

Scottish MPA project – progress update since March 2014

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Aim

1. To provide the Advisory Council with an update on progress with work streams of the Scottish MPA project. This update covers the plans to designate new national marine protected areas (MPAs) and development of fisheries management measures for existing Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

New MPAs

2. Scottish Ministers are expected to make their decision on MPA designations in the next 2 weeks. An announcement of this decision will happen before 25 July 2014. The level of engagement throughout this project from Council members has helped shape the final package of sites. At the last council meeting the two combinations for designating sites on the Hebridean slope were outlined. These were;

i. Designate Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount along with Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope using the boundaries consulted on, or;

ii. Designate Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount, Geikie Slide and Hebridean Slope, and South-west Sula Sgeir and Hebridean Slope but use amended boundaries. This approach originated from the French fishing industry suggestion.

3. Following the last Council meeting further consideration was given to how fisheries would be managed under either option. Have further consulted Scottish and French fishing interests it was concluded that option 1 was more favourable. This was due to the larger site boundary for Barra Fan and Hebrides Terrace Seamount allowing a more flexible approach to potential management. This should result in better ecological and economic outcomes.

Existing SACs

4. Fisheries measures are presently being developed for 4 offshore SACs in the Advisory Council area. A workshop was held in Edinburgh on April 15 and 16 to consider how these sites could be managed with the context of the EU Habitats Directive.

5. The spirit in which members of the Advisory Council, both from the fishing and NGO side, participated in the discussions was exemplary. Although good progress was made there is a considerable amount of work to be done, and this will continue over the summer.

6. The intention is have some bilateral discussions with French fishing interests regarding Wyville Thomson Ridge SAC in August. This will hopefully be followed by bringing firm proposals to the Advisory Council meeting in September for discussion.