other species, not only on protected sites but across the length and breadth of Scotland."

Mark Ruskell MSP promised to ask the Scottish Parliament's new environment committee how much actual progress had been made. "It's critical that our new Scottish Parliament tests to destruction this dubious way of measuring environmental progress."

SNH stressed that the figures should be



interpreted with care. The proportion of natural features in favourable or unfavourable but recovering condition had now topped 80% per cent, it stated. Brian Eardley, of SNH, said: "It is the first time this milestone has been achieved. It has been accomplished through work with the private, public and voluntary sector. We have been consistent and explicit in explaining the breakdown between actual favourable and the other unfavourable recovering categories. The inclusion of 'recovering due to management' gives a better indication of changes made to benefit the feature which may not yet be picked up by site condition monitoring."

• In a letter to *The Sunday Herald*, Stuart Goodall of Confor wrote: "Sitka spruce is highlighted [in the *Sunday Herald* report] as an invasive species when SNH's own database identifies beech as a bigger threat to these woodlands and birch and Scots pine in the case of raised bog. Sitka requires significant sunlight and would struggle to 'invade' broadleaved woodland. Modern, sustainable forestry supports wildlife ..."

See: <http://bit.ly/224puuK>

The data used in the report primarily come from SNH's Site Condition Monitoring programme. See: <http://bit.ly/1ZMSJu2>

**RED SQUIRRELS & LEPROSY**

Leprosy was identified in red squirrels for the first time in Scotland in 2014, though it is thought to have been in the population for centuries. Post-mortem examinations have revealed that leprosy is also affecting squirrels on the Isle of Wight and Brownsea Island, in Poole Harbour, Dorset, which are among the few spots in England that red squirrels are still found.

Around 200 red squirrels on Brownsea Island are being studied, where the disease is thought to have been for many years but only recently diagnosed. The island location of the study will enable researchers to examine the impact of leprosy on the squirrels in a contained environment.

Little is known about how the leprosy bacteria, which causes swelling and hair loss to the ears, muzzle and feet, is spread among red squirrels.

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh will work with the National Trust, which manages the island, and the Dorset Wildlife Trust, which manages a large nature reserve on the island.

**CAITHNESS SEABIRDS**

An SNH report on the East Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA) found that there has been an increase in the numbers of razorbills, great black-backed gulls and European shags since the previous count in 1999. It appears that 2015 was a good year for breeding seabirds and that this resulted in some particularly high counts.

Unfortunately, during the same period, a number of seabirds have declined, including northern fulmars, herring gulls, common guillemots and black-legged kittiwakes.

Nationally, after two decades of decreasing numbers, there are early signs of hope for some seabirds over the last two years; however, there are regional variations. At East Caithness Cliffs, the increases in numbers are generally larger and the decreases tend to be less than those recorded for some seabirds nationally. There are approved plans for major offshore windfarm developments off the Caithness coast, and this seabird survey will ensure there is up-to-date information on the East Caithness seabird populations to help inform post consent monitoring.

*Seabird Counts at East Caithness Cliffs SPA for Marine Renewable Casework*, see: <http://bit.ly/1sBpJBP>

**LITTLE TERNS**

Little terns migrate from western and southern Africa to Scotland to breed on sandy beaches. RSPB Scotland said that mainland colonies of little terns have been in decline because of increasing disturbance from recreational visitors and predators such as foxes. It said that less frequently visited machair on the Western Isles provides some of the best habitat and protection for the migrants. The Western Isles have between 80 to 90 pairs of little terns, about 5% of the UK population. Most of the colonies are found on the Uists, but in some years they also breed on Lewis and Harris.

RSPB Scotland's Stuart Taylor said: "On the Western Isles the birds nest away from the beaches, preferring the machair instead. Here they are unlikely to suffer from disturbance, but late agricultural activities can be a problem." In years when ploughing has been delayed due to weather conditions, nests and young can be destroyed during machair crop sowing. He said: "Being ground-nesting birds, the clutch of two or three eggs are well camouflaged against the sandy ground and can easily be overlooked. We are hoping that crofters will be on the lookout for them so that they have a chance of breeding successfully."

RSPB Scotland has started work identifying where terns are nesting and alerting crofters to where the birds are.

**GREAT YELLOW BUMBLEBEE**

A survey of great yellow bumblebees is being undertaken by RSPB Scotland and the Bumblebee Conservation Trust across RSPB reserves. 47 great yellows were recorded in 2015, most on RSPB Scotland's reserve on Copinsay in Orkney. Two were found on Coll, in the Inner Hebrides, and none were found on reserves where they had previously been recorded. Once found throughout the UK, the bee's reduced distribution is largely due to the loss of more than 97% of the UK's wildflower meadows, which the bees relied on for pollen and nectar.

 **FARMING**

**COMMON GRAZINGS**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Upper Coll and the Mangersta grazings committees on Lewis was dismissed by the Crofting Commission due to a perceived failure to provide audited accounts [Apr 16]. An application is now being made to the Scottish Land Court in a bid to have the dismissal overturned.

Common grazings are areas of land shared by crofters and others who hold a right to graze stock on that land, managed by grazings committees. There are more than 1,000 common grazings covering a total of 500,000 hectares across Scotland, according to the Crofting Commission.

The Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) criticised the Crofting Commission's actions in dismissing the committee and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar appealed for the dispute to be resolved.

• *The Herald* reported that grazings constables have now been appointed, in the absence of grazings committees, to manage land at upper Coll and at Mangersta at the centre of the dispute between the Crofting Commission and crofters.

Solicitor Brian Inkster, a specialist in crofting law, has written to the Crofting Commission asking them to reinstate the two grazings committees and clerks without delay. He had previously described the Commission's conduct as 'unreasonable' and 'illegal.'

Ken MacLeod, of solicitors MacLeods WS, is acting for the former members of the Upper Coll committee. He said: "I believe [the appointment of a constable] such an action is not legally competent. But we are well on the way to framing the land court action, and think this will be decided ultimately by the land court."

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that around half of all grazings committees throughout the Highlands and Islands are currently in abeyance as individuals are unwilling to volunteer their services due to the time commitment and bureaucracy involved.

Fiona Mandeville, of SCF, said: "The behaviour of the Crofting Commission is causing widespread resentment and bewilderment in the crofting communities. We are all completely dismayed that the body that is supposed to be promoting the interests of crofting is instead behaving so negatively and harmfully. It seems to have lost all sense of reason. How does the Crofting Commission intend to manage the day-to-day running of the grazings that they have left with no committee? Claims for Common Agricultural Programme support are due imminently, both by committees on behalf of grazings and by individuals who need agreement of their grazings committees to use extra soumings. Large amounts of money, and we are talking thousands of pounds, will be lost. Will the Crofting Commission be ready to compensate for losses? Or do they expect the constables they are imposing on the grazings to do this?"

"Whilst being questionable in legality, imposing constables is belligerent, particularly as shareholders are expected to pay for them ... We are hearing from many committees that if they are forced to pay out all their operational reserves they will simply have to wind up management of the grazings. That will be the end of this unique system, which we hope is not the intention."

Crofting Commissioner William Swann said that under the Crofting Reform Act of 1993, any money that comes into the village must be distributed among all the shareholders, including absentees. Any improvement works needing to be carried out must be financed through a levy charged on the same shareholders. Until now, grazings committees had adopted a 'pragmatic approach' to financial management. He said that some villages were now handling substantial amounts of money through environmental schemes.

**GM CROPS**

A study by the American National Academies of Sciences, Engineering & Medicine, which examined more than 900 pieces of research, found that genetically modified (GM) crops pose no danger when eaten and could even be beneficial to the environment. GM foods were banned by the Scottish Government last year [Sep 15].

Following publication of the report, a spokesman for NFU Scotland said: "Our view is that we always want policy in this area to be science-led rather than led by rhetoric. We believe there might be a place for such technology on Scottish farms. But as things stand we cannot even conduct field trials because of the ban which is in place, even though we have world-leading research institutes which are well-placed to examine this type of technology and establish if it has a role in Scottish food or farming."

"To be perfectly honest, if we look at the technology currently available most of it concerns crops such as maize and soya, which are not crops grown in Scotland. But that's not to say there might not be technologies developed in the future which could be of benefit to both health and the environment. I think that Scottish farmers would back any technology and see what it has to offer. But it is also a consumer-led industry and farmers

would keep an eye whether there was significant public resistance to this type of food.”

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: “Scotland has a global reputation for naturally high quality food and drink which often attracts a premium price. Allowing GM crops to be grown in Scotland could damage our clean and green brand and our £14 billion food and drink sector.”



## WOODLANDS

### MOFFAT WOODLANDS

The Scottish Land Fund has awarded £171,622 to Moffat Community Woodlands (MCW) to buy 33.4 hectares (82 acres) of land on Gallow Hill. MCW intends to work with Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland to replant the land with a broadleaf woodland and improve recreational opportunities.

### LARGS

The *Largs & Millport Weekly News* reported that Stakis Forestry LLP is planning to plant 1.3 million trees on two former farming estates on the hills behind Largs in North Ayrshire. Douglas Blair, chairman of Largs Community Council, said: “We have voted to hold a public meeting on the issue. The Environmental Impact Assessment will be submitted to FC Scotland this week. The review should take several weeks then will go out to public consultation.”

The community council has formally requested a 14 day extension to the public consultation from FC Scotland, the maximum allowed.

An online petition has been set up to ‘Save the Gretas.’ The petition aims to provide a compromise solution to suit both the Stakis forestry development and the Largs public. It proposes that the area of planting is restricted to the east of the Greeto Burn, while the area to the south bank of the Gogo Valley is left as a popular and well-used beauty spot.

See: <http://tinyurl.com/zcfbv24>

### GLEN NEVIS

*The Scotsman* reported that the Nevis Landscape Partnership, Bidwells and Rio Tinto are collaborating on an initiative to expand woodland cover in upper Glen Nevis, Lochaber. Local seed and root stock from Scots pine and aspen is being collected to provide seedlings for habitat regeneration over the next three years. The natural regeneration work is part of the Future Forests conservation project, supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.



## FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

### SEA-LICE

*The Herald* reported that an official complaint has been lodged by Salmon & Trout Conservation Scotland (S&TCS) with the European Commission. S&CTS claims that the Scottish Government has failed to protect wild salmon and sea trout from sea-lice on fishfarms, and that the problem is getting worse. S&CTS said that the Scottish Government’s approach constitutes a breach of European environmental legislation.

A study suggested that almost 60% of Scottish salmon production was failing to adhere to thresholds set out in the industry’s voluntary code of good practice for numbers of sea-lice.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, of S&TCS, said: “The response of the Scottish Government to these threats has been and remains inadequate. Despite our best efforts over many years, the

Scottish Government has not been persuaded of the need to act robustly to deal with the sea-lice issue. S&TCS has been left with no choice but to ask the European Commission to intervene.”

Mr Graham-Stewart said European law, in the form of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), required the government to publish a programme of measures necessary for good environmental status in marine and coastal waters by 2020, and ‘to put those measures into effect by the end of this year.’ This required protection of wild salmon and sea trout from the threat of sea-lice from fish farms. He said that the published programme was inadequate to achieve the objectives of the directive. He said that he believed the Commission would conclude the Scottish Government’s actions were ‘insufficient and inadequate to comply with European law designed to protect the marine environment.’

A spokeswoman for the Scottish Government said: “Scotland has a robust legislative and regulatory framework in place which continues to provide the right balance between growing aquaculture and protecting the environment. The Scottish Government acknowledges that sea-lice management presents a challenge for the aquaculture industry which is why we have invested significantly in science, research and innovation to enhance the environmental sustainability of the sector.” She said that the government would continue to work with the industry to address the issue, investing in biological management techniques such as the use of cleaner fish as well as trialling other new technologies.

Scott Landsburgh, of the Scottish Salmon Producers’ Organisation (SSPO), said that fish health was fundamental to successful salmon farming: “The jobs, economic benefits and export success rely on a robust, professional farming process.” The industry was investing heavily in new technologies and equipment to protect fish health.

### AQUACULTURE CENTRE

*The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that a scoping study has been launched into a proposed centre of excellence for Scottish aquaculture. The study was initiated by the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre (SAIC) and Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) and will canvass industry opinion. Complementing the study, SAIC and HIE are also working with independent consultant Imani Development on a foresighting exercise to map Scottish aquaculture developments through to 2030.

### WILD SALMON CATCHES

*The Herald* reported that S&TCS has compiled statistics which show that wild salmon rod catches in the main salmon farming region of the west Highlands and Islands lag far behind those of the east coast, which is essentially free from aquaculture.

The analysis found that the five year average catch for the east coast rod fishery, from the Tweed to Cape Wrath, increased by approximately 40% between 1970 and 2014. In comparison, the five year average catch for the west coast rod fishery, from Cape Wrath to Mull of Kintyre including the Hebrides, declined by around a quarter between the beginning of the salmon farming movement in 1970 and 2014. In the worst affected area of the west coast, the mainland from Ardnamurchan Point to Mull of Kintyre, the rod catch halved between 1970 and 2014.

Hughie Campbell Adamson, of S&TCS, said: “The regional picture in the west coast masks just how serious the situation is in some rivers.

It is surely no coincidence that the only recent extinctions or near-extinctions of wild salmon from entire river systems in Scotland have occurred in the salmon farming regions of the west Highlands and Islands. One notable example is the Lochaber’s River Strontian, previously – before the advent of intensive salmon farming in the adjacent sea loch – a productive fishery, where the local fisheries trust was unable to find any adult salmon with which to initiate a restocking programme.”

S&TCS is seeking tougher regulation of the salmon farming industry, particularly the introduction of sanctions to penalise producers in areas where sea-lice exceed a safe threshold.

Andrew Graham-Stewart, of S&TCS, said: “Rod catch statistics are the main measure used to assess the conservation status of salmon in Scottish rivers and this analysis underlines the stark contrast between the fortunes of wild salmon in the east and west coasts in the last 45 years. The vast majority of rivers on the West Coast and Islands are in the Scottish Government’s category three – the most threatened – and the only significant difference between the two coasts is the presence of aquaculture on the west.

“The salmon farming industry in the west has grown inexorably since 1970. Our analysis fundamentally contradicts the misguided and disingenuous contention of representatives of the salmon farmers who maintain that there is no ‘evidence’ that their activities have an impact on wild fish numbers. Misleadingly they employ all-method figures (including net-caught) for salmon both east and west coasts to ‘show’ similar declines, thus ‘proving’ that salmon farming is not to blame in the west. There will be no improvement in west coast salmon and sea trout numbers whilst salmon farms are permitted to pump out billions of sea-lice parasites into the wider environment with absolute impunity. To date Scottish Government remains impervious to and dismissive of any pressure to regulate the industry in a way that gives any meaningful protection to wild fish.”

The latest sea-lice data for January to March 2016 was published this month by SSPO. There is no sign of any real improvement in controlling the parasite; the trendline for the percentage of total industry production capacity above the Code of Good Practice threshold (for recommended treatment) is on a steady upward trajectory. The SSPO said: “This quarter’s figures continue to demonstrate that the industry is facing some environmental challenges in certain locations.”

Scott Landsburgh, of SSPO, said: “It is, of course, regrettable that the status of these rivers is so poor. Very few Scottish rivers are in good form for a wide variety of reasons, for example global climate change has altered salmon feeding grounds at sea and means that fewer survive to make it back to their rivers in Scotland. The salmon farming industry’s joint working with wild fisheries organisations has shown a productive and co-operative relationship looking at restoration and restocking projects. Work has focused on the importance of maintaining and improving river habitats and encouraging catch and release rather than depleting the river populations. Industry technical expertise and facilities have also assisted a restocking programme of the River Lochy, as part of a wider five year project to assist 14 different rivers in Lochaber. This sort of joint working and information sharing about both wild and farmed salmon is surely the productive way forward.”

### SHELLFISH PRODUCTION

Marine Scotland Science has published the Scottish Shellfish Farm Production Survey 2015. The publication details statistics on the employment, production and value of shellfish from Scottish Shellfish Farms. It is structured to follow industry

trends within the mussel, Pacific oyster, native oyster, queen scallop and scallop species sectors. The main findings are that production tonnage of mussels dropped by 5% from 7,683 tonnes in 2014 to 7,270 tonnes in 2015. This is the second highest level of mussel production recorded in Scotland. The production of Pacific oyster shells decreased by 21% from the 2014 total. Additionally, over 5 million shells were produced for on-growing in other waters.

The overall estimated value of the industry was calculated to be approximately £10.1m in 2015. See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FHII/surveys](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/marine/Fish-Shellfish/FHII/surveys)

**SEA FISHERIES 2015**

*Provisional Scottish Sea Fisheries Statistics* has been published by Scotland's chief statistician which show that the quantity of fish landed by Scottish registered vessels in 2015 was 439,900 tonnes with a value of £437m, a decrease of 8% and 15% respectively since 2014.

The decrease in value of fish landings in 2015 was driven by a 12% decrease in the volume of pelagic fish landings; the value of pelagic landings decreased by 27%. Shellfish landings decreased in value by 11% and 6% decrease in volume. Demersal landings increased in volume by 2%, while the value remained stable:

Mackerel is the most valuable stock to the Scottish fleet, accounting for 30% (£131m) of the total value of Scottish landings. The volume of mackerel landed by Scottish registered vessels in 2015 was 200,000 tonnes, 17% lower than in 2014. Nephrops (Norway lobster/langoustine) are the most valuable shellfish stock, accounting for 45% of the value of shellfish landings, and the second most valuable stock overall to the Scottish fleet. In 2015, the total value of nephrops decreased 19% to £61m. This is due to a 20% decrease in volume landed to 16,000 tonnes and a 1% increase in average price to £3,688 per tonne.

The number of active Scottish registered fishing vessels in 2015 was 2,017, a decrease of 13 vessels (1%) from 2014. At the end of 2015, there were five more vessels in the 10 metre and under fleet to 1,452 vessels; 18 less vessels in the over 10 metre fleet to 565 vessels; demersal sector reduced by 12 vessels to 182 vessels; shellfish sector decreased by five vessels to 363 vessels and the pelagic sector reduced by one vessel to 20 vessels.

In 2015, the number of fishermen employed on Scottish fishing vessels was 4,828. This represents an increase of 32 (1%) compared to 2014. Both the number of regularly employed and irregularly employed fishermen increased, to 3,985 (less than 1%) and 792 (4%) respectively.

Quota uptake was 97% and above for the key demersal fish stocks in the North Sea, with the exception of North Sea haddock (above 83%), North Sea plaice (above 66%) and North Sea megrim (above 53%). North Sea nephrops quota uptake was 64%, lower than the uptake in 2014 due to a decrease in quota as well as a decrease in quantity landed. Quota uptake for North Sea herring and west of Scotland mackerel exceeded 100% in 2015.

See: <http://bit.ly/1VVK1Sx>



**MARINE**

**ARGYLL & CLYDE MARINE ECONOMY**

*The Buteman* reported that an independent study, commissioned by Caledonian MacBrayne, has been undertaken to help grow the marine economy of the Clyde and Argyll Regional Marine areas over the next 25 years. The report was co-

authored and compiled by MacArthur Green environmental consultants and the University of the West of Scotland and is intended to stimulate inter-industry and agency discussion within the scope of the National Marine Plan Focusing on the aquaculture, transport and tourism sectors.

Researchers highlighted the aquaculture industry's reliance on only two major products (salmon and blue mussels) and planning constraints in getting new developments approved. The study suggests raising awareness of the cleanliness of Scottish marine environment, while diversification into new products such as sea snails, sea urchins or seaweeds would make the industry more secure. Research and development into aquafeeds could help too, by reducing costs and improving nutritional value, while enhanced monitoring would provide early warning of dangerous algal and jellyfish blooms. Cultivating seaweeds has the potential to increase marine biodiversity, mitigate coastal erosion and to provide energy self-sufficiency for island communities through biogas production.

The study found that tourism and recreation offers many opportunities for future growth, particularly in relation to sailing tourism, wildlife tourism, cruise ship tourism and adventure tourism. However, this is likely to result in greater competition for resources, such as access to shore front or to fish stocks. More damage to the environment is also likely and growth will be hampered by a lack of provision of services, such as access to the internet, and a lack of affordable housing for local residents.

Marine traffic is likely to increase in the Clyde and Argyll region over the next 25 years with much of the growth expected to be through the development of the cruise ship and sailing tourism sectors. The report also suggests that in the longer term new international shipping routes may open up if the arctic ice mass reduces much further; Clyde and Argyll are ideally placed to exploit them. However this growth will inevitably cause problems; congestion and an increase in marine noise pollution and emissions, and require substantial infrastructural port development to meet growing demand.

The report emphasises the many competing demands for use of the seas around the west coast and their interdependency.

The Scottish Association for Marine Science, the University of Stirling's Institute of Aquaculture, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and Marine Harvest Scotland also contributed to the report.

**PORPOISE SAC**

*The Oban Times* reported that Argyll & Bute Council (ABC) has voted not to support the Scottish Government's plans to designate the Inner Hebrides & Minch as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the harbour porpoise. An SNH consultation, now finished, identified a 13,539 km<sup>2</sup> site in the Inner Hebrides and the Minch, from Islay to Lewis, which comprises 13.8% of the harbour porpoises' habitat in the west of Scotland and contains 31.4% of the population.

ABC contended that the harbour porpoise is 'already protected by a range of measures' and withheld overall support. This was: "... based on concerns over the scale of the site, number and extent of existing designations and uncertainty over management advice which may become more restrictive. The scientific evidence to support the proposal appears to be appropriate in relation to the selected criteria and current management advice suggests that activities are unlikely to be significantly affected in economic terms."

**MARINE TRAFFIC & WILDLIFE**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust (HWDT) is to monitor the potential effects of marine traffic on wildlife. An Automatic Identification System (AIS) transponder will be used to monitor other vessels' movements and will match them with that of whales and dolphins sighted or heard by using underwater equipment in the same area, the first time that HWDT has attempted such a project. The work will be done during the latest season of research trips using its yacht *Silurian*, out of Tobermory on Mull as well as Kyle of Lochalsh and Ullapool.

**BATHING BEACHES**

The *BBC News* website reported that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) measured the quality of water at 84 'officially designated bathing waters' across Scotland. The water quality at 17 Scottish beaches has been classed as 'excellent' against new, much stricter EU standards which include four years' of monitoring data which SEPA said provided a 'more consistent picture' of water quality. 38 beaches were rated as 'good' and 12 as 'sufficient.' SEPA said that 80% of Scottish beaches were 'excellent,' 'good' or 'sufficient' standard. However, 17 beaches are now rated as 'poor' under the new system. Many beaches likely to have good water quality, for instance in the Western Isles, are not officially designated and so the pollutants are not monitored there.

The new EU classification system includes four years' of monitoring data which SEPA said provided a "more consistent picture" of water quality.

SEPA is preparing improvement plans to help poorly-rated beaches with the aim they would meet at least the 'sufficient' standard by 2020.

The new directive puts a greater emphasis on information provision for beach users and bathers, and to help even more people make informed decisions about whether to use bathing waters. SEPA is increasing its daily water quality predictions to a total of 29 key beach locations this year. The network of electronic signs, which provide daily real-time water quality information, would be extended to six new beaches: Fisharrow Sands, Heads of Ayr, Nairn (East & Central), and St Andrews (East & West Sands). This real-time water quality information is also available via SEPA's website, smartphone app and Beachline number. See: <http://apps.sepa.org.uk/bathingwaters/Profiles.aspx>

**NIGG HARBOUR**

The *Press & Journal* reported that a report by Fugro to Aberdeen Harbour Board showed higher than expected levels of metal contamination within an area to be dredged for the expansion of the harbour into Nigg Bay. However, the results of the environmental study were discounted as anomalous after a second study showed contamination levels at 'below action level 1.' The results are now out for consultation with Marine Scotland.

Aberdeen City Council has voted to grant planning permission 'in principle' for access roads and temporary construction areas for the project.

**FAIR ISLE**

The community of Fair Isle, between Orkney and Shetland, has submitted a proposal for a Demonstration and Research Marine Protected Area (MPA). This will demonstrate, through research and dissemination, the effectiveness of a community-led partnership approach in achieving a programme of sustainable measures to help ensure that the marine environment is in a condition that benefits all stakeholders as fully as possible.

The aim is for the proposal to be formally designated by the end of 2016, and for the Fair Isle D&R MPA Steering Committee to take over

local management of the site, with support from Scottish Government and SNH.

See: <https://consult.scotland.gov.uk/marine-conservation/fair-isle-demonstration-and-research>



## POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

### GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

In the Scottish Parliament elections, the Environment minister Dr Aileen McLeod lost her seat. Land reform campaigner, Andy Wightman, was elected to Holyrood as an MSP.

Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Food & Environment, stepped down from the post before the cabinet reshuffle, for personal reasons. Environment, Climate Change & Land Reform will have a dedicated Cabinet Secretary for the first time, with Roseanna Cunningham being appointed to the role. Her responsibilities will be for climate change, flood prevention, water quality, land reform, physical and marine environment, sustainable development, biodiversity, natural heritage, environmental protection, environmental and climate justice, National Parks, and Scottish Water. A junior minister for the Environment has not been appointed.

Fergus Ewing, previously the minister for energy and tourism, has been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy & Connectivity. He will be responsible for Rural Scotland, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, aquaculture, food and drink, and crofting.

Paul Wheelhouse becomes minister for Business, Innovation & Energy.

Humza Yousaf has become minister for Transport & the Islands, acting as junior minister to the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy & Connectivity and reporting to the Economy & Climate Change Secretaries as appropriate.

Fiona Hyslop has been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs.

### PAIRC ESTATE

The *West Highland Free Press* reported that former owner of the Pairc Estate on Lewis, Barry Lomas, has claimed compensation against the Pairc Trust, the new community landlords, over losses allegedly occurred during attempts to force the sale of the land [Dec 15].

### LAND REFORM

Scottish Land & Estates and Community Land Scotland (CLS) have agreed a protocol to help local communities which want to pursue buy-outs from privately owned estates. 'Route maps' are provided towards the voluntary sale and purchase of land. One route map will be for landowners considering selling their land, or part of their land, to the local community; and another will be for communities who have identified areas they wish to buy from the landowner. CLS now sees the Land Reform Act as a last but powerful resort to force a landowner to sell land, while recognising the considerable benefits for local people in negotiating a sale instead.



## GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

### GOSHAWK DEATH

The *Press & Journal* reported that a goshawk was shot on an Aberdeenshire sporting estate in the Strathdon area, in the Cairngorms National Park. A witness took the bird of prey to the New Arc

wildlife sanctuary where an examination revealed severe damage to the lung and shoulder; the goshawk was later euthanised. Police Scotland are investigating this crime. The name of the estate where the shooting was witnessed has not been released.

Grant Moir, of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, said in a statement: "We are incredibly frustrated to again be putting out a statement condemning the shooting of a raptor in the National Park. We must ensure such crimes become a thing of the past. We will be working with the new minister for Environment to consider what else we can do in the National Park, building on public support for our wildlife and finding ways of getting more eyes and ears on the ground."

### MUIRBURN

*The Herald* reported that the Scottish Wildfire Forum issuing a warning for most of the country, as the heatwave increased the risk of wildfires.

Gamekeepers and estates in the north of Scotland called for controlled muirburn to prevent wildfires from devastating the landscape as the UK climate warms.

Ian Hepburn, a member of Loch Ness Rural Communities group, said: "Muirburn is a beneficial practice, for a variety of reasons, and there is no doubt controlled muirburn could have helped prevent the worst of what we have seen recently. Given the heat we've had this week, everything is so dry and, if the heather on the moors are not being managed by controlled burning and the creation of firebreaks, all it takes is a strong wind in the wrong direction and an accidental fire will just take off. It takes an awful lot to get it under control, when that happens, not to mention the strain on the resources of the fire service."

Hans Mckenzie Wilson, of Grampian Moorland Group, added: "Muirburn is undertaken, principally, for grouse shooting, which brings over £30m to Scotland ... but it also benefits a whole host of rare species and helps ensure that accidental moor fires can be brought under control much quicker than we have seen in the last few days."

- An extensive wildfire occurred near Tongue in Sutherland on seven square kilometres of land around Ben Blandy; the origin of the fire is unknown.

### AIR POLLUTION

The *BBC News* website reported that the World Health Organisation said that Glasgow is one of 11 urban areas in the UK and Ireland which have breached air pollution safety levels for particulates (PM10), and the only Scottish location on the list.

Glasgow and Prestonpans in East Lothian were on the list of over 40 towns and cities across Britain and Ireland which breached the safe levels for PM2.5, fine particles in the air.

A spokeswoman for Glasgow City Council said: "Glasgow has set a target of being one of the most sustainable cities in Europe and we take our responsibility to monitor air quality very seriously. In fact the latest data for air quality in the city shows that both the Scottish Air Quality Objective and WHO target level for the pollutants PM10 and PM2.5 were met across the city in 2015. While we have made good progress, we recognise there is more to be done. The council is a key partner in the Scottish Government's Clean Air for Scotland Strategy which is intended to define the path to achieving full compliance with the relevant air quality standards over the next few years."

### PARK OF KEIR

More than 1,000 people have signed a petition against the proposed Park of Keir tennis and golf complex, with housing, on the outskirts of Dunblane [Mar 16]. The petition, 'Save Park of Keir, don't let it be another Trump fiasco,' has been submitted to Holyrood. The developers lodged an appeal with the Scottish Government after Stirling Council voted against granting planning permission; Scottish ministers called in the application in March. A hearing and/or a public inquiry is now to be held.

### EDINBURGH GREENBELT

Murray Estates' plans to create a new £1 billion village on greenbelt land at the edge of Edinburgh have been approved by the Edinburgh City Council planning committee. At least 3,500 houses could be built in 'a world class extension to the nation's capital.'

The Garden District would see 1,350 homes built in the first phase of the development sited between the City Bypass and Gogar Station Road in west Edinburgh. The development will also see the creation of a new school, community hub and shopping centre, sports facilities and green space.

The city's planning department recommended rejecting the proposals which breached several environmental policies. Councillors approved the application, attaching conditions including more detailed analysis on flood prevention, traffic, public transport and tree protection. Another condition is ending production at an adjacent poultry farm.

The planning report said that 'there is an effective housing land supply - this means that the land is not required for housing.' It concluded: "The proposal contravenes policies on Green Belt and Special Landscape Areas as well as the overarching policies in respect of housing land supply as there is no requirement to release the land for housing. The proposal is not supported by the adopted Altered Rural West Edinburgh Local Plan in that it contravenes policies on Green Belt and Prime Agricultural Land."

*The Herald* reported that Alison Johnstone MSP urged the authority to reverse the planning decision and ultimately reject Sir David Murray's proposals. She said: "As the council's own report made clear, there is plenty of land within Edinburgh that can be developed for housing. This scheme would unnecessarily chew up yet more of our precious greenbelt when we should be protecting it. I would urge the full council to see sense and overturn the planning committee's decision, which smacks of desperation. The city council's energies should be going into transforming existing brownfield sites that have good infrastructure connections and bringing empty properties back into use."

However the case will now go before the full council in June and then to the Scottish Government.

### DERELICT MINERAL SITES

Scotland's chief statistician has released the latest annual statistics on the extent of vacant and derelict land in Scotland. The National Statistics Publication for Scotland, the *2015 Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey*, shows that there has been a large upward revision to the total amount of derelict land reported for 2014 in Scotland, from 8,509 to 10,753 hectares.

The revised results show that the total amount of derelict land in Scotland increased by 2,108 hectares (24.4%) between 2013 and 2014, from 8,645 hectares to 10,753 hectares, with the total amount of derelict and urban vacant land increasing by 18.9% from 11,042 hectares to 13,132 hectares.

Since then the total amount of derelict and urban vacant land has decreased by 458 hectares

(3.5%) to 12,674 hectares in 2015. The decrease of 458 hectares is explained by 356 hectares that were brought back into use and 317 hectares that were naturalised or removed for definitional reasons, 217 hectares of which is accounted for by changes to the Westfield former opencast mining site near Kinglassie in Fife. This balances against 176 hectares of new derelict and vacant land reported by local authorities, along with a net increase of 39 hectares in the sizes of existing derelict and urban vacant land.

Of the 12,674 hectares of derelict and urban vacant land recorded in the 2015 survey, 2,309 hectares (18%) were classified as urban vacant and 10,365 hectares (82%) were classified as derelict. Since 2009, there has been an increase of 1,145 hectares (10%) in the total amount of derelict and urban vacant land recorded in the survey, from 11,530 hectares in 2009 to 12,674 hectares in 2015. This increase is mainly due to the addition of 2,217 hectares of former surface coal mines that became derelict in East Ayrshire in 2014. Excluding derelict mineral sites there has been a decrease of 643 hectares (7%) in the total amount of derelict and urban vacant land since 2009.

The local authority with the highest amount of recorded derelict and urban vacant land is East Ayrshire, containing 2,536 hectares (20% of the Scotland total). Highland has the second highest amount with 1,342 hectares (11%), North Ayrshire is third with 1,333 hectares (11%), followed by North Lanarkshire with 1,266 hectares (10%).

For those sites where the previous use is known, 38% of derelict land recorded in 2015 had been previously used for mineral activity (3,768 hectares), 19% for defence (1,941 hectares), and a further 18% for manufacturing (1,835 hectares). The most common previous use for urban vacant land, where previous use is known, was agriculture (19%, or 382 hectares) and the second most common previous use was residential development (18%, or 355 hectares).

3,250 hectares (28%) of derelict and urban vacant land in 2015 was reported to be developable in the short term, with an expectation of development within five years. A total of 3,053 hectares (26%) of derelict and urban vacant land is seen by local authorities as being uneconomic to develop and/or is viewed as suitable to reclaim for a 'soft' end use (*i.e.* non-built use).

The most common new use for derelict land was residential, with 43% (88 hectares) of the derelict land that was brought back into use since the previous survey reclaimed for this purpose. The second most common new use was for mineral activity, accounting for 31% (63 hectares). For urban vacant land the most common new use was residential, with 45% (67 hectares) of the land reclaimed for this purpose.

Of the 176 hectares of new derelict and urban vacant land reported by local authorities, the most common previous land uses were manufacturing (61 hectares), community and health (24 hectares), education (18 hectares), utility services (16 hectares), mineral activity (14 hectares) and housing (10 hectares).

Of the 356 hectares of land reused in 2015, a total of 66 hectares involved some form of public funding, either a full or partial contribution.

See: [www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning/Publications](http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning/Publications)

**WILDLIFE PROSECUTION**

At Edinburgh Sheriff Court, Craig Aitken pleaded guilty to setting 47 illegal snares, without authorisation, on Seggarsdean Farm in Haddington, East Lothian in January 2015.

He was also convicted of stealing some of the Scottish SPCA's covert cameras, which had GPS trackers attached enabling the Scottish SPCA to trace them to his home.

He was sentenced with a 180 hour Community Payback Order and a six-month Restriction of Liberty Order (curfew).

**PEREGRINES**

Police Scotland is investigating the disappearance of two female peregrines from active nests in Dumfries & Galloway. Both nest sites, at Dalveen on the Queensberry Estate (part of the Buccleuch Estates), were being monitored by the Dumfries & Galloway Raptor Study Group. Eggs had been laid at both sites.

**PEATLANDS**

*The Herald* reported that Scottish Natural heritage (SNH) and grouse estates in the Lothians are cooperating to secure carbon stores in moorland peat bogs as part of the Peatland Action project. Old hill ditches, made in the last century to enable farming, are being re-shaped and blocked to wet the peat again. Ewan Campbell, of SNH, said: "These projects exemplify how public bodies can work successfully with private estates to help deliver such ecosystem service benefits, whilst also complementing grouse management objectives."

**ATLAS OF LIVING SCOTLAND**

*The Atlas of Living Scotland* has been launched. It provides a platform for the collection, aggregation, analysis and use of biological data in Scotland and has been created as a daughter website to Scotland's Environment Web (see: [www.environment.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.environment.scotland.gov.uk)). It is also a pilot for a potential initiative to develop new biodiversity data infrastructure for the entire United Kingdom. The objectives of the Atlas are about education, promotion of biodiversity and providing a trusted portal for Scottish biodiversity data.

Many people, including volunteers and citizen scientists, and organisations in Scotland are involved in observing, monitoring and recording nature including government and non-government organisations, research and educational institutions, Local Environmental Record Centres, museums and botanic gardens, community groups and national and regional biological recording schemes and societies. This atlas provides a platform to bring the data, collected by these organisations, together, and to merge them with other environmental data such as spatial layers for soil, climate and habitats.

The project is a partnership between the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), SNH and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Significant funding comes from the European Commission LIFE+ funding programme which is supporting SEPA to deliver a range of partnership initiatives in Scotland to provide a gateway to data and information about the environment. Over two million biological records have been transferred to the Atlas of Living Scotland from the NBN Gateway, however some data is not yet visible. Planning

Contact: [info@als.scot](mailto:info@als.scot); See: [www.als.scot](http://www.als.scot)

**PLANNING REVIEW**

The *BBC News* website reported that an independent review has set out 48 recommendations which it said would strengthen the planning system to enable sustainable development [Sep 15]. The report that a fundamental rethink of the system as a whole is needed to ensure the planning system is much better equipped to deal with future challenges and opportunities. It called for strong and flexible local development plans, which should be updated regularly with a '20

year vision', and an enhanced national planning framework. The panel recommended setting up a national infrastructure agency, with statutory powers, and asking the government to examine options for a national or regional infrastructure levy to raise funds.

Panel members made a number of recommendations to open up the planning process, but said that they were not persuaded over third party rights of appeal, which would give additional groups the ability to appeal against planning decisions. They said this would 'add time, complexity and conflict to the process.' However, they did back making it obligatory to consult community councils and young people on development plans and setting up a working group to break down barriers to greater involvement in planning.

Planning minister, Kevin Stewart, said: "This independent report will help form the basis to kick-start a new, focussed and revitalised planning system."

The panel was chaired by Crawford Beveridge, and included Petra Biberbach of Planning Aid for Scotland.



**ENERGY**

**TRANSMISSION UPGRADES**

*The Herald* reported that Scottish & Southern Energy Power Distribution (SSE PD) held a second consultation on its plans for pylons as part of the Beaully-Blackhilllock-Kintore Reinforcement Project. The new consultation was necessary because of amendments made to the 'preferred' route as was originally consulted upon in 2015.

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS) said that the amended boundary would mean that pylons would be constructed close to Culloden Battlefield and the nearby Clava Cairns, as well as Castle Fraser and Leith Hall. NTS said that the 50 metre high overhead pylons would degrade the landscape and called for them to be re-sited or for cables to be buried underground.

Simon Skinner, of NTS, wrote to SSE PD, and said: "Our own research has found that overhead powerlines are identified by both our members and the wider public as one of the most significant factors in degrading valued landscapes. It is therefore imperative that the careful siting and, where appropriate, undergrounding of power cables is followed. Without these protections, the enjoyment of our nationally and internationally valued landscapes will be damaged, with all the consequences that follow. It is unacceptable, for example, that in the case of Culloden, if this project goes ahead there will be no less than three large overhead lines passing through this glen within a mile or so of each other. This is not something we can support. I completely understand that the country needs to upgrade its capacity to transmit electricity.

"What disappoints me with this scheme is that SSE seems to be coming up with the cheapest, least imaginative and most damaging options possible. Scotland is a country rich in history and natural heritage and these help define us internationally and sustain a significant part of our economy through tourism. SSE should not be putting forward proposals that jeopardise this. SSE made over half a billion pounds of profit last year, much of it coming from levies that have been applied to the energy bills of ordinary Scots. At the very least they have an obligation to minimise the impact of their proposals on the nation's cherished places."

The *BBC News* website reported that Dr Christopher Duffy, of the 1745 Association, said that the SSE project threatened the 'historic integrity' of the area around Culloden. He said:

"We do not accept that an underground route would be environmentally damaging."

A spokesman for Scottish Hydro Electric Transmission plc, a subsidiary of SSE, said: "We assess the best possible engineering option, and undergrounding is not a panacea as it can be extremely damaging to the environment as it could require up to a two metre deep trench the width of dual carriageway to be carved through the landscape ... SHE Transmission has a regulatory responsibility to find the best engineering, environment and economic solution possible to ensure a safe and secure supply of electricity is delivered to homes and businesses across the country."

The major upgrades were needed 'due to the increasing electrical demands on the network.'

#### APRIL RENEWABLES

The *BBC News* website reported that data from energy analysts WeatherEnergy indicated that windfarms provided 699,684 MWh of electricity to the National Grid during April. The total was enough to power 79% of average Scottish households. The energy output was up by 15% compared with the same time last year. WeatherEnergy said that on eight days in April, wind turbines generated enough electricity to supply 100% of Scottish homes.

*The Herald* reported that a WWF Scotland analysis of the data provided by WeatherEnergy found that domestic solar panels provided over 70% per cent of an average household's electricity or hot water needs. There was enough sunshine to generate an estimated 87% of power in an Edinburgh home, 86% in Aberdeen, 84% in Glasgow, and 83% in Inverness. Solar panelled homes in Dundee fared best for sunshine-generated electricity, with 95% of total household's power provided by solar. Solar hot water panels generated 80% of an average household's hot water in Dundee, 78% in Aberdeen, 76% in Glasgow, and 74% in Edinburgh.

#### WINDFARM CONSTRAINT PAYMENTS

The Renewable Energy Foundation (REF) published data which showed that windfarm operators in Scotland have been paid more than £217m over the past five years for switching off turbines; constraint payments were introduced in 2011. The National Grid compensates the companies for balancing the volume of electricity on the network; the cost is passed on to households in their bills. REF claimed that windfarms were making more money when they were not generating. However, paying windfarms to stop generating may be cheaper than expanding the grid to remove bottlenecks. Dr John Constable, of REF, said: "There are no cheap solutions to the problems caused by the overbuild of wind power in Scotland."

#### RENEWABLES & BIRDS

A report has been published, RSPB's *2050 Energy Vision*, which says that the renewable energy schemes could help the UK to achieve climate targets, but should not be constructed in areas rich in birdlife and other wildlife as birds were at risk of collisions with turbine blades. The report assesses where renewable energy technologies could be located to avoid sensitive wildlife areas. A strategic approach to energy planning is required where projects are located to maximise generation at the lowest cost to nature.

RSPB Scotland said that it would support well-sited solar, bioenergy, offshore wind, wave and tidal energy projects.

Stuart Housden, of RSPB Scotland, said: "Our research shows that a low carbon energy future in harmony with nature is possible and we have

set out a positive vision for how this can be done without harming Scotland's special places for wildlife. It's critical that we work together now to make this happen. Climate change is one of the single biggest threats to people and nature alike, but with Scotland's nature in decline, we have a responsibility to invest in an energy system that works for both people and our natural heritage."

Lindsay Roberts, of Scottish Renewables, said: "Climate change is one of the biggest threats to nature, and renewable energy is absolutely key to tackling it. This study shows clearly that meeting our renewable energy targets and protecting our natural environment can go hand-in-hand. The charity's work also demonstrates how more mature technologies such as onshore wind and solar can play an increasingly important role in our energy mix alongside newer, innovative technologies such as wave energy and storage."

#### WINDFARM UPDATES

**Caithness:** *The Herald* reported that E.On's has proposed a 22 turbine windfarm in Golticlay Forest. A wildcat den was identified in the area in a 2012 scoping report. A further detailed survey was conducted in 2015 after Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland had cleared the site, but no wildcats were found; the noise of forest clearance and lack of habitat could have driven out any animals.

An E.On spokesman said that no DNA evidence or any signs of Scottish wildcats were found within the development area. Tests on scat from the site showed that it was a pine marten's. FC Scotland said that the clearance was part of planned felling as part of an approved forest plan and nothing to do with the windfarm development. A formal planning application has not yet been made.

**Dumfries & Galloway:** Council planning officers have advised councillors to approve Muirhall Energy's 11 turbine Langholm windfarm scheme at Crossdykes Farm. However, planning officials said that Force 9 Energy's five turbine project near Auldirth would have a significant adverse impact on the surrounding landscape.

**Highland:** *The Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reported that Highland Council has rejected an application from Nanlach Ltd to have its existing consent for the Tom Nan Clach windfarm by Glenferness extended from three years to five [Dec 15]. The developers needed more time to comply with the conditions associated with the development. The current planning permission for 17 turbines runs out in June this year. The development lies within the newly designated Drynachan, Lochindorb and Dava Moor Special Landscape Area. The council planning officers recommended approval.

• *The Herald* reported that Scottish ministers and SSE are challenging a judicial review decision that blocked plans for the 67 turbine Stronelaig windfarm in the Monadhliath Mountains near Fort Augustus [Dec 15]. The late Lord Jones in a judicial review by the John Muir Trust, overturned the Scottish Government's decision in the Outer Court of the Court of Session. The project is now to go before the Inner House of the Court of Session. The court had previously heard that Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) had objected in principle to the windfarm's proposed site. Lord Jones said: "If the ministers did take into consideration SNH's objection in principle to any windfarm development at Stronelaig, they have given no reason for rejecting it, and the decision is defective on that account." He also said that the public was denied an opportunity to comment on a revised planning application for the proposed windfarm.

Stuart Brooks, of the John Muir Trust (JMT),

said: "We are disappointed that this application has come back to court, and we don't believe it's a sensible use of public money. We would have preferred that the developer SSE had been asked to resubmit the application and then follow due process. The decision by Scottish ministers to allow the project to go ahead was taken despite the Scottish Government's own advisors, SNH, advising that a windfarm should not be built at Stronelaig because of its wild land qualities."

In a separate but related application, JMT was refused a Protective Expenses Order that would have limited its liability for costs in the Inner House of the Court of Session in the event of losing the main appeal. The judgment was a split decision, with Lady Smith and Lord Brodie finding against the JMT with Lord Drummond Young supporting the JMT's case.

Stuart Brooks said: "While we await the decision of this latest appeal, it's disconcerting that the refusal of a Protective Expenses Order means that in taking on this issue in the public interest, as was noted in the Judicial Review decision, we will have to continue to ask members of the public to dig deep into their pockets to defend a judge's decision which ruled that the Scottish Ministers' consent for the construction of Stronelaig was unlawful."

The JMT has been fighting the proposed development since 2012. The windfarm application was approved by Scottish Ministers on 6 June 2014, ten days before the Scottish Government changed its national planning policy to afford more protection to wild land. The Wild Land Areas map was published on 16 June, with significant protection being given to wild land areas identified on that map. A consequence of the windfarm being consented to prior to the publication of the Wild Land Areas map was that the central part of the Monadhliath Mountains, where Stronelaig is located, was expressly excluded from the map.

• Force 9 Energy and EDF Energy jointly planned a 13 turbine windfarm at Cnoc An Eas above Loch Meikle near Glen Urquhart. Highland Council has refused planning permission, saying that the turbines would have had a 'severely detrimental visual impact' on properties in the area and on tourists and visitors using the land to the north, south and east of for recreational purposes. Four local community councils had objected to the plans, along with 287 other objections. Cliff Green, of Stop Turbines at Glenurquhart, said: "We hope that this will send a message to other developers that enough is enough and we do not want or need any more windfarms in the Loch Ness area."

• Vattenfall is erecting a meteorological monitoring mast on the Ourack Wind Energy project site [Sep 15]. The company was originally refused permission for the anemometer by Highland Council, but won an appeal against the decision. The proposed 50 turbine windfarm is north of the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park, near Grantown on Spey. *The Strathspey & Badenoch Herald* reported that Matthew Taylor, of the Cairngorms National Park Authority, reported some six significant areas of concern including the adverse effects on landscape, the cumulative impact with other developments, the adverse effect on wild land and the potential impacts upon capercaillie populations and ecological receptors, including Special Protected Areas.

Lorna Macdonald, of RSPB Scotland, said: "We disagree with the statement that there are no extant populations of capercaillie within five kilometres of the potential wind turbine area – capercaillie require large areas of good quality, well-connected forest habitat ... so although the nearest designated sites for capercaillie are some 6

km and 10 km away, capercaillie use a much wider area than this, with several other lek locations closer to the proposed site, with the closest less than 3 km from the area of interest.”

Jeannie Munro, of the Save our Dava campaign, said: “Our group regard this latest windfarm planning application to impact the natural integrity of Dava Moor to be the largest and most intrusive so far encountered ... there is no indication as to the location of the proposals within the application area – which approximates to an area equivalent to that of the city of Inverness. The entire area lies within the Dava, Lochindorb & Drynachan Moors Special Landscape Area, recently formally adopted by the Moray and Highland Councils.

**OFFSHORE WIND**

Mainstream Renewable Power, developer of the Neart na Gaoithe offshore windfarm in the outer Firth of Forth, said that it was ‘currently in arbitration’ with Low Carbon Contracts Company (LCCC) over the terms of its subsidy and had served ‘a notice of dispute.’ LCCC can terminate the project’s Contract for Difference (CFD) subsidy if schemes fail to meet agreed timetables; the project has had several delays.

A spokesman for the developer said: “LCCC issued a notice which, in its view, terminated the project’s CFD. Neart na Gaoithe strongly disputes the validity of the termination notice.”

The windfarm is the subject of a legal challenge by RSPB Scotland, which argues the scheme is an unacceptable threat to seabirds; the Court of Session is carrying out a judicial review [May 15]. Aedán Smith, of RSPB Scotland, said: “The Neart na Gaoithe project is one of four which were consented conjointly by Scottish ministers in 2014 and collectively they would result in thousands of seabirds being killed each year. The manner in which these consents were issued meant that we had no option but to challenge the decision in the courts and the court’s judgement is currently awaited.”

- The Crown Estate has granted a lease to Statoil to build the Hywind project, the world’s largest floating windfarm, in the Buchan Deep off Peterhead in Aberdeenshire [Nov 15]. Five 6 MW turbines will be deployed in deeper water than any previous offshore wind turbines around the UK coast.

The project consists of a floating steel tube filled with ballast, which is fastened to the seabed. Preliminary on-shore and near-shore works will start later this year and erection of the turbines is due to begin in 2017, with first power being generated towards the end of the year.

- The *BBC News* website reported that SSE is to begin construction of the £2.6bn Beatrice Offshore Windfarm Ltd (Bowl) project in the Outer Moray Firth, off Caithness. 84 turbines will generate 588 MW of power once operational in 2019 [Mar 14]. Around £10m of investment is planned at Wick Harbour to house the windfarm’s operations and maintenance facilities and to improve the existing RNLI facilities. At its closest point, the windfarm would be about 8.5 miles (13.5km) from the east Caithness coast.

**LOCH BROOM HYDRO**

The *BBC News* website reported that the community around Loch Broom in Wester Ross have begun raising funds through a community shares issue for a hydro-electric scheme on the Allt a’ Mhuilinn burn at Lael, near Ullapool.

**TIDAL TURBINES**

SNH has produced new guidance, *Assessing collision risk between underwater turbines and marine wildlife*, to help developers, consultants and

regulatory bodies, to promote a standardised approach to collision risk assessment for tidal energy projects.

Developers can be asked to include a collision risk assessment as part of their Environmental Impact Assessment and Habitat Regulations Appraisal. The guidance includes three models which can be used to estimate the number of animals likely to collide with tidal arrays.

Dr Chris Eastham, of SNH, said: “High energy tidal environments are ideal for renewable energy projects, but they are also important for a wide range of marine wildlife, from mammals and fish, to diving seabirds. Tidal turbines pose a collision risk to wildlife and it’s important to understand the degree and extent of this risk. We’ve still much to learn about the ways animals react to turbine arrays in our seas and the whole topic of assessing the risk of collision is still in its infancy. This guidance will provide greater confidence in impact assessments and help protect our marine wildlife.”

See: <http://bit.ly/20R5LxF>

**FRACKING**

*The Sunday Herald* reported that Ineos has advertised for staff with the ‘immediate intention’ of using licences granted by the UK government to frack for underground shale gas around Falkirk and Stirling. The company is proceeding despite a Scottish Government moratorium and widespread opposition to fracking from communities and political parties.

Mark Ruskell MSP said: “Scottish communities have made clear their opposition to this dangerous and unnecessary technology and will be angered to hear that this company is gearing up for drilling. It shows the need for the SNP to come down clearly on the side of communities and turn the moratorium into a permanent ban. The new group of Green MSPs will continue to lead the political fight against fracking and we will increase the pressure on ministers to stop Ineos in their tracks.”

Mary Church, of Friends of the Earth Scotland, accused Ineos of ‘bullishly’ pushing ahead with fracking despite opposition. “Unlike in the rest of the UK, in Scotland Ineos needs to get permission from every single home or landowner who they want to frack underneath. Given the strong opposition in communities facing fracking, the company’s new land agents will have their work cut out for them. It’s pretty telling that the first of Ineos’s promised fracking jobs are all based in London, bringing nothing to the communities targeted for this dirty industry in Scotland and northern England.”

Donald Campbell, of Broad Alliance – the community group opposing fracking – criticised Ineos for ‘riding roughshod’ over threatened communities. He said: “This is not community engagement, this is a farce. It flies in the face of local democracy, of people’s hopes and their entitlement to a safe and healthy environment for them and their families in perpetuity. This recruiting process smacks of contempt for local communities, an attempt to wear down resistance to fracking, another twist of the knife in the relentless push for unconventional gas extraction despite a moratorium.”

Gary Haywood, of Ineos Shale, pointed out that the decline in indigenous gas from the North Sea meant that the company was having to import shale gas from America to Grangemouth: “As North Sea reserves decline further, UK shale gas offers us the real prospect of picking up this slack and helping with the country’s economic and energy needs for years to come. We are certain that shale gas can be extracted safely, as

the Scottish Government’s own expert panel has already stated.”

**ROCKALL BASIN**

The University of Aberdeen has been awarded a £250,000 grant by the Oil & Gas Authority to study the potential for oil and gas exploration in the Rockall Basin in the Atlantic, 300 miles from the Scottish coast. Dr Nick Schofield said that Rockall is truly a frontier area of hydrocarbon exploration on the continental shelf, with challenging geology.



**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS**

**LINK**

LINKLocal, a project funded by Scottish Environment LINK, aims to link up Scotland’s campaigning and local action groups working on environment issues. See: <http://bit.ly/1Tu4lUz>

**SRUC**

Following a review of its veterinary laboratories, Scotland’s Rural College (SRUC) has confirmed that its Inverness facility will remain open [Oct 15]. The existing site at Drummondhill will be closed but the animal disease surveillance services will be relocated to the University of the Highlands & Islands new campus at Beechwood in Inverness. The laboratory carries out post-mortem examinations on livestock for a large area of northern Scotland. The Scottish Marine Animal Strandings Scheme will also continue to operate from Inverness.

**SNH**

Five new appointments to the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Board have been announced. They are Dr Kate Broughton, Cath Denholm, Dr Jackie Hyland, Aoife Martin, and Susan Murray.

**SWT**

The Scottish Wildlife Trust has appointed Susan Davies as Director of Conservation. She was most recently acting chief executive of SNH. Her role will include the strategic management of SWT’s 120 wildlife reserves as well as partnerships including the Living Landscapes programme and Saving Scotland’s Red Squirrels.

**TREES FOR LIFE**

Project Wolf has been launched on Trees for Life’s Dundreggan Conservation Estate in Glenmoriston, Inverness-shire. It involves volunteers operating in teams of ‘wolves’, regularly walking through the woodlands during the night and at dusk and dawn, creating disturbance that will keep deer on the move, and prevent them from grazing newly emerging seedlings and the new season’s growth on young trees.

Alan Watson Featherstone, of Trees for Life, said: “Grazing pressure on young trees by too many deer, today undisturbed by natural predators, is the major threat to Scotland’s native forests. This is starkly apparent in the surviving Caledonian Forest, where many remnants consist only of old and dying trees because young trees cannot survive the relentless browsing. Project Wolf – an innovative answer to this challenge – is supporting our reforestation work by creating a ‘landscape of disturbance.’

“By walking through Dundreggan’s woodlands at unpredictable times, the volunteers mimic the effect of wolves in keeping deer on their toes and less likely to spend time leisurely eating seedlings and young trees. This will encourage new trees to flourish – giving them the chance to form the next generation of forest giants that are desperately needed if the Caledonian Forest is to survive.”