



# Shetland Marine Planning Partnership Newsletter

*Supporting clean, healthy, safe and productive seas in Shetland*



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## Welcome to the Autumn 2023 issue of the Shetland MPP newsletter

As a marine region, after significant delays while we have awaited responses from the Marine Directorate, we hope that progress may be made with adopting our regional marine plan which was publicly consulted on in 2019 and it might progress to adoption in 2024. Since this consultation period the policy landscape in Scotland has continued to evolve. The Marine Directorate continue to gather evidence and consult on the development of National Marine Plan 2, and since the spring newsletter the National Planning Framework 4 has been adopted. Consultation on proposed highly protected marine areas (HPMAs) resulted in an announcement by the Cabinet Secretary that proposals for HPMAs, as consulted on, would not be taken forward.

This newsletter also contains information on a range of projects and plans which have continued to be developed by, or in association with, the Shetland Marine Planning Partnership, UHI Shetland or the Shetland Islands Council, relevant to marine planning.

We hope you enjoy reading about these within the newsletter.

**Rachel Shucksmith**  
Marine Spatial  
Planning Manager  
Shetland UHI



**Simon Pallant**  
Coastal Zone  
Manager  
Shetland Islands  
Council



## In this issue...

### Marine Planning News-

- National Marine Plan 2 update
- Review of aquaculture guidance
- Diverse Values project update
- Response to ECCLR report
- Highly Protected Marine Areas
- New team member
- Searching for Shetland’s lost seagrass

### Invasive Non-native Species-

- New sea-squirt for Shetland
- New reports on the threat of invasive species
- International conference on marine bioinvasions

### Native Species-

- Harbour porpoise PhD update
- Focus Species- *Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi*

### Reports and Publications-

- UHI Shetland’s first policy brief published
- Results of the first Fair Isle inshore fish survey

### Shetland Community Wildlife Group-



- SCWG members clean beaches for MCS and SIF
- Stall at the Cunningsburgh Show

### Projects of Interest-

- Shetland flapper skate tagging project

To get in touch please contact the Marine Planning Team at UHI Shetland

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# Marine Planning Partnership News

## National Marine Plan 2 update

Our previous newsletter highlighted that work on developing the next National Marine Plan (NMP2) had commenced and we focused on the engagement strategy that was published in October 2022.

In June this year, the first National Marine Plan Forum was held and staff from the Marine Planning Partnership attended virtually and participated in workshops on a number of marine related themes. **Presentations from the forum can be viewed on You Tube via the [Scottish Government's Marine Directorate channel](#).**

**On the 25<sup>th</sup> September, the Scottish Government's consultation on the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Report for NMP2 opened. It ran until 30<sup>th</sup> October 2023 and feedback provided during the consultation will be fed into the SEA process. **The SIC and MPP responses can be viewed on the [SIC website](#).****

**The National Marine Plan Engagement Strategy can be viewed [here](#).**



## Diverse Values project update

The diverse value project is now in its third and final year. One aspect of the project is exploring how we connect with and value our local marine and coastal environment in and around Shetland.

The survey is led by Dr Emma McKinley at Cardiff University, working in partnership with UHI Shetland along with other partner organisations, to explore how different communities around the UK value their own local coasts and seas.

**There is still time to participate in the online survey via the link or the QR code.**

[www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/OLinShetland\\_2023](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/OLinShetland_2023)



In 2022 the project also created a short film exploring the values people in Shetland hold in relation to the sea. The film was aired in the Shetland Museum but can be watched online and touches upon the cultural, historic and economic importance of our seas.

**You can watch the film on link below [SMMR Shetland: Reddin Values on Vimeo](#)**



## Response to ECCLR report

In July 2023, after a significant delay, a response from the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition to the ECCLR's (Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee) report on the 'Development and Implementation of Regional Marine Plans in Scotland' was published.

The response reaffirms the Marine Directorates commitment to deliver regional marine planning, and outlines the following steps they will take:

- Closer collaboration with existing Marine Planning Partnerships
- Assist Local Authorities in improving their marine planning expertise
- Evaluate current approaches
- Identify funding opportunities
- Form a Regional Marine Planning Forum

**The full response can be found here:**

[Regional marine plans in Scotland-Scottish Parliament Website](#)



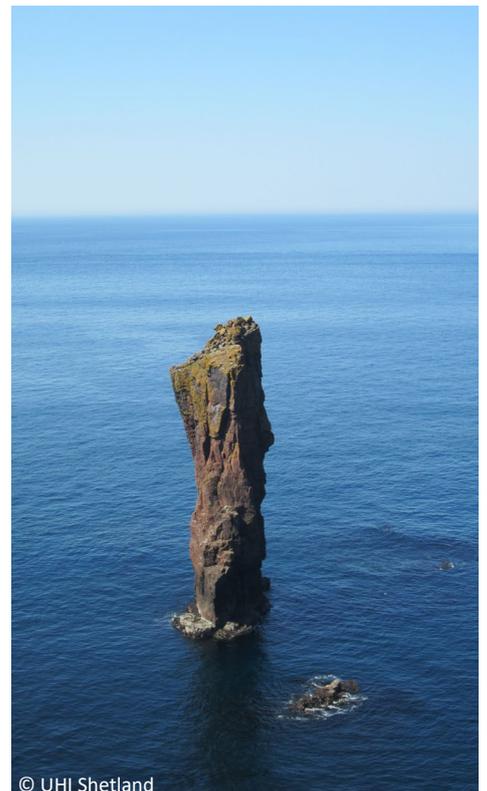
## Review of aquaculture guidance

We previously announced that the Shetland Islands Council marine planning team would soon commence a review of their existing Supplementary Guidance on Aquaculture that was adopted in 2017.

This guidance applies to all planning applications for fish farming development, which the Council has authority to issue planning permission for under the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act. It includes general policies and specific

policies relating to finfish and shellfish development, which the Council uses to determine planning applications.

We intend to take a report to the Council's Development Committee later this year to seek their agreement to commence an initial stage of consultation to seek views and gather evidence, before drafting the updated guidance in 2024. This will then be subject to a formal period of public consultation.



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# Marine Planning Partnership News

## Highly Protected Marine Areas

Our last newsletter provided information on the Scottish Government's HMPA consultation that ran from December 2022 until March 2023. On the 27<sup>th</sup> March 2023, Shetland Islands Council provided a response to the consultation, and strongly opposed a number of aspects of the proposals.

In June 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Transport, Net Zero and Just Transition announced in the Scottish Parliament that the proposals for HPMAs, as consulted on, would not be taken forward. This was based on initial analysis of consultation responses

and feedback from engagement with stakeholders.

In her statement, the Cabinet Secretary committed to developing a new pathway and timetable for enhancing marine protection, in line with the Government's draft Biodiversity Strategy ambition for Scotland to be nature-positive by 2030. She also pledged to renew the Government's focus on community-led marine conservation and engaging with local people to co-develop our approach to enhanced marine protection in Scotland.

## New team member at UHI Shetland

Tanya recently joined the Marine Spatial Planning Team at UHI Shetland as a post-graduate Marine Scientist, having completed her MSci (Hons) in Marine Vertebrate Zoology from Bangor University in 2019. Her research has encompassed a diverse range of projects from habitat modelling of Eurasian Otters to benthic taxonomy and ascertaining the impact of rising carbon levels on sea urchin reproduction to assessing the use of high-energy tidal sites by Harbour Porpoises. Tanya also volunteered as a marine mammal medic for BDMLR, where she has rescued over 100 seals and assisted in the refloating of numerous cetaceans ranging from Harbour Porpoises to Fin Whales.

Currently, her research primarily focuses on enhancing our understanding of habitats in Shetland (and beyond). Recognising the intricate web of interactions that define marine ecosystems, her studies aim to draw correlations between these habitats and various marine activities and users. A particular focus is placed on the realm of fisheries – a vital sector with multi-faceted interactions with marine habitats – and analysing the

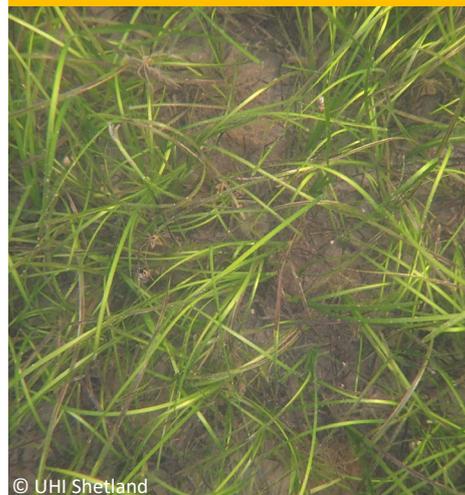
high encounter areas of fisheries with marine habitats. Tanya's work encompasses both hands-on and analytical work. Conducting marine surveys, gathering data firsthand from the marine environment, providing a holistic view of the current state of these habitats. Furthermore, she leverages modelling techniques to predict potential habitat coverage to inform conservation.

In addition, Tanya is also currently invested in biotope coding the seabed surrounding Shetland. Utilising drop-down video footage, she is able to analyse and categorise the seabed into its diverse and intricate biotopes. This process not only shines a light on the current state of these biotopes but serves as an important repository of information for future research initiatives. She will also be working to identify key benthic habitats within the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research MPA.



*Welcome  
Tanya!*

## Searching for Shetland's lost seagrass



© UHI Shetland

The marine spatial planning team at UHI Shetland are running a two-year project to map the distribution of Shetland's seagrass beds and help fill data gaps identified in the SIRMP Environmental Assessment. Funded by the [Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund \(SMEEF\)](#), the project aims to conduct aerial drone surveys to map known and historic records of seagrass, as well as working with local swimmers and snorkellers to map their size and assess the condition of the existing beds.

Seagrass is a type of flowering grasses in the same family as terrestrial grass. Eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) is found in the subtidal and can form extensive beds, which provide a variety of ecological services including and stabilising sediments, acting as nursery habitat for fish including commercial species and improving water quality, as well as being championed for their ability to store carbon and act as blue carbon habitats.

In Shetland, the only known eelgrass beds are now found in Whiteness Voe. Historic records from the Vadills and around the Burra isles of eelgrass beds are now thought to be lost, but we don't know why they disappeared. We are hoping to identify the condition of the remaining beds to prevent further loss.

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# Invasive Non-native Species

## New reports on threat of invasive species

Two new important reports on non-native species have been published in the last month.

The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) have published the IPBES Invasive Alien Species Assessment, which identifies the global threat posed by invasive alien species. Globally, over 37,000 non-native species are thought to have been moved to new regions. The report states that the threat of harmful non-native species is often ignored until it is too late, with invasive species playing a major role in 60% of species extinctions and causing severe impacts to people's quality of life and food resources.

The full report can be downloaded from the [IPBS website](#)



In Scotland, the Horizon Scanning and Pathway Analysis report for Scotland identifies the species most likely to arrive in Scotland in the near future. The three marine species identified in the top 30 high-impact species were the slipper limpet, American lobster, and a red algae. Vessel stowaways, ballast water, and hull fouling identified as important maritime pathways for the movement of species.

The full report can be downloaded from the [Scottish Government's website](#)



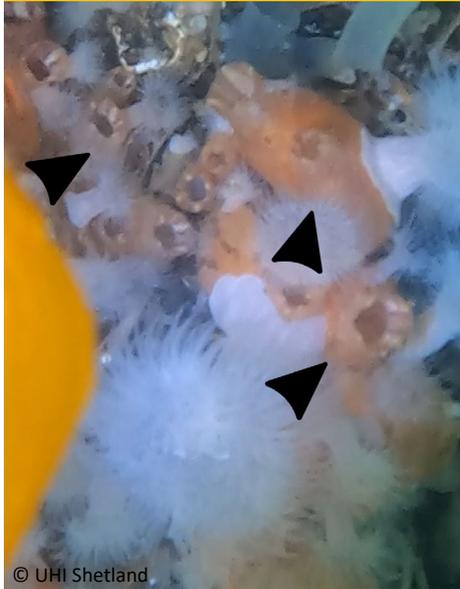
## Download our INNS guide

Download our INNS identification guide [here](#) or scan the QR code and help us monitor and limit the impact from INNS in Shetland.

We also have range of resources to help marine users minimise the spread of INNS on the marine planning pages of the UHI Shetland website, scan the QR code or click [here](#).



## A new sea-squirt for Shetland



A novel marine non-native species has been confirmed as present in Shetland. The Compass sea-squirt *Asterocarpa humilis* has been detected in Scalloway, Lerwick and Yell.

Found attached to hard substrate and identified in part by the white stripes on its siphons, the sea squirt is unlikely to cause a large environmental impact but may spread rapidly between sites now it is established in Shetland. It was first found in the south of the UK in 2009 and in Orkney in 2014, so has spread quickly around the country.

It is a reminder of the importance of good biosecurity practices in preventing the arrival of novel species, demonstrating the potential for the spread of new and harmful species remains. More information can be found in the Shetland Biosecurity Plan or on the [Non-native Species Secretariat website](#).

## International conference for marine bioinvasions

In May, Rebecca travelled to the International Conference for Marine Bioinvasions (ICMB-XI) in Baltimore, USA to present work from the UHI Shetland annual monitoring of marine non-native species programme in Shetland.

The conference attracted over 200 attendees from six continents, and it was great to compare and discuss methods for researching marine invasive species, discuss commonalities between countries, and learn about the impacts of marine invasives across the world from the Canadian arctic to New Zealand.

The conference represented a great opportunity to present the important biosecurity work taking place in Shetland and Orkney to an international audience, with Dr Jenni Kakkonen from the Orkney Islands Council Harbour Authority also presenting.



## Get in touch

For more information on marine invasives and biosecurity or to send us your records, email Becky on [marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk)

**Becky Giesler**  
Marine Planning Officer  
UHI Shetland



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## Important Marine Species and Habitats

### Harbour porpoise PhD update

PhD student, Sophie Smith has expanded her monitoring of harbour porpoise around Shetland within South Nesting Bay and Mousa Sound.

As harbour porpoise exclusively produce Narrow Band High Frequency (NBHF) clicks to help with navigation, prey capture and communication, such sounds can be utilized to monitor the species via passive acoustic monitoring (PAM) methods.

Specifically, PAM devices called FPODs have been deployed which are fully automated and static monitoring systems that detect porpoises, dolphins and other toothed whales by recognising the trains of echo-location clicks. The data collected can further be filtered via software and algorithms to focus on subject species.

The use of acoustic monitoring systems will help towards a more detailed understanding of harbour porpoise occurrence and distribution where land-based surveys have limitations. This will further support Shetland marine regions to be fundamental areas towards the conservation of harbour porpoises.

For more information about the research being conducted and how you can get involved in data collection, email Sophie on [sophie.smith@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:sophie.smith@uhi.ac.uk).

Sophie would like to thank Blueshell Mussels for assistance and use of resources to deploy acoustic devices.



### Focus species- *Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi*



Austin Taylor © Shetland Islands Council

*Ascophyllum nodosum ecad mackayi*, known locally as crofter's wig is a globally rare and rather interesting seaweed. It is a form of egg wrack (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) but exists solely in a free-living form. It gets its name, crofter's wig, from the wig-shaped masses it forms.

This ecad of *Ascophyllum* develops from broken fragments of the commonly found *Ascophyllum nodosum* where, in extremely sheltered conditions, grows unattached in large mats along the intertidal zone. Conditions need to be very stable with little to no wave action and there will often be freshwater run-off creating a brackish environment.

These *mackayi* mats have been classified by NatureScot as one of 81 Priority Marine Features (PMF) and is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species (UKBAP). The complex 3D masses *mackayi* create can become very humid providing an important habitat for a range of mid-shore organisms that would struggle to survive in the sediment that typically makes up the sheltered areas *mackayi* grows.

In Shetland there are known rafts of *mackayi* within The Vadills SAC and Lera Voe. These Shetland records may

represent the northern most extent of this species.

If you think you may have spotted *mackayi* you can get in touch with the team at UHI Shetland at [marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk)



Austin Taylor © Shetland Islands Council

### Download our guide to important marine species

To be able to monitor and record these species we need accurate and up-to-date information on their distribution around Shetland.

You can help by downloading our guide to important marine life in Shetland [HERE](#) or scan the QR code.



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## Reports and Publications

### UHI Shetland's first Policy Brief published

The Marine Spatial Planning team at UHI Shetland have recently published the first policy briefing in a series set to inform local decision makers on current issues and research within Shetland's marine environment.

The brief entitled "Just transition to net zero: creating a process that fully accounts for social justice" highlights the need for a transition process from fossil fuels to marine renewable energy that fully accounts for all three justice principles: distributional, procedural and recognitional justice within both energy generation and consumption.

This energy transition can create winners (those set to benefit) and losers (those impacted negatively) and so mechanisms need to be put in place to consider the 'justness' of the process and outcome for all parties.

Current Scottish Government just transition documentation focuses on a just outcome for all (distributive

justice) focussed on energy consumption. However, to create a fully just energy transition, it is vital to recognise the importance of the process of transition (recognitional and procedural justice).

By using the fishing industry as a case study, it was found that the process of just transitioning has improved over time with fishers gaining increased representation, indicating improvements in procedural justice. However, it also highlighted areas where there were significant barriers to achieving a fully just transition.

By improving the process of energy transitions and fully recognising all parties involved along with the outcome, a fully just transition pathway can be created which can be used for energy transitions but also within wider management challenges, marine and land processes, and areas of policy development to ensure social justice is achieved.

The initial research was conducted by Inne Withoutack as part of her PhD at UHI Shetland and subsequently published in the [Energy Research & Social Science journal](#).

The full policy brief can be downloaded from the [MSP pages of UHI Shetland's website](#).



### Results published from the first Fair Isle inshore fish survey

The first Fair Isle inshore fish survey was conducted during July 2022 as part of the research being carried out under the Fair Isle Demonstration and Research Marine Protected Area (DR MPA) and results were published earlier this year in a report by UHI Shetland's Fisheries team.

Data collection was conducted by UHI Shetland staff aboard the 12 m MFV Atlantia II (LK 502) using the same methodology and trawl gear as used in the Shetland inshore fish survey carried out since 2011 allowing for comparisons to be made.

Results showed the catches were dominated by elasmobranchs, particularly spurdog (*Squalus acanthias*). And the average catch rates of spurdog, flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius*), and lesser

spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus canicular*) were substantially higher than those in the Shetland inshore fish survey.

Of the commercial species, cod (*Gadus morhua*) was the most significant in terms of weight; however, haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*) was the highest in terms of number followed by cod and lemon sole (*Microstomus kitt*). Some notable species, for example sandeel (*Ammodytes*), were not observed and there was little evidence of significant juvenile populations of commercially important fish species.

Stomach samples were also taken, and diet analysis showed contributions from eight major prey groups with, Norway pout (*Trisopterus esmarkii*) being by far the most important diet component overall.

In nearshore areas unsuitable for trawling, baited remote underwater video (BRUV) landers were deployed. The video footage showed a variety of habitat types and 17 mobile species were observed to be present, including some fish species not sampled by the trawl. Foraging seabirds were also observed in the footage.

The Fair Isle Inshore Fish Survey has been successfully repeated again this summer with analysis of the most recent data ongoing. There are plans to repeat and expand the survey in subsequent years which would further inform management of the Fair Isle DR MPA.

The full report is available to download on the [UHI website](#)



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© Ian Napier

## Shetland Community Wildlife Group News

### Beach litter surveys for MCS beach clan and Scottish Islands Federation

Volunteers joined SCWG members and UHI Shetland staff to clean 2 stretches of shoreline in Scalloway recently. The surveys were part of our annual contribution to the Marine Conservation Society's Great British Beach Clean.

This year the data is also being used by the Scottish Islands Federation (SIF) who are collaborating with the MCS. They are using the MCS data, along with some additional data collected during the beach cleans to further investigate marine litter impacts specific to Scottish Islands.

As part of SIFs marine litter project, beach stretches are cleaned once a quarter. There are 4 beach stretches currently included in the survey programme:

- St Nininan's
- North Roe
- Scalloway
- Sands of Sound

However, new survey stretches are very much welcomed.

SIF are also interested in hearing from anyone who would like to volunteer to help out on these quarterly surveys or from community groups or local

businesses who would like to become ambassadors for a stretch of shoreline and organise their own SIF surveys.

To get in touch with SIF email Jessica [Jmathermarinelitter@gmail.com](mailto:Jmathermarinelitter@gmail.com)

Find out more about the Scottish Islands Federation and their marine litter project on their [website](#).



### Visit to the Cunningsburgh Show



© UHI Shetland



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In August we attended the annual Cunningsburgh Show to promote the citizen science work being carried out by the Shetland Community Wildlife Group and UHI Shetland and encourage Shetland residents and visitors to get involved.

This year we focused on 3 key areas:

- The Shetland porpoise survey
- Mapping Shetlands seagrass
- Flapper skate tagging project

It was great to meet everyone and see how much passion there is for Shetland's marine wildlife within the local community.

### Get in touch

We would love to hear from anyone who would like to get involved in the group or has ideas for projects or leaflets that would be beneficial. So please get in touch.

**Kate Allan**  
SCWG  
Coordinator



[shetlandcommunitywildlife@outlook.com](mailto:shetlandcommunitywildlife@outlook.com)

[shetlandcommunitywildlife.org](http://shetlandcommunitywildlife.org)



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### Shetland flapper skate tagging project

The Marine Science team at UHI Shetland were recently successful in securing funding from the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF) to run a two-year project tagging Europe's largest skate species, the flapper skate, in the seas around Shetland.

They will spend time tagging as many flapper skate as possible with the hope of receiving reports from commercial fishers and hobby anglers when a tagged skate has been recaptured.

The flapper skate (*Dipturus intermedius*) is the largest and most endangered skate species in Scottish waters. They can grow up to 2.85m in length and, due to this, are often referred to as 'barn door skate'.

We know they are distributed across the eastern North-Atlantic, northern North-Sea including Orkney and Shetland, northwest coast of Scotland, and the West coast of Ireland. But we currently, know very little about their movements around Shetland.

This lack of data means that the behaviour and distributions of flapper skate in Shetland are poorly understood. The purpose of this project is to address these knowledge gaps through collaboration with anglers and industry.

The collection of vital baseline data

will help the team at UHI Shetland better understand the population dynamics, distribution, movement, and critical habitats of flapper skate in Shetland.

Tagging will mainly take place aboard UHI Shetland's survey vessel, *Atlantia II* but to increase coverage the team are looking to join anglers on some of their trips to tag their skate catches. If you are an angler and would be interested in help please get in touch.

The team have also been deploying cameras on baited landers to observe skate behaviour at the seabed. Footage is viewed by the team once back at the office and will help determine preferred habitats and give an insight into their behaviour.

### CAN YOU HELP?

#### REPORT TAGGED FLAPPER SKATE IN SHETLAND



If you catch a tagged flapper skate:

1. Return it to sea alive
2. Share the details

- TAG NUMBER
- DATE
- LOCATION (GRID REFERENCE IF POSSIBLE)
- LENGTH

Tel: **01595 772000**

WhatsApp: **07385 433508**

Email: [tags.shetland@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:tags.shetland@uhi.ac.uk)

**UHI | SHETLAND**



This project is supported by the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF).



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This newsletter has been produced by UHI Shetland on behalf of the Shetland Marine Planning Partnership.

The development of the Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan is supported by funding from Shetland Islands Council and Marine Scotland. If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter please contact us via email: [marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:marineplan.shetland@uhi.ac.uk)

Electronic copies and past issues of the newsletter can be found on the [UHI Shetland website](http://UHI Shetland website)



The Shetland Islands Regional Marine Plan and more information on marine planning in Shetland can be found on the Marine Spatial Planning pages of the UHI Shetland website [here](#).

Contact the Marine Spatial Planning Team on:

**01595 772000**

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For more information on SIC marine and coastal planning visit their website [here](#) or contact them on:

**01595 744293**

[marine.planning@shetland.gov.uk](mailto:marine.planning@shetland.gov.uk)



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