

Debate Pack
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Debate on Marine Protected Areas

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Background

A Westminster Hall debate will be held on Marine Protected Areas on Tuesday 2 May 2023 at 3.30 pm. The debate will be opened by the Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP.

1.1

What are Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)?

A variety of pressures is globally impacting marine wildlife and habitats, including fishing activities and physical structures such as oil rigs. One way in which the adverse consequences of these pressures can be combatted is by protecting vulnerable marine ecosystems through protected areas (MPAs).

There are many definitions for Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). However, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) stated that they can be defined broadly as:

a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values.¹

There are several types of MPA in the UK, which in combination are intended to form an [ecologically coherent and well-managed network](#) as a contribution to the effective conservation and sustainable use of the UK's marine environment:

- [Special Areas of Conservation \(SACs\)](#) – designated to protect habitats and species of European importance.
- [Special Protection Areas \(SPAs\)](#) – classified to protect bird species of European importance and regularly occurring migratory birds.
- [Marine Conservation Zones \(MCZs\)](#) and [Nature Conservation Marine Protected Areas](#) (in Scotland)– designated to protect nationally important species, habitats, ecological processes and features of geological/geomorphological importance.
- [Sites of Special Scientific Interest \(SSSIs\) / Areas of Special Scientific Interest \(ASSIs\)](#) – designated to protect any area of special interest for its flora, fauna, geological or physiographical features. These are coastal (and terrestrial) designations with some sites protecting marine features. Northern Ireland has ASSIs, which are equivalent to SSSIs in England, Scotland and Wales.

¹ Joint Nature Conservation Committee webpages, [About Marine Protected Areas](#), (accessed 25 April 2023)

- [Ramsar sites](#) – wetlands of international importance designated under the Ramsar Convention. These are coastal (and terrestrial) designations with some sites protecting marine features.²

The [INCC provides an interactive Marine Protected Area mapper](#) containing information on the MPAs designated in UK and Crown Dependency waters.

1.2 MPAs across the UK

The extent of coverage of UK seas by MPAs varies across the different parts of the UK:

- There are 197 MPAs in English waters, covering 51% of inshore and 37% of offshore waters.³
- The Scottish MPA network covers approximately 37% of seas and comprises 231 sites for nature conservation protecting a broad range of habitats and species and eight Historic MPAs to preserve sites of historical importance around the Scottish coast.⁴
- Wales has 139 MPAs covering 69% of inshore waters (up to 12 nautical miles).⁵
- In Northern Ireland, the current MPA network is made up of 48 MPAs covering 38% of the inshore region.⁶
- The has 374 MPAs, covering 38% of UK waters (47% of inshore and 36% of offshore waters). Note that some MPAs cover both in and offshore waters, so the total number of MPAs cannot be derived by adding up the figures above.⁷

Marine conservation is a devolved matter for Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish inshore waters. The responsibility for MPAs within territorial waters sits with the relevant government department or nature conservation body:

- England – [Natural England](#)
- Northern Ireland – [DAERA](#)

² Joint Nature Conservation Committee webpages, [About Marine Protected Areas](#), (accessed 25 April 2023)

³ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [UK Marine Protected Areas statistics](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

⁴ Scottish Government, [Marine Environment: Marine Protected Areas](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

⁵ Welsh Government guidance, [Marine Protected Areas](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

⁶ Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, [Marine Protected Areas](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

⁷ Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [UK Marine Protected Areas statistics](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

- Scotland – [NatureScot](#)
- Wales – [Natural Resources Wales](#)

The [Marine Management Organisation](#) (MMO) manages fishing in MPAs offshore of 6 nautical miles and manage non-licensable activities,⁸ in MPAs inshore of 12 nautical miles in English waters.⁹ [IFCAs \(Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities\)](#) regulate activities in MPAs within 6 miles of the coast.

The [Joint Nature Conservation Committee \(JNCC\)](#) is responsible for providing scientific advice to the UK Government and the devolved administrations on MPAs in UK offshore waters beyond territorial waters, and on the UK MPA network. The JNCC collaborates with the country nature conservation bodies (CNCBs) for the inshore (within territorial waters) to provide advice on MPAs which fall within both inshore and offshore waters.

In addition, a range of public authorities have responsibility for regulation of activities occurring in the sea and on the coast. These include: the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCAs), the Environment Agency, local authorities, harbour authorities and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

⁸ Marine non-licensable activities are those which do not require a marine licence. These include shore-based activities such as bait collection and beach recreation as well as water-based activities such as sailing and motor boating. For more information on activities that do require a marine licence, please see the GOV.UK [marine licences page](#).

⁹ Marine Management Organisation webpages [Collection - Managing fishing in marine protected areas](#) (accessed 25 April 2023) provide further information.

Policy framework

The [Government states that the purpose of an MPA](#) is to:

protect and recover rare, threatened and important habitats and species from damage caused by human activities. In the UK, all MPAs are designated to protect specific habitats or species (also known as 'features') and have conservation objectives set which state what conservation outcomes the MPA is designed to achieve.¹⁰

The Government considers that protecting MPA species and habitats will contribute to healthier marine ecosystems, and the maintenance and restoration of valuable ecosystem services:

Overall, a healthy sea and resilient ecosystem can generate many ecosystem services with positive impacts including provisioning services (food, water), regulating services (waste removal, climate regulation), supporting services (shelter and biogeochemical cycles), and cultural services (aesthetics, recreation and tourism).¹¹

2.1

The 25-year Environment Plan

The Government's approach to marine conservation is set out in the [25-year Environment Plan](#) published in January 2018. It includes protection and management of UK waters, together with funding for Overseas Territories and other countries in the form of Overseas Development Assistance.

The Government has committed to complete an assessment of the marine environment to inform an updated UK Marine Strategy. The [existing UK Marine Strategy](#) was published in three parts between 2012 and 2015, under the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) (2008/56/EC), which required Member States to set out measures to achieve Good Environmental Status (GES) in EU marine waters by 2020. The Directive also required each stage of the strategy to be reviewed every 6 years and updated as necessary, starting in 2018.

The Government published its proposals to update the [UK Marine Strategy](#) for the next 6 years in May 2019. The update would be conducted in three parts:

- a [consultation](#) on the first part, covering the assessment of the state of the UK's seas and GES characteristics, targets and indicators closed in June 2019. A summary of responses was published in October 2019.¹²

¹⁰ Defra, [Managing fishing in marine protected areas](#), (accessed 26 April 2023)

¹¹ Defra, [Managing fishing in marine protected areas](#), (accessed 26 April 2023)

¹² Defra, [Marine Strategy Part One: UK Updated Assessment and Good Environmental Status](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

- a consultation on [UK Marine Strategy part two: Monitoring programmes](#) was carried out in 2020, with responses published in March 2021.¹³
- A consultation on [UK Marine Strategy part three: programme of measures](#) closed in November 2021. The Government is currently analysing feedback.¹⁴

The Government has published annual [progress reports](#) on the environment plan. The [2021/22 progress report](#) [PDF] noted that:

- the Government had built a comprehensive network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and was focussing on making sure they were now properly protected;
- 98 MPAs in English inshore waters had measures to “protect sensitive features from damaging fishing gears. In offshore waters, the first four fisheries byelaws have now also been announced”;
- a call for evidence was issued for 13 more sites, with plans to put in place “effective fisheries management for all offshore sites by the end of 2024”;
- the Government had published its response to the [Benyon review](#) on Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) (see below) and in 2022, started to consult on the proposed candidate HPMA sites. It will then designate pilot HPMAs.¹⁵

2.2 Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) summarises what MCZ are:

MCZs are national MPAs, designated and protected through the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (the same piece of legislation which created the MMO). MCZs protect nationally significant features, which can include wildlife, habitat, geology and geomorphology. MCZs also take into account socio-economic factors, unlike European or international MPAs.

There are 91 MCZs in waters around England covering 32,090km.¹⁶ (for locations see [JNCC's interactive map](#)).

The first 27 zones were designated on 21 November 2013, and a further 23 sites were designated in the second phase on 17 January 2016.

¹³ Defra, [Marine strategy part two: monitoring programmes, consultation outcome](#), updated March 2021

¹⁴ Defra, [Marine strategy part three: programme of measures, consultation](#), updated 4 August 2022

¹⁵ Defra, [25 year environment plan annual progress report April 2021-March 2022](#) [PDF]

¹⁶ Defra blog, [What are Marine Protected Areas](#), 20 November 2020

Following consultation, 41 sites and 12 additional features were designated on 31 May 2019.¹⁷

Defra said that the third phase of designations “essentially completed the UK Blue Belt and our contribution to the ecologically coherent network in the North East Atlantic in terms of the representation of species and habitats”.¹⁸

Similar schemes are operating in [Wales](#), [Scotland](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) to contribute to a UK wide network of marine protected areas.

The Government committed to increasing the number of (MCZs) for England in the [25-year Environment Plan](#).¹⁹

As the Association for Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities (IFCA) notes, [activities such as fishing should be appropriately managed](#).²⁰ However, the MCZ designation does not mean there necessarily needs to be any changes to activities, although part of the designation requirements is that activities that do take place are assessed. Any new approaches are consulted on with stakeholders [as set out in the guidance](#).²¹

Further background on MCZ details can be found in the Commons Briefing Paper [Marine Conservation Zones in England](#).²²

As noted above, MCZs fall within the wider group of Marine Protected Areas in the UK, from international designations such as Ramsar sites to smaller more local Sites of Scientific Interest. Further details of how all these fit together can be found in a blog from the MMO [blog on Marine Protected Areas](#) from November 2020.²³

2.3

International initiatives

Blue Belt Programme

The Government supports the development of the new international [treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction](#).²⁴ It also supports international ambitions to see [30% of the world's oceans protected by 2030](#).²⁵ A key UK programme supporting delivery of this aim is the [Blue Belt programme](#). This aims to provide long term

¹⁷ Gov.UK [Marine conservation zone designations in England](#) (accessed 25 April 2023)

¹⁸ Gov.UK [Marine conservation zone designations in England](#) (accessed 25 April 2023)

¹⁹ Defra, [25 year environment plan annual progress report April 2021-March 2022](#) [PDF]

²⁰ Association of Inland Fisheries and Conservation Authorities, [Management of Inshore Marine Protected Areas by the IFCA's 2011 to 2018 booklet](#)

²¹ Defra guidance, [Marine Conservation Zones: Explanatory Note](#), 21 November 2013

²² Commons Library Briefing, [Marine Conservation Zones in England](#), 2015

²³ Marine Management Organisation blog on [Marine Protected Areas](#), November 2020

²⁴ UN Sustainable Development blog, [Countries agree to recommend elements for new treaty on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction](#), 24 July 2017

²⁵ GOV.UK webpage, [Global Ocean Alliance: 30by30 initiative](#) (archived)

protection for over four million km² of marine environment within UK Overseas Territories waters, establishing MPAs in collaboration with the UK's Overseas Territories (OTs). By 2020, a total of 4.4 million km² of ocean within the UK OTs was within an MPA. The UK waters represent around 2% of the world's oceans, and MPAs in the OTs cover around half of that.²⁶

The Blue Belt Programme was provided with £27 million of funding from 2016 to 2021 to support the protection of biodiversity, strengthened governance over the seas, and the sustainable management of resources. It received a further £8 million in 2021/22. Between 2022 and 2025, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's International Programme Fund will fund the programme directly.²⁷

Further information can be found in the Library Briefing Paper on the [UK Overseas Territory: Climate change and biodiversity](#).²⁸

Blue Planet Fund

The Government announced the creation of a [£500m Blue Planet Fund](#) in June 2021, during the G7 conference:

The £500 million fund will support countries including Ghana, Indonesia and Pacific island states to tackle unsustainable fishing, protect and restore coastal ecosystems like mangroves and coral reefs, and reduce marine pollution.²⁹

A first tranche of [funding of £16.2 million](#) from the fund was announced in August 2021.³⁰ Details of more recent funded projects can be found on the [Blue Planet Fund webpages](#):

Financed from the UK [Official Development Assistance](#) (ODA) budget, the Blue Planet Fund is an important part of the UK's global leadership on marine issues. This includes our call to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030 (for more information look at the [Global Ocean Alliance "30by30" initiative](#)) and our existing commitments to stop plastic pollution entering the ocean through our joint UK and Vanuatu-led [Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance](#).

²⁶ Defra, [Blue Belt Programme guidance](#), updated 1 March 2023

²⁷ Defra, [Blue Belt Programme guidance](#), updated 1 March 2023

²⁸ Commons Briefing Paper, [UK Overseas Territory: Climate change and biodiversity](#), 21 October 2021

²⁹ Prime Minister's Office press release, [G7 leaders commit to protect planet and turbocharge global green growth](#), 12 June 2021

³⁰ Defra press release, [Government scales up support to protect the world's ocean with multimillion boost for marine recovery](#), 13 August 2021

3

Future developments

3.1 Marine Management Organisation (MMO) consultations

The [Fisheries Act 2020](#) introduced new powers for the MMO to make byelaws to manage fishing for the conservation of marine flora, fauna and habitats, including in England's offshore waters (beyond 12 nautical miles (nm) from the coast).

The MMO says that it is using these powers to introduce fisheries management to protect 41 offshore MPAs by the end of 2024, alongside measures to protect 10 additional MPAs sited between 6 and 12 nm from the English coast. This work is taking place over four stages.³¹

Stage 1: the MMO assessed the impacts of fishing on four MPAs.

- [Dogger Bank](#)
- [Inner Dowsing, Race Bank and North Ridge](#)
- [South Dorset](#)
- [The Canyons](#)

Management measures, such as making a byelaw, could be introduced, the MMO said, if fishing or marine non-licensable activities,³² were considered incompatible with the conservation objectives of the site. Byelaws for [each of the four MPAs](#) were made by the MMO on 8 April 2022 and came into force on 13 June 2022.³³

Stage 2 focusses on the impacts of bottom towed fishing gear on all rock and reef MPA features (other than those covered in Stage 1). On 17 January 2023, the [MMO launched a formal consultation on a proposed byelaw to manage bottom towed fishing gear in 13 MPAs](#). This consultation closed on 28 March 2023.³⁴

Stage 3 covers the remaining impacts of fishing on the 41 MPAs with seabed features not already covered in Stage 1 or Stage 2. The MMO held a [call for additional evidence](#) from 17 January 2023 to 28 March 2023 on

³¹ Marine Management Organisation, [Managing fishing in Marine Protected Areas](#), updated 17 January 2023

³² Marine non-licensable activities are those which do not require a marine licence. These include shore-based activities such as bait collection and beach recreation as well as water-based activities such as sailing and motor boating.

For more information on activities that do require a marine licence, please see the GOV.UK [marine licences page](#).

³³ Marine Management Organisation, [Managing fishing in Marine Protected Areas](#), updated 17 January 2023

³⁴ Marine Management Organisation, [Managing fishing in Marine Protected Areas](#), updated 17 January 2023

the MMO's evidence and analysis of the impacts of fishing on seabed features in English MPAs.³⁵

The MMO said that following further consultation, site level assessments and proposed management measures would be developed and be subject to consultation. Management measures would be finalised and, where appropriate, introduced.³⁶

Stage 4 covers the impacts of fishing on MPAs with highly mobile species features. There are two MPAs protecting harbour porpoise, and three MPAs protecting certain bird species. The MMO stated that it was "currently working closely with partner organisations to understand the impacts of fishing on harbour porpoise and relevant bird species, and agree our approach to assess and manage these".³⁷

Stakeholder views

Environmental campaigners are calling for more to be done to protect MPAs. For example, the [Marine Conservation Society](#) cites the statistic that only 6% of the UK's MPAs currently ban bottom trawling and dredging. The Society considers that:

Communities and livelihoods around the UK depend on fishing. Governments need to do more to support fishers to move away from the most damaging forms of fishing towards lower impact practices. This will allow coastal communities to thrive while protecting our marine environment.³⁸

3.2

Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs)

In 2019, the [Government commissioned Richard Benyon to carry out a review](#) to determine whether stronger protections for areas of sea, known as Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs), should be introduced. The [final report recommended that the Government introduce HPMAs](#). It said that, although 40% of England's seas were designated as MPAs, the Government's own marine assessment showed that the environment was not "in a healthy state".

The report noted that MPAs currently protected discrete habitats and species while allowing sustainable use to continue, which meant that:

extractive and depositional activities continued in many such sites, albeit under strict conditions. While important for overall marine conservation,

³⁵ Marine Management Organisation, [Call for evidence – gear-feature interactions in marine protected areas - Stage 3](#), (accessed 26 April 2023)

³⁶ Marine Management Organisation, [Managing fishing in Marine Protected Areas](#), updated 17 January 2023

³⁷ Marine Management Organisation, [Managing fishing in Marine Protected Areas](#), updated 17 January 2023

³⁸ Marine Conservation Society, [MPAs: your questions answered](#) (accessed 26 April 2023)

these MPAs do not allow ecosystems to fully recover or deliver the full range of ecosystem services.³⁹

The review's final report concluded that HPAs allowed marine ecosystems to recover to a mature state by taking a 'whole site approach' to designation. This, it said, "protected all habitats and species in their boundaries" and HPAs would give "nature the best chance to thrive".⁴⁰

The final report stated that HPAs would support delivery of government's environmental ambitions in the [25-year environment plan](#) including:

- for waters to reach 'Good Environmental Status' as set out in the UK Marine Strategy;
- to conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information as set out the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and
- to safeguard at least 30% of the world's ocean by 2030, establishing and leading a Global Ocean Alliance.⁴¹

The headline recommendation was that HPAs were an essential component of the Marine Protected Areas network, and the Government should introduce them into Secretary of State waters.⁴² These HPAs would:

go further [than MPAs] by taking a 'whole site approach' and only permitting certain activities within their boundaries such as vessel transit, scuba diving and kayaking. Activities that could have a damaging effect on habitats or wildlife, including fishing, construction and dredging would be banned. The review claims the introduction of such areas could lead to a significant biodiversity boost for our seas by giving our marine life the best chance to recover and thrive.⁴³

There were 25 recommendations, covering what HPA's are, and how they should be selected and managed.⁴⁴

³⁹ Defra Independent report, [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary](#), updated 17 August 2022

⁴⁰ Defra Independent report, [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary](#), updated 17 August 2022

⁴¹ Defra Independent report, [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary](#), updated 17 August 2022

⁴² The review covers the English inshore, offshore and Northern Irish offshore waters. Collectively these are referred to as Secretary of State waters.

⁴³ Defra news release, [Independent review backs introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas](#), 20 June 2020

⁴⁴ Defra Independent report, [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary](#), updated 17 August 2022

The review also concluded that there should be at least five pilot sites initially, with sufficient geographic spread to cover nearshore, inshore and offshore areas and different regional seas.⁴⁵

The Government [published a response to the Benyon review on 8 June 2021](#) in which it accepted the recommendation to introduce HPMA, and set out how it would move forward:

We will consider designating five sites as part of our consultation process. The number and type of activities varies enormously between inshore and offshore sites and we intend to identify sites in both of these areas. There needs to be a balance between the differences across these sites, for example the habitat and historic use of the site, and the ability to be able to effectively evaluate them to inform future decisions.⁴⁶

The Government has said that HPMA will be designated as MCZs in English inshore and offshore waters using powers in the [Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009](#). It has also said that, as with existing MPAs, [activities in HPMA will be managed by the appropriate regulator](#) supported by scientific advice from the relevant statutory body, Natural England or JNCC. Acceptable levels of activities that are consistent with full recovery will be determined on a site-specific basis.

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has set out [the process for designating pilot sites](#). A [consultation](#) on candidate pilot English HPMA was run by Defra between 6 July 2022 and 28 September 2022. Additional evidence gathering also occurred throughout 2022.⁴⁷

The [Government has now announced](#) that it would designate the first three HPMA in English waters, before 6 July 2023. These sites are:

- North East of Farnes Deep,
- a modified version of Allonby Bay, and
- a modified version of Dolphin Head.

(see here for [Maps of the 3 Highly Protected Marine Areas](#)).⁴⁸

Two further sites consulted on, Lindisfarne and Inner Silver Pit South, will not be designated. The Government said that the initial pilot phase of HPMA will inform the future of HPMA policy.⁴⁹

The Government has said that [management measures will be needed](#) to further the conservation objective of HPMA. It anticipates that

⁴⁵ Defra Independent report, [Benyon review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: Final report - executive summary](#), updated 17 August 2022

⁴⁶ Defra, Government response to the Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMA) review

⁴⁷ [English Highly Protected Marine Areas | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation](#)

⁴⁸ Defra policy paper, [Highly Protected Marine Areas \(MPAs\)](#), updated 28 February 2023

⁴⁹ Defra policy paper, [Highly Protected Marine Areas \(MPAs\)](#), updated 28 February 2023

extractive, destructive and depositional activities will be prohibited within each site.

This would include activities such as:

- commercial and recreational fishing
- dredging
- construction
- anchoring

Non-damaging levels of other activities to the extent permitted by international law are allowed.⁵⁰

In February 2023, Defra Minister Mark Spencer told the [Scottish Affairs Committee](#) that the Department was considering five pilot areas, with the aim of announcing the pilot sites in spring (by July 2023). These would cover around 0.53% of English waters, within which there would not be fishing:

I think that is the purpose of a HPMA: to allow those zones to flourish and be a real nursery for future stocks of fish and for wildlife and biodiversity.⁵¹

Defra officials told the Committee that:

the approach that we have taken in the consultation that we ran over the summer was the proposal that there would be no destructive, extractive or depositional activities, including fishing, allowed within an HPMA. The idea is that you allow sites to recover pretty much to their natural state in order for the ecosystem to thrive. That is the basis of the consultation that we ran last year and which we are still in the process of concluding.⁵²

Stakeholder views

Stakeholders have opposing views on the HPMA proposals. The [summary of the responses](#) to the 2022 [consultation on HPMA](#)s reported that overall, 56% supported the designation of pilot HPMA in English waters and 36% were opposed:

Fifty-three per cent of supportive responses agreed with the need for HPMA to address the climate crisis, biodiversity decline and declining environmental status. The most common reason for opposing HPMA was the direct (30%) and indirect (22%) impact on livelihoods.⁵³

Some environmental campaigners expressed strong support for designating HPMA. The summary of responses notes that Greenpeace

⁵⁰ Defra policy paper, [Highly Protected Marine Areas \(MPAs\)](#), updated 28 February 2023

⁵¹ Defra Minister, Mark Spencer MP, oral evidence to Scottish Affairs Committee, inquiry into Fishing grounds in Scotland, HC 864, 6 February 2023, [Q93](#)

⁵² Defra, oral evidence to Scottish Affairs Committee, inquiry into Fishing grounds in Scotland, HC 864, 6 February 2023, [Q101 \(Mike Rowe\)](#)

⁵³ Defra, [Highly Protected Marine Area sites, consultation outcome: summary of responses](#), updated February 2023, Executive Summary

campaign respondents all strongly supported the implementation of pilot HPMA at all five sites and wanted more sites designated and for “elements of industrial fishing should be banned in existing MPAs, which would provide for local fishers, and sustain marine populations”.⁵⁴

On the other hand, representatives of the fishing industry are concerned about the economic impacts of HPMA, with some considering the existing marine protection designations to be sufficiently effective.⁵⁵ There are also concerns about the evidence base for the policy. The National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations told the Scottish Affairs Committee in December 2022 that it had not seen evidence of the impact of closing an HPMA to fishing would have on increasing fish stocks:

The HPMA round in English waters recently did not have anything like that evidence base. It was very much a kind of, “Designate and see what happens afterwards”. Even the documents in that consultation referred to work to be done finding out the impact of closure and displacement after it had been put in place. That is not evidence-based.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Defra, [Highly Protected Marine Area sites, consultation outcome: summary of responses](#), updated February 2023, Executive Summary

⁵⁵ Oral evidence to Scottish Affairs Committee, Inquiry into Fishing Grounds in Scotland, HC 864, 5 December 2022, [Q8](#) (Elsbeth Macdonald)

⁵⁶ Oral evidence to Scottish Affairs Committee, Inquiry into Fishing Grounds in Scotland, HC 864, 5 December 2022, [Q22](#)

4

Parliamentary material

4.1

Written statement

Marine Protection Update

HC Deb 28 February 2023 | HCWS585

I am announcing my intention to designate the first Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) – North East of Farnes Deep, Allonby Bay and Dolphin Head. These will contribute to the government’s vision under our UK Marine Strategy for ‘clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse ocean and seas’. They will increase the scope and protection of protected areas at sea and will allow sites to fully recover, increasing resilience to climate change. This forms part of our commitment to deliver 30by30 under the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Between 6 July and 28 September 2022 my department led a public consultation on five candidate HPMAs. The sites included two inshore: Allonby Bay (located in the Irish Sea) and Lindisfarne (Northern North Sea). The other three were offshore: North East of Farnes Deep (Northern North Sea), Inner Silver Pit South (Southern North Sea) and Dolphin Head (Eastern Channel).

Over 900 responses to the consultation were received, and after carefully considering these and further evidence, including economic impacts, I will proceed with designating North East of Farnes Deep as set out in the consultation. For Allonby Bay and Dolphin Head, I will designate modified areas.

I will not designate Lindisfarne, owing to the impacts on the local community raised during the consultation, nor Inner Silver Pit South, owing to the high costs to fishers identified during the impact analysis.

The revised Allonby Bay HPMa boundary allows for an area of recreational angling, including access for disabled anglers, and for other activities to continue due to its importance to the community and takes account of the needs of Maryport Harbour and the Port of Silloth while still delivering important biodiversity benefits. The revised boundary for Dolphin Head is to improve compliance and enforcement. The new boundary still provides high ecological benefits, whilst straightening the western most point of the site boundary.

These HPMAs will be designated as Marine Conservation Zones under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 by 6th July 2023.

I have asked officials to explore additional sites for consideration this year.

The Government Response will be available on gov.uk.

4.2

Debate

[Lords debate: Environmental Targets \(Marine Protected Areas\) Regulations 2022](#)

HL Deb 24 January 2023 | Vol 827 c31GC-

4.3

PQs

[Marine Protected Areas: Fisheries](#)

Asked by: Grayling, Chris

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether she plans to extend the ban on bottom trawling in more highly protected marine areas.

Answering member: Mark Spencer | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Highly Protected Marine Areas are areas of the sea which will prohibit all destructive, extractive, and depositional activities, including bottom trawling. The Government announced it will explore additional Highly Protected Marine Areas this year.

We will also continue to ban bottom trawling in our Marine Protected Areas wherever that is needed to protect the designated species and habitats. The Marine Management Organisation recently consulted on a byelaw to manage fishing using bottom towed gear in a further 13 sites and is now analysing the responses received.

HC Deb 25 April 2023 | PQ 181807

[Marine Protected Areas](#)

Asked by: Offord, Dr Matthew

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make it her policy to advocate for high seas Marine Protected Areas in all regional fisheries management organisations of which the UK is a member.

Answering member: Mark Spencer | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

The UK uses its engagement in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and other international fora to push for outcomes focussed on managing fisheries sustainably, protecting marine ecosystems (including those covered by Marine Protected Areas) and combatting illegal fishing.

HC Deb 27 March 2023 | PQ 168037

[Marine Protected Areas](#)

Asked by: Aldous, Peter

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps she is taking to propose new Marine Protected Areas under the mechanism established by the new High Seas Treaty.

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make it her policy to support high seas marine protected areas in relevant regional fisheries management organisations.

Answering member: Mark Spencer | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Draft text for an international legally binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction - the BBNJ Agreement - was agreed on 5 March. It will be adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference at a further meeting, later this year. This is a landmark agreement for biodiversity and will mean much greater protection for over 60% of the global ocean.

The UK will work to ratify the Agreement as soon as possible, and work with global partners to ensure it is implemented quickly and effectively.

The UK uses its engagement in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations and other international forums to push for outcomes focused on managing fisheries sustainably, protecting marine ecosystems (including through Marine Protected Areas) and combatting illegal fishing.

HC Deb 22 March 2023 | PQ 167095; PQ 167096

[Marine Protected Areas](#)

Asked by: McNally, John

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make it her policy to ensure that 10 per cent of the UK's waters

within her responsibility are covered by a Highly Protected Marine Area by 2026.

Answering member: Trudy Harrison | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra recently announced that it intends to designate the first three Highly Protected Marine Areas in English Waters. These HPMAs would be designated before 6th July 2023. Currently there are no targets set or planned for Highly Protected Marine Areas, however Defra will explore additional sites this year. Any future sites will also be subject to consultation.

HC Deb 21 March 2023 | PQ 163876

[British Overseas Territories: Marine Protected Areas](#)

Asked by: Rosindell, Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what steps his Department is taking to encourage British Overseas Territories to join the Blue Belt Initiative; and if he will make a statement.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The Overseas Territories governments have responsibility for management and protection of the marine environment. The UK's Blue Belt Programme was launched in 2016, aiming to enhance marine protection in the Territories; Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha soon joined and committed to designating marine protected areas. The Turks and Caicos Islands and Anguilla have also now joined. The Programme is open to all Overseas Territories wishing to enhance marine protection and sustainable management. A sub programme, Blue Belt Ocean Shield, provides support with enforcement to Bermuda; and a network of Territories deploying Baited Remote Underwater Video Cameras (BRUVS) has been set up.

HC Deb 20 March 2023 | PQ 165237

[British Indian Ocean Territory: Marine Protected Areas](#)

Asked by: Rosindell, Andrew

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, how much his Department has spent on the maintenance of the Marine Protected Area around the British Indian Ocean Territory in the last 12 month period for which figures are available.

Answering member: David Rutley | Department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

The FCDO provides an annual amount to the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Administration, which covers environmental protection and governance. In 2022/23, this totals £2.4 million.

HC Deb 14 March 2023 | PQ 158812

[Seas and Oceans: Treaties](#)

Asked by: Grayling, Chris

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what proposals his Department will be making for the proposed High Seas Biodiversity Treaty; and if she will make a statement.

Answering member: Anne-Marie Trevelyan | Department: Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

Negotiations in the Intergovernmental Conference to negotiate a new Implementing Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ) resumed at the UN on 20 February. The UK strongly supports the conclusion of an ambitious agreement at these negotiations and is working hard with international partners to achieve that outcome, which will include a mechanism for establishing Marine Protected Areas in the high seas. Negotiations conclude on 3 March.

HC Deb 27 February 2023 | PQ 146818

[Marine Environment: International Cooperation](#)

Asked by: Opong-Asare, Abena

To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whether he expects the UK to meet its Global Ocean Alliance 30by30 target to protect England's seas by 2030.

Answering member: Trudy Harrison | Department: Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Since 2019, the UK has been leading the Global Ocean Alliance of countries championing ambitious ocean action under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), including the target to protect at least 30% of the global ocean by 2030 which was agreed at the CBD COP15 in Montreal, December 2022.

The 30by30 target is a global target. Nearly 8.3% of the global ocean is now protected. Achieving a global 30by30 target will require an international effort, from all countries and sectors. The UK is leading the way. We have established a comprehensive network of 374 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) covering 40% of English waters, and we are now focusing on making sure they are properly protected.

The Government is committed to protecting 30% of land and sea in the UK by 2030 (30by30). We consulted on our approach to 30by30 in the Nature Recovery Green Paper, which closed in May 2022. We are now in the process of analysing responses and will publish a Government response on conclusion of this exercise.

HC Deb 20 January 2023 | PQ 114835

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News and press releases

Nature Sustainability

24 April 2023

[Ocean governance milestone](#)

Scotsman

21 April 2023

[Growing coalition of voices opposes Highly Protected Marine Areas](#)

BBC News Online

5 March 2023

[Ocean treaty: Historic agreement reached after decade of talks](#)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Natural England press release

28 February 2023

[Highly Protected Marine Areas to be designated in English waters](#)

BBC News Online

28 February 2023

[Rewilding seas: Some waters off England to get full protection](#)

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Marine Management Organisation press release

17 January 2023

[UK takes further action to protect vital marine habitats](#)

Times [subscription required]

14 December 2022

[Destructive fishing still hurts 90% of protected zones](#)

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