



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP 2017-225, 14 November 2017

# UK's role in degradation of the marine environment

## Summary

This pack has been produced ahead of the debate to be held in Westminster Hall on Tuesday 14 November 2017 on the UK's role in degradation of the marine environment. The debate will be opened by Barry Sheerman MP.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Summary

## 1.1 Introduction

Oceans cover about 70 per cent of the earth and support an incredible variety of life. However, according to the UN, as much as 40 per cent of the world's oceans are heavily affected by human activities, including pollution, depleted fisheries, and loss of coastal habitats.<sup>1</sup> The oceans include a vast variety of habitats, and the broad spectrum of human activities in the oceans affect different species and ecosystems to different extents.

UK seas extend to some 867,400 km, more than three and a half times the UK land area,<sup>2</sup> and host a wide variety of marine habitats and species. There are thought to be more than 330 fish species inhabiting the shelf seas around the British Isles, 28 species of dolphins and whales, and 38 species of seabirds which use British waters.<sup>3</sup>

Human activities in the both coastal and open waters have increased, leading to physical and biological pressures on the marine environment, including the impacts of fishing, pollution and climate change. The UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform states:

Oceans, seas and marine resources are increasingly threatened, degraded or destroyed by human activities, reducing their ability to provide crucial ecosystem services. Important classes of threats are, among others, climate change, marine pollution, unsustainable extraction of marine resources and physical alterations and destruction of marine and coastal habitats and landscapes. The deterioration of coastal and marine ecosystems and habitats is negatively affecting human well-being worldwide.<sup>4</sup>

General information on the oceans and marine ecosystems is available from the following resources:

- Gov.uk [policy pages on the marine environment](#)
- [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\)](#) – The US Government department for the Oceans provides background information on marine systems. [NOAA Ocean Explorer](#)
- The [ARKive website](#) offers a visual exploration of the world's wide range of species and habitats, for example this exploration of the [UK's rocky shores](#). ARKive is an initiative of the charity Wildscreen.
- European Environment Agency', [Towards healthy and productive seas in Europe and beyond.](#)' 15 September 2017

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<sup>1</sup> UN Sustainable Development Goals, '[Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources](#)' page [Accessed 23 October 2017]

<sup>2</sup> Defra, [Marine Strategy Part 1](#), December 2012

<sup>3</sup> Defra, [Marine Strategy Part 1](#), December 2012

<sup>4</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, [Oceans and Seas](#) page, [Accessed 9 November 2017]

### Our Ocean Conference

The European Union recently hosted the 4th edition of the '[Our Ocean conference](#)' in Malta on 5-6 October 2017. The conference aimed to bring together world leaders, organisations, businesses and experts to drive concrete action to reduce deterioration of the marine environment. The conference identified six areas where action is needed: Marine Protected Areas, Climate Change, Sustainable Fisheries, Marine Pollution, Sustainable Blue Economy, and Maritime Security.

The [Conference website](#) contains more information on their areas of action, as well as details of the over 400 commitments made by governments, businesses and organisations, which include the ambition of 2.5 million square km of additional Marine Protected Areas and over 7 billion Euros in financial pledges.

Prince Charles addressed the Our Ocean Conference:

“While we should be relieved that the health of the ocean is now understood, alongside our rainforests, to be one of the essential prerequisites for our physical and economic survival, I wonder if the ocean’s fragility is yet truly grasped and how susceptible it is to the impacts of our economic activities ... We must never mistake [the oceans] for a new frontier for endless economic exploitation.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Supreme wake-up call: Prince Charles' urges action on ocean pollution](#), The Guardian, 5 October 2017

## 1.2 UN Sustainable Development Goal 14

According to UN figures over three billion people depend on marine and coastal resources for their livelihoods. In addition, oceans are crucial for global food security and human health.<sup>5</sup> The need to address these concerns is reflected in [UN Sustainable Development Goal 14](#) (SDG14) which sets out to “Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”, in particular through:

SDG 14 Targets:

- 14.1 By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds
- 14.2 By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts
- 14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific collaboration at all levels.
- 14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and destructive fishing practices.
- By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas
- By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing.

<sup>5</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, [Oceans and Seas](#) page, [Accessed 9 November 2017]

- By 2030, increase the economic benefits to Small Island Developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources.<sup>6</sup>

The UK government published [Agenda 2030](#) setting its approach to delivering SDGs in the UK and worldwide in March 2017. This lists a range of UK actions covering the following:

- working internationally to manage ocean change sustainably and providing modern, accurate marine data and developing the skills needed to manage and protect critical marine ecosystems; and
- developing and encouraging sustainable fishing regulations, reducing water contamination and protecting a healthy UK marine biodiversity.<sup>7</sup>

The [UN Ocean Conference](#) was held in New York from 5th – 9th June 2017. Defra Minister Dr Therese Coffey provided the following update to the House on the UK Government approach following the conference:

I am pleased to report that, through its statement to the conference, the UK Government was able to demonstrate its continued support for the SDG process. We recognised the delivery of SDG 14 has a particular significance for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries and that we would continue to support the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, in developing sustainable ocean economies, alleviating poverty, and mitigating the effects of climate change and environmental threats.

The UK Government statement noted that climate change and ocean acidification continue to be significant threats to the long term health of our oceans. We highlighted the major role the UK played in securing the Paris Agreement and reiterated our commitment to its implementation.

I am also pleased to report that, recognising the need to take action on pollution from land-based sources, including the increasing amount of plastics and micro-plastics, the UK was able to sign up to the UN Environment Clean Seas Campaign.

The expertise of our marine science industry was demonstrated through the successful ocean acidification event led by the UK.

The UK also made four voluntary commitments to support the implementation of SDG14, highlighting our work on Marine Protected Areas, including in the Overseas Territories; marine science; marine litter and the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme. These can be viewed on the conference website at <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/><sup>8</sup>

### 1.3 Marine Conservation

The [European Red List of Endangered Marine Fishes](#), published in 2015, identified that in the Northeast Atlantic the waters around Iceland, the British Isles and Norway as hotspots of threatened fish species.

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<sup>6</sup> UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, [Oceans and Seas](#) page, [Accessed 9 November 2017]

<sup>7</sup> DFID, [Agenda 2030, The UK Government's approach to delivering the Global Goals for Sustainable Development - at home and around the world](#), March 2017

<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Ocean Conference: [Written statement - HCWS44](#), 13 July 2017

Marine protected areas (MPAs) have been introduced, in the UK and elsewhere, with the aim of protecting the marine environment from harmful human activities. MPAs are clearly defined geographical spaces, and are dedicated to achieving the long-term conservation of marine ecosystems.<sup>9</sup> Networks of MPAs have been shown to be effective at protecting marine species, leading to “higher densities, biomass and species richness of marine biota” within and around the area.<sup>10</sup>

In the UK, approximately 23% of our waters are currently within MPAs. There are 105 [Special Areas of Conservation \(SACs\)](#) with marine components, 102 [Special Protection Areas \(SPAs\)](#) with marine components, 56 [Marine Conservation Zones](#) and 30 [Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas](#).<sup>11</sup> The UK Government is aiming to protect over 4 million square kilometres of the marine environment in the UK and its overseas territories by 2020.<sup>12</sup>

The UK Government has also set a date of 2021, by which Marine Plans will be in place for each of its marine planning regions. Under these human activity will have to be set at a level that enables good environmental status to be achieved.<sup>13</sup>

## 1.4 Fish farming

Finfish and shellfish aquaculture (also known as fish or shellfish farming) are increasingly contributing to a larger share of the world’s total fish production. However, there are associated concerns such as risk of escapes, transfer of disease to wild animals, and eutrophication from fish farm feed and waste. Finfish such as salmon are also fed mostly on small wild caught fish, leading to concerns about sustainability.

Scotland is biggest producer of aquaculture in the UK, and the largest producer of farmed salmon in the EU.<sup>14</sup> Scotland is also home to a large number of shellfish farms and a few small scale seaweed farms have recently been established.<sup>15</sup> The salmon industry in Scotland has recently been criticised for its impact on wild salmon and sea trout as a result of failures to control sea lice, and an inquiry into aquaculture in Scotland was agreed for early 2018 by the Scottish Parliament [Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee](#).<sup>16</sup>

On the 26 October 2017, Michael Gove launched the Cefas-Exeter Collaborative Centre for Sustainable Aquaculture Futures with the ambition of “bringing together world-leading scientists to ensure the

<sup>9</sup> [Selection of Marine Conservation Zones](#), POST Note, 6 June 2013

<sup>10</sup> [Marine Conservation Zones in England](#), Commons Library Briefing SN06129, 17 July 2015

<sup>11</sup> JNCC, [Contributing to a Marine Protected Area network](#) page (as accessed on 27 October 2017)

<sup>12</sup> Marine Management Organisation (MMO), [UK Blue Belt - Global ambitions for marine protection](#), 5 September 2017

<sup>13</sup> DFID, [Agenda 2030](#), March 2017

<sup>14</sup> Government Office for Science, [Future of the sea: trends in aquaculture](#), 3 August 2017

<sup>15</sup> Scotland’s Aquaculture, [Our Aquaculture](#) page, (as accessed on 27 October 2017)

<sup>16</sup> [‘Scottish Parliament Inquiry into Salmon Farming Agreed’](#), Fish and Fly, 26 June 2017

key challenges facing sustainable growth of the aquaculture industry are better understood, both at home and internationally.”<sup>17</sup>

## 1.5 Fisheries

Currently fisheries policy is an exclusive competence of the European Union under the [Common Fisheries Policy](#) (CFP). The UK government points to its “playing a key role in securing radical reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP)” as evidence of its focus on sustainable fisheries.<sup>18</sup>

The principal aim of the CFP is to ensure high long-term fishing yields for all stocks “by 2015 where possible, and at the latest by 2020”. It also has an aim of reducing unwanted catches, or bycatches, and practices such as discards, to the minimum. It has done this through the gradual introduction of a landing obligation. The EU also has stated aim of increasing stakeholder participation, when setting fishing quotas. Quotas are based on the available data and scientific evidence, which are used to set the maximum sustainable yields for each species.<sup>19</sup>

## 1.6 Climate Change

The Committee on Climate Change (an independent statutory body) explains the impacts of climate change as follows:

Since the late 19th century, the global average temperature has risen by about 1°C and the global sea level has risen by about 20cm. The rising temperature is leading to wider changes to our weather. At the same time, increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels are causing the world’s oceans to become more acidic.

Many impacts of climate change are already being detected, including:

- warming of the troposphere (the lower part of the atmosphere)
- acidification of the oceans
- rising sea levels
- declining glaciers and sea ice
- slowing of increases to crop productivity<sup>20</sup>

The impacts on the marine environment are set out further on [Gov.uk: climate change explained](#) as follows:

### **Warming oceans**

While the temperature rise at the Earth’s surface may get the most headlines, the temperature of the oceans has been

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<sup>17</sup> Defra & CEFAS Press Release, ‘[Environment Secretary Michael Gove launches the Cefas-Exeter collaborative centre for Sustainable Aquaculture Futures to support food security and blue growth](#)’, 26 October 2017

<sup>18</sup> DFID, [Agenda 2030. The UK Government’s approach to delivering the Global Goals for Sustainable Development - at home and around the world](#), March 2017

<sup>19</sup> EU Commission, [Managing Fisheries](#) [website accessed 9 November 2017]

<sup>20</sup> Committee on Climate Change, [The science and impacts of climate change](#) [accessed 9 November 2017]

increasing too. This warming has been measured all the way down to 2 km deep.

The chemistry of the oceans is also changing as they absorb much of the excess carbon dioxide being emitted into the atmosphere. This is causing the oceans to become acidic more rapidly than at any point in the last 65 million years.

### **Melting polar ice and glaciers**

As the Arctic warms, sea ice is decreasing rapidly. In the Antarctic, sea ice has slowly increased, driven by local changes in wind patterns and freshening sea water. Over the past 20 years the ice sheets (the great masses of land ice at the poles) in Greenland and the Antarctic have shrunk, as have most glaciers around the world.

### **Rising sea levels**

As land ice melts and the warming oceans expand, sea levels have risen. Between 1901 and 2010 the global average sea level rose by 0.19 metres, likely faster than at any point in the last 2,000 years.<sup>21</sup>

Further information on these topics and UK Government action on climate change is available in the following resources:

- POSTnote [Rising Sea Levels](#), 15 June 2017
- Commons Library Briefings on the [Paris Agreement and Marrakech Climate Conference](#), 25 November 2016
- [Gov.uk: climate change explained](#)
- The [Marine Climate Change Impact Partnership \(MCCIP\)](#), including a [10 Year Report card](#), which summarises scientific findings on the impact of climate change in UK seas since the project started in 2006; <sup>22</sup> and more detailed information on key topics such as [ocean acidification](#) and [temperature, impacts on biodiversity](#), and impacts on society (i.e. [fisheries](#), [human health](#) and [coastal flooding](#)).
- The annual United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP23) is currently being held in Bonn, Germany (6-17 November). Up-to-date information on progress is available on the [UNFCCC COP23 pages](#).

Defra Minister Dr Therese Coffey gave a [speech at COP23 on 11 November 2017](#) about the UK's actions on protecting oceans and marine life, and announced that the UK would sign up to the "Because the Oceans" declaration. <sup>23</sup>

## **1.7 Marine pollution**

Marine pollution originates from a variety of marine and land-based sources, and includes pollutants in the form of heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants, excess nutrients, oil, plastics, radioactive materials and anthropogenic underwater noise.

<sup>21</sup> Gov.uk, [Climate changed explained](#) [accessed 10 November 2017]

<sup>22</sup> MCCIP (2017). [Marine Climate Change Impacts: 10 years' experience of science to policy reporting](#). (Eds. Frost M, Baxter J, Buckley P, Dye S and Stoker B) MCCIP, Lowestoft, 12pp

<sup>23</sup> Gov.uk, [Environment Minister speaks at the UK Climate Change Conference](#), 13 November 2017



One example of marine pollution which has recently received a lot of Parliamentary and press coverage is plastic pollution. The Secretary of State for Defra (Michael Gove MP) pledged action to reduce plastic waste in oceans in July 2017, including confirmation that legislation would be introduced this year to ban the sale and manufacture of microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products:

Eight million tonnes of plastic are discarded into the world's oceans each year, putting marine wildlife under serious threat.

In October 2015, the government introduced the 5p carrier bag charge. Figures released today show that policy's enormous success – nine billion fewer carrier bags distributed since the charge was introduced, a fall of 83 per cent. More than £95million raised from the charge has been donated to environmental, educational and other good causes.

Last year the government launched a consultation on banning microbeads in personal care products, which have such a devastating effect on marine life. We are responding to that consultation today and we will introduce legislation to implement that ban later this year.

But there is more we can do to protect our oceans, so we will explore new methods of reducing the amount of plastic - in particular plastic bottles - entering our seas, improve incentives for reducing waste and litter, and review the penalties available to deal with polluters - all part of a renewed strategy on waste and resources that looks ahead to opportunities outside the EU.<sup>24</sup>

Further information on this topic is available in the following resources:

- Environmental Audit Committee Report, [Environmental impact of microplastics](#), 26 July 2016; and corresponding [Government Response](#), November 2016
- Commons Library Briefing, [Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products](#), 4 January 2017
- Commons Library Briefing, [The 5p Plastic Bag Charge](#), 22 June 2017
- POST Note, [Marine Microplastic Pollution](#), 5 June 2016
- Commons Library blog, [What does Brexit mean for the UK's beaches?](#)

## 1.8 Increasingly busy seas

Other concerns relating to impact on the marine environment focus on the increasing use of the seas by a number of different industries, such as the oil & gas, fishing, aquaculture, tourism, renewable energy and shipping industries. The concentration of multiple marine users in coastal seas has led to calls for consideration of the cumulative impacts on marine systems. Environmental impact is frequently assessed only for the one development under consideration, without taking account of the number of other activities which might also be impacting species in the area. Limitations in knowledge about the impact of combined activities make such assessments hard. Issues such as high levels of noise and light pollution affecting marine mammals and other species, animal

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<sup>24</sup> Gov.uk, [Environment Secretary pledges action on ocean plastics](#), 21 July 2017



strikes from wind turbines or ships, and the movement of invasive species may be intensified as the amount of use increases. Marine planning is a possible solution for reducing cumulative impacts and for addressing issues between sectors.

For more information see POSTnote, [Marine Planning](#), 15 September 2011.

## 2. News articles

BBC News, 23 October 2017

[More acidic oceans 'will affect all sea life'](#)

The Guardian, 23 October 2017

[Ocean acidification is deadly threat to marine life, finds eight year study](#)

The Guardian, 23 October 2017

[Waiting for the tide to turn: Kiribati's fight for survival](#)

The Guardian, 23 October 2016

[Flotsam and fashion: recycler of 'ghost' fishing nets makes marine litter trendy](#)

Oceans Deeply, 19 October 2017

[Sea turtles are a conservation success story - mostly](#)

The Guardian, 11 October 2017

[Sewage plants are leaking millions of tiny plastic beads into Britain's seas](#)

The Guardian, 5 October 2017

['Supreme wake-up call': Prince Charles' urges action on ocean pollution](#)

The Guardian, 14 September 2017

[MPs to reopen inquiry into plastic bottle use](#)

The Guardian, 7 September 2017

[UK coast haven for 200,000 seabirds becomes marine special protected area](#)

The Independent, 9 August 2017

['Climate change, sewage and fertilisers could trigger mass extinction of life in the oceans, scientists warn'](#)

The Guardian, 4 August 2017

[Industrial meat production is killing our seas. It's time to change our diets](#)

The Independent, 27 July 2017

[British seabirds face an 'uncertain future' as UK waters warm up](#)

Financial Times, 19 July 2017

[North Sea cod completes long journey back to sustainability](#)

The Daily Mail, 25 June 2017

[Fish farms shoot dozens of seals to save salmon bound for 'ethical' Waitrose and M&S supermarkets](#)

BBC News, 21 June 2017

[Scottish Salmon farming risk to wild wrasse](#)

UN News Centre, 6 June 2017

[Climate Change and the World's Oceans](#)

The Economist, 27 May 2017

[Getting serious about overfishing](#)

BBC News, 2 May 2017

[Shocking levels of PCB chemicals in UK killer whale Lulu](#)

BBC News, 24 April 2017

[Rare Loch Carron flame shell reef 'devastated' by Scallop dredger](#)

The Guardian, 1 April 2017

[Salmon farming in crisis: 'We are seeing a chemical arms race in the sea'](#)

The Guardian, 13 February 2017

['Extraordinary' levels of pollutants found in 10 km deep Mariana Trench](#)

The Guardian, 4 February 2017

[The primal thrill of sharks: the emotional case for rewilding the sea](#)

The Guardian, 8 January 2017

[How warming seas are forcing fish to seek new waters](#)

### 3. Government announcements

#### [Speech: Environment Minister speaks at the UN Climate Change Conference](#)

From: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) and [Thérèse Coffey MP](#)

Part of: [Marine environment](#)

Published: 13 November 2017

Delivered on: 11 November 2017 (Transcript of the speech, exactly as it was delivered)

#### **On Saturday 11 November Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey gave a speech at the UN Climate Change Conference in Bonn, Germany.**

I am delighted to be here at COP23, working with other nations, international organisations and of course Peter Thomson.

I thank Fiji for their leadership in the Presidency and Germany for being great hosts.

We have had feedback that the UK can play a greater role globally and we are happy to do that.

Oceans make up around two thirds of our planet and our lives are inextricably linked with our blue seas. However, our oceans are changing and we must take action to save them.

We now have nearly 300 Marine Protected Areas in UK waters, and by 2020 we will deliver a network of Marine Protected Areas that will cover 25 per cent of the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone. In addition, the UK is on track to protect 4 million square kilometres of ocean across its Overseas Territories by 2020.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life. Action on plastic bag use has been taken across the UK, for instance, the 5p plastic bag charge in England has cut the use of plastic bags by over 80 per cent, or over 9 billion in just one year, and our microbead ban will be one of the toughest in the world.

We recognise the particularly damaging effects of climate change on developing countries. That is why the UK has committed at least £5.8 billion of international climate finance between 2016 and 2020 to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

One example of this is the £10 million we have committed to tackle mangrove loss in Madagascar that will benefit over 100,000 people in coastal communities by providing protection against natural disasters and supporting their livelihoods. It will deliver around 13 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> savings.

It is only by collaboration on a global scale that we can truly address marine climate issues, including ocean acidification.

We have already seen the devastating impact of rising sea levels on our coastal communities. We should be clear that ocean acidification could threaten the very basis of life itself. I say that because acidification threatens the whole basis of the marine ecosystem, as it literally attacks the building blocks of life as key organisms fail to develop fully, which is starting to disrupt the food web.

Earlier this year we published a synopsis of our [UK Ocean Acidification Research Programme](#) and, based on current projections, cold water corals will be 20-30 per cent weaker, causing reef disintegration and losing the rich biodiversity that they support.

The programme provided an extremely successful collaborative science partnership across the UK and internationally, particularly with the EU European Project on Ocean Acidification and the German BIOACID programme. Science is the spur to action and the more we can collaborate across nations, the more we can innovate.

The UK set up the Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP) to provide verifiable evidence of the effect of climate change. This brings together scientists, government, its agencies and NGOs and has just published "Marine Climate change Impacts - 10 years' experience of science to policy reporting".

However, there is more that we can do. This is why the UK Government is committed to a new United Nations Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which will deliver real protection across the world's oceans.

Oceans Action Day reminds us of the importance of the two thirds of our world and that our blue spaces are just as precious as our green spaces - and that actions on land have consequences for all parts of this blue planet, especially those actions which are altering our climate.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the United Kingdom will today sign up to the "Because the Oceans" declaration and I encourage others who have not done so, to do the same.

## [Environment Secretary pledges action on ocean plastics](#)

From: [Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#) and [The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP](#)

Part of: [Environmental quality](#), [Waste and recycling](#), and [Marine environment](#)

Published: 21 July 2017

### **The Environment Secretary has set out how the government is protecting our oceans.**

Environment Secretary Michael Gove pledged action to reduce plastic waste choking our oceans as he set out his ambition for the UK to lead the world in environmental protection.

Around eight million tonnes of plastic makes its way into oceans each year, posing a serious threat to our natural and marine environment – experts estimate plastic is ingested by 31 species of marine mammals and over 100 species of sea birds.

As [new figures](#) published today revealed more than nine billion fewer plastic bags were used since the government introduced a 5p charge, an 83 per cent reduction, the Environment Secretary set out further plans to prevent other sources of plastic finding their way into our oceans and seas during a speech entitled 'Delivering a Green Brexit' today.

Mr Gove confirmed [legislation will be introduced this year](#) to ban the sale and manufacture of microbeads – tiny pieces of plastic that are easily swallowed by marine life – in cosmetics and personal care products such as toothpastes and shower gels.

Speaking at WWF UK on Friday morning, Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

Eight million tonnes of plastic are discarded into the world's oceans each year, putting marine wildlife under serious threat.

In October 2015, the government introduced the 5p carrier bag charge. Figures released today show that policy's enormous success – nine billion fewer carrier bags distributed since the charge was introduced, a fall of 83 per cent. More than £95million raised from the charge has been donated to environmental, educational and other good causes.

Last year the government launched a consultation on banning microbeads in personal care products, which have such a devastating effect on marine life. We are responding to that consultation today and we will introduce legislation to implement that ban later this year.

But there is more we can do to protect our oceans, so we will explore new methods of reducing the amount of plastic - in particular plastic bottles - entering our seas, improve incentives for reducing waste and litter, and review the penalties available to deal with polluters - all part of a renewed strategy on waste and resources that looks ahead to opportunities outside the EU.

Since its introduction, the 5p plastic bag charge has reduced use by over nine billion bags – enough to wrap around the world more than 100 times. Money raised from the charge has generated £95 million for good causes.

An expert group announced as part of the government's [Litter Strategy](#) has begun work to explore ways to reduce the use of commonly littered items such as drink bottles, as well as considering the advantages and disadvantages of different types of deposit and reward and return schemes.

The government is also bringing forward legislation to help councils tackle littering from vehicles and will shortly publish our response to a consultation into increasing the fixed penalty fine for littering.



## 4. Parliamentary material

### 4.1 Statement

#### [The United Nations Ocean Conference: Written statement - HCWS44](#)

13 July 2017

Made by: [Dr Thérèse Coffey](#) (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities)

#### **The United Nations Ocean Conference**

I would like to update the House on the recent United Nations Ocean Conference, held in New York from 5th – 9th June. Although I was unable to attend due to the pre-election period Defra's Deputy Director for Marine policy led the United Kingdom delegation. I wish to convey to the House the global importance of the conference and summarise its key outcomes.

The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, commonly referred to as SDGs or the UN 2030 Agenda, are a collection of 17 Goals that set the global environment and development agenda from 2016 to 2030. They cut across all areas of Government, from ending poverty and achieving gender equality through to tackling climate change and using resources sustainably.

The Conference was an attempt to galvanise international action on the implementation of SDG 14: *Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development*. This SDG tackles a range of marine issues such as marine pollution and ocean acidification.

It produced two major outcomes: a Call for Action and a registry of over 1300 voluntary commitments made by the global community to support the implementation of SDG14.

I am pleased to report that, through its statement to the conference, the UK Government was able to demonstrate its continued support for the SDG process. We recognised the delivery of SDG 14 has a particular significance for Small Island Developing States and Least Developed Countries and that we would continue to support the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, in developing sustainable ocean economies, alleviating poverty, and mitigating the effects of climate change and environmental threats.

The UK Government statement noted that climate change and ocean acidification continue to be significant threats to the long term health of our oceans. We highlighted the major role the UK played in securing the Paris Agreement and reiterated our commitment to its implementation.

I am also pleased to report that, recognising the need to take action on pollution from land-based sources, including the increasing amount of plastics and micro-plastics, the UK was able to sign up to the UN Environment Clean Seas Campaign.

The expertise of our marine science industry was demonstrated through the successful ocean acidification event led by the UK.

The UK also made four voluntary commitments to support the implementation of SDG14, highlighting our work on Marine Protected Areas, including in the Overseas Territories; marine science; marine litter and the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme. These can be viewed on the conference website at <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>

The Call for Action was agreed by consensus at the conference although the United States dissociated itself from the language on the WTO and recalled the US administration position on the Paris Agreement. The Call highlights particular action to be taken on a number of issues including: the need to increase scientific knowledge, prevention of pollution, in particular from plastics; delivering sustainable fisheries and improving access to market for small scale artisanal fisheries in developing countries; concluding negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on fishery subsidies; and encouraging active engagement in the discussions on the development of an international legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. The Call for Action is available at <https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction>

## 4.2 Debates

[Air and Water Pollution: Impact](#)

26 Oct 2017 | HL Deb cc1043-1073

[Animals in Peril](#)

18 Oct 2017 | HC Deb 629 cc960-8

## 4.3 PQs

[Marine Environment: Antarctic](#)

**Asked by:** Rosindell, Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to further the roll-out of marine sanctuaries in the Antarctic.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

Defra works closely with colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on issues relating to the protection of the Antarctic including the designation of marine protected areas (MPAs). The UK led the proposal to establish an MPA around the South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf, agreed in 2009, through the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources and strongly supported the designation of the Ross Sea Region MPA. The UK supports proposals for

MPAs in the Weddell Sea, East Antarctic and the Antarctic Peninsula regions of the Southern Ocean.

01 Nov 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 109464

[Fisheries: North Sea](#)

**Asked by:** Smith, Angela

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if he will support the policy of the European Council of Ministers on the North Sea Multiannual Plan to legally sanction overfishing of bottom dwelling fish stocks such as cod and haddock over the next five years.

**Answering member:** George Eustice

The draft North Sea Multi Annual Plan includes an upper range for fishing consistent with Maximum Sustainable Yield. Exploitation rates may be set within this upper range only in certain prescribed circumstances, for example to maintain balance in a mixed fishery. The UK supports this general approach, which we consider to be consistent with the principle of sustainable fisheries.

25 Oct 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 106530

[Plastics: Seas and Oceans](#)

**Asked by:** Coaker, Vernon

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress the Government has made on international steps to tackle plastic pollution in the oceans; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

At the recent Our Ocean conference the UK made several voluntary commitments to help tackle marine plastic pollution. These included signing up to the UN's Clean Seas campaign, the Global Partnership on Marine Litter and the Global Ghost Gear Initiative. These programmes aim to transform habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to reduce marine plastic pollution and the harm it causes.

18 Oct 2017 | Written questions | 107387

[Marine Environment: Developing Countries](#)

**Asked by:** Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what voluntary initiatives his Department has implemented under the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

The United Kingdom has made four voluntary commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the following topics:

- **Marine science.** The UK has pledged to work actively with international partners in a range of major issues such as strengthening global ocean observations, world ocean assessments and data sharing.
- **Marine Litter.** The UK has committed to several actions in order to combat marine litter. These include reducing the volume of single use plastic bags, the introduction of national litter strategies and banning microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. The UK has also signed up to the UN Clean Seas Initiative.
- **Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) Programme.** The UK has committed to delivering a package of measures that will help to provide Commonwealth Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Ocean regions with accurate hydrographic and scientific data relating to their marine environment. The UK will also provide training and capacity building for national bodies involved in the research and management of marine resources, to enable them to use the data to promote economic growth and development.
- **Marine Protected Areas in the UK and our Overseas Territories.** The UK has committed to ensuring that UK waters are managed and used in a sustainable way, including by working internationally with our Overseas Territories in order to protect the globally significant biodiversity found in their waters

A more detailed summary of the commitments of the United Kingdom and other States and organisations is at <https://oceanconference.un.org/commitments/>

04 Sep 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 4888

### [Marine Environment: Plastics](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Hylton

Her Majesty's Government, in the light of the UN Oceans Conference on 5–9 June and the Council of the European Union Environment Council on 19 June, what plans they have to reduce, and if possible eliminate, the pollution of oceans, seas and beaches by plastic materials.

**Answering member:** Lord Gardiner of Kimble

At the recent UN Oceans Conference the UK made several voluntary commitments, including signing up to the UN's CleanSeas campaign. This programme aims to transform habits, practices, standards and policies around the globe to dramatically reduce marine litter and the harm it causes.

The UK Government has undertaken several key actions to protect the marine environment from marine litter which are set out in the Marine Strategy Part Three. Recent additional actions include the publication of the National Litter Strategy for England and our plans to ban microbeads in cosmetics and personal care products. We also work with neighbouring countries to address this issue, particularly through the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on marine litter.

20 Jul 2017 | Written questions | House of Lords | HL670

[Chemicals: Seas and Oceans](#)

**Asked by:** Lord Hunt of Chesterton

To ask Her Majesty's Government which organisation is responsible for providing public information about chemicals which are dispersed into the seas surrounding the UK; and what steps they are taking to require industry and UN organisations to reduce such dispersals.

**Answering member:** Lord Gardiner of Kimble

Defra and the Devolved Administrations have provided information to the public about chemicals dispersed to the UK seas through their public consultations on the assessment of the State of the UK Seas set out in UK Marine Strategy Part 1. This assessment will be updated in 2018.

Under the Marine Strategy Part 3, Defra and the Devolved Administrations have set out a programme of measures which reduce contaminant concentrations in the marine environment to acceptable levels. These include various pollution reduction requirements for emissions and discharges from industry, and measures for coastal waters that are set out in the Water Framework Directive River Basin Management Plans, published by the UK environment agencies.

The UK also contributes to, and implements, the obligations of several UN initiatives, which protect the world's oceans from mercury, persistent organic pollutants, hazardous wastes, hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

The UK, as a signatory to the Oslo and Paris Convention (OSPAR), submits annual returns of the quantities of contaminants which enter UK seas. This information is made available via the OSPAR website.

The UK Government is committed to the effective delivery of UN Sustainable Development Goal 14, including target 14.1 "**By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution**". The Government welcomes the fact that the 3 United Nations Environment Assembly will focus on all forms of pollution, including marine pollution.

05 Apr 2017 | Written questions | House of Lords | HL6319

[Sustainable Development: Marine Environment](#)

**Asked by:** Evans, Mr Nigel

To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what steps her Department is taking to support smaller countries toward achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 on conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment.

**Answering member:** James Wharton

The UK Government is playing a leading role in helping developing countries achieve the SDGs, including Goal 14. As part of a strong

cross-Government effort, DFID supports the Global Environment Facility, which includes assistance for small island developing states in managing their marine territories.

21 Mar 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 67961

### [Plastic Bags](#)

**Asked by:** Evans, Mr Nigel

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what representations she has received on the merits of banning all plastic bags in pursuit of achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 on conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

We have received representations from the French Government to join a coalition to build a political impetus towards the elimination of single-use plastic bags. The associated declaration makes clear that this goal can be achieved through a variety of measures. Our 5p charge on single use carrier bags is a good example of how we are contributing towards a reduction in the use of single-use plastic bags.

20 Mar 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 67964

### [Marine Environment: Sustainable Development](#)

**Asked by:** Evans, Mr Nigel

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps the Government has taken towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal 14 on conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment since January 2016.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

The Government is currently developing a report outlining the UK's contribution to delivering the Goals domestically and internationally. The report will be published in due course.

20 Mar 2017 | Written questions | House of Commons | 67960

### [Marine Conservation Zones](#)

**Asked by:** Moon, Mrs Madeleine

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her oral contribution of 18 October 2016, Official Report, 301WH, which UK sites are already designated for protection because of international agreements; and if she will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Dr Thérèse Coffey

The UK has designated 150 sites under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, including 25 in the UK Overseas

Territories and Crown Dependencies. In addition UK Marine Protected Areas contribute to the well managed ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas under the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic. These can be found on line at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-1389> and <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=4549>

Our network of protected sites, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, National Parks, Marine Conservation Zones, European and Ramsar sites, support the UK's contribution to achieving the Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Target 11 (protected areas increased and improved). These networks also contribute to the achievement of UN Sustainable Development Goals 14: conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment and its resources; and 15: sustainable use of the terrestrial environment and halting biodiversity loss.

25 Oct 2016 | Written questions | House of Commons | 49418

## 4.4 House of Commons Select Committee material

### Science and Technology Committee

[Inquiry into ocean acidification](#) (concluded)

[Letter from Committee Chair to Defra](#), 26 April 2017

[Reply from Defra](#), 18 July 2017

[Marine science. Science and Technology Committee ninth report with written evidence and formal minutes.](#)

25 Mar 2013 | HC 727 2012-13

[Marine science: Government response to the Committee's ninth report of session 2012-13. Science and Technology Committee second special report.](#)

17 Jun 2013 | HC 443 2013-14

[Investigating the oceans. Science and Technology Select Committee tenth report in 2 volumes with proceedings, evidence \(HC 470 i-vi not printed separately\) and appendices.](#)

09 Oct 2007 | House of Commons papers - Select Committee reports | House of Commons | HC 470 2006-07

[Investigating the oceans. Innovation Universities Science and Skills Select Committee fourth special report - government response to the Science and Technology Select Committee's tenth report of 2006-07 \(HC 470\), together with evidence \(HC 469-i 2007-08 not printed separately\).](#)

30 Apr 2008 | HC 506 2007-08

### Environmental Audit Committee



[Disposable Packaging: Coffee Cups and Plastic Bottles inquiry](#)

The Environmental Audit Committee is relaunching its predecessor's inquiry into Disposable Coffee Cups and Plastic Bottles. The previous Committee's inquiry received over 100 submissions of evidence. The General Election was called before the Committee could complete its inquiry.

- [Previous inquiry: Coffee Cups and Plastic Bottles: disposable packaging inquiry](#)

[Marine Protected Areas revisited. Environmental Audit Committee tenth report with formal minutes.](#)

21 Mar 2017 | HC 597 2016-17

[Marine Protected Areas revisited. Government response to Committee's tenth report of session 2016-17. Environmental Audit Committee second special report.](#)

12 Sep 2017 | HC 314 2017-19

[Environmental impact of microplastics. Environmental Audit Committee fourth report with formal minutes.](#)

20 Jul 2016 | HC 179 2016-17

[Environmental impact of microplastics: Government response to the fourth report of the Committee, session 2016-17. Environmental Audit Committee fifth special report.](#)

08 Nov 2016 | HC 802 2016-17

## 5. Further reading and links

### 5.1 Briefings and reports

Commons Library Briefing, SN06129, 17 July 2015

[Marine Conservation Zones in England](#)

Commons Library Briefing, 7669, 4 July 2017

[Brexit – What next for UK fisheries?](#)

Commons Library Briefing SN00745, 10 February 2016

[UK and European sea bass conservation measures](#)

Commons Library Briefing 7510, 4 January 2017

[Microbeads and microplastics in cosmetic and personal care products](#)

Commons Library Briefing 7241, 22 June 2017

[The 5p Plastic Bag Charge,](#)

Commons Library blog, 7 September 2017

[What does Brexit mean for the UK's beaches?](#)

POST note 555, 15 June 2017

[Rising Sea Levels](#)

POST note, 437, 6 June 2013

[Selection of Marine Conservation Zones](#)

POST note, 427, 18 January 2013

[Biodiversity in UK overseas territories](#)

POST note 342, 1 October 2009

[Coastal Management](#)

POST note 516, January 5, 2016

[Trends in the Environment](#)

POST note 388, 15 September 2011

[Marine Planning](#)

Lords Library note 2017-0073, October 23, 2017

## [Impact of Air and Water Pollution on the Environment and Public Health](#)

Government Office for Science

### [Future of the sea](#)

Last updated: 31 August 2017

Foresight project looking at the important future trends, challenges and opportunities for the UK from the sea.

Includes the following reviews:

- [Future of the sea: health and wellbeing of coastal communities.](#)
- [Future of the sea: trends in the transport of goods by sea](#)
- [Future of the sea: ocean acidification](#)
- [Future of the sea: biological responses to ocean warming](#)
- [Future of the sea: plastic pollution](#)
- [Future of the sea: implications from opening Arctic Sea routes](#)
- [Future of the sea: trends in aquaculture](#)

International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), [Explaining Ocean Warming: Causes, scale, effects and consequences](#), September 2016

Marine Climate Change Impact Partnership (MCCIP)

[Marine Climate Change Impacts: 10 years' experience of science to policy reporting](#) (2017).

European Environment Agency, '[Towards healthy and productive seas in Europe and beyond.](#)', 15 September 2017

## 5.2 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Some examples of NGOs working in the area of marine environment are provided below:

[Capturing Our Coast \(CoCoast\)](#) – A citizen science project which conducts surveys of marine life around British coasts.

[Greenpeace](#) - Greenpeace runs campaigns in the UK with aims including to 'stop climate change, defend oceans and protect forests, work for peace and disarmament, eliminate toxic chemicals and save the Arctic.

[Marine Conservation Society \(MCS\)](#) - MCS aims 'to secure a future for our living seas and to save our threatened marine wildlife before it is lost forever'. It is concerned with marine protection areas and reducing dangers to sea life – such as plastic waste.

[Mission Blue](#) – Led by oceanographer Dr Sylvia Earle, Mission Blue is a global coalition of organisations campaigning for networks of Marine Protected Areas.

[Oceana](#) - An international organisation focused solely on oceans, dedicated to achieving measurable change by conducting specific, science-based campaigns with fixed deadlines and articulated goals.

[Seas at Risk](#)— European association of non-governmental environmental organisations working to protect and restore to health the marine environment of the European seas and the wider North East Atlantic.

[Save Our Seas Foundation](#) - Funds and supports research, conservation and education projects worldwide, focusing primarily on charismatic threatened wildlife and their habitats.

[Surfers Against Sewage](#) – an environmental charity working on ocean pollution in the UK.

[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) - Wildlife and Countryside Link is an umbrella body, whose purpose is to bring together voluntary organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife, landscape and the marine environment.

[The Wildlife Trusts](#) – The Wildlife Trusts work on marine issues through their '[Living Seas](#)' campaign.

[World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#) - WWF lists [Protecting Oceans](#) as one of their campaigns. The main challenges to UK seas WWF is working on in the UK are tackling unsustainable fishing, climate change, and improving management of UK seas.

[Zoological Society London \(ZSL\)](#) – ZSL has a programme of marine conservation, working on both global and local issues (such as monitoring marine mammals in the Thames).

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