

UK creates global alliance to help protect the world's ocean

The UK has today announced a new global alliance to help drive urgent action to safeguard the world's ocean and protect its precious wildlife.

Plastic pollution, warming sea temperatures and human impacts are having a significant impact on the world's marine environments and even putting certain species at risk of extinction.

The UK is leading the way on this issue, [having been the first country to call for a global 30 per cent target at the United Nations General Assembly last year](#). The UK has also taken action, protecting more than 50 per cent of UK and Overseas Territories waters by 2020, and tackling the scourge of plastic that often ends up there, by introducing the 5p plastic bag charge and banning the supply of plastic straws, stirrers and cotton buds from next April.

So far, Belize, Costa Rica, Finland, Gabon, Kenya, Seychelles, Vanuatu, Portugal, Palau and Belgium have all signed up to the 30by30 initiative, which is pushing for at least 30 per cent of the global ocean to be protected in Marine Protected Areas by 2030. These protections help sensitive species such as seahorses, turtles and corals to thrive, and can help fight climate change by protecting key carbon habitats such as mangrove forests and seagrass meadows.

The Global Ocean Alliance will push for the trebling of existing globally-agreed targets so at least a third of the ocean is safeguarded in Marine Protected Areas over the next decade. It will also call for the 30by30 ambition to be adopted at the next Convention on Biological Diversity conference in China and introduced into international law through the High Seas Treaty in 2020.

Last month [the Prime Minister announced plans to go even further with £7 million to extend the 'Blue Belt'](#) – over four million square kilometres of marine environment – across the UK Overseas Territories. The international coalition announced today will help to drive even greater international action to tackle these issues and safeguard the world's ocean for future generations.

Environment Secretary, Theresa Villiers said:

The UK is taking a world-leading approach to marine conservation and is on track to safeguard nearly 50 per cent of our precious marine habitats. But we are determined to go further.

The world's ocean is a shared resource, sustaining lives and

livelihoods and supporting 80 per cent of our blue planet's biodiversity. Only by working together can we protect and restore our marine environment for future generations to come.

International Environment Minister Zac Goldsmith, in New York to attend UNGA, said:

We have all seen the damage that both climate change and human exploitation has had on our most pristine environments. Our ocean is under unprecedented pressure, with appalling effects on marine biodiversity and human livelihoods.

I am delighted to be in New York to press the case for an ambitious global network of marine protected areas which will be critically important in reversing the loss of biodiversity and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Less than 10 per cent of the world's ocean is currently designated as Marine Protected Areas. But science shows such areas are one of the most important ways to protect precious sea life and habitats from damaging activities – and evidence supports a target of at least 30 per cent to reverse existing adverse impacts, preserve fish populations, increase resilience to climate change, and sustain long-term ocean health.

The international coalition announced today builds on the UK's world-leading efforts to increase Blue Belt protections. [The UK government designated 41 new Marine Conservation Zones in May](#), marking the most significant expansion of England's 'Blue Belt' to date. The UK now has a total of 355 marine protected areas in waters around Great Britain and Northern Ireland and an independent review is considering whether stronger protections should be introduced.

It also follows recently announced UK-backed plans for more than 150,000 square miles of a 'no take' zone around Ascension Island, closing the off-shore area to any fishing activity. This will support the protection of key species such as green turtles.

The government's commitment to marine protection forms a key part of the [25 Year Environment Plan](#). As part of this plan, the government has also introduced [one of the world's strongest bans on microbeads](#) to protect our ocean, in addition to the plastic bag charge and [ban on straws, stirrers and cotton buds](#).