

Minister Pow keynote speech – Coastal Futures 2022

Thank you for inviting me to speak again, at a crucial time for our ocean. Over the next few days, you'll hear from a formidable line up. This conference is an excellent opportunity to share the wealth of knowledge that you all have – expertise that is welcome in our efforts to build back better from the pandemic, where innovation will play a crucial role.

We're privileged in the UK to be surrounded by some of the most beautiful and diverse coastal and marine habitats on Earth. We do know that protecting and restoring those habitats can provide the most wide ranging benefits, including preventing biodiversity loss, supporting livelihoods and wellbeing, and regulating our climate.

As nature recovery minister, marine and coastal conservation are absolutely key parts of my work. This year, colleagues across the Defra Group will continue working towards our vision of clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse seas, which are used sustainably.

A key part of that vision, framed by the Fisheries Act 2020, is our ambition to be a world-leading fisheries management nation and achieve fully sustainable fisheries. This year we will continue to develop Fisheries Management Plans, working in partnership with stakeholders. Today, together with the devolved administrations, we are launching a public consultation on the Joint Fisheries Statement to help us deliver world-class sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management and that sets out how we propose to deliver our eight Fisheries Objectives. We very much want to hear from all of you about our proposals.

The Joint Fisheries Statement and Fisheries Management Plans will be key tools underpinning our progress towards Good Environmental Status under the UK Marine Strategy. We are currently updating Part Three of the Strategy, which sets out the programme of measures we will implement to help us achieve our vision for our seas.

The last year has been a period of change. We are free to chart our own course in so many areas – including fisheries. And I firmly believe that we can achieve this ambition to be the most sustainable fisheries in the world – with rejuvenated fishing communities and a thriving marine environment.

This Government is committed to an ambitious levelling up agenda, and coastal communities must be at the heart of this. Over a third of the UK population live within 5 km of the coast and 17% live in coastal communities. So, we cannot truly level up without investing in our coastal communities.

We have launched a £100 million UK Seafood fund, with £24 million of investment to develop technology, trial new gear and support world-class research to improve the productivity and long-term sustainability of the

industry.

To support the industry, last year we launched the Fisheries Industry Science Partnerships scheme, and received over £2million worth of bids in the first round. The next round opens in early spring, and we want to hear from you in terms of applying and what you think would be useful.

We are also investing to upskill the workforce, train new entrants and ensure that we truly are at the cutting edge of new safe and sustainable fishing methods.

As we look to the future, innovation in the UK's world-leading offshore wind industry is transforming coastal communities and means the ocean will play an even greater role in getting to net zero. Defra is rising to the challenge of ensuring this greater role is balanced with protection of the marine environment, including through work on strategic compensation and new proposals for marine net gain and I am working very closely with my team and BEIS team.

Last week, Defra's Secretary of State met with the Stop Sea Blasts Campaign to watch a demonstration of how unexploded ordnance can be cleared in a much quieter way than the traditional technique of detonation, which is incredibly noisy and can impact on our whales and dolphins. Innovative solutions such as this will be key in ensuring we meet the Government's climate change commitments, whilst ensuring the protection of our marine environment.

I had a great visit recently to the East Coast Hub in Grimsby last year I saw, first-hand, how marine industries like offshore wind and fisheries can work together. Orsted and the Holderness Fishing Industry Group are finding new ways to drive community regeneration and reduce their cumulative impact on the marine environment. As the marine space gets busier, and we look to the sea to provide more of our energy and carbon storage, such collaboration will be the future.

We will also need to take a look strategically how we use our seas. That's why Defra is leading a cross-government programme of work to consider marine spatial prioritisation. We want to work with all of you to support co-existence between all sea users, optimising the use of our seas, and balancing the needs of industry with restoring and protecting the marine environment.

As the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development begins, the UK is embarking on a £140 million flagship science innovation programme, the Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme. Continuing the work started by Professor Dasgupta in his review of the economics of biodiversity, the programme will highlight the natural assets we have, and their condition, and begin to seek to acknowledge the value of nature for people and the economy – supporting Government ambitions to incorporate nature into its national accounts.

This year, we will strengthen the marine protections already in place by continuing work to ensure our network of Marine Protected Areas are

effectively protected. Now that we have left the EU, the MMO has used new powers to develop byelaws for four offshore sites and they are in the process of being finalised. These byelaws will prevent damaging fishing activity from taking place.

It's important to get these byelaws right and ensure they are robust; they set the tone for the remaining offshore sites, for which an ambitious three-year programme has been developed. This will implement byelaws, where necessary, to manage fishing activity in all English offshore MPAs.

In the next few months, we will also be conducting a formal consultation on potential Highly Protected Marine Area sites, which will have the highest protection in our seas. I spoke about this at my first conference here – and we are moving so close to this now, making real progress.

We also want to use our voice on the international stage to share our experiences, including those of our partners in overseas territories and crown dependencies who are stewards for so much marine life. 2021 was a significant year for this international work, including at the G7 leaders' summit in June, where the UK launched a £500 million Blue Planet Fund which will support developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty.

It was also tremendous to see the ocean right at the heart of the conversation at COP26, and we continue to advance the science on the connection between the ocean and our climate. We have just published a Natural England report on the exciting and rapidly developing area of blue carbon.

We will continue to champion action in 2022, including calling for ambitious outcomes from COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK has been leading calls to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030, including through the UK-led Global Ocean Alliance, and over 100 countries already support the target.

I'm proud of the progress we have made together so far, through the Environment Act, a significant piece of legislation and look forward to continuing to work closely with you all to ensure we hand on our marine environment in a better state than we found it. Thank you.