

Press release: Gove calls for 30 per cent of world's oceans to be protected by 2030

- UK calls for third of world's oceans to be safeguarded by 2030
- Current global targets for protected areas to treble under ambitious plans
- Marine protection top of agenda at UN General Assembly in New York

Environment Secretary Michael Gove has today called for a third of the world's oceans to be protected by 2030.

Globally, less than 10 per cent of the world's seas are currently designated as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) – one of the most important ways to protect precious sea life and habitats from damaging activity.

Now, the UK is backing ambitious calls to treble internationally-agreed targets for protected areas, meaning 30 per cent of the world's seas would be safeguarded as MPAs by 2030.

This will build on the UK's global leadership in protecting the marine environment – with over 200,000 square miles of Britain's coastline already protected and recent proposals for 41 new Marine Conservation Zones marking the most significant expansion of the 'Blue Belt' to date.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Protection of our oceans is a global challenge which requires global action. The UK has already safeguarded vast swathes of precious marine habitats, but we must go further.

Only by working together can we protect our shared home and ensure our marine life continues to be a source of awe and wonder for future generations.

The UK's ambitious calls also coincide with the United Nations General Assembly, where countries have gathered in New York to discuss protection for our oceans.

While there, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey will call on other nations to push for the global target of 30 per cent of oceans designated as MPAs by 2030.

Speaking from New York, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

It is only by working with our counterparts internationally that we can truly bring about global change.

I am delighted to be in New York this week to look at how we can build on the progress made on marine protection and protect the world's oceans for future generations.

Currently, global targets for marine protected areas are set by the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, with parties agreeing to protect 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas by 2020.

The UK will join almost 200 other countries in November in Egypt to begin negotiations on a new global target, and while here will push to treble the current figure to 30 per cent by 2030.

This approach would see a third of the world's oceans protected. As is the case now, MPAs will consist of a range of management measures.

Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan said:

The UK and our Overseas Territories are working together to establish a Blue Belt of marine protection for over four million square kilometres of British waters by 2020, protecting and sustainably managing our oceans for future generations.

It is imperative that we act now to save our ocean from unsustainable activities and protect its unique ecosystems which we still know so little about. This 30 percent global target to improve ocean management and protection is both ambitious and achievable and we encourage our international partners to take action now.

Back home, 36 per cent of England's waters are already safeguarded as MPAs – with the government's recent proposals for 41 new Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) representing the most significant expansion of the Blue Belt yet.

The proposed new MCZs span more than 12,000 square kilometres, protecting species such as the short snouted seahorse, stalked jellyfish and peacock's tail seaweed.

Across its overseas territories as a whole, the UK has pledged to safeguard over four million square kilometres of ocean by 2020. The Government will also publish an international ocean strategy before the end of the year setting out further action to conserve and sustainably use the ocean.

This commitment to marine protection forms a key part of the 25 Year Environment Plan, an ambitious roadmap for a greener future.

The government has introduced one of the world's strongest bans on microbeads to protect our oceans and 13 billion fewer bags have been distributed thanks to the Government's 5p plastic bag charge.

In a further drive to clean up our seas, the Government has also set out

ambitious plans to end the sale of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds and introduce a deposit return scheme, subject to consultation later this year.