

Press release: World-leading Blue Belt expands as new marine protections revealed

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has [today set out plans](#) to create more than 40 new Marine Conservation Zones across the country – safeguarding almost 12,000 square kilometres of marine habitats and marking the most significant expansion of the UK's 'Blue Belt' of protected areas to date.

The proposed protections – announced on World Oceans Day – will cover an area almost eight times the size of Greater London.

The new sites will reach right the way across England's coastline – from the South West to Berwick on the Scottish border, with two sites in Northern Irish offshore waters.

No new activities deemed damaging – such as dredging, or significant coastal or offshore development – will be allowed to take place in these areas. Existing harmful activities will be minimised or stopped to allow important habitats to be restored over time.

Rare or threatened marine habitats and species which will be protected include the short snouted seahorse, stalked jellyfish and peacock's tail seaweed.

At the same time, the Prime Minister will be making a call for urgent global action to protect the world's oceans from plastics and other harmful waste.

Speaking at the G7 summit in Canada, she will implore other world leaders to follow the UK lead in working with business, industry and Non-Governmental Organisations to find innovative and effective solutions to this issue.

She will say that without joined-up, global action, we cannot effectively tackle this shared environmental challenge.

The Prime Minister is expected to say:

Marine plastics pollution is one of the greatest environmental challenges facing the world today.

The UK government is a world leader on this issue, with our 25 Year Environment Plan setting out a clear ambition to eliminate avoidable plastic waste to protect our rivers and seas.

There is an urgent need for greater global action and co-ordination on marine plastics pollution, including working with business, industry and Non-Governmental Organisations to find innovative and effective solutions.

This is a global problem, requiring global solutions.

The Environment Secretary has today announced a total of 41 new Marine Conservation Zones.

Some 50 zones have [already been designated](#) around England as part of the UK's ambitious Blue Belt programme, including the first tranche of 27 zones designated in 2013, followed by the second tranche of 23 sites in 2016.

This third and final tranche will be designated within 12 months of the consultation, which will last for a period of six weeks. It will cover approximately 11,700 square km, bringing the total area of protection to over 32,000 square km.

Marine Conservation Zones are just one type of the many Marine Protected Areas in place around the UK to conserve rare, threatened and nationally important habitats and species for future generations. Marine Protected Areas currently cover a total of 209,000 square km.

If approved, the new tranche will take the total figure to around 220, 000 square km – meaning two fifths of the UK coast would be protected.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, said:

The UK is surrounded by some of the richest and most diverse sea life in the world. We must protect these precious habitats for future generations.

Today marks an important step towards completing our Blue Belt. We are creating safe havens for our cherished wildlife and putting the UK at the forefront of marine protection.

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[SEPA and Health & Safety Executive announce joint investigation into Mossmorran complex at community meeting as operating permit variations to be served on operators](#)

 08 June 2018

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) & the Health and Safety Executive today (Friday 8th June 2018) announced a joint investigation into ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Limited, the operators of the Mossmorran petrochemical plants in Fife.

The above assets are available for print, online and broadcast media to use to illustrate this story. Please [click through to our media gallery](#) to download them – no registration is required. All related items will be shown on the same page.

- Scottish Environment Protection Agency & the Health and Safety Executive announce joint investigation into Mossmorran complex following April ‘final warning’ letters for environmental non-compliance.
- Operating permit variations to be served on operators following a review

(announced in April) to strengthen noise and vibration controls.

- October, March and May flaring incidents and monitoring data remain under investigation to avoid prejudice to future enforcement action.
- SEPA Chief Executive Terry A'Hearn meets MP, MSPs, Councillors and communities to hear first-hand accounts of local impacts.

The move follows the serving of Final Warning Letters on both companies by the agency in April 2018 related to "preventable and unacceptable" unplanned flaring during June 2017.

Operating permit variations are to be served on ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK Limited following a review announced in April, to strengthen noise and vibration controls. These will be published on SEPA's website next week.

Hearing first-hand accounts of the constituency MP, MSPs, Councillors and communities, SEPA Chief Executive, Terry A'Hearn, explained why October, March and May flaring incidents and monitoring data required to remain under investigation to avoid prejudice to future enforcement action.

Speaking after the community meeting in Kirkcaldy, SEPA Chief Executive, Terry A'Hearn, said:

"Every day, SEPA works to protect and enhance Scotland's environment and compliance with Scotland's environmental rules is simply non-negotiable.

"We were clear that unplanned flaring in June 2017 was preventable and unacceptable and we issued final warnings to both companies in that regard. Despite that, communities have endured further unplanned flaring in October, March and again in May.

"We've listened carefully to community calls for a root and branch review and today's announcement of a joint investigation by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) & the Health & Safety Executive will examine issues at both sites.

"But more than that, in April we promised a review of operating permits. Operating permit variations will be served on ExxonMobil Chemical Ltd and Shell UK in the next week. These permits are legal documents which set out what each operator must do under law.

"It's right that people want to know more about October, March and May flaring incidents. That said, people want action not words which is why I've come personally to explain why these incidents remain under investigation and why we need to avoid prejudice to future enforcement action.

"We're listening to the community and it's important the companies do too."

ENDS

[Guidance: Commonwealth Marine Economies \(CME\) Programme: Pacific Marine Climate Change Report Card and Scientific Reviews](#)

These scientific reviews support the Pacific Marine Climate Change Report Card 2018.

[Press release: UK meeting milestones for Euratom exit](#)

- new international safeguards agreements signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency
- moves provide certainty to the civil nuclear industry and international partners as the UK prepares for Euratom exit

The [Nuclear Safeguards Bill](#) has become one of the first pieces of legislation addressing the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union to complete its passage through Parliament.

The Bill, which will shortly become an Act, addresses the United Kingdom's departure from the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), an international organisation that governs the peaceful use of nuclear energy within the EU. This essential legislation enables the government to establish a domestic nuclear safeguards regime following departure from Euratom and provides a clear signal to the public, industry and international partners that the UK is on track to meet its obligations from day one of exit.

Nuclear safeguards are important processes through which the UK demonstrates to the international community that civil nuclear material is not diverted into military or weapons programmes.

The UK's commitment to international safeguards and nuclear non-proliferation was reaffirmed in Vienna today, with the signing of 2 new safeguards agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

These key agreements with the IAEA – of which the UK is a founding member – are a major milestone in Euratom exit preparations and provide the basis for civil nuclear trading arrangements. This step will be welcomed by the industry in the UK and trading partners around the world.

Minister for Business and Industry, Richard Harrington said:

This major step in our work to prepare for Euratom exit ensures that we will continue in our role as a responsible nuclear state after leaving the EU and Euratom.

These new agreements emphasise our continued commitment to the IAEA and to international safeguards and nuclear non-proliferation, ensuring continuity for our civil nuclear industry from day one of exit.

Suella Braverman, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union, said:

These agreements are a positive step and will help ensure our cooperation with third countries in the field of nuclear energy will continue. This positive progress gives the UK nuclear industry the confidence that there will be no disruption to these arrangements as we leave the EU.

These developments come just weeks after the UK signed a new Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA) with the United States of America, which will allow the UK and US to continue their mutually beneficial civil nuclear cooperation when the current Euratom arrangements cease to apply to the UK.

This US-UK NCA is expected to be the first in a series of new international agreements ensuring uninterrupted cooperation and trade following the UK's exit from Euratom.

Notes to Editors

1. The [Nuclear Safeguards Bill](#) will amend the Energy Act 2013 to:
 - a. Provide the Office for Nuclear Regulation with a new safeguards function
 - b. Create new powers for the Secretary of State to put in place regulations setting out the detail of the domestic safeguards regime
2. The Bill will also create a limited power for the Secretary of State to amend 3 existing pieces of legislation to update references to the new IAEA agreements.
3. The UK's Voluntary Offer Agreement and Additional Protocol were signed in Vienna on 7 June.

4. The UK has been a member of the IAEA since its formation in 1957.
5. The signing of new bilateral agreements with the IAEA, a Voluntary Offer Agreement and Additional Protocol, will replace existing trilateral arrangements between the IAEA, Euratom and the UK.
6. The new agreements ensure that the IAEA retains its right to inspect all civil nuclear facilities, and continues to receive current safeguards reporting, thereby ensuring that international verification of our safeguards activity continues to be robust. Such agreements have been put in place on a voluntary basis by the 5 nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.
7. The new safeguards regime to be established in the UK will be operated by the Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR). The ONR already regulates nuclear safety and security in the UK and has been making preparation to replace Euratom as the regulator of safeguards.