



Wester Ross MPA © Neil MacGregor

The Wester Ross Marine Protected Area Guide

The Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA) was designated in July 2014 to protect diverse and fragile seabed habitats and to enable the recovery of protected species like maerl (a pink seaweed) and flame shell beds. Maerl and flame shell beds are vital to the health of the local marine ecosystem, and they support local fisheries such as scallops, cod and keystone species like herring. Within the intricate mosaic of tidal bays, sea lochs and scattered island channels, the MPA encompasses a host of Priority Marine Features (PMFs), including kelp forests, burrowed mud with seapens, burrowing sea cucumbers and northern feather stars, which have MPA protection. Other important PMFs include seagrass meadows, horse mussels, salmon and sea trout. The coastal environment also supports a wide range of sea birds and marine mammals.

Many of these species are unique to Scotland, and the Wester Ross MPA is one of the few areas in Scotland with such exceptional marine biodiversity, still partly intact. Indeed, the abundance of maerl beds within the Wester Ross MPA are of global significance.



Flame shells © Andy Jackson



Scallop hidden in maerl bed © Andy Jackson

Fisheries management measures for the Wester Ross MPA were ratified in 2016 through an official *Marine Conservation Order*. This involves an MPA-wide ban on scallop dredging, giving umbrella protection to the ecosystem, which benefits marine tourism, low impact fishing and angling. Unfortunately, illegal fishing within the protected area threatens the unique and fragile marine environment, but *you* can make a difference. With the help of this guide, you can help us protect our beautiful sea and ensure its survival for future generations.



Kelp forest © SNH, SNH Flickr

How to help protect the MPA?

Simple actions and everyday choices can go a long way. Buy local and low-impact seafood such as lobsters and crabs, and be sure to ask for creel caught langoustine (prawns) and dive caught scallops. Avoid any seafood that has been caught by dredging, as this fishing method causes extensive damage to the seabed.



Herring spawn on maerl © Andy Jackson

Scallop dredgers have been banned from the entire Wester Ross MPA in order to protect the fragile marine life, while trawlers have been restricted to particular zones. The MPA protection benefits low-impact scallop divers and creel fisheries. It also benefits wild fish species such as herring, salmon and sea trout, as well as seabirds and sea mammals such as otters, dolphins, porpoise and whales. Choosing local and sustainably caught seafood therefore helps to minimise the impact on the marine environment, and it also supports local businesses and coastal communities.



Sustainable scallops © Keltic Seafare



Take 3 For the Sea: become a sea protector by picking up and recycling at least 3 pieces of litter, when you walk home. Finally, read the **K.I.P.P.E.R.** guide on the next two pages to familiarise yourself with the Wester Ross MPA zones and what to do if you witness illegal or suspicious fishing activity within the protected area.

Wester Ross Marine Protected Area

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT MEASURES

-  Demersal trawl and dredge prohibited
-  Dredge prohibited. Demersal trawl (except beam trawl) permitted subject to conditions
-  Protected area

	Dredge	Demersal Trawl
Fishing grounds before measures (sq km)	32	254
Fishing grounds after measures (sq km)	0	180
Percentage of grounds still available (%)	0.0%	70.9%

Annual value of fisheries (£)	£1.6 million
Estimated value affected (£)	£0.24 million
Total revenue of 108 affected vessels (£)	£27.7 million
Overall impact (%)	0.88%

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Map detailing the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area zones © Joshua Rex. Contains information from Scottish Government (Marine Scotland) licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

The K.I.P.P.E.R. guide

The Wester Ross MPA stretches all the way from Rhu Coigach in the north to Rudha Reidh. It includes the Summer Isles archipelago, Loch Broom, Little Loch Broom, the Gruinard Bay and Loch Ewe. South of this is Loch Gairloch, which is closed to mobile fishing gear under the Inshore Fishing (Scotland) Act 1984.

Marine Scotland, a civil service directorate within the Scottish Government, is responsible for ensuring the protection of Scotland's seas. Within the Wester Ross MPA, there is a complete ban on dredging. However, despite the *Marine Conservation Order*, there has been illegal fishing activity within the MPA. Illegal dredging and trawling can set back vital species recovery and damage fish stocks, undermining low-impact fisheries. A single dredging incident can cause irrevocable harm to marine life for decades.

The penalty for non-compliance is severe, but Marine Scotland has limited resources with which to monitor Scottish MPAs. To successfully deter and prevent illegal fishing within protected areas, community support is vital. Court quality evidence is required to prosecute infringement, i.e. the more witnesses with detailed and accurate evidence of the same incident the better. You can help report suspicious activity in the Wester Ross MPA by following the **K.I.P.P.E.R.** guide:

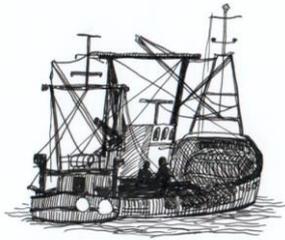
- **Know the MPA zones**
- **Identify and describe vessel and activity**
- **Photograph or video with land visible in foreground and background where possible**
- **Place your own location and the vessel location on a chart or map**
- **Exact time and date**
- **Report to Marine Scotland**

With your help, the Wester Ross MPA can benefit all and produce healthy, diverse and productive seas. This sustains and creates jobs for the coastal communities, and all those who live and work in the NW Highlands.

How to follow the K.I.P.P.E.R. guide

Know the MPA zoning. The darker blue area inside the yellow MPA boundary shows the full Wester Ross MPA, but there are two types of zones. Dredging and demersal trawling is prohibited within the entire MPA, except for the area marked by large yellow dots, which is open to some conditional trawling (except for beam trawl).

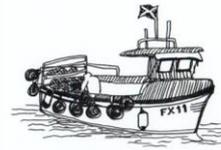
Identify and describe vessel and activity. Marine Scotland need the following information to identify vessels: 1) boat type (see descriptions below); 2) colour; 3) estimated length; 4) registration letters (if visible); 5) is the fishing gear stowed, or is it in the water (if visible); 6) the speed of the vessel (is it towing gear or making passage, the latter is not illegal). But how do you tell what kind of fishing boat you are looking at? Here are a few examples:



Scallop dredger; dredge lines come from protruding “arms”. These boats can work at night and are often lit up. They are barred from the entire area.



Prawn trawler; boats move slowly, and the lines to the net are usually over the stern or to the sides. They are only permitted in select zones.



An example of a **creel boat;** these little boats fish with fleets of creels and use marker buoys. They can work anywhere within the MPA.

Photograph. To produce evidence, please take photos or video to identify the vessel (with registration number) and locate it. Take care to get a good position and clear photographs from several angles, and try to include land in the fore and background of the photograph to show the vessel's location.

Place location on a chart/map. If possible, take a compass bearing from your known GPS position (e.g. using your mobile phone), then move several hundred metres away and take another bearing or photograph with land markers on it. This will give a better indication of the boat's true position.

Exact date and time. Take a note of the time and date. If your photo or video also has this information on it, then that will be very helpful as evidence for the authorities.

Report. Reports of suspected fishing vessel infringements should be made directly to Marine Scotland Fisheries Compliance Office in Edinburgh: tel. **0131 271 9700** (24 hours). If possible, call while you are viewing the activity. If you are in doubt about whether the boat is fishing or not, please contact Marine Scotland to verify your concern.

Email UKFMC@gov.scot with the **K.I.P.P.E.R.** details and photo evidence as above.

In case you do not have adequate photo or video evidence, you may also fill out a compliance form online here: www.marine.Scotland.gov.uk/mscomplianceForms/

If you suspect suspicious fishing activity within the Wester Ross MPA, please also email “Sea Change, Wester Ross” at news@seachangewesterross.co.uk. This will alert a local group, who can help you collect evidence.

This **K.I.P.P.E.R.** guide has been prepared with collaboration and support from:



Coastal Communities Network
Scotland



North Minch Shellfish Assoc

To watch a film of the beautiful species that the Wester Ross MPA protects, search online for **The Bountiful Sea: The Story of the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area**, or find the film directly at: <https://vimeo.com/163831259>.