

2026 SCOTTISH ELECTIONS: Manifesto Asks

WHALE AND
DOLPHIN
CONSERVATION



Photo: WDC/CharliePhillips



Whale and Dolphin Conservation is calling for:



Launch the long-overdue public consultation on fisheries management for inshore Marine Protected Areas within the first 100 days of the next Scottish Parliament

Why it's needed:

Introduction of protections for Scotland's inshore MPAs have been delayed for nearly a decade. Continued delays mean damaging fishing activities can still take place in sites designated to protect important species and habitats, including whales, dolphins and porpoises. This undermines the purpose of MPAs, weakens progress towards Good Environmental Status, and erodes confidence in Scotland's marine governance. Launching the consultation is an essential first step towards delivering effective, evidence-based management and ensuring MPAs provide real protection.



Phase out or ban the most damaging fishing practices, such as bottom trawling and gillnets, in all Marine Protected Areas

Why it's needed:

According to WDC's 2024 research, based on publicly available data, in 91% of cetacean MPAs, fishing methods that are known to be harmful to whales and dolphins can be permitted, such as, gillnets, seine nets and trawling. Without urgent action, MPAs are failing to provide the protection they are intended to ensure.



Introduce and enforce statutory piling noise limits for offshore windfarm construction to protect whales, dolphins and porpoises including within Marine Protected Areas

Why it's needed:

Pile driving during offshore wind construction can produce intense impulsive noise that can cause auditory injury, disturbance and displacement from important habitats for cetaceans. Many offshore wind developments overlap with MPAs designated to protect whales, dolphins and porpoises yet noise pollution remains largely unmanaged. Clear, precautionary noise limits — backed by monitoring and effective mitigation — are essential to ensure offshore wind expansion does not undermine Scotland's nature commitments, species recovery targets or the purpose of MPAs. These noise limits should be UK wide and align with any noise limits introduced in English and Welsh waters to allow for a consistent approach to management.



**LET'S TURN DOWN
OCEAN NOISE**



Photo: WDC/CharliePhillips



Commit to a strategic, cross-sector approach to managing and reducing harmful underwater noise across Scotland's seas

Why it's needed:

Underwater noise from activities such as shipping, offshore construction and seismic surveys is a significant and growing pressure on the marine environment, with well-evidenced impacts on whales, dolphins and porpoises including disturbance, displacement and increased stress. Despite legal protections for cetaceans and commitments to achieve Good Environmental Status, underwater noise remains poorly regulated and managed. A coordinated approach — including a clear action plan, monitoring and adaptive management — is needed to reduce noise at source and resulting risks posed to marine wildlife from noise pollution.



Tackle abandoned and lost fishing gear through producer responsibility and free disposal

Why it's needed:

Lost and discarded fishing gear continues to threaten marine wildlife including whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals, while damaging habitat, and polluting Scotland's seas. Many fishers lack affordable, accessible ways to dispose of end-of-life gear responsibly. The next Scottish Government must introduce an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for fishing gear, provide free disposal and recycling at all Scottish ports and harbours, and expand Fishing for Litter programmes to prevent marine pollution at source.

Photo: Mark Duffy from Getty Images



WDC - Whale and Dolphin Conservation, is the leading charity dedicated to the protection of whales and dolphins.

Our vision is a world where every whale and dolphin is safe and free.

We care deeply about whales and dolphins, and we share this passion with our supporters.

Our work is backed by robust research, science and philosophy.

For more information, please contact Vicki James, Protected areas lead vicki.james@whales.org



Photo: WDC/CharliePhillips