

To whom it may concern.

I am writing in response to the Scottish Government consultation on Possible Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas. From Scotland's Marine Atlas it is clear that the seas around Scotland are in turmoil, with concerns and declines over most of the seabed, declines in common seals, seabirds and sharks, skates and rays, and ongoing concerns with fish stocks in many areas. Within a system that puts the marine environment at the centre of marine planning, I believe a network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas is essential to help reverse these historic declines and enhance the many important benefits the sea provides us all.

I firmly support the development of an MPA network in Scotland's seas.

Not only would I wish all the proposed MPA sites be adopted by Scottish Government, I specifically wish the Skye-Mull search area including Tiree to be designated as a nature conservation Marine Protected Area by Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government has a legal obligation to enhance Scotland's seas and, according to international recommendations, the MPA network must support the wider marine environment.

For each MPA, effective management must therefore be in place so that species and habitat recovery is possible both within and beyond the boundaries of the site. Zonal management that protects only the remnant extent of marine species and habitats, particularly of vulnerable benthic features, is not enough given the context of ecological decline documented in Scotland's Marine Atlas.

The Skye-Mull search area including Tiree is designated a BASKING SHARK HOT-SPOT.

The current SNH Tagging project results, as of 12 Nov, confirm this designation.

In the UK, Basking Sharks are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 and the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004. These Acts make it illegal to intentionally kill, injure or recklessly disturb or harass Basking Sharks in British waters. Any person committing such an offence could face up to six months in prison and a large fine.

Also:-

In 2007 Basking Sharks were designated a Prohibited Species under the EU CFP. The critical requirement for the Skye-Mull search area (including Tiree) to be designated a MPA, is to ensure Scottish Government's abides by, and fulfills its legal obligations, as above, with regard to any possible adoption/consent of proposed offshore wind farm development(s), within this MPA search area.

Yours faithfully

Rachel Gwilym