

Inshore Marine Protected Area and Priority Marine Features Consultation

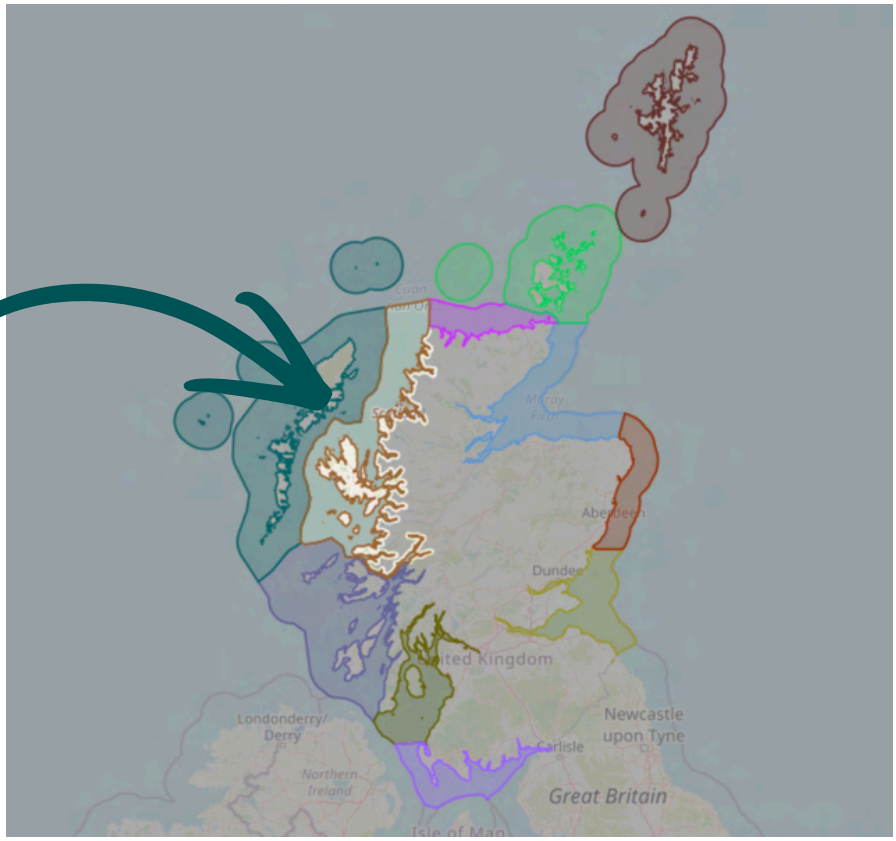
West Highlands

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 West Highlands region.

The West Highland SMR has a complex coastline with sea lochs, bays, islands, etc. Many of the sea lochs have sills that restrict the water exchange. It receives large freshwater inflow from land runoff and numerous small rivers, which influences the salinity in its coastal areas.



West Highlands 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.

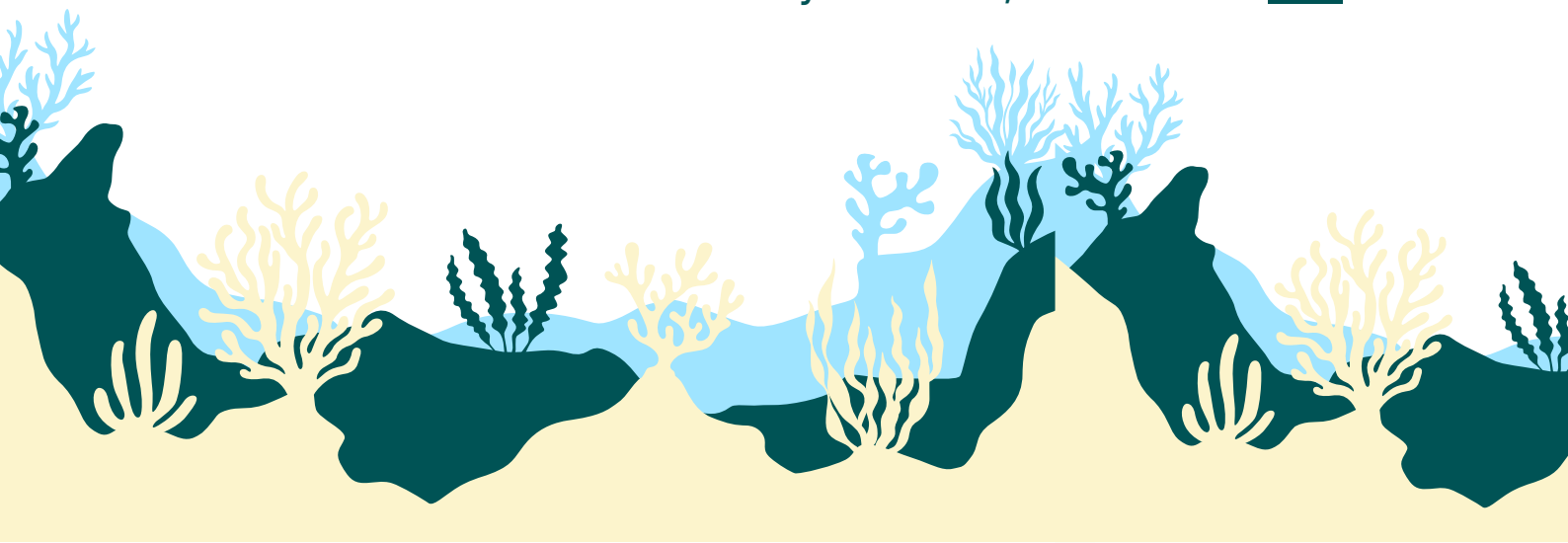
This is the chance for real protection to be implemented in Scotland's inshore waters after over 10 years of simply designation.

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 West Highlands, the consultation includes proposed fisheries management measures for:

1 NCMPAs | *3 SACs* | *3 SPAs* | *30 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

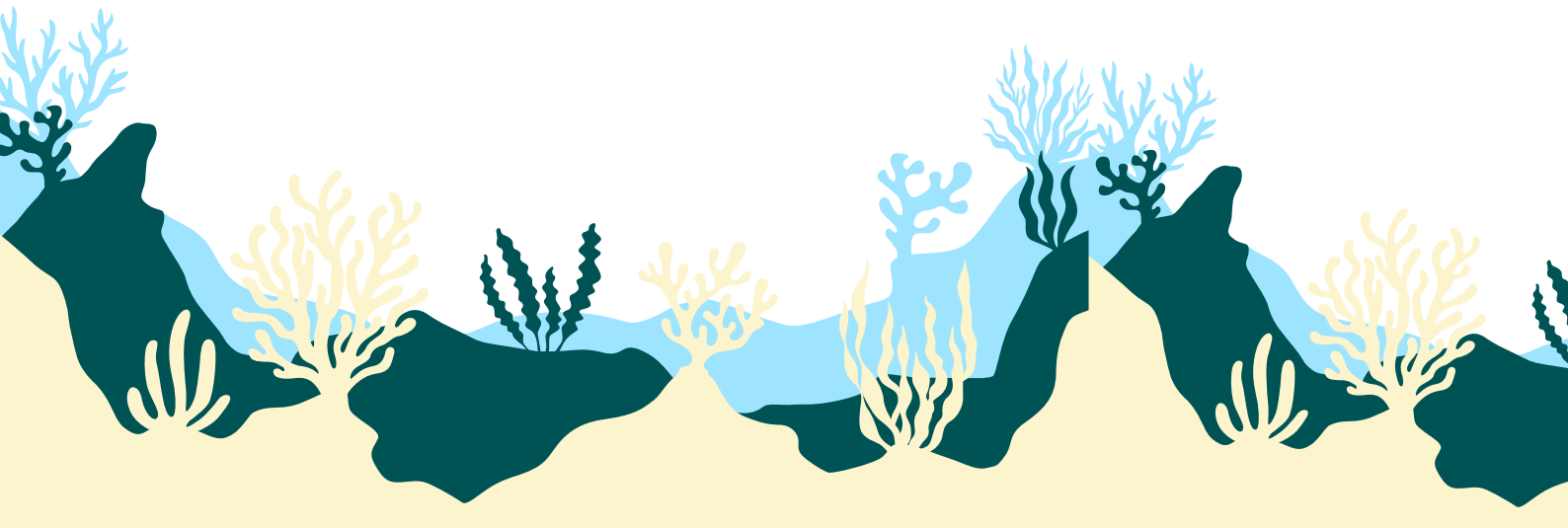
For the majority of the **MPA sites**, 2 options will be proposed. In some cases, only 1 option is proposed due to the conservation objectives of that site.

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: Q485 - 487, 496 - 498



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.

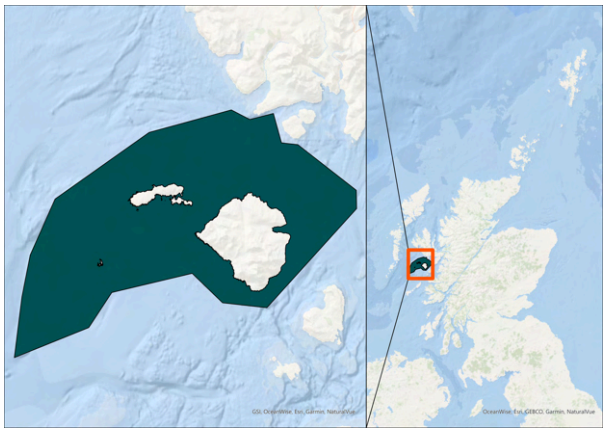
Research has found increases in king scallop and lobster numbers, greater marine biodiversity and healthier habitats, while supporting local communities through activities such as diving, snorkelling and commercial scallop diving. Go to COAST's website to read more.



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

Small Isles NCMPA

WEST HIGHLANDS



The Small Isles NCMPA is located off the west coast of Scotland and encompasses waters surrounding the islands of Canna and Rum, including the Sound of Canna. The site covers over 800 km².

Protected Features



Black Guillemot
In unfavourable condition at the Small Isles MPA and therefore Conservation Objectives seek to recover this condition.

THREATS
Sensitive to bycatch in fishing nets and disturbance from vessel movements



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.



Circalittoral sand and mixed sediment communities
Support a large number of species living on and within the seabed.

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



Northern Sea Fan and Sponge communities
Form delicate and colourful seabed habitats where many species thrive.

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

Small Isles NCMPA

Continued

Protected Features



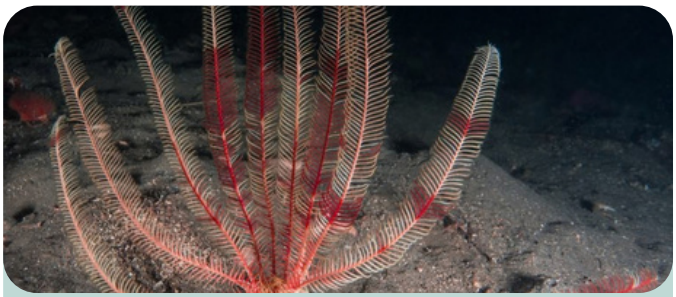
Horse mussel beds
Dense, biogenic marine reefs formed by the large horse mussel and provide habitat to lots of species

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



Fan mussel aggregations
Fan mussel aggregations are formed by the fan mussel, Britain's largest and most threatened bivalve mollusc

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



Northern feather star aggregations on mixed substrata
Brightly-coloured, feathery species that form a carpet on the seafloor and provides shelter for other marine life.

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



White cluster anemones
This is a scarce sea anemone found at a number of scattered locations around northern and western Scotland

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

Small Isles NCMPA

Continued

Our Seas recommends:

OPTION 2

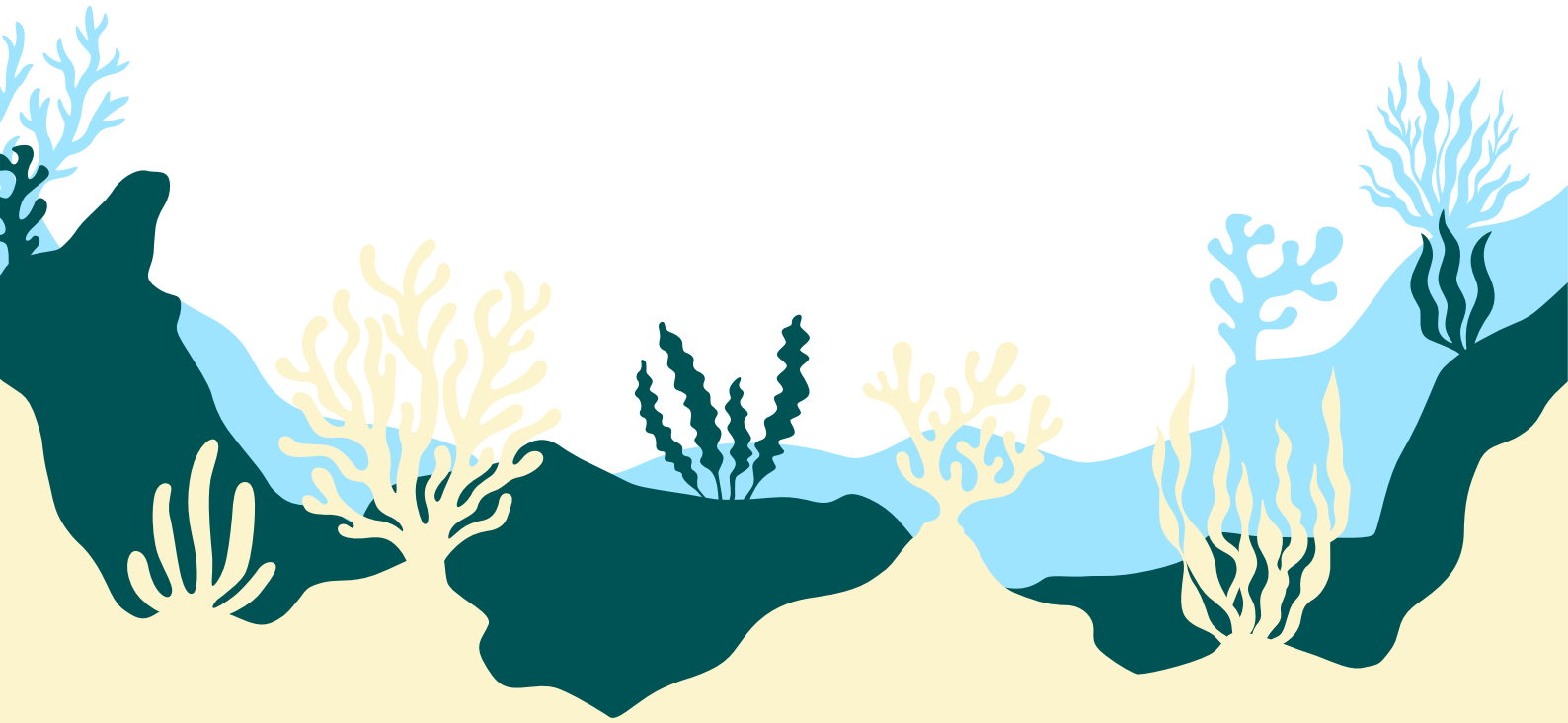
For this site

This option fully closes the site to bottom towed fishing practises and secures the strongest protection for the designated features. This is important as both features have slow recovery rates. This site has many seabed features within it that **need** strong protections.

Have your say!

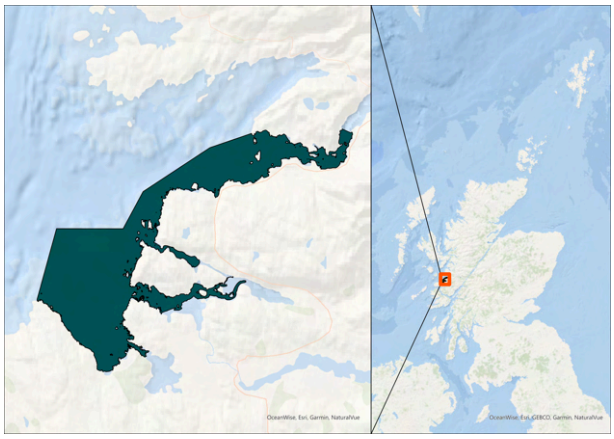
Read more about this site and the other option here

Respond by email by filling in the form on our website, answering Q.485 - Q.487 and emailing it to **marine_biodiversity@gov.scot**



Sound of Arisaig

WEST HIGHLANDS



The Sound of Arisaig SAC lies on the west coast of Scotland, between Loch Ailort, Loch Moidart and Loch Ceann Traigh. It covers around 4,500 hectares and is designated for its subtidal sandbanks.

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.



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 and secures the strongest protection for the designated features and the wider ecosystem. This is important as both features have slow recovery rates.

Have your say!

Read more about this site and the other option here

Respond by filling in the form on our website, answering Q.496 - Q.498 and emailing it to **marine_biodiversity@gov.scot**

PMF Areas Proposed Options

For the majority of **PMF areas**, 2 options will be proposed, in some cases, only 1 option is proposed.

Both options restrict bottom-towed fishing gear. The consultation is about the size of the area where these restrictions will apply.

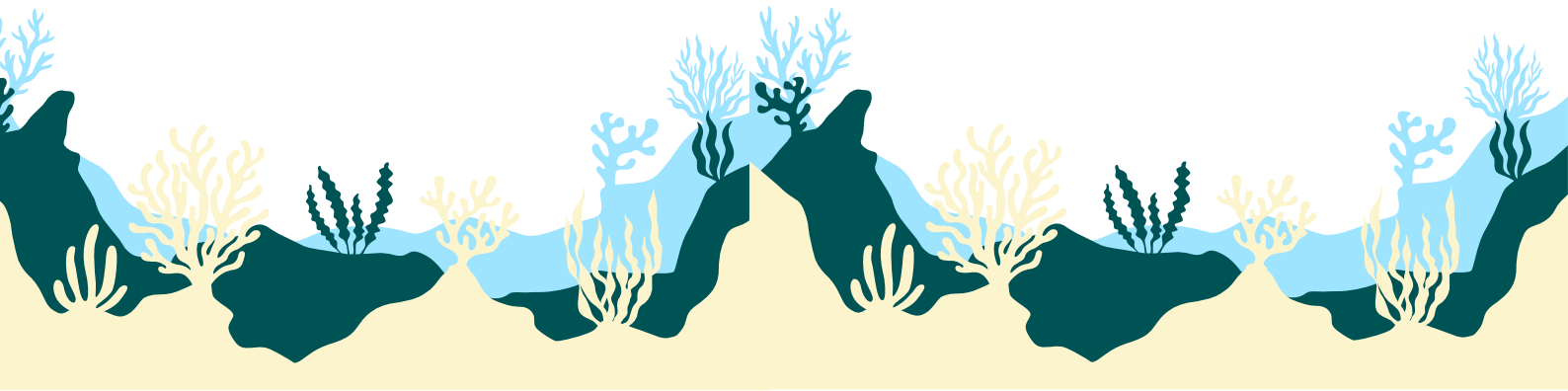
Option 1 - Smaller protected area

Option 2 – Larger protected area: Includes a buffer around the PMF, although the difference from Option 1 is small.

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

Both proposed options for are not adequate because:

- The areas are **not large enough** to provide real protection that is truly enforceable.
- Many populations of the 11 PMFs are **found outwith the proposed areas and therefore have no protection.**



Our Seas Coalition's Position PMFs

Neither of the proposed PMF options will provide sufficient protections; they do not go far enough to help restore the seabed, allow marine ecosystems to recover or to support sustainable fisheries. We believe at least 30% of Scotland's inshore should be protected from more damaging fishing activities like bottom trawling and dredging.

If you agree, we suggest you submit a response as follows:

- 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, no dredging or trawling within 1 nautical mile or waters shallower than 45/50m.**

PMF Areas

In this section, we will summarise the PMF management areas proposed for the West Highlands. These are locations where populations of the 11 most vulnerable PMFs have been found outside the MPA network and where the Scottish Government are proposing protection from trawling and dredging. **Read the profile for each of these 11 PMFs here!**

If you agree that the proposals are not sufficient, answer Qs 511-617 as we have set out above.

Ascrib Islands (Skye)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds
Northern sea fan and sponge communities




Eddrachillis Bay (Assynt)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds
Seagrass beds




Eigg, South-East

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds
Northern sea fan and sponge communities




Sgeir na Sean Chroit (Upper Loch Linnhe)

Designated to protect:

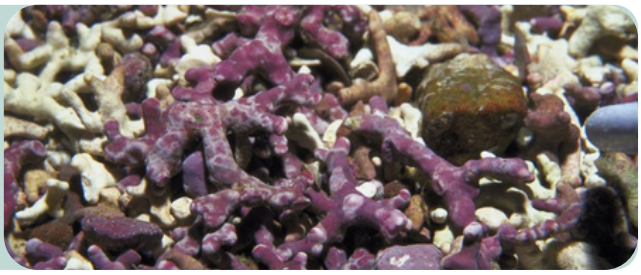
Flame shell beds
Horse mussel beds




Handa (Durness)

Designated to protect:

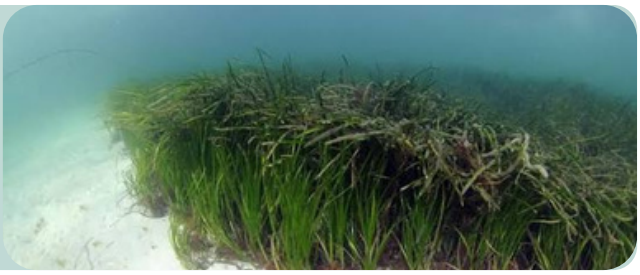
Maerl beds



Inverie, Loch Nevis (Knoydart)

Designated to protect:

Seagrass beds



Little Minch

Designated to protect:

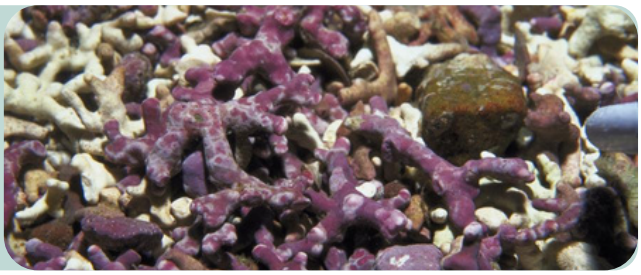
Northern sea fan and sponge communities



Loch Bay (Skye)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds



Loch Bracadale (Skye)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers





Loch Eil (Lochaber)

Designated to protect:

Horse mussel beds



Loch Hourn (Knoydart)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds
Seagrass beds



Loch Leven, Ballachullish (Lochaber)

Designated to protect:

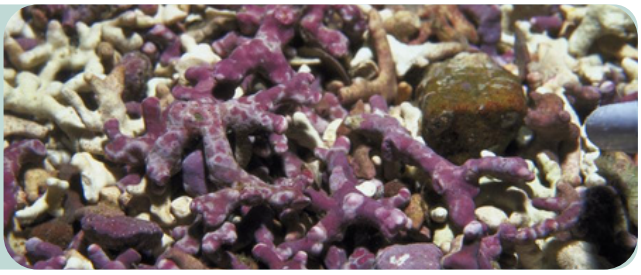
Flame shell beds
Horse mussel beds



Loch nan Ceall (Arisaig)

Designated to protect:

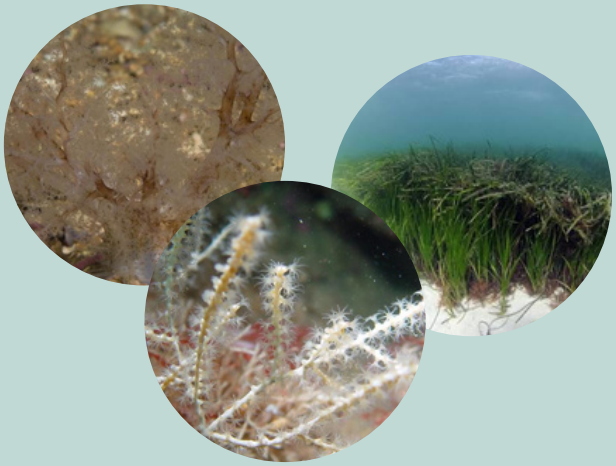
Maerl beds



Loch nan Uamh (Arisaig)

Designated to protect:

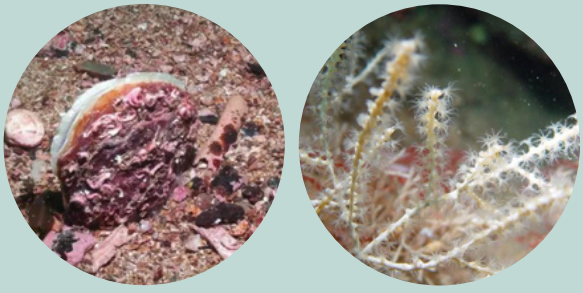
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers,
Northern sea fan and sponge communities,
Seagrass beds



South of Muck and Bo Fascadale

Designated to protect:

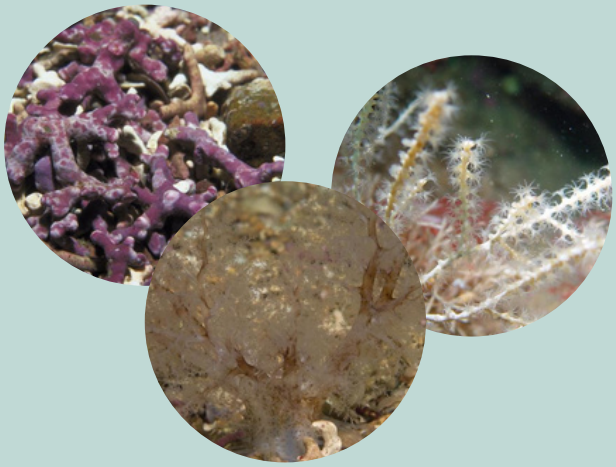
Fan mussel aggregations,
Northern sea fan and sponge communities



Loch Scavaig (Skye)

Designated to protect:

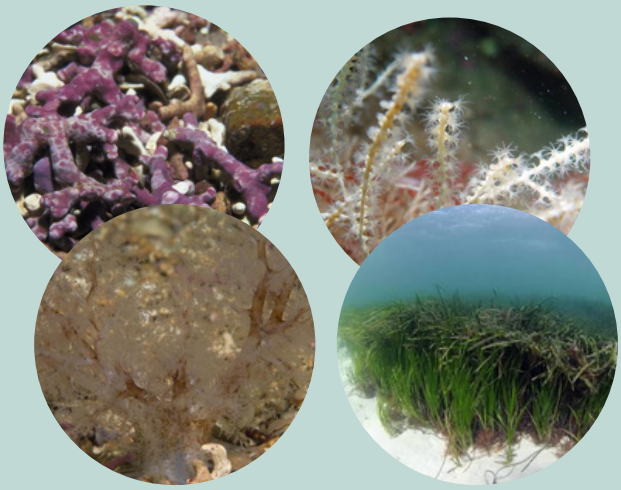
Maerl beds.
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers,
Northern sea fan and sponge communities



Lochs Eishort and Slapin (Skye)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds,
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers,
Northern sea fan and sponge communities,
Seagrass beds



Loch Sligachan (Skye)

Designated to protect:

Flame shell beds
Horse mussel beds



Loch Ainort and Caolas Scalpay (Skye)

Designated to protect:

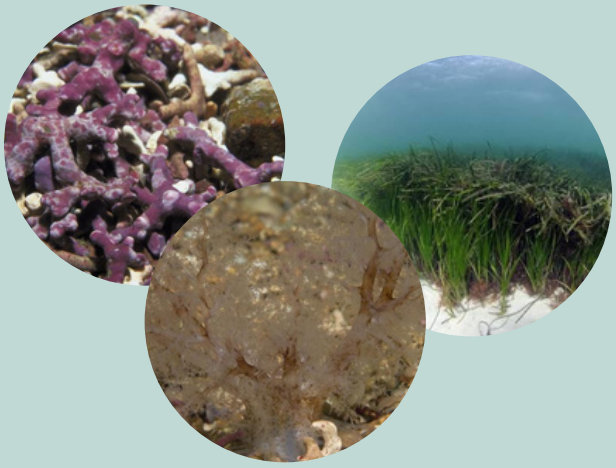
Flame shell beds;
Maerl beds;
Horse mussel beds; and
Seagrass beds



Port Erradale (Gairloch)

Designated to protect:

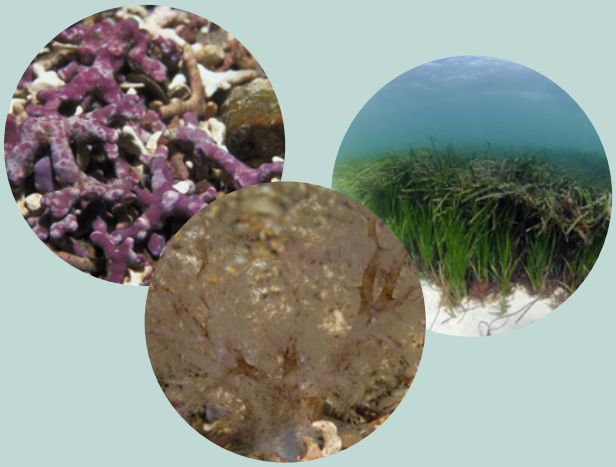
Maerl beds,
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers,
Seagrass beds



Red Point (Torridon)

Designated to protect:

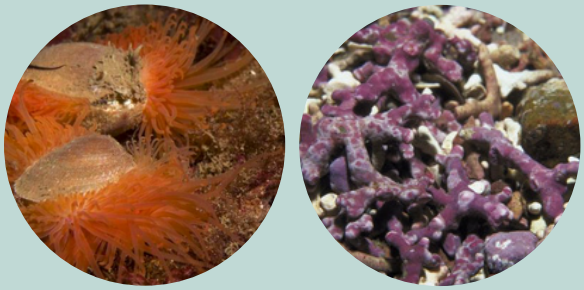
Maerl beds,
Maerl or coarse shell gravel with burrowing sea cucumbers,
Seagrass beds



Rubha Chuaig (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

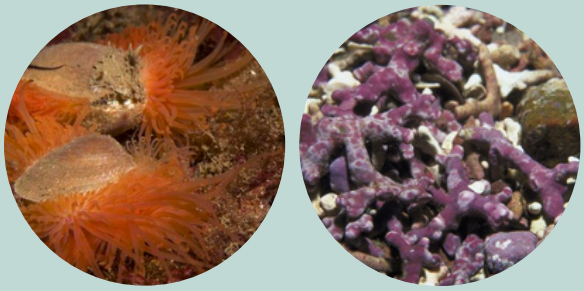
Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



Scalpay, North (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

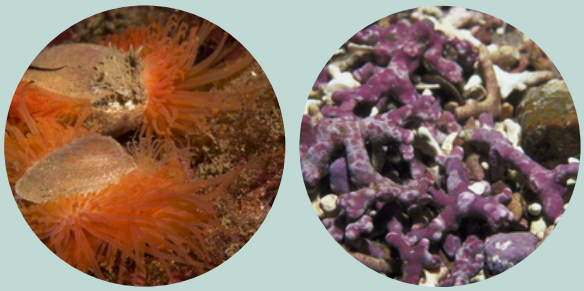
Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



Pabay, South-West (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



Muck and Godag

Designated to protect:

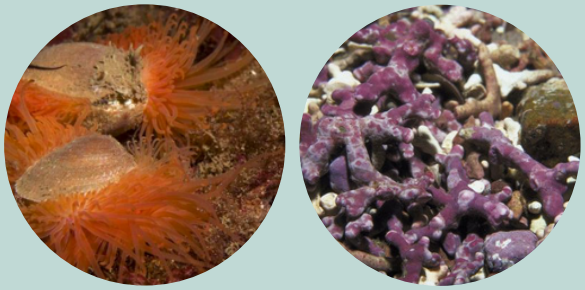
Northern sea fan and sponge communities



North of Crowlin Islands and Eilean na Ba (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

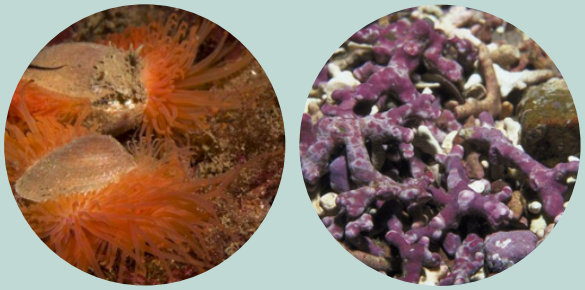
Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



East of BUTEC (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



Oberon Bank

Designated to protect:

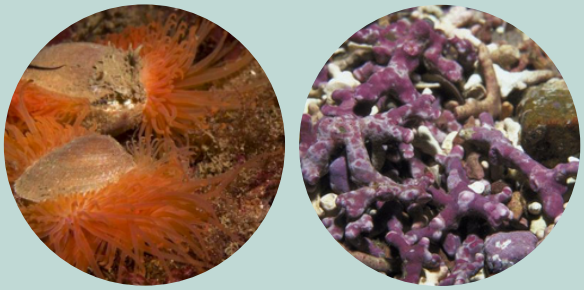
Northern sea fan and sponge communities



Pabay, North (Inner Sound)

Designated to protect:

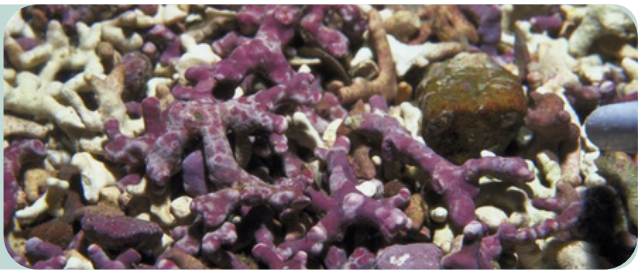
Flame shell beds
Maerl beds



Sandaig Bay, Loch Nevis (Knoydart)

Designated to protect:

Maerl beds



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

