

Loch Carron

Marine Protected Area



Scotland's largest known flame shell bed

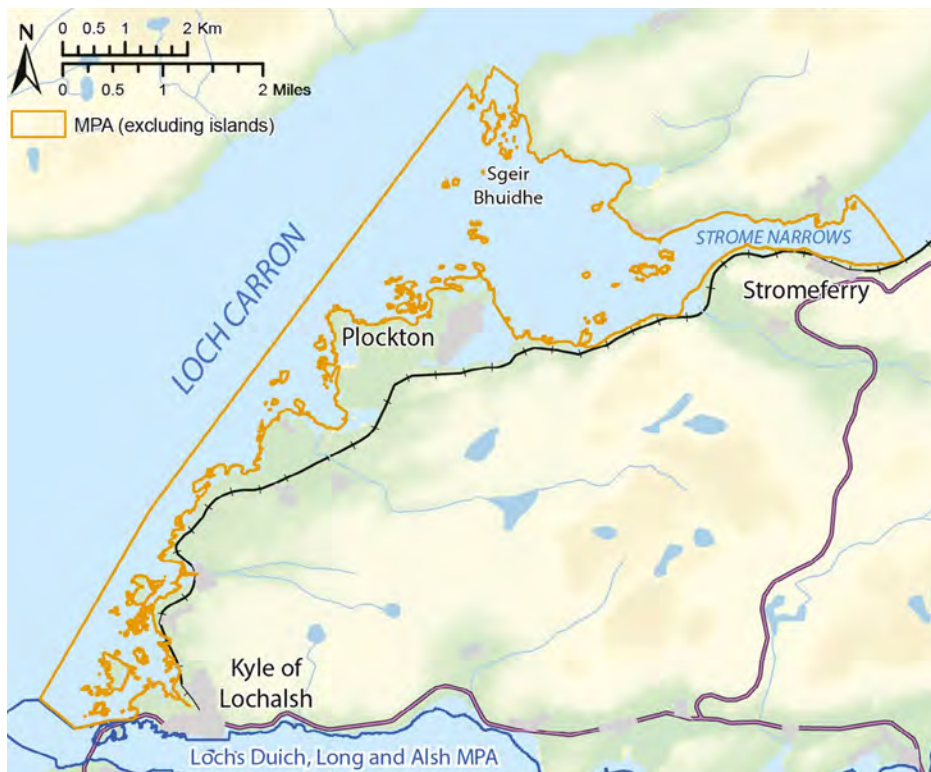
Loch Carron

Marine Protected Area



Loch Carron Marine Protected Area (MPA), located on the west coast of Scotland, is home to flame shell beds including the largest known in the world. The MPA encompasses the outer reaches of Loch Carron extending south to meet Lochs Duich, Long and Alsh MPA.

The MPA not only supports an estimated quarter of a billion flame shells, but also numerous maerl beds. Increased tidal flow in shallower waters along the coastline and over the sea loch sill (at the Strome Narrows) supplies the necessary food for these species and habitats to form and thrive.



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Location: 57° 20.756' N 005° 41.056' W

Area: 23 km²



Painted gobies on maerl in Loch Carron

Protected Features and Conservation Objectives

Biodiversity

Flame shell beds

Maerl beds

The aim is to **recover** the **flame shell beds** and to **conserve** the **maerl beds** in order to make a long lasting contribution to the MPA network.

Flame shells are beautiful bivalve molluscs with fiery orange tentacles. In only a few special places in the world – almost all in Scotland – do flame shell nests group together forming dense beds. These beds provide an important habitat for a myriad of other animals and plants in our seas such as seaweeds, whelks, starfish, brittlestars and crabs. The ‘recover’ conservation objective for flame shell beds relates to damaged smaller beds off Sgeir Bhuidhe. The larger Strome Narrows bed is distinct from these and is in excellent condition.

Loch Carron and the complex system of embayments, skerries and channels between Plockton and Loch Alsh are also host to a number of high quality maerl beds. Maerl is a free-living red seaweed with a hard, chalky skeleton. In suitable conditions, including in Loch Carron MPA, maerl can carpet the sea bed providing a complex habitat that offers shelter and protection to a wide range of animals. These can include the larval and juvenile stages of important commercial species such as cod and scallops.

Further information

Information on the wider MPA network in Scotland's seas and protected areas management is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/marine/marine-environment/mpanetwork

For additional site-specific MPA documents and more on the fascinating range of marine life to be found in Scotland's seas, please visit www.nature.scot/mpas



A sun star and brittlestars on a flame shell bed in Loch Carron

