

COP26: Government Leads on Ocean Action Day

News story

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The UK Presidency marked 'Ocean Action Day' at COP26 (5th November), championing a call for action to protect and restore ocean health and resilience.

A healthy ocean is an essential ally in our fight against climate change. Protecting the marine environment and restoring key habitats – from seagrasses and mangroves to saltmarshes and coral reefs – is critical to help us tackle climate change and respond to its impacts.

The UK Presidency called upon world leaders to take ambitious steps towards ocean health and resilience in order to achieve net zero ambitions and keep a rise of no more than 1.5°C within reach.

To help drive this, the UK made a number of announcements, including contributing £6million to PROBLUE, a World Bank fund that supports sustainable ocean projects, and £1million to the Global Fund for Coral Reefs on top of the £5 million announced earlier this year.

Protecting the world's oceans is vital to safeguard a healthy and thriving environment for future generations to enjoy and today's announcements were made on Youth and Public Empowerment Day at COP26, which highlights the critical role of young people in taking climate action.

International Environment Minister Lord Zac Goldsmith said:

The ocean plays a unique role in regulating our climate. There is no pathway to net zero – or any of our shared global goals – that does not involve protecting and restoring nature, including the ocean, on an unprecedented scale.

At COP26, we have brought the ocean community together to recognise and value the restoration and protection of the marine environment. Working collaboratively with the international community and continuing to invest in climate research will create a healthy, resilient and biodiverse ocean for future generations.

The UK made the following announcements on Ocean Action Day:

- A £6 million UK contribution to PROBLUE, a World Bank fund that works across a broad range of issues, from sustainable tourism to tackling illegal fishing, to support the development of the blue economy as an important driver of growth in coastal and island developing countries.
- £400,000 to support the government of Fiji in issuing its first sovereign blue bond. This is a UN led programme which will help to create a supportive environment for sustainable ocean finance in Fiji, supporting projects that improve ocean health and support the livelihoods of coastal communities.
- An additional £1 million contribution to the Global Fund for Coral Reefs, further to the £5 million we announced earlier this year. The fund is dedicated to the conservation and restoration of coral reef ecosystems and the communities that depend on them. The UK's contribution will help developing countries prevent the extinction of vital coral reefs by exploring techniques such as sewage treatment and the management of marine protected areas.
- Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance roundtable which will see at least \$20million made in commitments made at the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance roundtable to drive health and resilience of the ocean and climate vulnerable communities. This vital investment and cross-sector collaboration will support nature-based solutions and coastal communities. This includes a new \$9 million commitment from Canada, significant announcements from the private sector such as Deutsche Bank, Salesforce and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and includes the £2 million committed from the UK earlier this year.
- The UK is driving global support for a new '30by30' target, to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030. Evidence indicates that achieving this target will not only help to reverse adverse ecological impacts and preserve fish populations but will also help to increase resilience to climate change and sustain long-term ocean health. The UK

welcomed the most recent countries pledging their support for this target: Bahrain, India, Saudi Arabia, Jamaica, St Lucia, Sri Lanka, Georgia, Qatar, Samoa, Tonga and The Gambia [Full list TBC]. In total, over 100 countries now support a 30by30 target for the ocean.

- Work to progress evidence on blue carbon habitats in the UK, such as saltmarsh and seagrass. The UK announced its intention to work together to help establish a new cross-Administration UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership to progress the evidence base on these habitats. Through this partnership, UK Administrations will work together to address key research questions related to blue carbon policy, including working to fill the evidence gaps that currently hinder inclusion of saltmarsh and seagrass habitats into the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory.
- The Environment Agency has published handbooks to support the restoration and protection of coastal blue carbon habitats to combat climate change. The three handbooks will focus on seagrass, saltmarsh and intertidal sediments and will be instrumental in informing the restoration of blue carbon habitats in the UK and beyond. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26 Presidency is championing a

Call for Ocean Action as part of Ocean Action Day:

1. Climate action is ocean action For the health of the ocean, secure global net zero emissions no later than 2050 and keep a rise of no more than 1.5°C within reach. This includes decarbonising the shipping sector and scaling up offshore renewable energy.
2. The ocean is part of the response to climate change Protect, restore and sustainably manage key marine habitats and species, including blue carbon habitats, driving marine nature-based solutions that will help us and the ocean to mitigate, adapt and be resilient to climate change as part of Paris Agreement commitments.
3. Protect the ocean to address climate change and biodiversity loss together Commit to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030 (30by30), and work towards achieving an international legally binding instrument under UNCLOS for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.
4. Invest in ocean-climate action Commit to increasing finance for marine nature-based solutions, ocean protection and restoration, throughout the next five years as part of commitments to increasing finance for nature.
5. Underpin ocean action with transformative ocean science Collaborate through the unique opportunity offered by the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) to enhance global ocean observations and deliver accessible data for all.

Background information:

- As a multi-sector collaboration, the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance (ORRAA) will drive investment into coastal natural capital through pioneering finance products that incentivise blended finance and private investment. The UK, alongside the Swiss Re Foundation, announced investment into the ORRAA Ocean Resilience Innovation Fund, which was created to pioneer innovative finance products that drive investment in 'blue' natural capital, and reduce risks from the ocean and climate to coastal communities.
- In the UK 38% of our waters are already in Marine Protected Areas, these include the majority of saltmarsh and seagrass habitats. We have also committed to designating a number of pilot Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), including areas containing important blue carbon habitats

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