

Pitcairn Islands' tiny Pacific community publishes ambitious five-year management plan for its vast Marine Protected Area

The Government of the Pitcairn Islands has published an ambitious five-year Marine Protected Area (MPA) management plan to protect over 841,910 square km of ocean in one of the most remote places on earth.

This plan will further protect the Pitcairn Islands' untouched coral reefs and safeguard threatened species such as the humpback whale, green turtles and seabirds such as the Henderson Petrel.

It builds upon the work already delivered by the Government since the designation of Pitcairn's Highly Protected MPA in 2016, one of the largest in the world. These include the development of a whale watching code of conduct and training for local operators to ensure whale watching tours could be delivered without disturbing the animals. The management plan takes initiatives like these even further whilst also underpinning the economic aspirations for the territory.

The nearly pristine nature of the Pitcairn Islands marine ecosystems means that its MPA has an irreplaceable unique global value. In addition, Henderson Island, a designated World Heritage Site, is one of the best remaining examples of an elevated coral atoll ecosystem.

The extreme clarity of the water means coral can grow at depths greater than expected for most Pacific reefs and potentially, Ducie Island's coral reefs may also be more resilient to climate change. Over 1,250 marine species have been recorded, including three species of whales that are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List. The area is also home to hawksbill and green turtles (critically endangered and endangered, respectively); as well as three species of endangered seabirds; one critically endangered fish and one endangered fish. There are also five species of endemic bony fishes found nowhere else on Earth.

The UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, Pew Trusts, RSPB and other key partners have assisted the Government of the Pitcairn Islands in the development of their management plan to ensure day-to-day management and protective measures are enforced across the MPA.

The management plan is critical to the success of the MPA and the protection of the marine environment by ensuring that all supporting legal, institutional and policy frameworks are in place, that the objectives of the MPA are clearly defined and all the necessary resources – in both finance and people are secured. The plan has been shaped by Pitcairn Islanders, who were involved in a public consultation in 2018.

Lord Goldsmith, UK Minister for the Environment, commented

The Pitcairn Islands are a great demonstration of real ambition on marine protection. This tiny population is already working to safeguard its vast MPA. But with the publication and implementation of its management plan it is laying down a statement of intent to ensure the health of its ecosystem, and the potential for its unique coral reefs to further inform our understanding of climate change. This is a very positive step, especially when all eyes are on COP26, and we have an urgent need to share and increase our knowledge of how climate change is affecting the health of our oceans.

I'd like to congratulate the islanders, who have followed both Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha in the publication of their MPA management plans, showing the fantastic progress being made under the Blue Belt Programme, with support from key organisations such as the Pew Trust and the RSPB.

Key aspects of the MPA include:

- All harmful activities, such as fishing mining and dumping waste, which may threaten vulnerable marine ecosystems and endangered species are banned within 99.5% (832,738 square kilometres) of the MPA.
- The no-take MPA has closed off areas previously exposed to fishing and other extractive activities, ensuring a positive impact for these environments.
- The remaining part of the MPA (the territorial seas around Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands, an area known as Adams Seamount and a transit zone between Pitcairn Island and Adams Seamount) only permits activities that are managed sustainably, such as fishing by local residents.
- The new Marine Conservation Regulations set out how activities within the territorial seas will be managed to ensure that they don't damage the important habitats and species found there. The management plan also identifies and sets out strategies to minimize the challenges Pitcairn Islands' marine environment faces through possible increased threat of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; pollution (marine oil spills and plastics); anchor damage; erosion and run-off from land; invasive non-native species and climate change these threats.

Alasdair Hamilton, Deputy Governor of the Pitcairn Islands, said:

This management plan will be an important blueprint to help us protect and monitor Pitcairn's unique and precious marine environment – home to pristine coral reefs and species not seen anywhere else on earth. These areas of rich marine biodiversity are mostly untouched by humans, meaning the health of the ecosystem is

an important way for us to assess not only the impacts of climate change, but the benefits of having more Marine Protected Areas globally.

I am delighted that the small but capable Pitcairn Island community can undertake such important work in delivering on this plan and demonstrating how Pitcairn's MPA is an exemplar model of global action to protect our oceans.

Pitcairn has a proud cultural heritage and is keen that the whole of the local community benefits from the MPA through the potential of new marine eco-tourism.

Michele Christian – Division Manager, Government of Pitcairn Islands, commented:

The Blue Belt Programme continues to be an extremely important piece of work for the Pitcairn Islands. This year we're excited to put in place our new MPA Management Plan, which will bring clear guidance on how to manage and effectively protect our valuable marine environment.

It's a very exciting time for Pitcairn, as along with the publication of its management plan, several Pitcairn Islanders have taken part in a science expedition, collecting data on the health of its MPA. The scientific survey has been an amazing opportunity for local engagement, the experience of seeing first hand the wonders of nature both on land and sea. We now share a greater understanding of how important it is to protect the strong and vulnerable species by ensuring that we have robust management and monitoring systems leading into the future. Thank you, Blue Belt, for giving us – the Pitcairn community – the opportunity and lasting memories of the special place we live in – what a privilege. Hopefully the findings will be out in the Autumn.

Read the full [Pitcairn MPA Management Plan](#)

The Blue Belt Programme is a UK Government initiative to enhance marine protection across over 4 million square kilometres of marine environment in the UK Overseas Territories.

Overseas Territories part of the Blue Belt Programme who protect their waters with the support of this initiative, include Ascension Island, the British Antarctic Territory, British Indian Ocean Territory, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, the Pitcairn Islands, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha

– covering an area 17 times the size of the UK and over one percent of the Earth's entire ocean.

This flagship Programme has been central to the UK Government's ambition of leading action to tackle the serious global problems of illegal fishing, species extinction and climate change. The Programme has underpinned the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan and supported the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals. More recently, it has supported the UK's commitment to ensure 30% of the world's oceans are protected by 2030.