

Public to have their say on stronger protections for UK waters

The public are being asked to give their views on strengthening protections for UK waters to help safeguard precious species and habitats.

As part of a four-week [call for evidence](#) which launches today (3 October 2019), communities, industry and stakeholders are being asked for their comments on putting tougher measures in place to help stop the impacts of human activity from damaging the marine environment. Views are also sought on which areas would benefit most from these extra protections.

These Highly Protected Marine Areas would be the strongest form of marine protection in the UK and would build on the 220,000 square kilometres of protection areas already in place around the UK. Known as the 'Blue Belt', these areas are already helping to protect species such as the short-snouted seahorse and stalked jellyfish.

The government is committed to restoring the marine environment for future generations and is a world-leader on this issue, having committed to safeguarding 50 per cent of UK and Overseas Territory waters by the end of next year. And at last week's United Nations General Assembly, [the UK created a global alliance](#) to drive urgent action to safeguard the world's ocean and protect its precious wildlife.

Today's call for evidence is part of a six-month review undertaken by an independent panel of experts to look at what further protections might be needed to drive progress in the UK.

Review chair, Richard Benyon MP, said:

We want to make sure we are doing our utmost to protect our ocean and this call for evidence will help us evaluate whether, and where, we can go further to safeguard marine life, while balancing the needs of fishing, marine industries, conservation and local communities.

The views of those who use the seas will be at the heart of the review and we want to hear particularly from those with expertise on the aims, opportunities and challenges of introducing Highly Protected Marine Areas.

The feedback gathered by the call for evidence will inform the work of the independent panel, which is looking at the case for introducing higher protections to English waters and Northern Irish offshore seas. The views of those who use the seas will be at the heart of the review, which will consider the economic and social impacts on businesses and individuals who use the sea, taking into account the views of fishermen, conservation groups,

marine industries, and local communities.

The review will conclude in early 2020, after which time the panel will make a formal recommendation to Defra.

Further information:

- In June 2019, [Defra announced a review](#) to examine whether and how the strongest protections for areas of sea, known as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), could be introduced. The review, led by Richard Benyon MP, will run from June 2019 to early 2020, and will consider the waters for which the Secretary of State has responsibility: the English inshore and offshore and Northern Ireland offshore zones. Further info is available at [this link](#).
- The review into Highly Protected Marine Areas follows the successful designation of 91 [Marine Conservation Zones](#) in England between 2013 and 2019. These zones were introduced after close consultation with local communities, and the industries that rely on UK waters, to ensure that the needs of fishing, conservation and local communities are all taken into account.