



# Your Seas Your Voice

The Marine Conservation Society has been a powerful voice for the environment in recent years and in this article Scottish manager Calum Duncan continues this advocacy ...

AS DIVERS, we all want to be able to enjoy abundant marine life. However, from the Firth of Lorn to Luce Bay, I hear from many that have seen first-hand the impact of heavy fishing gear over the seabed. Whilst Scotland has gone further than many countries in Europe to better manage fisheries - including decommissioning vessels, introducing more selective fishing gear and the conservation credits scheme - areas of fragile seabed life still feel the crunch of towed dredge and trawl. Add to that pressure from fish-farming, pollution and other new developments and our seas are at risk of buckling under the strain.

To help our seas recover, they need better protection and management, previously discussed at length in these pages. This is where the Marine (Scotland) Bill can help, if it includes what we need! After many years of campaigning it is at last before the Scottish Parliament but the hard work to make sure it is strong enough and puts the marine environment first has only just started.

#### *Underwater Networking*

While we welcome the proposals in the draft Bill for Marine Protected Areas, there is currently no mention of a 'network' of sites. Protection of our precious marine ecosystems cannot be achieved through stand-alone sites. Only

an 'ecologically coherent' network will help prevent the continued loss of marine biodiversity and let important areas recover from damage and over-use.

A network is needed to include examples of the full range of marine species, habitats and features present in Scotland, each of which should be represented in multiple sites and located to allow the movement of different life stages (spores, eggs, larvae, juveniles and / or adults) between sites. Some of these sites, for particularly biodiverse or fragile areas for example, must have high levels of protection.

The lack of a 'duty' to set up this network means that ministers could choose not to create a marine protected area, even if they have concluded that the marine wildlife in the area is under threat. This is a worry, as the long-term health of our seas could be traded off against short-term socio-economic considerations.

#### *Toward a sustainable future*

Scottish Government statistics state that 'the health of commercial fish stocks may be taken as a proxy for the general health of the marine environment'. According to 2008 figures, of 11 commercial finfish stocks in Scotland, five are below full reproductive capacity, an improvement on two in 2000 but still some way to go. A network of sites for biodiversity protection and ecosystem recovery is not intended for fisheries management, but by improving the health of the ecosystems on which the fish depend, this can only be good news in the long run.

Across the UK, only 8 of 47 stocks are known to be healthy, where for 23 of these stocks there isn't even information. World-wide, 80% of fish stocks are fully-exploited or over-exploited, and in many catches up to 90% of what is caught is

discarded, due to its lack of commercial value or restrictive regulations on mixed fisheries.

We are working to encourage sustainable fisheries through creating consumer demand for fish from sustainable sources. Over the last three years, MCS has distributed over 350,000 pocket good fish guides to members of the British public wishing to make more sustainable seafood choices. The scale of their concern helped give us the leverage we needed to inform a drastic rethink in the fish sourcing policies of the nation's supermarkets. As a consequence our work is having a transformative effect on the fish buying habits of the nation, creating far-reaching change throughout the supply chain.

#### *Make your voice heard*

We recognise that there are many thousands of people that enjoy our coasts and seas, including divers, whose voices may not be heard loud enough. MCS can help you:

- Add your voice to calls for a network of sites by visiting [www.marinereservesnow.org.uk](http://www.marinereservesnow.org.uk) and send a message to Scottish Environment Secretary Richard Lochhead that the Marine (Scotland) Bill should include a duty to set up this network of sites. Our campaign for marine protected areas has already shown us how deeply you care about the sea. Nearly half a million people across the UK have already voted for better protection.
- Let us know where in the sea is important to you and why by visiting [www.yourseasyourvoice.com](http://www.yourseasyourvoice.com) and following the simple instructions. This is a new initiative so that all who enjoy the sea or earn their living from it can have a say. We will use this information to give

voice to the many thousands who care about our seas but feel that they are not heard.

○ Make everyday changes in the way you choose seafood. See [www.fishonline.org](http://www.fishonline.org) or for your free pocket Good Fish Guide just send a self-addressed envelope to: MCS, 3 Coates Place, Edinburgh, EH3 7AA.

#### *Be part of the solution with Seasearch*

Later in the year, we will also be using our Seasearch information on [www.yourseasyourvoice.com](http://www.yourseasyourvoice.com) to identify sites across the UK we think are important and worth protecting. In Scotland, this will build on the work set out in our ground-breaking report 'Finding NIMAs – the case for nationally important marine areas'. This report successfully made the case that the Scottish Marine Bill should include new powers for nature conservation Marine Protected Areas. But we still need that commitment to a network of sites.

Already this year we have had Seasearch records from Loch Fyne to Loch Torridon, including a record of sea fan anemones (*Amphianthus dhornii*) at Rona, Sound of Raasay, Skye from ScotSAC's very own Alison Fish. This is the most northerly record of sea fan anemones on the national biodiversity network database ([www.searchnbn.net](http://www.searchnbn.net)) and again goes to show how much recreational dives can add to our knowledge of special places underwater through Seasearch. Thanks Alison! A Seasearch course was been run for Galloway divers in Port William in April and an April trip to Firth of Lorn should feature in these pages in a future edition.



*Overpage: a squat lobster; above: a red blenny surveys the scene from his ledge (credit: George Brown)*



*An endangered fan mussel - only 15 recorded by divers in UK waters (George Brown)*



*A male cuckoo wrasse patrols the reef (credit: George Brown)*

### SEASEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE 2009 CALENDAR

13-14 June	Seasearch Luce Bay
6-10 August	Seasearch Surveyor course & diving Lochaline and Lismore
26-28 Sept	Seasearch Firth of Lorn

For general Seasearch enquiries visit [www.seasearch.org.uk](http://www.seasearch.org.uk), contact Calum on 0131 226 6360 or email [scotland@mcsuk.org](mailto:scotland@mcsuk.org).

Seasearch west coast co-ordinator Owen Paisley is on [seasearch.west@btinternet.com](mailto:seasearch.west@btinternet.com) or 01880-730262. Seasearch Northeast Scotland co-ordinator Chris Rickard is on [seasearch\\_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:seasearch_nescotland@yahoo.co.uk).

MCS is grateful to Scottish Natural Heritage for support of the Seasearch project in Scotland.

So, by letting your voice be heard, we can help get the protection our seas deserve. Among many others, future generations of divers will thank us for it.

### CHECK IT OUT

[www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org) > what we do > MCS in Scotland  
[www.mcsuk.org/downloads/scotland/28012008\\_FindingNIMAs.pdf](http://www.mcsuk.org/downloads/scotland/28012008_FindingNIMAs.pdf)  
[www.mcsuk.org/silentseas](http://www.mcsuk.org/silentseas)  
[www.marinereservesnow.org.uk](http://www.marinereservesnow.org.uk)  
[www.yourseasyourvoice.com](http://www.yourseasyourvoice.com)  
[www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/25-MarineScot/b25s3-introd.pdf](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/bills/25-MarineScot/b25s3-introd.pdf)  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/08/19084547/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/08/19084547/0)