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SCOTTISH SEABIRDS NEED URGENT HELP

The Scottish government is failing in its moral and legal obligations to protect declining seabird populations. According to its own figures, the number of seabirds breeding in Scotland has dropped by nearly half in the past 25 years. Arctic skuas have plummeted by a shocking 80 per cent, arctic terns by 72 per cent and kittiwakes by 68 per cent.

Food shortages, global warming, predation by non-native species such as mink, and commercial fishing for sandeels are all to blame. Plus there is now a huge queue of proposed windfarm developments in key feeding areas.

Time for urgent action? Well, no, not according to Alex Salmond. The First Minister is good at talking about conservation but notoriously bad at doing anything. Scottish conservation efforts are repeatedly undermined by lack of funding, poor implementation and vested economic interests.

So even though Scotland is home to approximately four million seabirds, astonishingly little is being done to protect them.

The Scottish Executive urgently needs to designate seven key feeding areas, used by tens of thousands of birds, as Special Protection Areas (SPAs) as part of a network of protected areas across the European Union. It has the full backing of the UK government's statutory advisors, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Yet the deadline for designating these SPAs

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passed no less than *three decades* ago.

The situation is so bad that the RSPB has submitted a formal complaint to the EC about the failure of the UK and Scottish governments to fulfil their legal obligations under the EU Birds Directive.

To be fair, 33 SPAs have already been designated around critical seabird colonies. But protecting these – without protecting their feeding grounds – does little more than provide safe places for the seabirds to starve to death.