

An Ocean Recovery Manifesto

A vision for restoring our seas by 2030

A healthy ocean is vital for life on earth as we know it. Yet our seas are suffering from the impacts of overfishing, exploitation, pollution and climate change. With the climate and nature emergencies lapping at our shores we can't continue to let our ocean suffer. Instead, we must urgently deliver radical measures to recover our marine environment.

With all eyes on the United Kingdom at COP 26, the UK Government must use this as an opportunity and commit to deliver a transformational **Ocean Recovery Agenda** to restore our domestic waters by 2030, and in so doing, demonstrate leadership on the world stage.

This programme will avert seas from climate disaster and place them on a firm path to recovery, increasing food and livelihood security, restoring nature and providing natural climate solutions.

What's the problem?

Our seas used to be some of the most biodiverse in the world. Tuna weighing as much as 380kg swam off our shores, kelp forests spread out along our coastlines and the seabeds were home to an abundance of life.

Sadly, it's a less promising picture for our marine environment today. Over-fishing has pillaged our ocean. Many of our marine protected areas do not have any effective environmental management measures in place. Marine planning has been delivered to maximise exploitation of marine resources rather than protecting wildlife and habitats. At the same time, the impacts of climate change are becoming ever more apparent. In summary:

- UK Governments have a target to achieve healthy seas by 2020, but failed on 11 out of 15 indicators in 2019
- Seabird numbers have plummeted by up to 70% in 25 years, in part due to changing food sources as a result of warmer waters from climate change ¹
- Over a third of UK fish stocks had catch limits set above sustainable levels for 2020 ²
- The UK has lost 80% of its salt marshes in the past 200 years, which are ten times more effective at capturing carbon than terrestrial ecosystems ³
- Management measures have only been implemented in 10% of UK Marine Protected Areas ⁴
- Thousands of dolphins, whales, seals, seabirds and other protected species such as sea fans die every year due to incidental capture in fishing gear in UK waters ⁵
- The UK's orca population has not reproduced in 25 years due to chemical pollution destroying their immune and reproductive systems ⁶
- The IUCN Red List of threatened species lists over 50% of UK sharks and rays in a Threatened or Near Threatened category ⁷



Why does it matter?

The ocean is vital for life, providing food, air and a natural defence against climate change:

- The ocean produces over half of the oxygen we breathe
- Without a healthy ocean, our planet would already be 36°C hotter than pre-industrial levels⁸
- 20–30% of CO₂ emissions and 90% of excess heat from human activity are captured by the ocean⁹

To continue to provide for our planet, our ocean must be healthy and resilient. We can only achieve that through an ambitious recovery programme that minimises and eliminates threats and builds on the potential for nature based solutions. Delivered sustainably our marine environment can also provide;

- Domestic and day trip coastal tourism is collectively valued at £8bn to the English economy¹⁰
- The UK's maritime sector facilitates 95% of all UK trade, supporting a total of £46bn of the UK's Gross Value Added in 2017¹¹
- UK offshore wind power was worth £1.2bn in 2016/17, with capacity set to double between 2017 and 2030 to generate one third of UK's electricity¹²

But as with all offshore developments we must seek to deliver an ecosystems based approach, and not cause further harm or decline to the already at risk ocean and seas.

What does ocean recovery look like and how is it achieved?

Ocean recovery means bringing our seas back to life, so they are healthy and thriving, for people, climate and nature. In six key areas this is what recovery of our seas looks like and the main actions needed to achieve it.

1. A minimum of 30% of our seas are fully protected by 2030

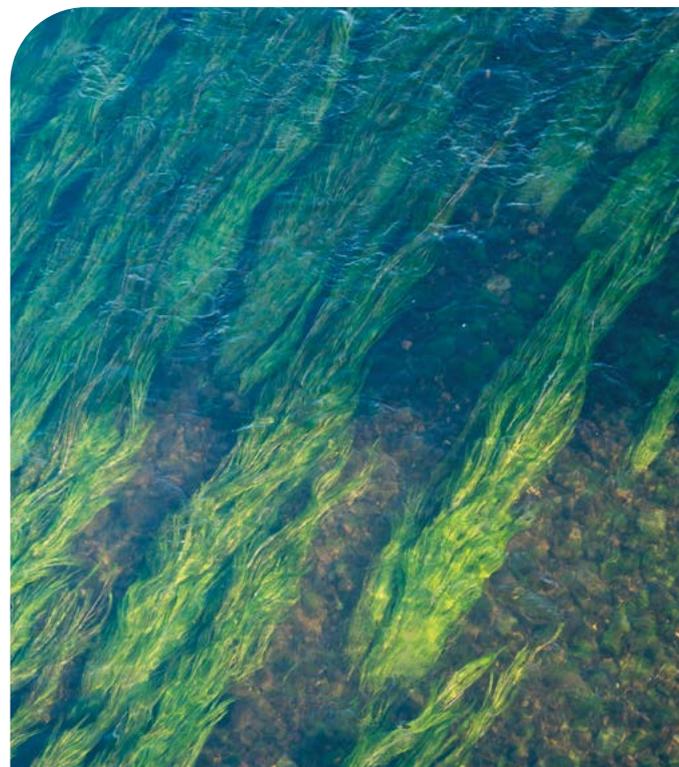
Our seas are home to an abundance of iconic and often vulnerable marine species and habitats. These will benefit from marine protected areas around England that are managed to restrict the most damaging activities. These sanctuaries will be connected to allow marine wildlife to thrive throughout our coastline and seas, helping to recover populations and habitats and in turn, build resilience to climate change.

Actions: Designate a minimum of 30% of English waters as highly or fully protected marine areas by 2030. Implement robust management measures in all Marine Protected Areas in England and provide funding to enforce these. Implement a whole-site approach to MPA management in suitable sites. Define management clearly in the context of recovery of the MPA network.

2. Carbon sinks are restored and protected

Existing carbon sinks, including the seabed, habitats such as saltmarsh, seagrass and marine species are closely monitored and preserved through MPAs and effective marine planning. A long-term programme is in place to restore the wetland, coastal, seagrass and sea kelp environments to their pre-industrial levels. These restored environments and populations help mitigate climate change by drawing down carbon and acting as a natural defence against sea level rise and flooding for vulnerable communities.

Actions: Map areas of existing or potential importance for carbon storage and sequestration and include these in existing MPA network or designate new climate MPAs where necessary. Provide sufficient funds for a long-term restoration programme and implement this in partnership with relevant Local Authorities and local communities. Establish a strategic licensing scheme that reduces licensing burdens for environmental programmes delivering carbon benefits.



3. Sustainable development prioritises the recovery of the marine environment

Development at sea prevents, minimises and mitigates the cumulative environmental harm; leaves the marine environment in a better state than it was found; and recognises the importance of ocean recovery.

Actions: Implement a revised marine planning and licensing system, that has a clear hierarchy between activities and policies. Activities that hinder or delay delivery of Good Environmental Status are given lower priority or avoided in the Marine Plans. Avoid offshore developments in biologically sensitive areas and encourage low impact designs e.g. floating wind turbines. Implement noise limits and a requirement to utilise effective mitigation measures such as bubble curtains to minimise disturbance to marine wildlife from marine developments.

4. Fisheries are sustainable and fully integrated with wider marine protection measures

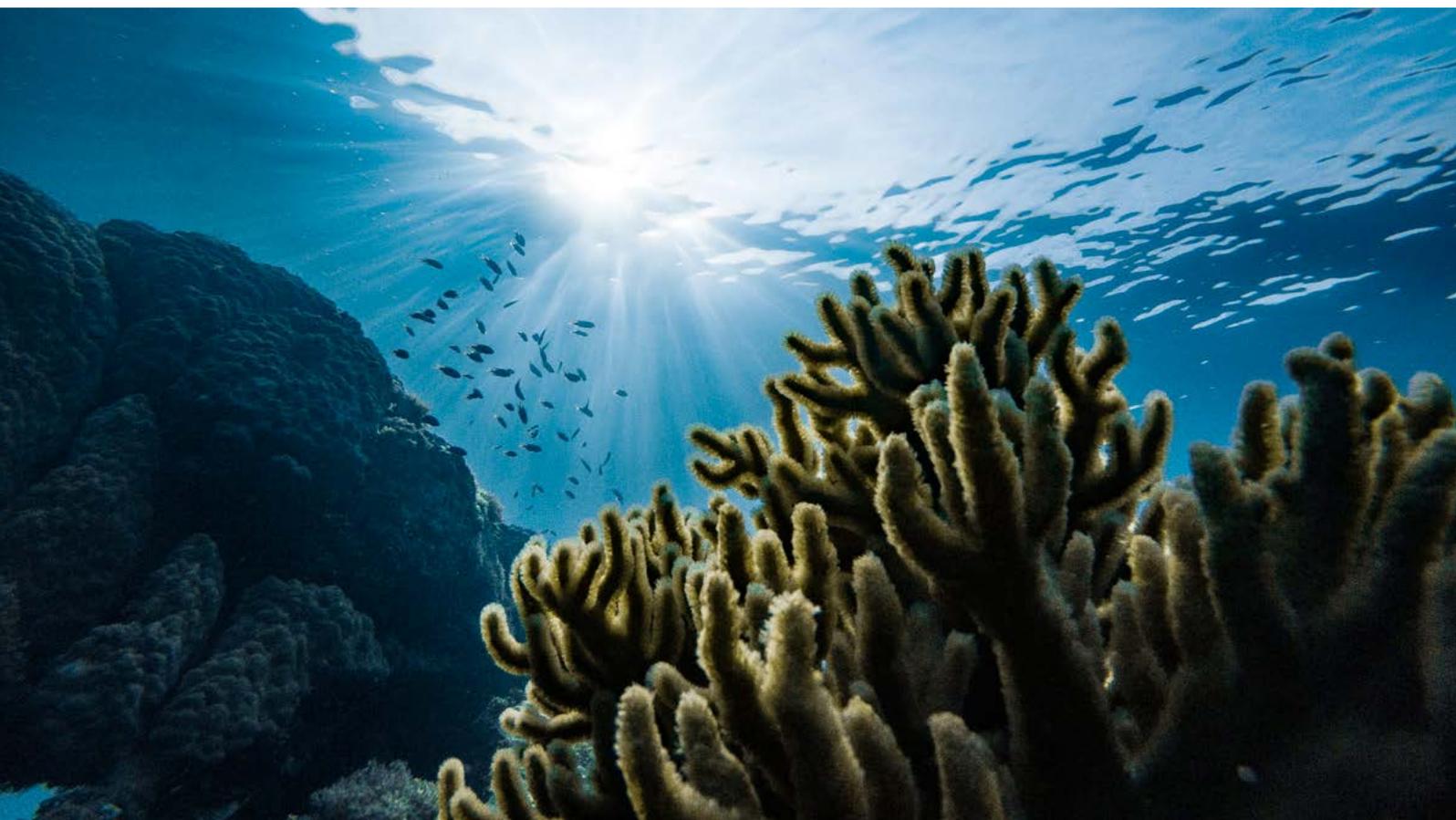
Whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, seabirds, sharks, rays and sea fans are safe from entanglement and death in fishing gear. Fish and shellfish stocks recover to truly sustainable levels. Fishing quotas are allocated fairly across the entire fleet based on sustainability criteria and all fishing activity is fully documented. Fisheries are effectively monitored and managed as part of wider marine planning and conservation measures.

Actions: Set timelines and targets for elimination of fishing related deaths of protected species. Set catch limits in line with scientific advice to prevent overfishing and lock up carbon. Reallocate quotas on the basis of sustainability criteria. Introduce Remote Electronic Monitoring on all vessels fishing in UK waters. Update and review scientific advice to ensure that fishing levels ensure sufficient biomass is available for marine biota. Negotiate future fisheries agreements with other coastal states with a view to ensuring sustainable management of shared stocks.

5. Management of marine, freshwater and terrestrial environments is integrated

Nutrient pollution of estuaries and coastal environments due to run-off is reduced. Bathing water quality is classed as 'excellent' and short-term pollution is reduced. The marine environment is managed as a whole catchment, incorporating estuarine, freshwater and coastal environments. Highly mobile and migratory fish species are fully protected when moving between marine and freshwater habitats to fulfil their life cycles.

Actions: Align monitoring and programmes of measures to recover aquatic, estuarine and marine habitats, taking a 'source to sea' approach in addressing, agricultural, nutrient, bacterial and chemical impacts. Target water companies investment plans to reduce short-term pollution along our coastlines. Align fisheries measures across freshwater, estuarine and coastal environments.





6. Plastic and chemical pollution are reduced at source

Plastic and chemical pollution leaking into the sea is dramatically reduced and no longer posing a risk to marine wildlife. Less plastic is found on beaches or in our sea, chemical contaminants in estuaries and coastal waters are monitored. Plastic production is reduced and production and waste management processes are strictly regulated to avoid leaks into the marine environment. Chemical pollution levels are falling, and all harmful chemicals have been identified and are restricted from being put on the market and leaking into the natural environment

Actions: Include microplastics in existing monitoring programmes from source to sea. Introduce a deposit return scheme for bottles of all materials and all sizes. Introduce an extended producer responsibility scheme that promotes environmental improvements of product systems across the whole life cycle of the product, not just disposal. Implement a Chemicals Strategy that prevents further build up of chemical contaminants in the marine environment, provides an early warning system and mitigation plan for emerging contaminants of concern and includes a plan for identification and destruction of legacy chemicals' stocks.

References:

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest environment and wildlife coalition in England, bringing together 58 organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of nature, animals and people. Together we have the support of over eight million people in the UK and directly protect over 750,000 hectares of land and 800 miles of coastline.

This document is supported by the following Link members:

