



# Reviving The Clyde

**Morven Robertson tells SCOTTISH DIVER about the Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust's new campaign to secure a productive Firth of Clyde for generations to come ...**

DIVERS JUMPING into the cold and choppy waters of the Clyde these days may be surprised and skeptical to hear from 'the older sometimes more experienced divers' of the large variety and density of fish and marine species encountered in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. This will be no surprise to any of you who have dived and seen the impact of an increased scale of fishing on marine environments; divers are often amongst the most aware and involved marine conservationists.

The threat and changes brought about by certain fishing methods has been high on the agenda in the Clyde for years. This article is intended to make Clyde divers aware of a campaign that is being promoted to Revive the Clyde which could improve diving experiences for both current and future generations of divers.

### The State of the Clyde

The Firth of Clyde is the UK's largest inshore sea, situated on the west coast of Scotland. As an extremely accessible and popular dive site, many divers will have plunged beneath its waves to explore the sheltered sea lochs, steep walls, shipwrecks and the varied marine life the Clyde has to offer.

For divers, the effects of bottom-towed fishing gears (dredging and trawling) are striking and evident. Concerns as

to their impact have risen along with the increase in these practices globally as well as specifically within the Clyde.

You need only drift over the despoiled Seagrass beds of Skipness, and the barren Skelmorlie Bank, Stravanan Bay off Bute and the Tan Buoy off the Great Cumbrae, areas once carpeted by horse mussel and flameshell beds to see the negative impact and unintended consequences these gears have had.

Years of subjecting the seabed to large indiscriminate nets and jagged teeth has left the Clyde impoverished as a marine environment, less resilient to other threats such as climate change, pollution, and emerging diseases in shellfish stocks.

As a result of these deprivations the Clyde has also suffered serious economic and commercial losses. The Clyde's once-great fin-fisheries for herring, cod and flat fish have collapsed, with takes down by around 95%, and its world class recreational sea angling has all but disappeared. The Clyde fishery is now considered 'a fishery of last resort', with the commercial industry forced to focus on scallops and prawns.

### The Facts

- 80% of the Clyde's biogenic reefs have disappeared in the last 50-100 years
- Employment in commercial fisheries in the Clyde has declined by 70% in just 60 years

- 200 jobs have been lost in the recreational sea angling sector
- 80% of fish in the Clyde are now too small to catch and sell.
- 99% of catch is scallops and prawns
- Large 'trophy' sized fish have disappeared

### Clyde 2020: An opportunity For Change

The good news is that more and more stakeholders in the welfare of the Clyde including the diving community are coming to the same realisations. With so many local communities depending on the Clyde, for work, and recreation, it is essential it be managed sustainably with maximum benefits for all.

Furthermore, the government is now looking to and has a responsibility to support active measures to co-ordinate a management system engaging and galvanizing the efforts of all interested parties to revive the Clyde.

### Our Campaign is YOUR Campaign

The Sustainable Inshore Fisheries Trust (SIFT) is soliciting and encouraging public support for a change in the way the Clyde fishery is managed through our Revive The Clyde campaign. The campaign provides you with the platform and opportunity to make the voice of divers prominent in the efforts to revive the Clyde.



*A diver drifts over plumose anemones amongst juvenile whiting in the Clyde*



*A recently dredged seabed for scallops*



*An ocean quahog sits amongst feather stars on an undisturbed seabed*

To pledge your support we ask that you sign our Clyde Charter that outlines key principles essential for a positive management system that will bring benefits for this generation and the next.

**The Clyde Charter**

1. Revive the Firth of Clyde marine environment.
2. Support a diverse fishery, boosting jobs and the local economy.
3. Promote fisheries management based on local input and scientific advice.

You can sign up and pledge your support for the Clyde Charter and the campaign by visiting our website [www.revivetheclyde.org](http://www.revivetheclyde.org).

For divers, recovering stable seabeds will allow both plants and animals to settle and colonise. This will promote healthier seabeds, with more diverse life helping improve fish populations and better underwater visibility due to the reduction in sediment. These factors will provide the opportunity for dive related activities and businesses to grow and thrive.

There has never been a better opportunity for change. But, change will only occur through the concerted and coordinated efforts of all stakeholders reinforcing the government's determination to take action.

**Who is SIFT & What Are They Doing**

A registered Scottish charity, SIFT was established in 2011 and promotes the sustainable development of Scotland's inshore waters by actively engaging in research, consultation and dialogue with all stakeholders including the Scottish Government which regulates Scotland's inshore waters.

At present, SIFT are developing a management plan for the Clyde with input from all stakeholders and with the Clyde Charter at its heart. The project aims to restore the Firth of Clyde ecosystem so it can again support a sustainable, economically viable mixed fishery for everyone's benefit.

Amongst other methods the project aims to manage the more damaging

forms of fishing, by creating separate zones for different fishing methods – with trawling continuing in less sensitive muddy areas and creeling operating in more sensitive habitats.

This emulates management in other Northern European countries where damaging forms of fishing are heavily spatially restricted inside sensitive inshore areas. The Faroe Islands for example, prohibit bottom-trawling within four nautical miles of their shoreline. Further still, both Sweden and Norway do not allow scallop dredging within the entire six nautical mile zone. These measures ensure sensitive habitats, much like those found in the Clyde, are protected to support ecological functions, marine related activities and economies.



Let's ensure the Clyde and the hidden wonders which can lie below the sea are revived for future generations of divers.

Join us on our social media sites @ReviveTheClyde and [www.facebook.com/revivetheclyde](http://www.facebook.com/revivetheclyde) Comments, information and enquiries can be directed to our Clyde Campaign coordinator Morven Robertson at [revivetheclyde@sift-uk.org](mailto:revivetheclyde@sift-uk.org).

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