

SNP scheme to boost protected areas fails as just 1 in 3 sites improve

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Just a third of protected areas earmarked by the Scottish Government for special attention three years ago have improved in quality, it has emerged.

Under an environmental scheme, 556 designated areas – including sites of specific scientific interest – were included in the Delivering Favourable Condition (DFC) action plan.

This was supposed to dedicate time and resource to some of Scotland's most treasured environmental zones, including conservation areas.

However, it has now emerged that of these only 183 have "improved in condition", with 201 showing no change and 58 actually getting worse.

In addition, the Scottish Government admitted 114 sites renewed an agreement for fear they would slip into an "unfavourable condition".

The statistics were released following a parliamentary question by Scottish Conservative MSP Maurice Golden.

Environment secretary Roseanna Cunningham admitted in her answer that areas which were included in the plan expected to see improvements within three years.

But following the publishing of the figures, it turns out just 32.9 per cent have benefited.

Reasons for areas being designated can vary; including protection of woodland, lochs and rare insects.

However, a breakdown of which areas are included in the action plan has not been published.

Scottish Conservative MSP Maurice Golden said:

"This process was established to help some of Scotland's most treasured areas.

"However, three years on and it seems around two-thirds of these important places have seen no improvement, or have even got worse.

"This reflects very badly on the SNP's commitment to improve Scotland's natural environment.

"Ministers should now examine why this has been such a failure, and outline what they intend to do to change this.

"These areas – which are crucial for a wide variety of reasons – deserve better, and so do the future generations who ought to be able to enjoy them."

A copy of the parliamentary question by Maurice Golden, along with the answer, is below:

31 March 2017 (Holding Reply Issued 30 March 2017)

Index Heading: Economy

Maurice Golden (West Scotland) (Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party): To ask the Scottish Government (a) how many and (b) what percentage of designated areas have seen (i) an improvement in, (ii) no improvement to and (iii) a decline in their Favourable status after three years of being included in a Delivering Favourable Condition Partnership action plan.

S5W-08160

Roseanna Cunningham:

Of a total of 5,368 designated features of Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Natura sites across Scotland, 556 have been included in a Delivering Favourable Condition Partnership Action Plan. After three years of these features being included in an Action Plan:

- i) 183 (32.9%) have improved in condition;
- ii) 201 (36.2%) have not yet improved from an unfavourable condition; and
- iii) 58 (10.4%) have declined in condition.

In addition, 114 features (20.5%) have retained their 'favourable' status or their 'unfavourable recovering due to management' status by renewing arrangements to support sympathetic management, where failure to take this action would result in the features slipping into unfavourable condition.

In another response, environment secretary Roseanna Cunningham said the aim of DFCs was "to improve the condition of designated areas" and that "improvements will be achieved within three years of an area's inclusion in the action plan".

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/28877.aspx?SearchType=Advanced&ReferenceNumbers=S5W-07615>