The Scottish Seabird Conservation Action Plan

Safeguarding our Seabirds' Future

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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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Ministerial Foreword

I am delighted to publish the Scottish Seabird Conservation Action Plan, which marks an important step forward in delivering a priority action from the Scottish Biodiversity Delivery Plan 2024-2030, and crucially in protecting some of our most iconic marine species. Our seabirds are not only a symbol of Scotland's natural heritage, but they also play a key role in the health of our marine ecosystems. Whether it is the flamboyant puffin or majestic gannet, these birds are integral to the rich biodiversity of our coastlines and seas.

However, many of our seabird populations are under threat. Climate change, invasive non-native species, food shortages, and other pressures caused by human activity are contributing to declines in seabird numbers. This action plan has been developed in response to these challenges, with the aim of safeguarding our seabird species for future generations.

It is important that we all play our part in protecting seabirds. Through collaboration, we can improve conditions for seabirds, both in our waters and on our islands, where many species breed. This action plan therefore outlines an evidence-based approach to seabird conservation, bringing together government agencies, conservation groups, local communities, and industry partners.

Key to the success of this action plan is the recognition that healthy seabird populations are not only beneficial for nature, but also for our economy and well-being. Seabirds are a crucial part of Scotland's thriving tourism industry, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors every year to our beautiful coastal regions. Furthermore, they help maintain the balance of marine food chains and contribute to the resilience of the wider marine environment.

This action plan is for everyone. I am confident that with concerted effort and shared responsibility, we can address the declines we are seeing in seabird numbers and restore their populations to sustainable levels. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the development of this plan, and I encourage everyone with a stake in Scotland's natural environment to work together towards the shared goal of seabird conservation.

Together, we can ensure that Scotland remains an international stronghold for seabirds, now and in the future.

Introduction

Scotland's coastline and waters are of global importance to seabirds. The twenty-four species of seabird regularly breeding in Scotland include approximately 60% of the world's breeding population of great skua, 46% of the world's northern gannet and 16% of the world's Manx shearwater[1]. As top predators, seabirds are indicators of the health of marine ecosystems, playing a crucial role in maintaining balance within marine food webs. Seabirds also have a significant role in the economy and our cultural identity, supporting a thriving tourism industry that is vital to local economies, particularly in rural and island communities.

However, seabirds are in trouble (OSPAR Quality Status Report, 2023). The proportion of species experiencing widespread and frequent breeding failures has been increasing over the last half century. In the UK this trend is evidenced by the UK marine bird indicator (Marine Strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status, 2019) with breeding seabirds continuing not to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in both the Celtic Seas and Greater North Sea. The severity of the situation has been brought to light by 'Seabirds Count' the fourth census of Britain and Ireland's internationally important populations of breeding seabirds. The census revealed that two thirds of Scotland's seabirds have declined over the last 20 years, with eight species declining by more than 50%. This is without the impacts of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) and autumn/winter mortality events resulting in further large-scale declines at many breeding colonies. More seabird species are on UK Birds of Conservation Concern 5 Red List (Stanbury et al., 2024) [2] than ever before. Urgency for action to support seabird recovery and resilience to our changing world has never been greater.

This urgency is captured in the 'Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045: tackling the nature emergency in Scotland', which sets out a clear ambition for Scotland to be Nature Positive by 2030, and to have restored and regenerated biodiversity by 2045. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy provides a vital new context and urgency for our work and places an emphasis on accelerating restoration '*more urgently and at greater scale than we have done up to now*' and recovering and protecting vulnerable and important species, making sure we make '*every effort to prevent the extinction of globally threatened species*'. By delivering the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and GES under the UK Marine Strategy, we will also deliver international obligations and commitments to protect and conserve the marine environment[3] and

[1] These percentages were prior to the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI)
[2] Highest level of conservation concern
[3] Under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 (to conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources for sustainable development), the Convention for the Protection of the of the Marine Environment of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR) North East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

perhaps more importantly, protect the vital marine environment on which significant parts of Scotland's economy depend.

Our Vision

By 2045, Scotland's seabird colonies are thriving and showing improved resilience to climate change with increases in abundance and breeding success since Seabirds Count (2023). This is the result of a co-ordinated national effort to manage our seas and coasts with seabirds in mind and through partnership delivery of priority seabird conservation actions to build resilience and support adaptation to climate change.

Aims

The action plan aims to deliver the vision through partnership delivery of ambitious, effective and adaptive actions to address existing pressures and emerging threats in our seas and coasts, supported by underpinning research, raising awareness and international collaboration.

It is designed to assist with prioritising programmes of work and identifying resources that could be used to implement action whilst ensuring management actions are integrated and remain focused on the long-term persistence of seabird populations and their coastal and marine habitats. The actions are measurable, achievable and fit for the challenges we face now, and in the future, not least in the context of a changing climate.

The UK Government and other devolved administrations are also working on seabird conservation plans, or equivalents, for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Together, their implementation will help assist the UK in working towards achieving and maintaining GES.

Objectives

1. Deliver actions to maximise seabird prospects and build resilience in Scottish seabird populations by:

   a) Maximising food availability for seabirds by ensuring management of prey species and prey supporting habitats takes account of the needs of seabirds in a changing climate. **[Ensuring plentiful food supplies]**

   b) Introducing a programme of ecosystem restoration across land and sea to improve nesting and foraging habitats, and ultimately, breeding success and distribution. **[Restoring and improving seabird habitats]**

   c) Implementing effective measures to minimise seabird mortality and enhance seabird resilience against pressures/threats including climate change. **[Maximising resilience and survival]**

2. Deliver seabird conservation research and an ongoing coordinated programme of monitoring to improve our understanding of seabird status and effectiveness of adaptive management to threats and pressures facing Scottish seabirds. **[Building the evidence]**

3. Raising awareness of the conservation, environmental, economic, and cultural importance of Scotland's seabirds across all sectors, fostering societal behavioural changes that reduce risks to seabird populations and promote their long-term protection. **[Celebrating Scotland's seabirds]**

4. Position Scotland as a key international partner contributing to the enhancement of global understanding and protection of seabird populations. **[Making a global contribution]**

Scope

The action plan covers 24 species of seabird (Table 1) that frequently occur in Scottish waters. In the context of this plan, 'seabirds' consist of petrels and shearwaters (Procellariiformes); gannets and cormorants (Suliformes); skuas, gulls, terns and auks (Charadriiformes)[4]. Further information on each species, is provided in the Species Accounts that accompany this action plan.

[4] Cory's shearwater, sooty shearwater, Balearic shearwater, glaucous gull, Iceland gull and little auk are not included as these species appear too infrequently and in numbers too low to target conservation action effectively.

Table 1 Seabird species included in this action plan and their UK and Scottish conservation status. Note: The trends pre-date the impact of HPAI.

Species	UK conservation status[5]	% of GB breeding population in Scotland[6]	Trend in Scottish breeding population	% of GB wintering population in Scotland
Northern fulmar	Amber	98%	Declining	89%[7]
European storm petrel	Amber	89%	n/a	n/a
Leach's storm petrel	Red	100%	Declining	n/a
Arctic skua	Red	100%	Declining	n/a
Great skua	Red	100%	Increasing	<1%[7]
Black-legged kittiwake	Red	61%	Declining	<1%[7]
Little gull	Green	n/a	n/a	Unknown
Lesser black-backed gull	Amber	21%	Declining	8%[7,8]
Herring gull	Red	63%	Declining	37%
Great black-backed gull	Red	71%	Declining	24% [7,9]
Black-headed gull	Amber	11%	Declining	9%[7,11]
Common gull	Red	97%	Declining	29%[11]
Little tern	Amber	16%	n/a	n/a
Sandwich Tern	Amber	9%	Stable	n/a
Common tern	Amber	39%	Declining	n/a
Arctic tern	Red	66%	Declining	n/a
Manx shearwater	Amber	38%	n/a	n/a
Northern gannet	Amber	84%	Increasing	<1%[7]
European shag	Amber	84%	Declining	82%[7,10,11]
Great Cormorant	Green	42%	n/a	35%[7,9,12]
Atlantic puffin	Red	78%	Declining	3.7%[7]
Black guillemot	Green	100%	Declining	95%

[5] Stanbury et al., 2024
[6] Burnell et al., 2023
[7] Furness, 2015
[8] Burton et al., 2013
[9] Woodward et al., 2020
[10] Austin et al., 2017
[11] Frost et al., 2019
[12] Humphreys et al., 2016

Common guillemot	Amber	73%	Declining	28% [7,13]
Razorbill	Red	69%	Declining	45%[7]

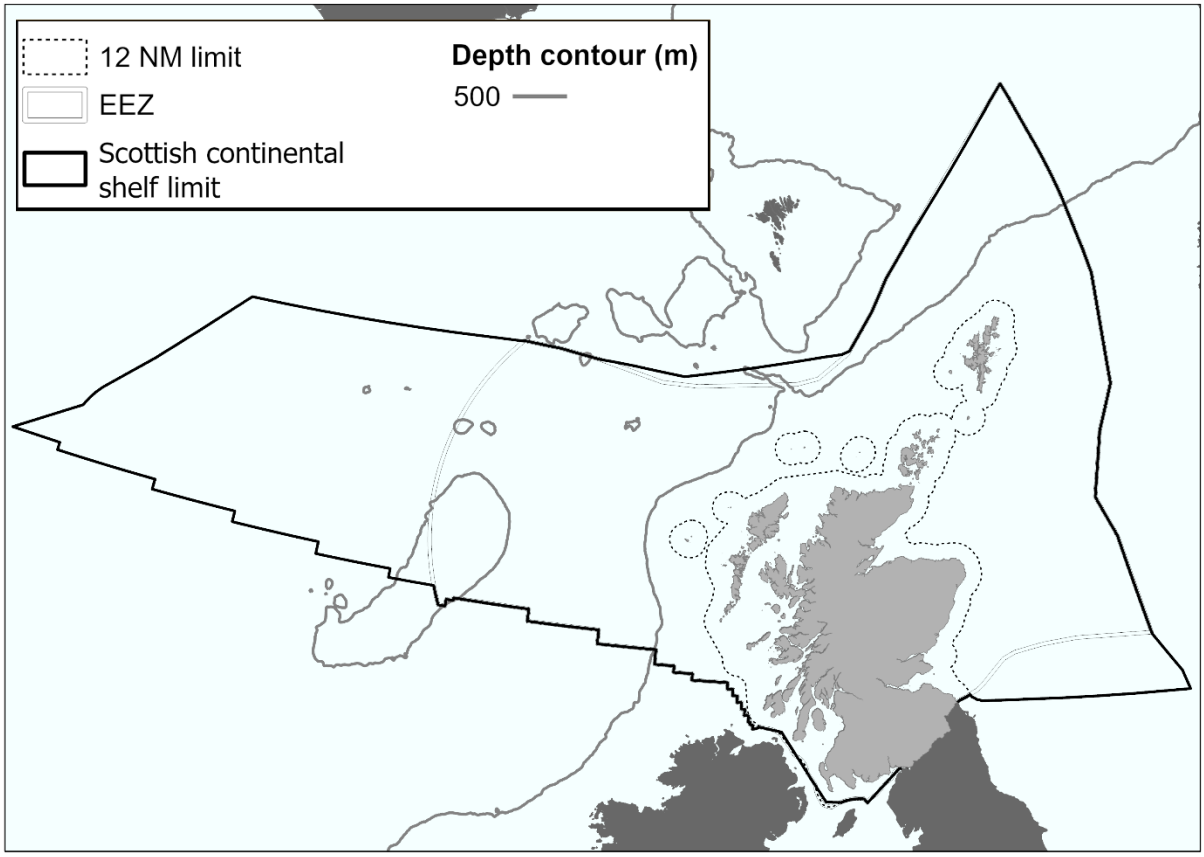

Figure 1 Area covered by the action plan (the Scottish continental shelf limit).

Our approach: Making a difference where it matters most

Our efforts to safeguard seabird populations are multi-faceted and chimes with our Scotland-wide ambitions to transition to net zero, be nature positive, restore and regenerate biodiversity, deliver sustainable fisheries and well-placed marine development, and to achieve and maintain GES for our seas. Collective progress across all sectors to address seabird declines in Scotland is being made with some significant steps in the right direction already implemented or underway (for example, developing technical measures to reduce bycatch in the fishing sector). However more can be done. Seabird conservation requires the coordinated effort of many stakeholders, including government, it's agencies, conservation organisations, marine industries, local communities, academia and the tourism sector. This action plan provides a framework for collaboration and ensures that efforts are well-coordinated, strategically targeted, and backed by evidence. By taking this holistic

[13] Bradbury et al., 2017

approach to seabird conservation, our efforts are focused where they are most needed and can be most effective.

Seabirds are long-lived species that spend most of their time at sea, in many cases only coming to land to breed. This means that seabird populations are affected by a wide range of pressures, some at sea, not just in Scottish waters, and others in coastal environments where they breed, or during migration. These pressures act on seabirds in three main ways; on their food supplies, availability of safe breeding and foraging habitats, or through direct mortality.

This action plan therefore focuses on three core themes for action in Scotland:

1. ensuring plentiful food supplies,
2. restoring and improving seabird habitats and;
3. maximising resilience and survival.

Actions required to support these themes such as research, raising awareness and international collaboration are also included. We recognise that there will be overlap between some themes and their actions.

The action plan has been developed in partnership by a Working Group taking account of stakeholder views from a workshop held in February 2022 and a report on potential actions to support recovery of seabird populations in Scotland (Furness et al. 2024). Actions are focused on addressing the main pressures acting on seabirds whilst in Scottish waters and/or at breeding colonies, as identified in 'The Scottish Seabird Vulnerability Report' (Marine Directorate, 2025) that accompanies this action plan. Each pressure is grouped under the relevant theme that reflects its impact on seabird populations, ensuring a targeted approach to addressing the specific challenges faced by seabirds in Scotland. We recognise that not all of the pressures act in isolation or are necessarily equal in how they affect seabird populations. The identified pressures are also likely to vary over time, space and across seabird species. In recognition of these complexities and the need for a multi-faceted approach to address seabird declines at the scale and pace required, the plan does not attempt to prioritise the pressures.

Climate change is recognised as a contributing factor to declines in global seabird populations and a key driver affecting several of the pressures presented within the action plan. Scotland's ambition to be net zero through the delivery of offshore wind energy has the potential, alongside other measures, to bring benefits to seabird species in the longer term through resilience building. The plan and accompanying vulnerability report recognise offshore wind developments as presenting a threat to seabirds in terms of collision, displacement and barrier effects. This plan acknowledges that there will be difficult decisions to be made in terms of how we balance our offshore wind ambitions and safeguard our seabird populations.

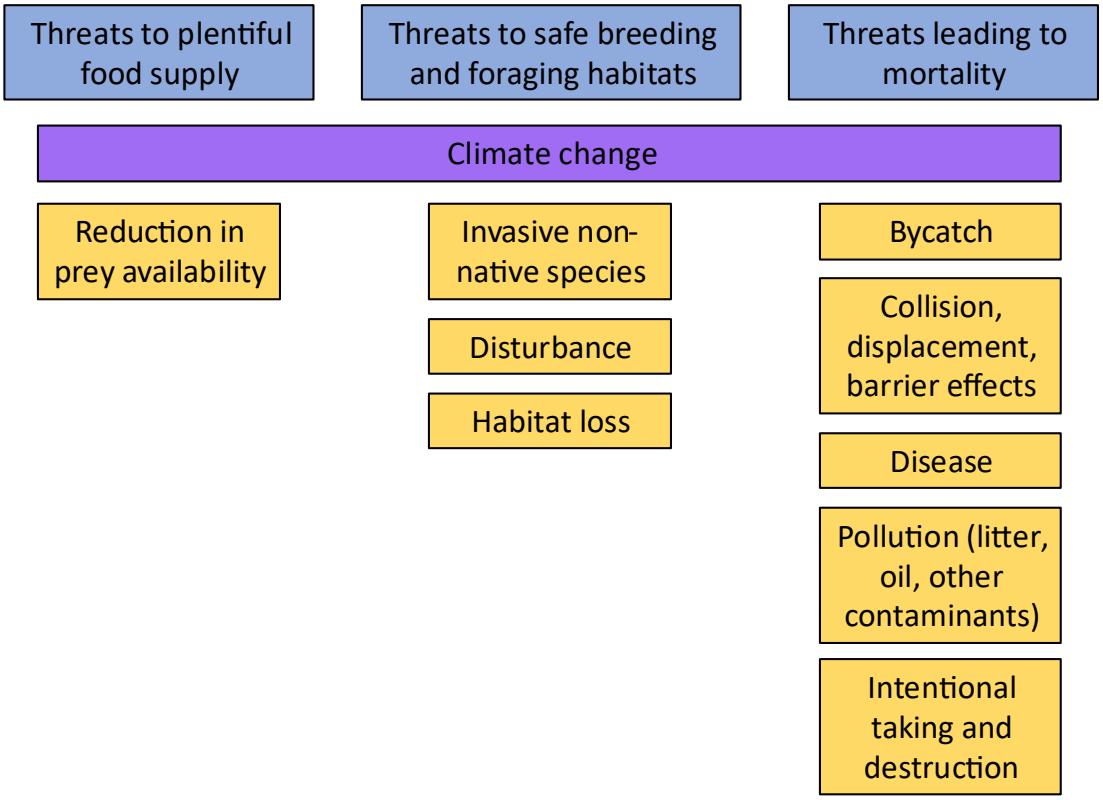

Figure 2 The main pressures and threats acting on seabirds in Scotland affecting the three themes.

Seabird Conservation Actions

Whilst some significant steps forward have been made to address some of the main pressures affecting seabird populations in Scotland, more needs to be done. It is essential to build on these existing efforts, identifying areas where further action can enhance current measures, while also pinpointing new actions that are required to address emerging challenges and ensure the long-term survival of seabirds.

The actions listed below include actions already underway, ones where we can build on existing measures and proposed new actions that could be implemented. The Scottish Government recognises that it has an important role to play in instigating and facilitating opportunities and, where appropriate, implementing some of these vital actions. However, we cannot do this alone, and not all of these actions will be for Government to lead on. Implementation of this action plan will require collaborative working across sectors, stakeholder engagement and partnership working, co-design and new, innovative, ambitious initiatives that a wide range of stakeholders will have a role in identifying, delivering and funding.

Ensuring plentiful food supplies

Depletion of forage fish is a pressure on many seabird species in Scotland. However, the relationship between forage fish and seabirds is complex, shaped by

various environmental and biological factors. Protecting this resource as well as, protecting, restoring, and enhancing the habitats of forage fish can improve their recruitment and long-term abundance, indirectly benefiting seabirds by ensuring a more stable and reliable food source for successful breeding and long-term survival.

Collectively, we are already:

Protecting sandeel populations: through closure of fishing for sandeel in all Scottish waters, which will bring potential benefits to the wider ecosystem.

We can work collaboratively to build resilience in seabird populations with actions to enhance prey availability.

Priority actions include:

- Implement planned fisheries management measures for hydraulic dredging in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) for seabed habitats.
- Take opportunities to restore and enhance fish spawning and juvenile congregation areas to maximise forage fish availability to seabirds.
- Take opportunities to restore and support recovery of benthic habitats such as seagrass meadows and kelp forests that provide important prey fish spawning and juvenile congregation areas.
- Recognising the need to account for seabird consumption on forage fish when setting total allowable catches, take opportunities where possible to influence international discussions to ensure sustainable fisheries.

Restoring and improving seabird habitats

Efforts to combat invasive non-native species (INNS) have demonstrated some success in improving seabird breeding populations. Effective action at national scale to prevent and mitigate the impacts of INNS at colonies is therefore a clear and achievable route to maximise seabird breeding opportunities and success. It will be a key element of building resilience in national seabird populations to other pressures including climate change. By maximising the availability of safe breeding opportunities, we maximise the future capacity of seabirds to capitalise on unpredictable and declining overall prey availability.

Collectively, we are already:

Tackling Biosecurity: 27 of our 29 seabird islands now have biosecurity plans and temporary biosecurity measures in place to monitor for potential incursions. Four incursion response hubs are also in action.

Protecting important seabird breeding and foraging sites: 23 of the seabird species covered by the action plan are protected features of one or more MPAs providing site-based protection, at coastal breeding colonies on land and while at sea.

And have:

Eradicated non-native mammalian predators from three key seabird islands – Canna, Ailsa Craig and the Shiant Isles.

We can work collaboratively to build resilience in seabird populations with actions to enhance safe breeding opportunities.

Priority actions include:

- Establish a Seabird Predator Reduction and Biosecurity Project Advisory Group (PAG) to coordinate, facilitate and develop a programme of work in relation to INNS eradication and biosecurity at seabird colonies.
- Implement a prioritised programme of seabird predator eradication and reduction, that could include areas and islands that would facilitate species range expansion and/or where seabirds have historically been known to breed.
- Implement a prioritised programme of best practice (Prevention, Awareness raising, Surveillance and Incursion response) seabird island biosecurity across the Scottish archipelago.
- Continue to support the work of '[Biosecurity for Scotland]' programme.
- Continue to implement localised predator exclusion management measures at seabird breeding sites where native predators e.g. foxes, corvids are demonstrated to be an issue.
- Consider including standard conditions, where feasible and appropriate, in statutory regulatory permissions (e.g. planning consents, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) consents, Species licence approvals) to incorporate the requirement of a biosecurity plan for new developments/proposals on and around seabird islands where the risk of predator incursions are identified.
- Explore opportunities to implement grazing management control at breeding sites where grazing intensity (e.g. by sheep, deer, rabbits) is considered to be reducing seabird breeding habitat availability or is impacting seabird breeding success.
- Explore opportunities to implement vegetation management where vegetation (e.g. tree mallow and INNS plants) is considered to be reducing seabird habitat availability.

Maximising resilience and survival

Ongoing development and adoption of best practices to mitigate the risks of incidental mortality and injury will remain crucial across marine industries, especially as marine pressures continue to rise and cumulative impacts become more evident. We have the opportunity to take a proactive, strategic approach, implementing actions developed through co-design that strengthen seabird resilience to potential future threats, acknowledging that we may not be able to mitigate all impacts at source as we strive to meet our transition to net zero and be nature positive.

Collectively, we are already:

Supporting bycatch mitigation: Trials on the use of streamers and altered buoyancy regimes are ongoing through the European LIFE funded project, CIBBRiNA and UK Bycatch Monitoring Programme.

Combatting Climate change through delivery of renewable energy, ensuring adverse impacts on seabirds are identified at strategic level through the sectoral marine planning process for Offshore Wind Energy and project level through mitigation and where appropriate, compensation.

Supporting research through the Scottish Marine Energy Research Programme (ScotMER) to identify and address key evidence needs for ornithology to help consent sustainable offshore wind development.

Tackling marine litter: Initiatives are underway from a wide variety of organisations ranging from small community groups to national NGOs. Some of these initiatives have been in existence for many years or decades and play an important part in Scotland's work to tackle marine litter (Marine Litter Strategy for Scotland).

And have:

Published the Scottish Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza in wild birds Response Plan which sets out the approach that the Scottish Government and its agencies will take to respond to an outbreak of HPAI in wild birds.

Removed gulls from the General Licence: Due to concerns around the significant and serious declines in all five gull species that breed in Scotland**,** all gull species were removed from the gull general licence in 2019 and the gull licensing guidance has been updated.

We can work collaboratively to build resilience in seabird populations with actions to reduce incidental mortality.

Priority actions include:

- Develop and adopt effective technical measures for the long-line fleet to reduce seabird bycatch.
- Implement static gear fisheries management measures, where necessary in seabird MPAs (not including creels).
- Develop spatial or technical measures to minimise bycatch in other fisheries where necessary, working collaboratively with the sector.
- Strategic site selection for future marine renewable leasing rounds should continue to minimise impacts on seabirds.
- Continue to improve and use the best available evidence to assess potential impacts on seabird populations from future consent marine renewable developments, with the aim on minimising and mitigating effects where possible and implement effective and timely compensation.
- Develop a ‘Catalogue of marine enhancement measures’, that includes detailed measures for seabirds, which will be used to drive future investment in improving the state of the marine environment.
- Ensure that seabird site protection network captures those areas of most importance to seabirds, are well managed, monitored effectively and protected through enforcement where necessary.
- Review the Scottish wild bird highly pathogenic avian influenza response plan as required.
- Continue to work with the UK Wildlife Disease Core Group in responding to new and emerging wildlife disease threats, including where they involve seabirds.
- Continue to implement and monitor the licensing regime (with regards to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) to those species where control is permitted across all licence types and continue to engage with relevant stakeholders.
- Continue to review the gannet harvest licence annually and adjust limits according to a precautionary approach.
- Continue work to minimise bycatch/ entanglement of seabirds in aquaculture infrastructure and improve techniques to reduce entanglement. Facilitate through increased monitoring, technical and standing advice for industry and regulators/policy makers.

- Reduce sources of litter that impact the coastal and marine environments and support the removal of marine litter through delivery of the Scottish Marine Litter Strategy.

Building the evidence

Science and evidence are key to delivering the action plan. The ambition is to have a coordinated approach across Scotland, and where applicable the UK and internationally, to enable strategic delivery, analysis and publication of scientific data and reports with the aim of supporting management actions directly.

This action plan will capitalise on the vast body of scientific knowledge that already exists by promoting collation and review of information into easily accessible formats to support management actions directly. However, given the critical situation for seabirds in Scotland a precautionary approach will need to be adopted with respect to data completeness. The action plan will enable the facilitation of a prioritised programme of supplementary scientific research and monitoring to address key knowledge gaps and inform adaptive management where appropriate, as well as help coordinate efforts among all relevant partners. This will allow resources and expertise to be combined to improve the efficiency and quality of our delivery.

There remain significant knowledge gaps in our understanding of key areas of seabird science such as the effects of climate change, predator/prey interactions and how species may respond to conservation management applications in a changing climate. Research and monitoring actions are included below where these are fundamental to informing our conservation efforts and/or provide a mechanism to enable a coordinated approach to securing the knowledge we need to help seabird populations to recover and strengthen their resilience to a changing environment.

Collectively, we are:

Delivering world renowned research and science: Undertaking and co-funding research through a range of mechanisms, including the Scottish Marine Energy Research Programme (ScotMER), the Offshore Wind Evidence & Change Programme (OWEC), the Ecological Consequences of Offshore Wind research programme (EcoWIND),the FluMap consortium, UK Seafood Innovation Fund (SIF), Fishing Industry Science Partnerships (FISP), collaboration with the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and via support for applied research through doctoral training programmes.

And have:

Established comprehensive networks and methodologies for seabird monitoring through the Seabird Monitoring Programme and mortality monitoring schemes.

Completed the fourth national seabird census (Seabirds Count, 2023) and the second gannet census: Seabirds Count covered 10,000 UK breeding colonies and 25 species surveyed between 2015 and 2021 to provide a comprehensive update on the status of these populations and gain greater insight into the relationships between them and the pressures they face. Survey work was also completed in 2024 for the second national gannet census (publication due autumn 2025).

We can support and promote collaboration with research and monitoring to inform decision-making.

Priority actions include:

- Continue to support and build on the Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP), including implementing recommendations from the 2024 sampling review and consideration of requirements for integrated population monitoring of seabird abundance, productivity and survival in Scotland.
- Support the repeat of a national seabird census.
- Continue supporting a coordinated approach with all relevant stakeholders to improve the efficiency of seabird monitoring across regulatory and statutory priorities.
- Establish and operate a UK Seabird Science Group to inform the identification of research that will benefit seabird conservation.
- Continue to support a coordinated approach to research projects through ScotMER to improve our understanding of the potential impacts of marine renewable developments on seabirds.
- Identify a mechanism to feedback results from post-consent monitoring to inform the evidence base for potential impacts from renewables.
- Continue to support bycatch monitoring programmes, including the use of remote electronic monitoring, to identify high-risk areas and/or gear types associated with seabird bycatch and to assess the effectiveness of any management measures.
- Undertake a feasibility study to identify options, methodologies and recommendations for seabird re-establishment and reintroductions across Scotland.
- Increase the number of and provide training for seabird monitoring professionals and volunteers, including supporting the maintenance and expansion of the JNCC Volunteer Seabirds at Sea scheme (VSAS).

Celebrating Scotland's seabirds

Many of Scotland's seabird breeding colonies are iconic, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. However, we need to broaden our reach and find new ways to share the story of these birds – why they are so special, what makes Scotland vital to their survival, why they need our help, and how everyone can contribute to protecting Scotland's seabirds.

Collectively we are:

Connecting people with seabirds: Many of Scotland's seabird colonies are rightly regarded as some of the world's finest wildlife spectacles and are protected and managed as National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and/or NGO-managed Nature Reserves, attracting tens of thousands of visitors a year. The Scottish Seabird Centre attracts 175,000 visits a year and engages with a further 5,000 people through its wider conservation, education and outreach activities. A committed network of volunteers also contribute to crucial seabird work (SMP, VSAS, Bird Observatories and ringing groups).

We can work collaboratively to raise awareness of seabirds with actions that will increase understanding and involvement.

Priority actions include:

- Raise awareness of impacts of domestic animals on seabird breeding colonies through dialogue and community initiatives directed towards collective behaviour change.
- Promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code to raise awareness across recreational groups and the tourism industry of the potential to cause disturbance from recreational activities.
- Take opportunities to minimise disturbance at seabird breeding sites (e.g. seasonal staff, guidance) where required.
- Establish a seabird colony site managers network/forum to exchange knowledge transfer, feedback on new and on-going projects/research and improve communication and collaboration between sites.
- Continue to support research knowledge exchange through The Seabird Group.
- Develop a UK Best Practice code for use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) at seabird colonies.
- Develop, publish and promote a Community Consultation Best Practice code for all eradication proposals – with a primary focus on inhabited islands.
- Support and build on the roll-out and development of the Predator Free Certification scheme for boat operators initiated by Biosecurity for Scotland.

- Continue to review and set high standards for seabird ringing and associated research with respect to seabird welfare, ethics and colony biosecurity (specifically around disease management).
- Develop, publish and promote Best Practice codes for reducing light pollution – with primary focus on offshore wind, cruise ships and other brightly illuminated vessels and structures that are anchoring/mooring overnight in vicinity of petrel, shearwater or puffin colonies.
- Improve public and business perceptions around urban gulls.
- Improve public and business attitudes and behaviours around marine and coastal litter.

Making a global contribution

Scotland cannot deliver our 2045 vision in isolation. The distribution of most seabirds covered by this action plan extend well beyond Scottish coastal breeding colonies or waters during the non-breeding season. Seabirds face ongoing pressures outside Scottish waters, often of multinational origin. The UK is party to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of wild animals (CMS) meaning Scotland has a responsibility to conserve migratory birds not just in Scotland but throughout their ranges. While some challenges, such as climate change, require global solutions, others demand stronger international collaboration with countries sharing responsibility for the seabird species covered by this action plan.

Collectively we are:

Engaging and reporting on our global contributions through the OSPAR Convention, Bern Convention, the African-Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (under the Convention on Migratory Species) and together with UK colleagues, leading on developing four of the thematic action plans stemming from the OSPAR Marine Birds Regional Action Plan; Enhanced measures for marine birds, Flyway scale conservation, Offshore wind mitigation/compensation measures and reducing the impact of mammalian predators. Plans developed through these international mechanisms allow collaboration on research, monitoring and management approaches to benefit biogeographical populations of our seabirds and hence optimise the resilience of Scotland’s seabirds to regional and flyway pressures.

We can work collaboratively with our international colleagues to make a difference globally with actions that contribute to and influence international decision making.

Priority actions include:

- Work with Contracting Parties to drive delivery of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan for marine birds.
- Implement the OSPAR bycatch recommendations, working with the international community to share best practice and lessons learned, with the aim of contributing to the understanding, minimising, and where possible eliminating seabird bycatch and entanglement globally.
- Implement actions identified by the Scottish Seabird Conservation Action Plan to maximise potential for moving towards achieving GES for seabirds at the north-east Atlantic scale.
- Work with the international community to influence and establish conservation management options across seabird breeding and non-breeding distributions.

Implementation

Overseeing Delivery - Next Steps

The Scottish Government will establish a Seabird Conservation Delivery Partnership to oversee the delivery and review of progress on the action plan, and which will include representatives from key stakeholders. Through this process, the final list of actions will be subject to ongoing review and adjustment (including smarter and timely targets where appropriate) to take account of emerging scientific evidence and other factors. The Delivery Partnership will operate within the governance framework of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, ensuring alignment and accountability following publication of the action plan. A member of the Delivery Partnership will also represent Scottish seabird interests at the UK seabird co-ordination group that will oversee the progress of seabird conservation across the UK.

Measures of progress and success

Progress in delivering the action plan will be determined by monitoring and reviewing measures of progress and success. Ultimately, however, the true success in achieving the vision of this action plan will be determined by the conservation status of Scottish seabirds in 2045. Progress to achieving this vision therefore needs to be measured by positive changes in seabird populations and their conservation status. Recognising that seabird species are mostly long-lived and slow to reproduce, we need to be realistic about what can be considered improvements, seabird populations are unlikely to bounce-back in the short-term and, recovery will take time. Added to this are the uncertainties around the impacts of climate change on

seabirds, as well as recognising that seabirds are affected by pressures outside of UK waters too.

There are four critical existing assessments which we consider will be instrumental in determining the success of this Action plan:

- **UK Marine Strategy Part 1**[14]**:** The UK Marine Strategy assessments will need to demonstrate some increases in seabird abundance and breeding success to provide confidence in any positive changes reflective of seabird population recovery and increased resilience in terms of achieving GES.
- **Scotland's Marine Assessment (SMA)**[15]: Future SMAs, or equivalents, will need to demonstrate increases in seabird abundance and breeding success to provide confidence in any positive changes reflective of seabird population recovery and increased resilience.
- **National seabird census:** A fifth national census will need to demonstrate positive trends in Scottish seabird breeding populations.
- **Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC):** Future BoCC assessments will need to demonstrate improved conservation statuses of all seabird species currently on the red and amber lists.

Emerging evaluation frameworks associated with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and proposals to establish statutory targets for nature restoration through a Natural Environment Bill may also provide suitable means of monitoring progress.

Funding

The action plan will focus funding from a wide range of sources and provide confidence to funders that they are supporting priority actions for Scotland's seabirds.

To catalyse action at scale to protect and restore Scotland's biodiversity, the Nature Restoration Fund or (successor schemes), the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF) Seabird Resilience Fund will be pivotal in delivering on-the ground positive conservation actions as well as providing a pipeline of

[14] The UK Marine Strategy Part 1 is a UK waters assessment rather than Scottish waters. Whilst it is not straight forward to use this as a primary source, the status of breeding seabirds in the UK will be heavily influenced by Scottish colonies.

[15] An assessment of the condition of the Scottish marine area is required to inform the preparation of a national marine plan under Section 4(b) of the Marine (Scotland) Act, 2010.

evidence to support more innovative solutions. The Crown Estate Scotland's Sustainable Communities Fund also offer opportunities for financial support to aid implementation.

Delivery of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy would also see the creation of a Biodiversity Investment Plan. This will set out the Scottish Governments' assessment of the investment required to deliver a nature positive future and the actions needed to mobilise public, private and philanthropic finance.

The Energy Act 2023 also provides powers for enabling the reform of the offshore marine energy compensatory process to enable greater flexibility in the range of compensatory measures available and ability to establish one or more Marine Recovery Funds to drive delivery of measures. This fund(s) will support compensatory measures projects for seabird species.

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Annex A: Glossary

A guide to terms and acronyms used across the document

- BoCC - Birds of Conservation Concern
- BTO - British Trust for Ornithology
- Bycatch - Incidental non-target species caught in commercial fishing gear.
- GES - Good Environmental Status
- HPAI - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza
- INNS - Invasive Non-Native Species
- JNCC - Joint Nature Conservation Committee
- MPA - Area of sea protected by legislation.
- MPA - Marine Protected Area
- NEAES - OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy
- NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation
- NRF - Nature Restoration Fund
- OSPAR - The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic.
- RSPB - The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- SMA - Scotland's Marine Assessment
- SMEEF - Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund
- SMP - Seabird Monitoring Programme (UK)
- SSSI - Site of Special Scientific Interest
- UAV - Unmanned Automatic Vehicle
- UNCLOS - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

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