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Fishing is banned at wildlife-rich reef after dredging

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A WILDLIFE rich reef which was wrecked by scallop dredging is to receive permanent protection from fishing.

Ministers had issued a temporary order banning mobile fishing on Loch Carron on Scotland's north-west coast after the incident in 2017.

Divers who visited the reef, which is a nursery ground for scallops, found the area had been "intensively" dredged.

Conservationists said the announcement was good news but that many more fragile habitats

remain unprotected. The Marine Protected Area (MPA) for Loch Carron will come into force on May 19, meaning fishermen operating trawlers or dredging boats will not be able to fish.

It will mirror the area covered by existing emergency closure, with the exception of Plockton harbour, where there is no evidence of a reef.

Environmental group Open Seas has been calling for dredging to be banned around Scotland's coast because of the damaging impact it can have on the sea bed. But fishing organisations say the move is unnecessary.

Nick Underdown, from Open

Seas, said: "This permanent protection is fantastic news and is an investment in the future health of our fisheries.

"But piecemeal protection is not enough and until the Scottish Government brings forward its promised measures to protect the full extent of our coastal waters from these fishing methods we will not see the regeneration that our rural communities so desperately need."

Loch Carron is home to the world's largest-known flame shell bed with an estimated 250 million brightly-coloured molluscs.

The scallop dredger which caused the damage was not operating

illegally since the area had no protected designation.

But it left the sea bed littered with broken shells and led to calls for dredging to be banned completely.

Fishing organisations say protections should be in place for "examples" of sea features like flame shell reefs, rather than all of them.

Elena Balestri, science policy officer for the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, said: "The question isn't whether there should be more protection, the answer is that there should an appropriate level of protection. We are not against protection where there is a scientific basis for it."



■ A flame shell bed. One was devastated by scallop dredging.