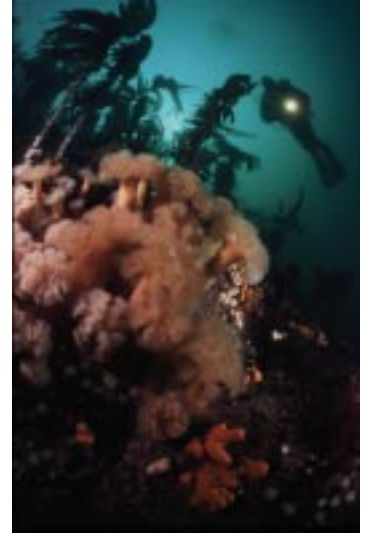


SHOTLINES



Dredging Banned



Above: a diver inspects a reef after it has been dredged while image right shows the beauty of an unharmed reef. (Photographs courtesy of David Ainslie).

THE HEBRIDEAN Partnership, SCOTSAC and BSAC recently welcomed the introduction of legislation that will ban scallop dredging in the Firth of Lorn. However, they expressed doubts about the Scottish Executive's commitment to enforcing and maintaining the ban.

The Prohibited Methods of Fishing (Firth of Lorn) Order 2007 bans scallop fishermen from dredging the seabed within the Firth of Lorn Special Area of Conservation (SAC). According to scientific studies, the area is second only to St. Kilda in terms of the number and variety of species of marine wildlife it contains.

Scallop dredging is highly damaging in ecological terms, because it doesn't just catch scallops - it also damages seabed wildlife habitats.

Around four years ago, representatives from communities local to the Firth of Lorn, with The Hebridean Partnership, SCOTSAC and BSAC, lodged two complaints with the European Commission under the European Habitats Directive. In spring 2006,

the European Commission endorsed the complaints and issued a formal letter to the UK Government requiring its action. This has led to the introduction of the dredging ban by the Scottish Executive.

Mark Carter, Chairman of The Hebridean Partnership, said: "We warmly welcome this overdue closure of the Firth of Lorn to scallop fisheries. The damage they have caused in the past has had an enormous negative impact on the flora and fauna of the Firth. We hope that this ban will allow the Firth to regenerate and naturally repair the damage caused, but it will take time." Mr Carter highlighted concerns about the Scottish Executive's commitment to the ban: "The Scottish Executive has fought our proposal for years, and has been forced to introduce this ban. We have serious doubts and concerns that the Executive will properly enforce the ban."

The Scottish Executive has said that scientific research will be undertaken to monitor the impacts of the ban. However, BSAC and community campaigners are

concerned that the research will not be undertaken properly.

Jack Morrison, Chairman, ScotSAC said: "It's all very well researching the impacts of the scallop dredging ban, but the Scottish Executive will not be allowing the research to be peer reviewed. This means that the Scottish Executive could, hypothetically, form a biased point of view, based on its own research, and then have it corroborated by a so-called 'independent' expert in its own pay. That is unacceptable and unethical!"

Andrew MacLeod, Chief Environmental Health Officer with the BSAC said: "I have seen it first hand - great swathes of the seabed now resemble a desert! The general public is not aware of this devastation, because it takes place underwater. However if I were to drag scallop-dredging gear through a terrestrial National Park, I would rightly be arrested."

So while the ban might be cause to celebrate in the here and now only time will tell if the celebrations will be long-lived.



New Café at St Abbs

ALISTAIR CROWE, the skipper of St Abbs hardboat *Lazy G-Diver*, has opened a harbour side café in St Abbs at Easter time. The café, called Ebb Carrs, will be open for snacks, drinks and light lunches. Food can be eaten in, as there is seating on two levels for 38, or taken away. It goes without saying that divers will be welcome.

The café is named after the submerged reef south east of the harbour which is the final resting place for at least two wrecks, the *Alfred Erlandson* and an Eyemouth trawler, the *Vigilant*.

Alistair plans to have photographs relating to the wreck of the *Alfred Erlandson* on display in the café which will be of interest to both divers and other visitors to St Abbs.

Dead Men's Finger Alive And Well This Winter

FOLLOWING THE 'In Reserve' feature in the January/February edition, **SCOTTISH DIVER** has received reports that Dead Men's Fingers are flourishing in more northerly waters. In the Creature Feature Liza Cole, the ranger at St Abbs' Voluntary Marine Reserve, noted:

"If you are one of the hardy few who dive St Abbs year-round, you will know that dead men's fingers look very different over the winter months. This is when they have a dormant period, the polyps are permanently retracted, and the colony can become smothered in red seaweeds so changing its colour entirely."

However Maren and Christoph from MC Diving Services based in Fife report different sightings further north:

"Our home diving ground is in the Firth of Forth, especially the inner Firth. The dive sites we visit regularly (ship wrecks and natural reefs) are exposed to strong tidal currents that provide nutrient rich water all year round.

"It was interesting for us to read that *Alcyonium digitatum* at St Abbs appears to

have a dormant period during the winter months as we dive throughout winter and have found that *Alcyonium* at our regular dive sites does not appear to do so. In fact we have always encountered large numbers of them feeding around high water (where most of our diving takes place).

"Our' Dead Men's Fingers also appear to grow to a larger size: the longest finger like structure that we have measured was 40cm long. On a different part of the same reef we have found *Urticina eques* measuring up to 70cm in diameter as well as other anemones in sizes and colours which we have not come across in any reference book.

"It left not only us in total amazement but also the marine biologists' who often dive with us, hence our keen interest in the marine species that populate our dive sites.

We have dived St Abbs a few times in different seasons of the year, but not so often as to come to any definite conclusion regarding the feeding behaviour of the soft corals there.



Dead Men's Fingers - St Abbs

It would be interesting to compare notes on this point; perhaps our corals and anemones in the Firth of Forth are simply better fed?"

Over to our readers ...



TWO SCOTSAC members were involved in a recent animal rescue operation at Eyemouth which led to a seal pup being taken to the SSPCA Middlebank Seal Centre at Dunfermline. It is now hoped the pup seal will make a full recovery.

hiding under one of the boats displayed on a hard standing at the top end of the harbour. It had apparently been there for several days and probably owes its survival to a local lady who had been feeding it bits of fish.

Seal Pup Rescued

David Fuller-Shapcott and Clare Tuck from the Kelso Sub-Aqua Club, both trained British Divers Marine Life Rescue Medics, recovered a sick grey seal pup from Eyemouth Harbour in Berwickshire on March 29. The pup, a 4-5 month old grey seal subsequently named Duncan (pictured above), was found

David and Clare, with the help of two other bystanders, persuaded the pup into a special kennel. It was then taken to the Middlebank Seal Centre where it was assessed and given lactate (rehydration fluid) by a stomach tube. Although extremely thin, it is described as a 'feisty wee thing' (it tried to bite the SSPCA officer) and it is hoped it will eventually make a full recovery.

The body of an adult grey seal was found on the same day on a nearby beach, but it is not thought that the two incidents are connected. Seals are often seen in Eyemouth Harbour and have become a popular tourist attraction.

Anybody finding sick seals or seal pups should not approach them, but contact the British Divers Marine Life Rescue on telephone number 01825 765546.



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