



Gillian Martin – Convenor
Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee
c/o Clerk to the Committee
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

27th June 2019

Dear Gillian,

**ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND LAND REFORM COMMITTEE
EVIDENCE SESSION: MARINE PLANNING AND LICENSING TUESDAY 11TH JUNE 2019**

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence at the above noted session in the Scottish Parliament. I wanted to provide a brief follow-up to support the ongoing inquiry by summarising some of the key points I raised on the day.

RSPB Scotland fully support the Committee's exploration of what part the marine planning, licensing and funding regimes could play in achieving protection and, specifically, enhancement of marine biodiversity. As heard during the first part of the evidence session, Scotland's seas are heavily modified and environmental indicators confirm the breadth and scale of damage sustained by marine wildlife and habitats^{1,2}. Marine planning and licencing has to date focused on managing human pressures to protect the environment in its current state but has been less successful in delivering the much needed enhancement. To meet our biodiversity objectives for Scotland's marine environment there is a need to go beyond protection.

Meanwhile there exists the challenge of achieving Scotland's net-zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2045. As touched on in the evidence session, the continued expansion of offshore renewables, specifically offshore wind, best illustrates the scale of these challenges. If our biodiversity and climate targets are not tackled in unison then we risk acting on climate change by deploying large amounts of offshore wind³, which could then inadvertently result in major cumulative impacts on our marine environment and the wildlife it supports. Avoiding such scenarios will require greater clarity and articulation from Scottish Government to help focus efforts on important issues such as delivering enhancement.

¹ [OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017](#). Highlights that breeding seabird abundance is below 1990 baseline levels since 2000, indicating the populations are not healthy.

² [UK Marine Strategy. 2019. Marine strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status.](#)

³ [Committee on Climate Change](#). May 2019. Net Zero – The UK's contribution to stopping global warming. Report outlined the need for up to 75GW of offshore wind capacity in UK waters by 2050 to enable achievement of the 'net zero' emissions target.

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Delivering enhancement at scale will require investment and resources. One way to achieve this is through better embedding the beneficiary and polluter pays principles. Marine operators that seek to benefit from our natural assets, and the common goods that Scottish seas provide, must also contribute towards the costs of managing those very assets, which includes delivering enhancement. To this end we are aware of some sector's willingness to contribute to enhancement measures, so consideration of this issue by Scottish Government couldn't be more relevant. Key to this issue will be addressing the differences between terrestrial and marine planning. Individual projects, and sectors can often deliver enhancement or planning gain on land, either within or adjacent to the project site. Offshore, the opportunities to do the same are limited or may not be desired. More often, actions will be better deployed in locations that are distant to the project or activity and unrelated to their specific impacts, but which will nonetheless benefit the health of the marine environment at local, regional and/ or national scales.

Finally, enhancement in coastal and offshore habitats is a relatively new field of research and practice, but to offer some tangible examples there exist habitat creation, restoration and enhancement projects such as native oyster bed restoration⁴, seagrass restoration/transplantation and coastal realignment⁵ that could potentially be scaled-up to deliver substantial benefits. RSPB Scotland is also involved in invasive species eradication projects on islands, work that can be effective in significantly improving the prospects of some of our breeding seabird colonies⁶. It is envisaged that such enhancement actions should work in tandem and complement established marine management measures such as the marine protected area network and the work on protecting Scotland's priority marine features.

I hope the above offers some further detail to those topics discussed at the session and once again thank you for the invitation to give evidence. We will also look to provide a response to the recent call for views on the 'role, status and effectiveness of Regional Marine Plans' and look forward to the Committee's forthcoming report.

Yours sincerely,

{SENT BY EMAIL}

Charles Nathan
Senior Conservation Planner

⁴ [Scotland: DEEP, The Dornoch Environmental Enhancement Project](#)

⁵ [Nigg Bay Coastal Realignment Project](#)

⁶ [Shiant Isles Recovery Project](#)