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[Home](#) • [Media centre](#) • [News by Department](#) • [Department of the Environment](#) • [July 2011 news releases](#) • *Attwood calls for greater protection for Strangford Lough*

## Attwood calls for greater protection for Strangford Lough

Environment Minister Alex Attwood today added his voice to calls for greater protection for Strangford Lough's unique marine life.  
~ Wednesday, 27 July 2011

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His comments follow on from a report issued today by the Department of the Environment (DOE) and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), into the restoration of Horse Mussel reefs in Strangford Lough.

Strangford Lough has a number of international and national designations to reflect the diversity of its marine life. One of the features justifying its' designation as a Special Area of Conservation, and one of only two Marine Nature Reserves in Ireland, was the abundance of reefs comprised of Horse Mussels (Latin name *Modiolus modiolus*) and associated fauna.

Surveys in 2003 indicated that the reefs had deteriorated and a ban on mobile fishing gear (trawling and dredging) was introduced by DARD at that time. A Restoration Plan was subsequently produced and was accepted by the European Commission. It committed the two Departments to survey the extent and condition of remaining Horse Mussel reefs, to put in place protective measures and to investigate practical methodologies for restoring damaged reefs.

Commenting on the report which has just been completed by Queen's University Belfast, Alex Attwood said: "This has been a big effort to survey the remaining Horse Mussel reefs in Strangford Lough, unparalleled in Britain or Ireland. This was necessary in order to comply with EU regulations. We were running the serious risk of EU infraction if we did not carry out this exercise.

"I am very aware that the three year project cost £1 million in total. I have asked officials for an evaluation to satisfy myself that this expenditure was necessary and if, for example, plant and equipment used will be retained by DARD/DOE not QUB. That said I understand the importance of having robust scientific evidence to support the continuation of existing restrictions or the need for additional restrictions.

Alex Attwood, commenting on the report's key recommendation, said: "This extensive report recommends 'total protection' in those areas of the Lough where pot fishing and other activities may be preventing recovery of the horse mussel reefs. I fully accept that. It is now for both Departments to use their powers to introduce legislation to make that happen.

"For my part in DOE, I will introduce regulations to restrict anchoring of boats and diving in affected areas as soon as possible. I look forward to DARD looking at its own obligations with respect to pot fishing and I am happy to work with them in this regard."

## Notes to editors:

1. All media enquiries should be directed to Philip Maguire, DOE Press Office, on 028 9054 1067, mobile 07788 108 657. Out of office hours please contact the duty press officer via pager number 07699 715 440 and your call will be returned.
  2. The Report is available at [www.qub.ac.uk](http://www.qub.ac.uk) (<http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/ModiolusRestorationResearchGroup/Documents/Fileupload,245109.en.pdf>).
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