



The elections for the Scottish Parliament happen soon after this edition of SCOTTISH DIVER lands on your mat. So a good time to update divers on the politics of maritime Scotland. Calum Duncan from the MCS sketches the background ...

# Sea Changes On The Horizon

Calum Duncan

A DRIER article this month - not much about diving and a reference to Scottish and UK marine policy! But please bear with me here as this, as ever, is important for the future of our seas.

Avid readers may recall various articles over the years calling for support to help demonstrate to Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) that many people care about our seas. You may even have had déjà vu when reading last edition's article, but the political process is moving in the right direction.

#### *Course for UK Seas Charted*

On March 15, the UK Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) published their UK Marine Bill White Paper. Although most activities, including aquaculture, fishing, renewable energy and marine conservation, within 12nm are controlled by the Scottish Executive, a UK bill is needed to control reserved activities like shipping and provide a marine spatial planning framework for all UK seas.

After all, sea life does not abide by invisible administrative boundaries. A UK Marine Bill must be delivered in the current Westminster term, so do respond to the White Paper. But what about the devolved activities happening from 0 to 12 nautical miles (nm) controlled from Scotland?

#### *Scottish Think Tank Concludes*

Also in March, the Advisory Group for the Marine and Coastal Strategy (AGMACS) made its final recommendations to the Scottish Environment Minister. 'Not another acronym' I hear you cry!

Well, AGMACS was a high-level think tank chaired by Scotland's Environment Minister Ross Finnie and included over 20 government, industry, science, tourism, environment and heritage representatives that met regularly over the course of a year to decide how to properly look after Scotland's coasts and seas.

Through Scottish Environment LINK, MCS chairs the group of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) working on marine issues in Scotland, including RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust and National Trust for Scotland. As well as a lot of in-depth work by other AGMACS members, a joint position arrived at by this marine NGO group was tabled at AGMACS by the LINK representatives.

Although some of the wording on marine nature conservation was watered down a little, the eventual AGMACS recommendations were still not a million miles away from what MCS and the other NGOs would have wanted, namely:

- ▼ A statutory system of **Marine Spatial Planning** with UK, Scotland and local levels that also makes best use of existing Coastal Partnerships;
- ▼ A **Scottish Marine Management Organisation** to oversee delivery of the Scottish plans that makes best use of existing resources without duplication;
- ▼ A **Marine Nature Conservation** system that includes species protection, site protection and wider policy measures (such as Marine Spatial Planning)
- ▼ A set of **Marine Ecosystem Objectives** to measure progress toward using and managing our coasts and seas in a way that doesn't forever damage them.

An official response from whoever is Environment Minister after May 3, 2007 is awaited with interest. However, an inquiry into Scotland's marine environment by the Scottish Parliament's cross-party Environment and Rural Development Committee (ERDC) earlier this year, also came to similar conclusions as AGMACS then went further by recognising the need for Marine Bills for both UK and Scotland.

So, it looks likely that whoever governs come May 4 will have a commitment to a Marine Bill for Scotland to deliver the AGMACS recommendations and plug the 0-12 nautical mile gap a UK Bill would leave.



Male cuckoo wrasse, Sannox Rock, Northeast Arran (Howard Wood)



Fifteen Spined Stickleback, Loch Eyanort, South Uist (Calum Duncan/MCS)



Curled octopus at Otterard Rock, near Campbeltown Loch (Howard Wood) & below: the basking shark - one of many species deserving of protection to 200nm (Polly and Freddy Pullar)



The real crux for MCS will be getting a Scottish Marine Bill that properly protects marine sites and species by delivering, among other measures:

- a network of Nationally Important Marine Areas for protecting good examples of Scottish priority marine species and habitats;
- extending the Wildlife & Countryside Act from 12 to 200 nautical miles to protect basking sharks, cetaceans and other important marine species.

*But Why Wait?*

The ERDC Marine Inquiry recognised ‘the value of establishing a coherent network of marine protected areas’ but also considered that ‘given the likely timetable for establishing a coherent network, this should not prevent individual initiatives of value being taken forward in the meantime.’

The latter point acknowledges the excellent progress made by the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), striving as they are for protection measures in Lamlash Bay that need not wait for new legislation. With political will, existing laws such as the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act (1984) could deliver what COAST want. Negotiations are progressing, although there is still a way to go.

**Keep Up the Pressure!**

However, setting up a coherent network of Nationally Important Marine Areas for Scottish priority species and habitats, as well as Marine Spatial Planning and the other welcome AGMACS recommendations, does need a Scottish Marine Bill to complement a UK Bill. This is just the end of the beginning and we need these bills to deliver for our sea life. Please write to your MSP to tell them you cherish Scotland’s seas and want to see them properly protected. Meanwhile ‘on the ground’ or rather in the water, Seasearch has a role to play in helping identify potential future Nationally Important Marine Areas.

*Main image on Page 18: Loch Eyanort overhang with soft corals and Parazoanthus anguicomus (Sue Scott) while images on this page represent what the marine conservation lobby is fighting for.*

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- [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org)
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- [www.everyonecan.org](http://www.everyonecan.org)
- [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)
- [www.scottish.parliament.uk](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk)
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**Marine Conservation Society**

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SEASEARCH IS already helping find important marine areas in Scotland. Indeed, last year was another bumper year with over 230 Seasearch forms, 20% of the UK total, submitted from Sanda to Shetland, Stonehaven to Skye. Although previous articles have expanded on most of this activity, I'd like to say thanks again to all who submitted their forms that are now entered onto the National Biodiversity Network ([www.search](http://www.search)

Scotland Marine Biodiversity Action Plan.

As I write, there is plenty to get involved with in 2007, although some events will have happened as you read this! There are three Seasearch co-ordinators in Scotland: I co-ordinate overall (CD), Marion Perutz (MP) for Northeast Scotland

*Image: Seasearch on seagrass bed, northwest Arran (Howard Wood)*

nbn.net).

Seasearch data has also been used to help develop a draft Marine Spatial Plan for Shetland, contributed to a site-condition monitoring report in the Firth of Lorn European Marine Site, informed fisheries discussions in Loch Fyne and contributed to the Northeast

Remember though that 'Any Dive can be Seasearch Dive' and we welcome all records. Without being an expert you can help us find Nationally Important Marine Areas in Scotland.

- For general Seasearch enquiries and training contact Calum on 0131 226 6360, email [scotland@mcsuk.org](mailto:scotland@mcsuk.org) or visit [www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk).
- For west Scotland Owen Paisley is on 01546 600209 or [seasearch.west@btinternet.com](mailto:seasearch.west@btinternet.com).
- For northeast Scotland Marion Perutz is on 07745 656978 or [seasearch\\_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:seasearch_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk).

*May 5-6*  
Seasearch Observer course, Edinburgh - diving at North Berwick (CD)

*May 12-13*  
Nudibranch identification course in Macduff (Full) (MP)

*June 9-10*  
Great pipefish hunts in Berwickshire (CD), inner Moray Firth (MP) and Loch Fyne (OP)

*July 21-22*  
Seasearch diving in Inner Moray Firth (MP)

*Oct 26-29*  
Seasearch Mull and Treshnish Isles on MV Peregrine (CD)

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