

News story: UK takes world stage in fight against marine plastic

Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey has set out how the UK is taking action to tackle marine litter and protect oceans from the effects of climate change at today's 'Our Ocean' conference in Malta.

Speaking in front of heads of state, ministers and NGOs from around the world, the Environment Minister pledged her support to help small island developing states with marine science, research and conservation projects – alongside setting out how the government is continuing the fight at home against the eight million tonnes of plastic that make their way into oceans each year.

The UK's ban on microbeads has been lauded as one of the toughest in the world and nine billion fewer plastic bags have been distributed since the government introduced a 5p charge. This week the government also issued a [call for evidence](#) on the benefits of reward and return schemes for plastic bottles in a bid to clean up our oceans.

Speaking from Malta, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Around the world our oceans are suffering from the blight of plastic pollution and the impacts of climate change.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life – our 5p plastic bag charge has taken nine billion bags out of circulation, our microbeads ban is one of the toughest in the world, and we are now exploring what more we can do to reduce the impact of plastic bottles.

But there is always more we can do – which is why I am meeting with my counterparts in Malta today to pledge my continued support for marine conservation and discuss how we can work together to protect our precious oceans and marine life for future generations.

The [Our Ocean Conference](#), held in Malta from 5-6 October, brings together heads of state, governments, industry and NGOs to discuss marine conservation and agree actions to protect seas and oceans around the world.

Alongside further funding under the [Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme](#) – which began in 2015 to help small island states make the most of their maritime assets and encourage sustainable economic growth – the Environment Minister also announced support for global initiatives to tackle plastic pollution.

These include joining the Global Partnership on Marine Litter – one of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – as well as signing up to the Global

Ghost Gear Initiative, an alliance of the fishing industry, NGOs and government agencies working to solve the problem of lost and abandoned 'ghost' fishing gear that can trap sea life.

£5.2 million has also been granted to marine projects through the two most recent rounds of the Darwin Initiative and Darwin Plus grant schemes – helping to protect coral reefs, set up Marine Protected Areas, encourage sustainable fisheries and increase the resilience of coastal communities to climate change.

While in Malta, Minister Coffey also reiterated the government's commitment to creating a network of marine protected areas around the United Kingdom, alongside reaffirming £4.8 million to drive forward the creation of a 'blue belt' across the UK's Overseas Territories.