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MAKE THE SWITCH THE ARRAN

Dramatic return of marine life in Lamlash Bay revival

by Hugh Boag
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Marine life has returned at dramatic levels in the Lamlash Bay No Take Zone since it has been closed to fishing, a new study from the University of York has found.

Numbers of some species have increased by nearly 400 per cent since the community-backed No Take Zone (NTZ) project was established off the coast of Arran nearly 12 years ago. The NTZ now sits within a 280 sq km Marine Protected Area (MPA), which has shown even more pronounced biodiversity recovery after just three and half years of protection.

The Lamlash Bay NTZ was established by the Scottish government in 2008, after years of campaigning by community group the Community of Arran Seabed Trust (COAST), which had witnessed the dramatic decline of fish stocks around Arran due to decades of overfishing.

Authors of the study, led by marine scientists at the University of York in partnership with COAST, say the project has kick-started a national movement to protect UK coastal waters from overfishing and loss of biodiversity.

The study reveals there are nearly four times more king scallops in the NTZ since research began in 2010, and legal-sized lobster numbers are also four times higher in the NTZ than adjacent areas. There is additional evidence of species 'spill-over' into surrounding areas and the study indicates increasing habitat complexity within the NTZ.

Initial analysis of dive surveys comparing the MPA pre and post-fisheries management, suggests a dramatic recovery with densities of

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Marine revival in Lamlash Bay

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king scallops over six-fold higher than in baseline studies. These surveys, the study reports, show the seabed is recovering following damage caused by fishing with trawls and dredges, with the growth of structurally complex 'nursery habitats' and key 'blue carbon habitats' showing particular recovery, which in turn supports the recovery of commercially important fish species.

Arran MSP Kenneth Gibson, who was instrumental in the designation of the Lamlash Bay NTZ and the South Arran MPA, said: 'I am absolutely delighted the No Take Zone has been such an outstanding success. The community on Arran should be very proud of their achievements over the last decade to promote marine conservation. This study proves the potential of effective marine management and I will be pressing the Scottish Government to seriously consider the creation of more NTZs as part of their marine management plans.'

But while scientific surveys show the zone has helped to boost biodiversity and marine life, the study argues that, of more importance, is the influence the Lamlash Bay project and COAST have had on marine protection nationally and internationally.

'Arran's conservation success has been recognised internationally and is inspiring greater involvement of communities around the UK and further afield,' said Dr Bryce Stewart from York's Department of Environment and Geography. 'Evidence from Lamlash Bay has supported the development of strong protection for marine protected areas, at times seeing off lobbyist efforts to weaken management. Communities around the UK have looked at the story unfolding in Lamlash Bay and - like COAST - have decided to take the destiny of their coastal waters into their own hands.'

Researcher Éilís Crimmins holds the largest Arran lobster recorded - a 141mm male in the NTZ.

Photograph: COAST

COAST had a pivotal role, working with Fauna and Flora International, in helping set up the Coastal Communities Network. To date this network has assisted another 15 community groups around the coast of Scotland to improve the protection of their own waters.

The work on Arran has been recognised with a series of environmental awards, it has influenced national marine protection policy and has highlighted the importance of community involvement in marine protection projects.

'Our success has also been underpinned by 10 years of science,' explained Howard Wood, co-founder of COAST. 'With the help of researchers at the University of York, we have clear evidence marine biodiversity in the protected area is improving. We have a solid scientific platform, which allows other coastal communities alongside the Scottish and UK Government to confidently move forward with marine reserve designation and management.'

Howard added: 'COAST's message is that any environment can benefit from better protection and every community has the right to a better environment.

'If that is embraced, we truly will see a seachange in the health of our seas.'

LETTE

Leading by example

It is nice to be able to report some good news, for a change, this week.

A new study has found a four-fold increase in lobsters and scallops in Scotland's only No Take Zone in Lamlash Bay. At a time of unprecedented pressure on our seas, the project has kick-started a national movement to protect UK coastal waters from overfishing and loss of biodiversity.

The University of York study reports on the research and community support after 11 years of the Lamlash Community Marine Reserve and four years, since management was put in place, of the South Arran Marine Protected Area (MPA). Both of these conservation designations were legislated for by Arran MSP Kenneth Gibson, Richard Lochhead and Marine Scotland.

The paper reveals a remarkable recovery of lobsters, scallops, species biodiversity and blue carbon habitat storage within the whole MPA.

With all the dire news on climate change, biodiversity loss and the lead up to COP26, this is a great positive news story which we are happy to share.

Good, too, to see Arran taking a pro-active interest in the global climate strike last week.

Whatever your view of teen green warrior Greta Thunberg, and there are good reasons to be sceptical of her background, there can be no doubt that she has helped put climate change at the top of the political agenda.

Thought for the week

'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.' Matt 5: 16