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## PROTECTION – OR JUST PAPER PARKS?

Four new Marine Protected Areas are proposed by the Scottish Government: the 10,000 sq km Sea of the Hebrides MPA; the smaller North East Lewis and nearby Shiant East Bank MPAs; and the Southern Trench MPA off the Aberdeenshire and Moray coasts.

All are supposed to protect a range of animals and features, and data collected by HWDT's teams will be crucial in protecting Minke whales and basking sharks in the Sea of the Hebrides, and Risso's dolphins off Lewis.

The Scottish Government is consulting on how they should be defined, and designation does mean some constraints on development. After that there will be lengthy debate over "management measures", controlling activity with the MPA areas, with the battle lines likely to be drawn between conservation campaigners and the fishing industry.

The consultation document suggests a cost of £14m to the oil and gas, power transmission and fishing industries from the strictest likely control measures, although it says the benefits to the economy could be far greater.

Nick Underwood of Scottish

conservation charity Open Seas fears the MPAs will be designated but won't have the rules in place needed to regulate damaging activity. "These sites are already long delayed – there have been worrying delays in the implementation of these MPAs," he says. "These sites need to be designated as soon as possible with meaningful management. Until that management is in place these are just going to be paper parks."

Elena Balestri, science policy officer for the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, says: "Every level of protection needs to be based on scientific evidence.

"As long as the fishing industry is kept in the loop and in the process and as long as the views and experience of the fishermen and the overlap between protection and the fishing grounds is minimised, then we are in favour of protection of cetaceans and marine mammals."

A Scottish Government spokesperson said: "Once designated, these sites will receive new levels of protection which mean decision makers have a legal responsibility to consider the effects of activities on the sites and features."