

Inshore Marine Protected Area and Priority Marine Features Consultation

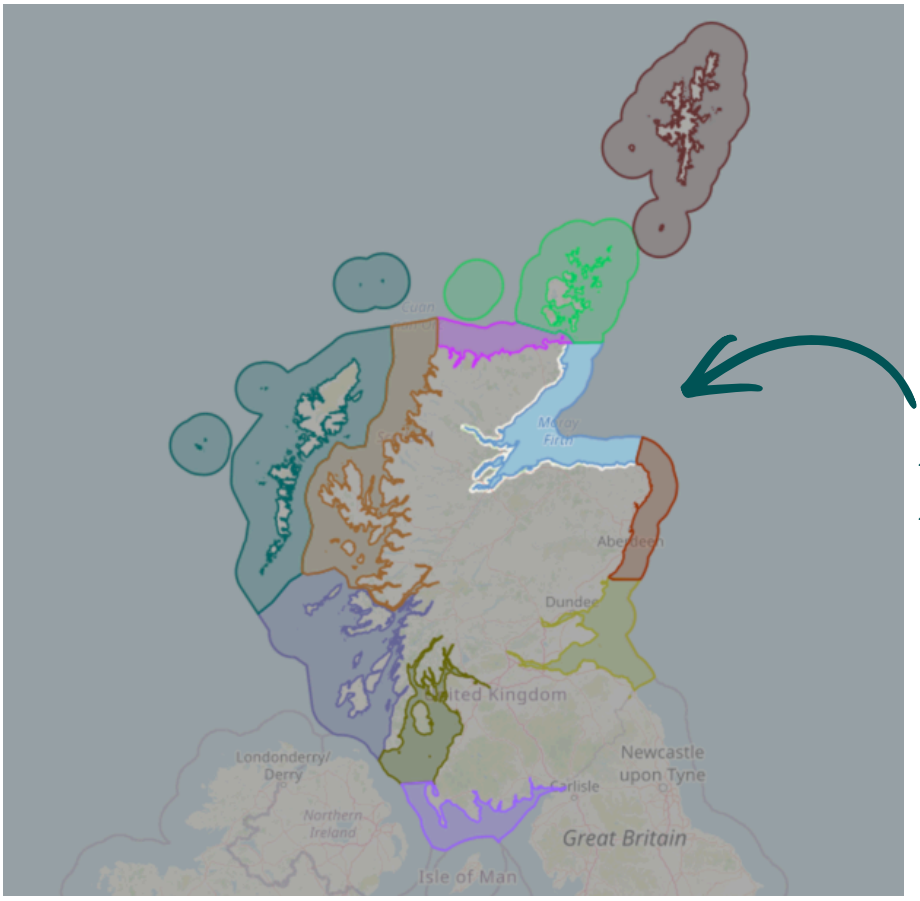
Moray Firth

11/11/2026

Introduction

Here you will find a briefing manual for the Proposed Fisheries Management Measures for Inshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and Proposed Priority Marine Feature (PMF) Management Areas within the Moray Firth Region.

The Moray Firth (MF) is the largest firth in Scotland and is regularly visited by marine wild life.



Moray Firth Marine Region

The Our Seas Coalition

The Our Seas coalition represents over 170 organisations, each with its own voice for the sea. We are united by a shared vision of greater protection for Scotland's inshore environment, however, individual members bring their own regional knowledge, priorities and perspectives on what that protection should look like. Consequently, our members will have their own individual views on the options presented within the consultation.

Our Seas encourage you to reach out to members in your area to learn more about their individual position.

Click here to be taken to the Members Directory!



The Consultation

After almost a decade of delay, the Scottish Government has finally launched its consultation on the future protection of inshore marine habitats and species. You can view it here.

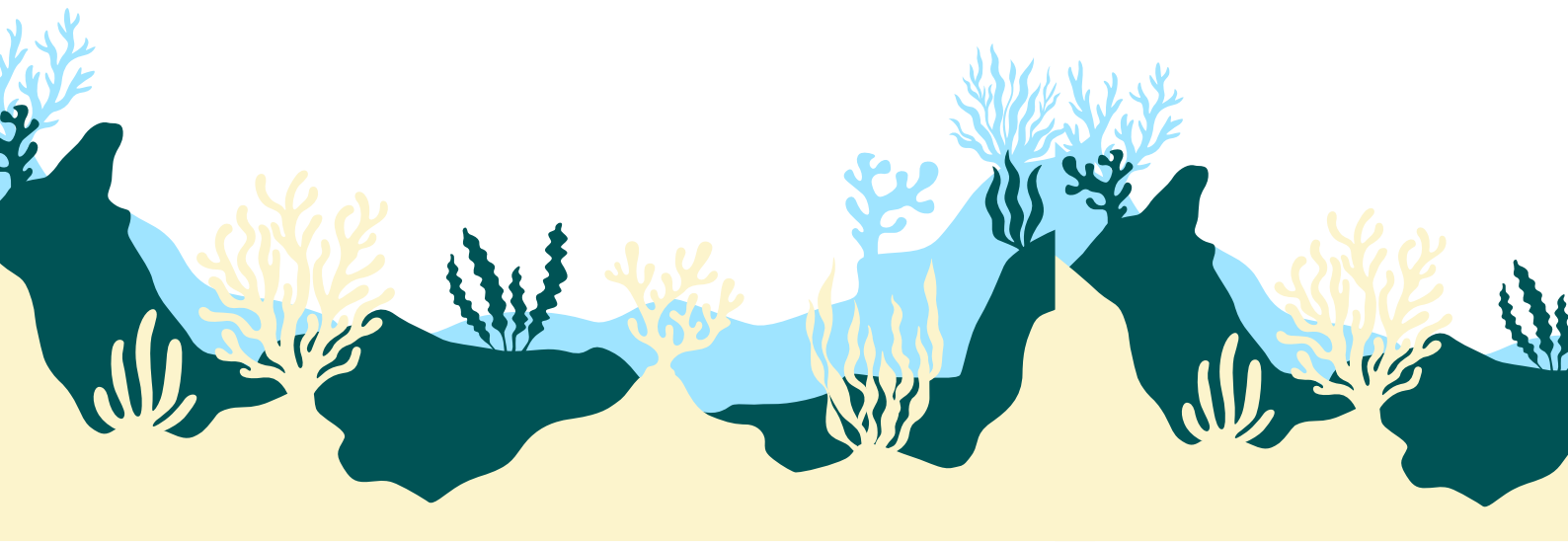
This is the chance for real protection to be implemented in Scotland's inshore waters after over 10 years of simply designation.

Within this consultation, the Scottish Government is asking for the public's opinion on proposed fisheries management measures for both sites and areas, where sites include: NCMPAs, SACs and SPAs and areas include locations where the 11 Priority Marine Features features have been identified outside MPAs.

In the Moray Firth, the consultation includes proposed fisheries management measures for:

2 NCMPAs | *1 SACs* | *2 SPAs* | *0 PMF areas*

This briefing will outline the sites that are designated to protect a seabed feature that is threatened by bottom-towed gear, in line with the asks of Our Seas. For more information on other sites in your area, follow this link!



MPA Sites Proposed Options

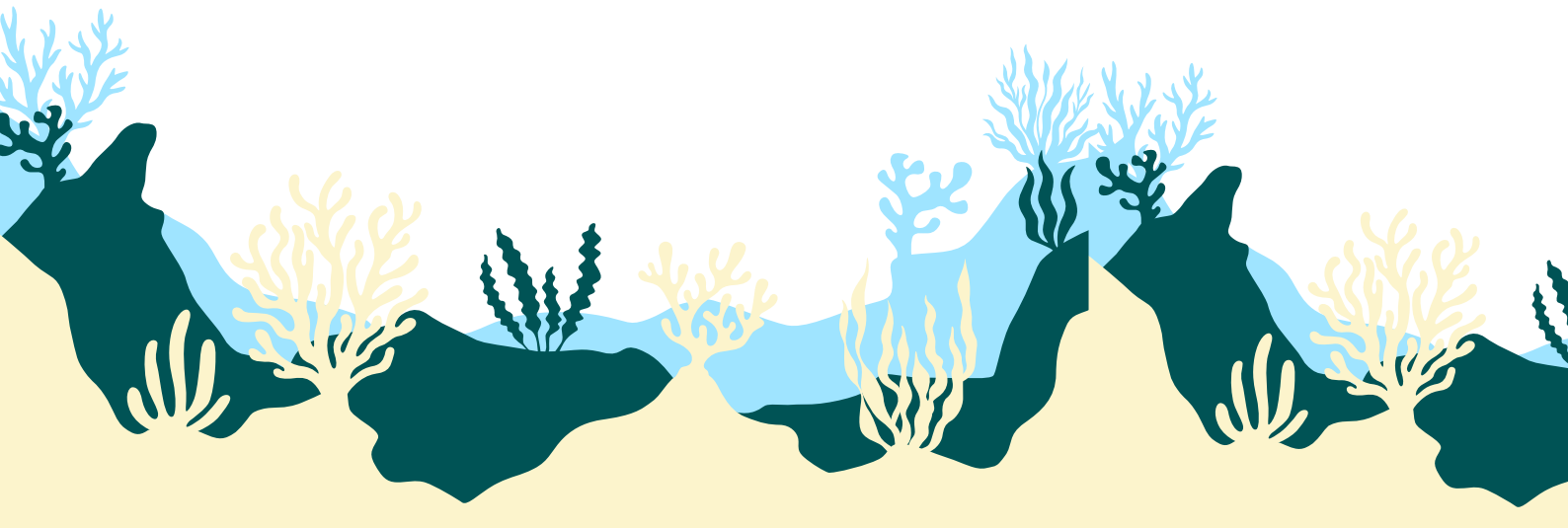
For the majority of the **MPA sites**, 2 options will be proposed. In some cases, only 1 option is proposed due to the conservation objectives of that site.

Option 1 - Zonal measures: Rules for specific fishing gears that may apply seasonally or to vessels above a certain engine power.

Option 2 - Full site measures: Rules on specific fishing gears that apply across the whole site all year round.

Other: If you disagree with both options, you can select 'Other' and explain your reasons in the comments box.

Relevant Questions in this Region: Sites: Q167 - 169, 174 - 176



Our Seas Coalition's Position

MPAs

Protect all seabed MPAs from bottom trawling and dredging to support healthy marine ecosystems, coastal communities and sustainable livelihoods.

If you agree, Our Seas suggest you could submit a response, as follows;

- Support **Option 2** for all the MPA seabed sites that propose a **full site closure to all bottom towed fishing gear**. This would mean that more damaging fishing practices such as bottom trawling and scallop dredging will not be allowed in sites designated to protect the seabed, allowing seabed habitats to recover.

- There are 3 sites that have a seabed feature designated which do not propose full site closure to all bottom towed gear, and Our Seas will be calling for stronger protections for these sites in the form of full site closure to all bottom towed gear. These are, Clyde Sea Sill NCMPA, Moine Mor SAC and North East Lewis NCMPA.

Why?

Because the sedbed should be protected. Bottom trawling and dredging physically disturb the seabed, damaging species and reducing the abundance and diversity of marine life. Closing seabed MPAs to bottom-towed fishing allows seabed habitats to recover and provides the **strongest protection** for the features the MPAs were designated to conserve.

What protection can look like...

On the Isle of Arran, Scotland's only No Take Zone and wider South Arran MPA show how effective marine protection can be, with bottom trawling and dredging restrictions helping to protect and restore the seabed.

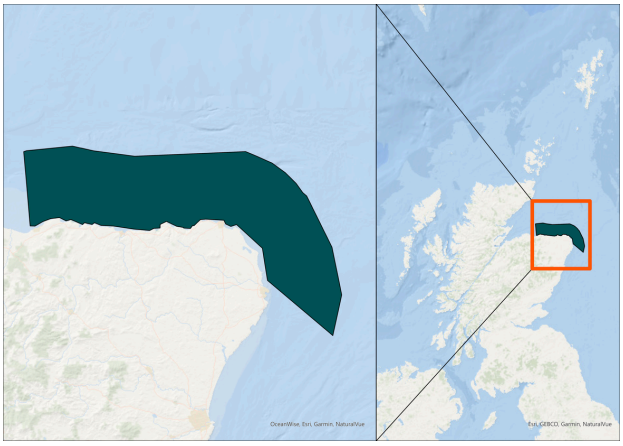
Research has found increases in king scallop and lobster numbers, greater marine biodiversity and healthier habitats, while supporting local communities through activities such as diving, snorkelling and commercial scallop diving. Go to COAST's website to read more.



📷*Howard Wood - COAST: A before and after of the seabed once protection came into place*

Southern Trench NCMPA

MORAY FIRTH



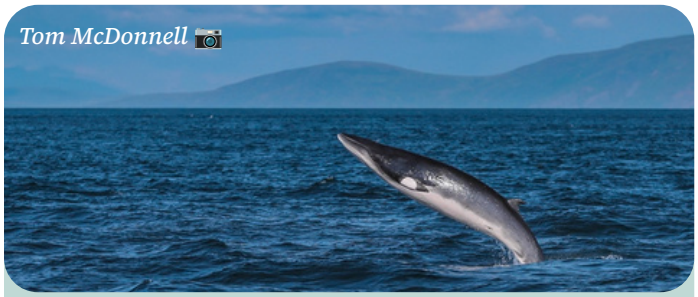
The Southern Trench NCMPA lies off the Aberdeenshire coast, stretching from Buckie in the west to Peterhead in the east, and hosts a fantastic range of marine life.

Protected Features



Burrowed Mud
In areas where this habitat is undisturbed it is extensively burrowed by mamy important species including Norway lobster

THREATENED BY
Bottom towed fishing practises that damage the seabed.



Minke Whale
The minke whale is the smallest of the baleen whales found in UK waters, measuring 7 to 10 metres when fully grown

THREATENED BY
Entanglement, vessel collision and habitat degredation.

Our Seas recommends:

OPTION 2

For this site

This option fully closes the site to bottom towed fishing practises, ensuring burrowed mud is not distrubed and preventing minke whale entanglement.

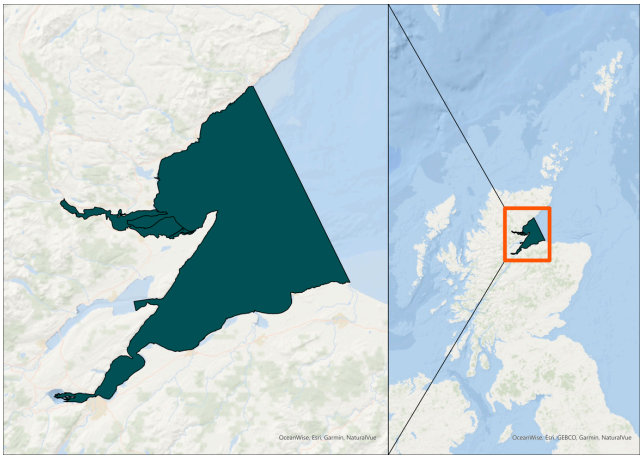
Have your say!

Read more about this site and the other option here

Respond by email by filling in the form on our website, answering Q.167 - Q.169 and emailing it to **marine_biodiversity@gov.scot**

Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC

MORAY FIRTH



Situated on the northeast coast of Scotland, the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC spans approximately 8,700 hectares. The site covers extensive areas of mudflats, sandflats, saltmarshes, and sand dunes, including the largest and most complete dune system in the UK.

Protected Features



Intertidal mudflats and sandflats
Mudflats are found in the most sheltered areas, within the upper reaches of estuaries, sea lochs and voes.

THREATS
Bottom towed fishing practises that damage the seabed and their habitat.



Estuaries
Estuaries are highly dynamic and sensitive ecosystems,

THREATS
Use of bottom towed fishing gear can disturb sediments and alter hydrodynamic conditions



Harbour Seal
A common, friendly species of Seal yet numbers are declining in Scotland for unknown reasons.

THREATS
Pollution and entanglement in fishing gear to name a few



Otter
A very cute species of the land, river and sea.

The otter is not discussed further as they are not a protected feature for which fisheries management measures are required.

Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC

Continued

Protected Features



Reefs
Rocky areas that rise from the seabed and provide a home for many marine animals and plants.

THREATS
Bottom towed fishing practises that damage the seabed and thus the reef.



Subtidal Sandbanks
An important habitat of submerged sand that contributes to nursery grounds for fish.

THREATS
Bottom towed fishing practises that damage the seabed and their habitat.

Our Seas recommends:

OPTION 2

For this site

This option fully closes the site to bottom towed fishing practises securing the strongest protection for the multiple seabed features designated within this site.

Have your say!

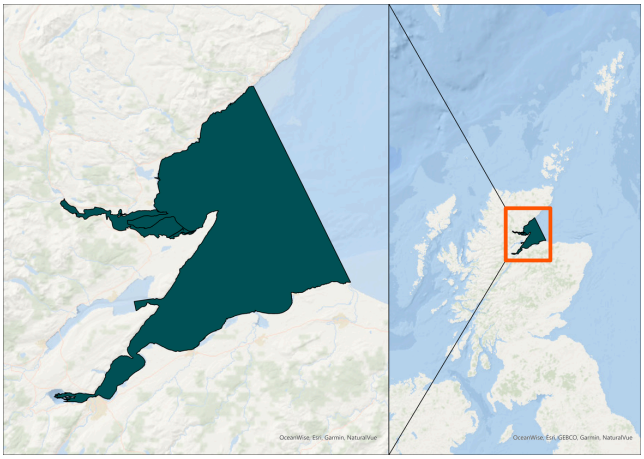
Read more about this site and the other option here

Respond by email by filling in the form on our website, answering Q.174 - Q.176 and emailing it to **marine_biodiversity@gov.scot**

The questions for this site are combined with the Moray Firth SAC

Moray Firth SAC

MORAY FIRTH



The Moray Firth SAC is a vast and ecologically significant marine protected area located off the northeast coast of Scotland, encompassing approximately 151,000 hectares. It is combined with the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC.

Protected Features



Bottlenose dolphin
Bottlenose dolphin are a large species of dolphin, historically associated with the Moray Firth now considered an East Coast population.

THREATENED BY
Entanglement, vessel collision and habitat degredation.



Subtidal Sandbanks
An important habitat of submerged sand that contributes to nursery grounds for fish.

THREATS
Bottom towed fishing practises that damage the seabed and their habitat.

Our Seas recommends:

OPTION 2

For this site

This option fully closes the site to bottom towed fishing practises, ensuring subtidal sandbanks are not disturbed from damaging fishing practises and preventing bottlenose dolphin entanglement.

Have your say!

Read more about this site and the other option here

Respond by email by filling in the form on our website, answering Q.174 - Q.176 and emailing it to **marine_biodiversity@gov.scot**

The questions for this site are combined with the Dornoch Firth and Morrich More SAC

How to Protect the Moray Firth

While there are no PMF management areas in the Moray Firth, there should still be a level of protection implemented to protect our marine environment alongside the MPAs.

If you agree, Our Seas suggest you could submit a response, as follows;

- In reference to questions 3 and 4 (general questions) and any other questions asking about specific PMFs you should:

- Support Option 2 at a minimum. We then encourage you to also ask for at least 30% of Scotland's inshore waters to be protected from the more damaging fishing activities like bottom trawling and dredging, in line with the coalition's ask of a modern inshore limit adapted to the needs of each Scottish Marine Region.

- If you want to go into more detail, Our Seas suggests this could look like:
    - In the West Highlands Marine Region no dredging or trawling within 3 nautical miles of shore.
    - In the Outer Hebrides Marine Region no dredging or trawling within 1 nautical mile of shore.
    - As Shetland has it's own Regulatory Order, leave it to to resolve it's own protection.
    - **Throughout the rest of the Scottish Marine Regions, including the North East, no dredging or trawling within 1 nautical mile or waters shallower than 45/50m.**

Regional Members List

Aberdeenshire
- Ellon Sub Aqua Club
- OpenRoad Ltd
- Project Media
- Saltwater Life
- Shark and Skate Scotland

Angus
- Esk Rivers and Fisheries Trust

Argyll & Bute
- Argyll District Salmon Fishery Board
- Argyll Fisheries Trust
- Carna Coast and Communities
- Coastal Connection
- Community Association of Lochs and Sounds (CAOLAS)
- Conor Ryan Photography
- Craignish Restoration of Marine and Coastal Habitat (CROMACH)
- Eda Frandsen Sailing Ltd.
- Friends of the Sound of Jura
- Heart of Argyll Wildlife
- Kilchoan Estate
- Kyles Coastal Community
- Loch Visions
- Lochaber Sub Aqua Club
- Lochnell Oysters
- Majestic Line
- Mull Charters
- Oban Sea School
- Ocean Gives
- Puffin Divers
- Save Kintyre Seas
- Sea Freedom Kayaks
- Sea Kayak Argyll and Bute
- SeaTrek Scotland
- SeaWilding
- Sealife Adventures
- Tighnabruaich Sailing School
- Wild Argyll
- Wreckspeditions

Arran and Ayrshire
- Arran Eco Savvy
- Ayr Sea Angling Club
- Clyde Porpoise
- Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST)
- Fairlie Coastal Trust
- Kilmarnock Sub Aqua Club
- Mara Deli and Fish Restaurant
- Nature Library
- River Eachaig Syndicate
- Scottish Sea Angling Conservation Network
- Terra Mare

Berwickshire
- Berwickshire Marine Reserve
- Firth of Forth Lobster Hatchery
- Sea The Change
- Snorkel Wild
- The Scottish Coastal Cleanup

East Lothian
- Coast to Coast Surf School
- Lawson Wood Photography
- Ocean Vertical

Edinburgh
- Black House Water Sports
- Blue Marine Foundation
- Cycle For The Seas
- Earth in Common
- Fauna & Flora
- Fish Legal
- National Trust for Scotland
- Nourish Scotland
- Open Seas
- Pam van de Brug
- Project Seagrass
- Scotland The Big Picture
- Scottish Sub Aqua Club
- Staunch Industries
- Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust
- Young Sea Changers Scotland

Fife
- East Neuk Seaweed
- Scottish Federation of Sea Anglers

Glasgow & Inverclyde
- Centre for Human Ecology
- Click Book Stay
- Clyde Charters
- Ecodrama
- Ethical Seafood Research
- Friends of Dumbarton Foreshore
- GalGael Trust
- Loch Lomond Angling Improvement Association
- Sunny Side Ocean Defenders
- That's Yer Dinner

Inverness
- Beauly District Fisheries Board
- Heavy Metal Munchies
- Highlands and Islands Environment Foundation
- Keltic Seafare
- Lochaber Environment Group
- Old Town Fish & Chips
- Sauna Ostara
- Wild Rose Escapes
- WildFish

Moray
- Burghead Sub Aqua Club
- Findhorn District Salmon Fisheries Board
- Findhorn Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust
- Gordon Castle
- Spey Fishery Board

Orkney
- Kraken Diving
- Orkney Skate Trust

Outer Hebrides
- MARA
- Outer Hebrides Fisheries Trust
- Wild Harris

Perth
- Morven Stewart

Skye and Lochalsh
- All Things Cuillin
- Cast Away with Katie Tunn
- Dive and Sea the Hebrides
- Hayley Wolcott Art
- Islandeering
- Knoydart Foundation Ranger Service
- Raasay House
- Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation
- Skye and Lochalsh Environment Forum
- Skye and Lochalsh Rivers Trust
- Skye Communities for Natural Heritage
- Skye Scallop Divers
- Skye Seas Survey Initiative
- Skye to Sea

Stirling
- Argaty Red Kites
- Freedom Diving

Wester Ross
- 58° North Seaweeds
- Ali Mac Candles
- Applecross Sea Rangers
- Atlantic Diving Services
- Isle Martin Trust
- James Curley Fly Fishing
- Johnston and Loftus Boat Builders
- Kayak Summer Isles
- Little Loch Broom Marine Life
- Loch Laxford Shellfish
- Mikytin Ltd
- Ockran Oysters
- Plastic at Bay
- Seaful
- Sea Change
- Shellfish Safaris
- Ullapool Charters
- Ullapool Outdoors
- Ullapool Sea Savers
- West Sutherland Fisheries Trust
- Wester Ross Area Salmon Fishery Board

Outside Scotland

England
- Angling Trust
- Blue Ventures
- ClientEarth
- Frogfish Photography
- Maryport Coast Aquarium
- Oceana UK
- Patagonia
- Project Baseline
- Sea-Changers
- Shark Guardian
- Source to Sea
- SubSeaTV
- Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition
- Wilderness Foundation

Northern Ireland
- Belfast Lough Sea Angling and Conservation Club
- Marine Conservation Northern Ireland
- Northern Ireland Federation of Sea Anglers
- Northern Ireland Fly Fishing Association

International
- Aquatic Life Institute
- Blue Planet Society
- Captain Paul Watson Foundation UK
- Clean Sailors
- Low Impact Fishers of Europe

