

Government sets out marine commitments to mark World Ocean Day

Under UK leadership, 80 countries have now signed up to an international target to protect at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean by 2030.

Today on World Ocean Day (8th June 2021), countries from all four corners of the world – from India to Guyana, South Korea to Austria have pledged to support the '30by30' commitment which is being championed by the UK-led [Global Ocean Alliance](#) and the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, co-chaired by the UK, Costa Rica and France.

This next milestone follows a successful meeting of the G7 Climate and Environment ministers, during which all members agreed to champion the global '30x30' target to conserve or protect at least 30 per cent of the world's land and at least 30 per cent of the world's ocean by 2030, as well as committing to '30x30' domestically.

Environment Secretary, George Eustice, said:

The UK is a global leader in marine protection, and we are leading the way internationally to deliver healthy and sustainable seas. We must strike a balance in supporting sustainable industries while increasing protections for our seas to ensure a healthy, resilient and diverse marine ecosystem and we will work with others as we develop future protections.

The UK has also [launched plans to increase protections for England's waters](#) through a pilot scheme to designate marine sites in England as "Highly Protected Marine Areas". The selected sites would see a ban on all activities that could have a damaging effect on wildlife or marine habitats.

This follows the independent Benyon Review, which recommended that Highly Protected Marine Areas would have an important role in helping the marine ecosystem recover. The review was commissioned in 2019 to look at how these areas could be introduced and the Government has today published its response to the review. As well as helping drive marine recovery, the review also highlighted other potential benefits of the sites, including increased tourism.

The sites to be piloted could be in or outside of existing Marine Protected Areas where they would benefit from a substantially higher level of protection. They will be identified by Natural England and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee with input from stakeholders with a formal consultation set to launch next year.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

I am delighted that the Government has committed to implement Highly Protected Marine Areas with a number of pilot sites. Natural England's evidence based advice has been instrumental in determining the need for special protection for our most vulnerable marine wildlife.

We look forward to working closely with Defra to identify pilot sites and use this great opportunity to explore how highly protected areas can mitigate the impact of human activities on the ocean, support its recovery to a more natural state, and enhance vital marine ecosystems.

This comes as Defra and the Ocean Conservation Trust publish the results of the largest ever survey in England and Wales on public attitudes to our oceans. The survey finds that 85% of people consider marine protection personally important to them. Of those who had visited our coastlines last year, 80% said it was good for their physical health and 84% said it was good for their mental health.

The findings also show that when asked about the greatest threats to the marine environment, participants were most concerned about pollution, with overfishing, climate change and loss of marine habitats also ranking highly.

Professor Michel Kaiser, HPMA Review Panel member and Chief Scientist and Professor of Fisheries Conservation at the Lyell Centre, Heriot-Watt University said:

The implementation of a trial of HPMA's provides a landmark opportunity to understand how marine habitats and life will respond in the absence of damaging activities, setting our ambition for healthy oceans of the future.

Joan Edwards, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at The Wildlife Trusts, said:

This new type of marine protection will be the gold standard for rewilding parts of the sea. It's a fantastic step-forward, one which The Wildlife Trusts and over 10,000 of our supporters have been waiting for – we're absolutely delighted!

The removal of all harmful activities – from fishing and trawling to construction – has never been attempted in UK waters before. This is an historic moment and we're certain that HPMA's will help our seas become healthier and that degraded underwater habitats will be better able to recover.

This special form of protection is vitally needed. Decades of overexploitation and pollution have left our precious seas damaged and the wealth of wildlife that once lived there is much diminished. Existing Marine Protected areas are limited in their ability to restore nature as they only go as far as conserving its current, sometimes damaged state. HPMAs will allow us to see what truly recovering seas look like. They will set a new bar against which other protected areas could be measured.

The UK has also further advanced its role as a global leader in ocean protection by moving to full membership of the [Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance \(ORRAA\)](#). The Alliance brings together the financial sector, governments, non-profit organisations to pioneer innovative ways of driving investment into critical ecosystems like reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, wetlands and beaches that provide the nature-based-solutions to build resilience against climate change.

The UK has also become a co-leader of The International Partnership on Marine Protected Areas, Biodiversity and Climate Change which will work with other countries to ensure they have the information and tools they need to understand the important role that Marine Protected Areas play in helping to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change on the world's oceans, and the biodiversity they protect.

The Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) has also today published its annual 'Blue Belt' assessment which reveals this year the [UK Government's Blue Belt Programme](#) exceeded its target of protecting and enhancing over 4 million square kilometers of marine environment around five UK Overseas Territories.

The commitments made today represent another step forward for the UK's efforts to step up action on climate change in the run up to the G7 Summit taking place in Cornwall this week and international climate conference COP26, to be hosted in Glasgow later this year.

ENDS

Further information:

Highly Protected Marine Areas

The government has [published its response to the Benyon review](#).

Highly Protected Marine Areas will take a 'whole site approach', conserving all species and habitats within their boundary to maximise protection of marine habitats and vital species. The government will develop criteria for identifying the sites and create a list of potential sites this year, followed by designations of a number of sites in 2022.

The Government recognises that the strict protections implied by Highly Protected Marine Areas will cause some concerns with other sea users and intends to liaise closely with them throughout the process, including the

fishing industry.

The Government will consider the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of these sites, and are working to better understand wider issues such as the possible displacement of fishing activity.

Defra and Ocean Conservation Trust Ocean Literacy survey

Held in England and Wales, the ocean literacy survey measured public awareness, attitudes, knowledge and behaviours related to the marine environment and pressures on it, such as climate change and pollution.

'Ocean literacy' can be defined as the understanding of our individual and collective impact on the Ocean and its impact on our lives and wellbeing.

8,440 people over the age of 16 participated in the online survey (6,032 England and 2,248 Wales). Fieldwork was conducted between 16 February and 15 March 2021. Survey results were weighted to be representative of the population of interest.

The Ocean Literacy survey is part of the larger project "Understanding Ocean Literacy and ocean climate-related behaviour change in the UK" delivered in partnership by Defra and the Ocean Conservation Trust and in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales which also included an [evidence review of Ocean Literacy and Ocean-Climate related behaviour](#) which was undertaken by Dr Emma McKinley (Cardiff University) and Dr Daryl Burdon (Daryl Burdon Ltd.)

The key findings include:

- A strong connection to the ocean with 85% of people saying that protecting the marine environment was personally very important or important.
- Evidence of strong physical and mental health benefits of our marine environment. Of those who had visited our coastlines, 80% said it was good for their physical health and 84% said it was good for their mental health.
- The public feel that marine litter and plastic pollution (74%) is the greatest threat to the marine environment, followed by the chemical pollution (57%) and overfishing (54%). *Protecting and restoring marine environments which remove carbon was the top choice to address the effect of climate change on our marine environment (43%), closely followed by international commitments to reducing emissions (41%).
- The study reveals the role that documentaries such as the popular Blue Planet and the 'Attenborough effect' may have on the understanding of the threats facing our seas with 47% of people receiving information on the state of our oceans from wildlife documentaries.
- 78% said they had or plan to make lifestyle changes to protect the marine environment. The most common reasons for making these changes was concern about climate change (69%) and a desire to be greener (68%).

Members of the Global Ocean Alliance and/or the High Ambition Coalition for

Nature and People

- The 80 countries now supporting the 30by30 target in the ocean are: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Chad, Cote D'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Togo, Uganda, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Belize, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, Mongolia, Jordan, Pakistan, UAE, Australia, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau, Vanuatu, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Maldives, India, Japan, South Korea, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, EC, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

UK leadership on ocean protection and recovery

At last month's G7 Climate and Environment Ministerial meeting, hosted by the UK, ministers agreed to a number of ambitious commitments to drive urgent ocean action, including:

- Committing to Net Zero emissions by 2050 at the latest, with deep emissions reduction targets in the 2020s, and keeping the 1.5 degree temperature limit within reach – and where we recognise that climate action is ocean action;
- To support the '30by30' target to conserve or protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030 including through protected areas and Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures, in addition to domestic 30by30 commitments;
- An agreement to strengthen support for the Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance;
- Working to conclude the negotiation of a new and ambitious legally binding instrument under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (the BBNJ Agreement), to support increased ocean protection;
- To fully engage in discussions or negotiations on options to tackle marine plastic litter and microplastics, including strengthening existing agreements, a potential for a new global instrument, and multi-stakeholder,
- To take action to tackle ghost fishing gear, including working with or supporting initiatives such as the Global Ghost Gear Initiative and to carefully consider the recommendations of the UK-commissioned OECD report 'Towards G7 Action to Combat Ghost Fishing Gear'.
- And to support these commitments, the G7 Ocean Decade Navigation Plan, agreed under the UK's Presidency, establishes a framework for the G7 to collaborate and advance our collective work on transformational ocean science for ocean action throughout the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) – International MPA Partnership

- The UK is committed to working with partners internationally to promote a safe, healthy and sustainable ocean, including nature based solutions for climate, biodiversity and people.
- The UK has a five-year Memorandum of Understanding with Chile to work collaboratively on MPAs. This work has led to successful joint workshops, parallel MPAs and climate change projects in both countries. The UK, Chile, France, Costa Rica and USA have set up an International Partnership for MPAs, Climate and Biodiversity to further develop this work around knowledge collaboration.
- The International Partnership on Marine Protected Areas, Biodiversity and Climate Change, with scientific support from the IUCN and the Marine Alliance for Science and Technology for Scotland, will support global leaders and MPA practitioners to ensure they have the information and tools they need to understand the contribution of MPAs, and the biodiversity they protect, as a solution in helping mitigate the effects of climate change on the ocean.
- The Partnership officially launched on 2nd June 2021 and further information is available at www.mpabioclimate.org

CEFAS – Blue Belt Update

- This year the Blue Belt Programme exceeded its target of protecting and enhancing over 4 million square kilometers of marine environment around five UK Overseas Territories.
- Tristan da Cunha's designation of a new Marine Protected Zone (MPZ) in November 2020 brought the programme over the target.
- This means that at least 60% of the entire UK marine estate, including around the UK mainland and OTs has been designated within MPAs. These MPAs range from full 'no-take' MPAs, to multiple-use MPAs which recognise the effectiveness of the sustainable use of marine resources while also protecting and conserving the wider ecosystem.
- The Blue Belt Programme Annual Update 2020/21 highlights its key achievements from the past year, and sets out future ambition into 2022.
- The Blue Belt Programme is key to the UK Government's commitment to lead global efforts to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, and demonstrates the impact that coordinated action can have on a global scale.
- The Blue Belt Programme will continue to work with and assist the UK Overseas Territories over the next year to further protect, monitor and sustain these unique marine environments for future generations.

ORRAA

- The UK has moved to full membership of membership of the [Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance](#) (ORRAA).
- The alliance aims to drive \$500 million of global investment by 2030 into nature-based solutions to climate change. The investment will be used to enhance marine and coastal ecosystems such as reefs, mangroves and seagrass beds to increase resilience to climate change and mitigate its impact on coastal communities.

- The UK becomes the second G7 country after Canada to become a full member of the Alliance. Through the UK's G7 and COP26 Presidencies, ORRAA will be uniquely placed to bring the financial sector, governments and NGOs together to drive investment in nature-based solutions and to build resilience in vulnerable coastal communities