

**Title: Update On Water Borne Access at Loch Kinord, Muir of Dinnet NNR**

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**Purpose:**

1. To provide a brief end of season update and;
2. To seek advice on consultation on future approach and action on the issue.

We would particularly welcome comments and advice from the LOAF on the stake holders and methodology

**Background:**

In response to a large increase in visitor numbers taking water borne access to Loch Kinord (Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve), changes to the type of use, and increased disturbance to wildlife, NatureScot worked with stakeholders to develop revised local guidance on responsible access during summer 2021 (effective from 16 June). A paper giving more information on the changes and the rationale [Changes to Local Access Guidance at Loch Kinord \(Muir of Dinnet National Nature Reserve\) in Response to Increased Water Recreation](#) was submitted to the LOAF meeting on 23 June 2021. At the same meeting the Local Access Officer submitted a paper on a Park wide approach and framework for specific site advice [Water Borne Access and Sensitive Species](#).

Prior to June, an initial approach of asking visitors not to use loch *if it was busy* proved to be ineffective as the general perception of what *busy* meant was variable but was often above levels which NatureScot perceived to be causing disturbance. A clearer message asking people not to take access on the water of Loch Kinord during the bird breeding season, (1 March to 31 August) was therefore adopted. This message was promoted through contacts with the stakeholder group that had been established to discuss the issue, a press release, signage on-site and face to face discussions with the public on-site.

Particularly because the changes were implemented relatively quickly to protect the conservation interests of the site; NatureScot undertook to review the operation of the changes following the 2021 season and prior to any decision over 2022 or subsequent seasons.

**The revised Local Access Guidance (2021) in practice**

In general visitors followed the request not to use the loch for water-sports: compliance was good. NatureScot received one formal complaint mainly regarding impacts on open water swimming. We also received several written messages of support. Even amongst the paddle-board community, views were mixed. One commercial provider had voluntarily ceased coming to Loch Kinord prior to our change of position, because of his own concerns. But the operator of an Aberdeen SUP website called our decision “heavy-handed”. Prior to the change of guidance mid-June, bird counts were higher at times when there were no or very few people on the water, compared with counts carried out when water-users were present. More detailed information on these findings and the methodologies will be provided as part of the consultation process.

Although the methodology was relatively crude, the counts did show a change following introduction of the revised guidance on water-borne access after mid-June. Summary data is included at Annex A.

The general trend shown that more birds were present on the loch when water-sports were absent or at a low level was supported by general observations of Reserve staff. However it is also possible that the change mid-June was too late to benefit all species. For example only 2 broods of Goldeneye were seen on the loch this summer, compared with 6 – 12 in recent years. However other factors may also have contributed to this decline.

### **Proposed Review and Consultation**

The Park framework for site specific advice, as presented in June, above, identified the following issues:

- Is the loch designated
- Are the species affected on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1984 (as amended), which provides a list of species that are granted special protection from disturbance?
- Is there a monitoring framework in place to determine how popular the loch is for water borne access?
- Is there strong evidence over time of impact on breeding, roosting and feeding success?
- Have alternative approaches to visitor management been tested such as on site guidance and education, buoys, zoning or increased ranger presence?
- Are there suitable alternative locations nearby?
- Can water borne access be facilitated at a manageable location?

The above framework can provide a basis for the forthcoming consultation aimed at considering if it is reasonable and/or necessary to continue with the local access guidance in its 2021 form or what changes to the guidance and monitoring which underpins it might be justified.

As set out in the previous paper, Loch Kinord forms part of nationally and internationally important designated areas. While the background to these designations will be provided as context it is not envisaged that they will form part of the consultation.

A list of Schedule 1 species will also be provided as part of the consultation.

Views will be sought from stakeholders about the monitoring of visitor use and what alternative or additional monitoring could reasonably and usefully be carried out and how this could feed into a more strategic approach.

Advice will be sought from specialists and stakeholders on the outcome of the disturbance monitoring which was carried out in 2021 and how robust the evidence that it provides is. Any issues such as uncertainty over impacts from different types of water-sport use will also be explored and suggestions for any changes considered.

Influencing visitor behaviour was through awareness raising and in particular through off-site publicity, on-site signage and increased interaction with Reserve staff. The unsuitability of other mitigation measures, such as zoning, was based on the physical size of the loch, ineffectiveness of the previous messages, and the available resources. Such alternative measures will be revisited with stakeholders.

There are 447 sites listed in Aberdeenshire on the [standing waters database](#); the majority of these will be unsuitable for water-borne recreation due to size or other constraints. There are 14 locations listed on the 'SUP Aberdeen' website (including coastal). The review will seek stakeholder input on potential alternative provision and try to identify some common issues where there are constraints.

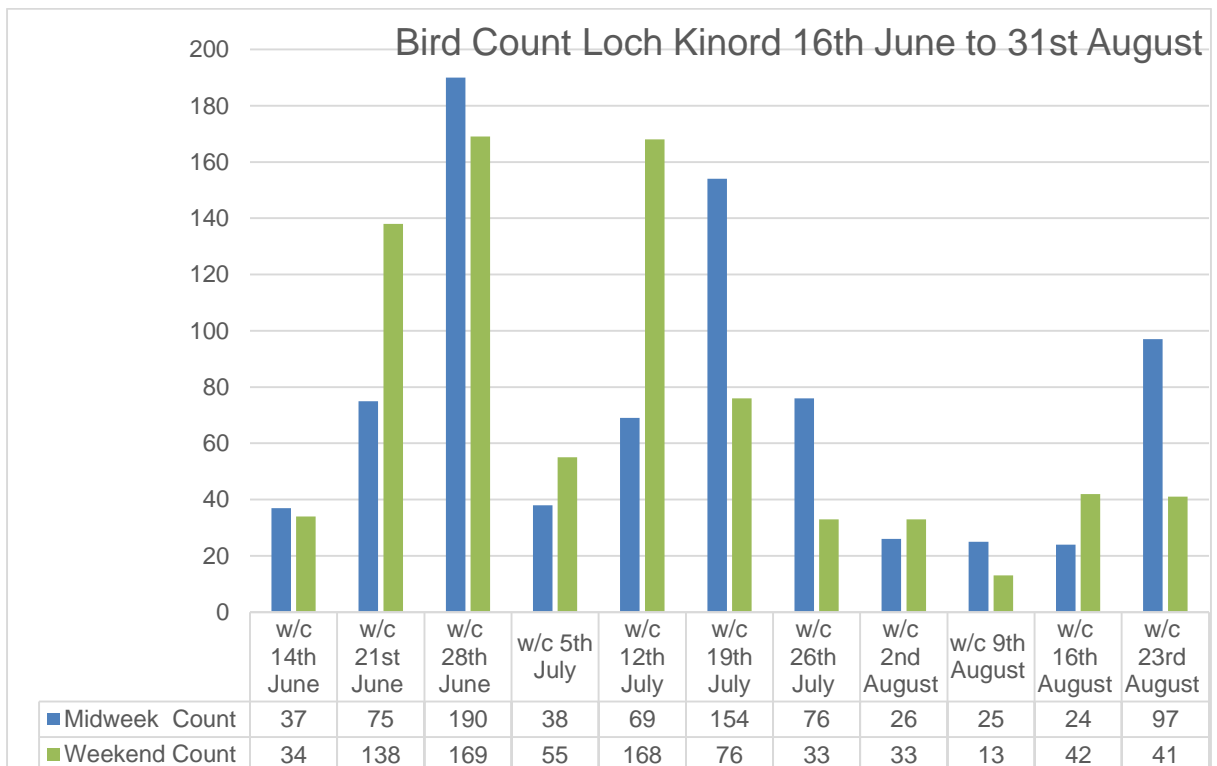
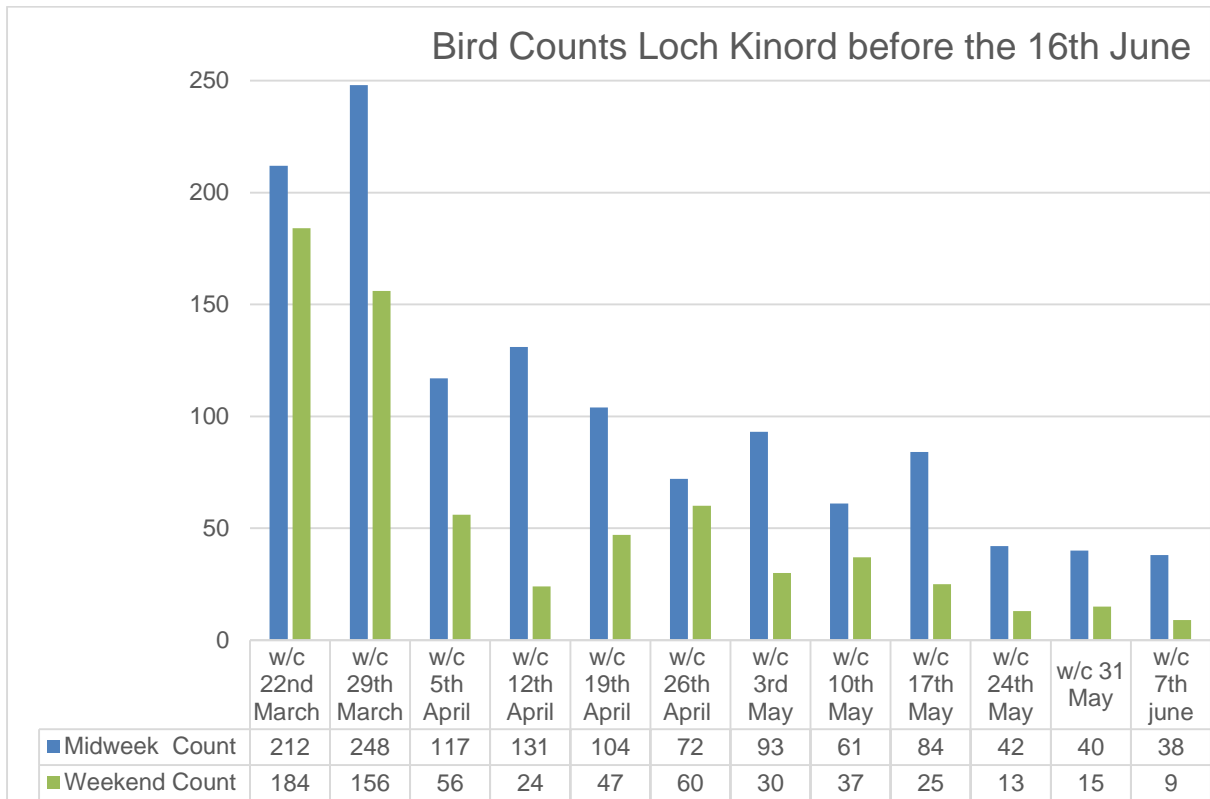
While not part of the criteria above we anticipate also gathering information on impacts of water borne access on the character of the site and other users' enjoyment, and this will be included in the review.

### **Stakeholders and Methodology**

The consultation undertaken in spring 2021 was relatively brief and limited in extent. Some gaps have been highlighted which we intend to address. An initial list of potential stakeholders is included at Annex B

It is proposed to draft a report on 2021 covering the points above to form the basis for much of the consultation. Expert input will be sought on technical aspects. We envisage circulating the report together with a structured questionnaire either as an email or another electronic form such as SurveyMonkey. Followed up with a plenary meeting to discuss the feedback and to gather any additional points prior to proposing a way forward, which we intend to present to the LOAF in February 2022, allowing adequate time to implement any agreed measures in the spring.

Annex A



**Annex B**

<b>Parties included in Spring 2021 stakeholder consultation</b>	<b>Additional parties or organisations to be consulted Winter 2021/22</b>
Aquaplay (water-sport provider)	Aberdeenshire Council (Access Authority in relation to other recreation sites)
CNPA (Access Authority)	British SUP Assoc
Dinnet & Kinord Estate (landowner)	Scottish Swimming
Mid-Deeside Community Council	Triathlon Scotland
RSPB	10 (approx.) private individuals who made representations for/against in 2021
Scottish Canoe Association	
Scottish Land & Estates	
SUP Aberdeen (website/ group organiser)	
2 x private individual (residents)	

