

28th September 2026

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Dear Rural Affairs Committee Members,

RE: Inshore Fisheries Evidence Session, Wednesday 30th September

The [Our Seas Coalition](https://ourseas.scot) has a membership of over 160 organisations, spanning community groups, marine-based industries, artists, fishers and charities which advocates for healthier coastal seas and the communities that depend on them.

We are calling for a minimum of 30% of Scotland's inshore waters to be protected from bottom-trawling and dredging to recover biodiversity and enable sustainable lower-impact fishing to continue.

To achieve this recovery, we believe the Scottish Government should prioritise inshore areas for sustainable lower-impact fishing, roll out effective vessel tracking on all fishing boats, ensure a just transition for affected fishing sectors and crucially, **protect 30% of Scotland's inshore waters from higher-impact dredging and trawling.**

Our Seas welcomes the Committee's commitment to an inshore fisheries inquiry and we are pleased that a number of our member organisations have been invited as witnesses at your forthcoming inshore evidence session, Wednesday 30th September.

As a coalition, we believe the key areas your Committee are well-placed to consider include an assessment of Scottish Government's Marine Directorate's (SGMD) success or otherwise of the Implementation of SGMD's **legal obligations** in the management of Scotland's inshore waters (under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, the UK Fisheries Act 2020 and other legislation) and other policy commitments. For example;

- The **Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement Programme (IFMI)**,
- The **National Marine Plan 2**,
- The **inshore MPA/PMF management measures**,
- The **Fisheries Management Plans**
- The **Future Catching Policy**.

In all these policy areas, SGMD has frequently failed in three key ways;

1. Timeliness of Marine Management Measures

There has been limited progress in putting specific marine management measures in place within the timeframes set out in policy or reasonably anticipated from earlier commitments.

As a result, several measures intended to support inshore MPAs and Priority Marine Features remain outstanding, and the expected pace of delivery has not been met.

2. Use of Best Available Scientific Evidence

The processes for obtaining and applying the best available scientific evidence have not consistently supported timely or well-informed decision-making. Although substantial evidence exists from NatureScot and other sources, it has not always been fully utilised or incorporated into policy development in a way that reflects the breadth of scientific understanding.

3. Progress Toward Good Environmental Status (GES)

Progress toward achieving Good Environmental Status, as required under regulation 4 of the Marine Strategy Regulations 2010, has been slower than anticipated. Key descriptors—particularly biodiversity, seafloor integrity, and sustainable use—remain below the levels needed to demonstrate improvement, indicating that current measures have not yet delivered the necessary environmental outcomes.

The Our Seas Coalition believes sustained Committee attention could help unlock long-overdue progress on all these areas of concern to improve ecological recovery, coastal resilience, and the long-term viability of Scotland's inshore fleet.

We look forward to your Committee's consideration of inshore fisheries during the course of this Parliamentary Session and our members stand ready to assist in any way we can.

Yours Sincerely,



Holly Hendry

Our Seas Coalition Coordinator

(Sent on behalf of the Our Seas Campaign Steering Group)