

## MPA CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

1. Do you support the development of an MPA network in Scotland's Seas?

Yes  No

I see the development of an MPA network in Scotland's Seas as an important measure for contributing to the protection of marine biodiversity (including MPA search features) in Scotland's seas.

### Individual possible Nature Conservation MPAs

2. Do you have any comments on the case for designation, management options and socioeconomic assessment for the possible Nature Conservation MPA(s)?

INSERT RELEVANT pMPA NAME(S) HERE: Small Isles MPA

Designation:

Yes  No

Based on recent findings by members of the Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum (SLEF) and local divers (including commercial scallop divers), it appears that the Small Isles MPA would be of greater benefit to Scotland's MPA network if the boundary was **extended to the coast line of Skye to include the sea surrounding the Isle of Soay, Loch Scavaig, Loch Slapin and Loch Eishort.**

This extension would enable the inclusion of a range of MPA search features such as: native oysters; seagrass beds; blue mussel beds; maerl beds; burrowed mud habitat; kelp and seaweed communities on sublittoral sediment; and low or variable salinity habitats. MPA mobile species recently documented within the suggested extension area include minke whale and black guillemot (including a local breeding area). The extension area is also of relevance for other Scottish marine priority species such as sea trout (from the Camasunarie and Coruisk river systems) as well as basking shark (for which the area is a MPA Search Area).

Management Options:

Yes  No

With respect to the proposed Small Isles MPA extension, maerl beds and seagrass beds should be protected for two reasons 1) their ecological importance and 2) their importance for species of value to local commercial fisheries. Other MPA search features and priority species should also be protected from further damage.

Socioeconomic Assessment:

Yes  No

This area includes some of Scotland's most iconic landscapes and seascapes and there is an important and expanding wildlife tourism industry in the South Skye sea lochs area (including frequent tour boats from Elgol). Extending the Small Isles MPA designation is expected to safeguard and benefit local tourism by helping to safeguard the local marine habitats.

The area is also of significance for shellfish harvesting and scallop diving. Based on recent reports from local scallop divers, local scallop populations have collapsed over recent decades as a consequence of unsustainable and highly destructive scallop dredging (including maerl bed destruction). The protection and subsequent recovery of shallow areas of these sea lochs would allow marine ecosystems to regenerate, which would benefit local scallop divers and other inshore fishermen.

In addition, the MPA extension could help contribute to the recovery and growth of local angling (e.g. including sea trout, salmon, cod, haddock, flat fish species etc.).

All of the above:

Yes  No

I believe that an extension of the Small Isles MPA to include the sea areas around the Isle of Soay, Loch Scavaig, Loch Slapin and Loch Eishort would be of overall benefit to the local community and economy as well as the environment, and further assessment of this would be of value. Efforts are currently on-going to more completely document and map the marine biodiversity within the proposed extension area (including relevant MPA search features).

## **Sustainability Appraisal**

- 3. Do you have any comments on the Sustainability Appraisal of the MPA network as a whole?**

Yes  No

## **Final Thoughts**

- 4. On the basis of your preferences on which pMPAs should be designated, do you view this to form a complete or ecologically coherent network, subject to the completion and recommendations of SNH's further work on the 4 remaining search locations?**

Yes  No

Some 'key note' species for inshore marine ecosystems have been overlooked within the list of MPA search features, and are worthy of further attention. Fin fish (these include fin fish species such as herring, which spawn on the seabed) and shellfish species would benefit from greater priority – as they are important from an ecological as well as commercial perspective.

Since the Scottish Marine Protected Area network will only cover a very limited area of overall marine habitat, wider measures will be vital to safeguard and ensure the sustainability of marine ecosystems overall. Without robust and coherent measures extending beyond the MPA network, the overall marine biodiversity in Scottish waters is likely to continue to decline.

- 5. Do you have any other comments on the case for designation, management options, environmental or socioeconomic assessments of the pMPAs, or the network as a whole?**

Yes  No

The establishment of an MPA network in Scotland's seas is a very positive step for starting to address the recent damage to marine habitats and wildlife following the removal of the three-mile limit. Alongside other measures, MPAs are very important for protecting Scotland's marine ecosystems.

Many thanks to all of those who are seeking to progress this important programme and other related marine protection initiatives.

## **Thank You.**