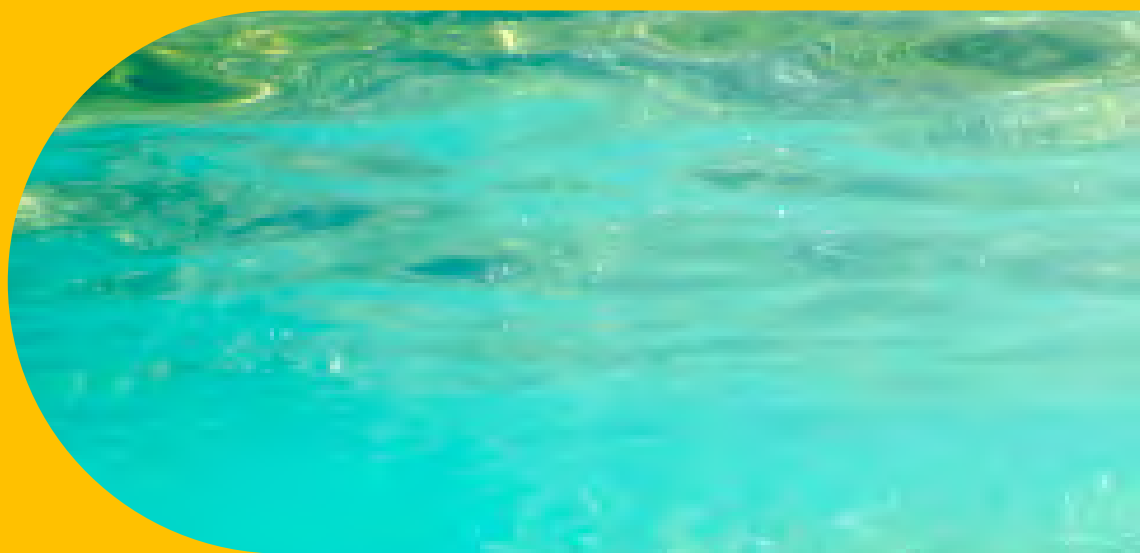




Chapter five: Strong leadership for a sustainable ocean



Priority actions for the UK

Government: Oceans, seas & coasts



1 Leadership for the ocean...

Strengthen leadership and governance on the marine and coastal environment, informed by systems thinking for a sustainable ocean.



2 to restore biodiversity...

Urgently deliver marine conservation and restoration to increase coastal resilience and meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.



3 invest in the blue economy...

Scale up public and private investment in the sustainable Blue Economy to create economic growth, blue jobs, and food security.



4 unlock critical data...

Work with environmental scientists to unlock the potential of marine science and ocean mapping, as called for by the UN Decade of Ocean Science.



5 ...and reconnect with the public.

Raise the profile of oceans, seas, and coasts in the UK's approach to tackling environmental challenges, from global negotiations to local delivery.

“The consequences of our actions are, quite literally, carried across the waves and felt around the world.”

The ocean covers more than 70% of our planet and 80% of the world's biodiversity lives within it.

Britain is an island and the UK's seas cover nearly 30 times the area of our land.

Oceans and seas face exceptional threats from the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution. Yet at home and on the global stage, marine and coastal areas are often missing from the environmental agenda.

A significant proportion of the UK's waters are designated protected areas, but these protections are not delivering in practice. For instance, bottom trawling, a highly destructive form of industrial fishing that releases huge amounts of greenhouse gases, occurs in **95% of marine protected areas**.

Despite being an island nation, people in the UK are less likely to visit, **and less connected to**, blue spaces than most people in European countries.

Connecting the public to our marine and coastal spaces is a key step towards creating a society that understands, protects, and restores oceans, seas, and coasts.

Marine and coastal habitats are an invaluable regenerative asset to fight back against the triple crisis. They hold significant power to support carbon sequestration, climate resilience, rich ecosystems, and widespread social and economic benefits.

We cannot squander these assets. The UK must maximise their benefits while addressing threats to oceans, seas, and coasts as we seek to protect and enhance our natural environment.

Globally, the situation is no less severe, with widespread pressures including ocean acidification, plastic pollution and intensive trawling practices. Countries must recognise that oceans and seas do not accept the borders we place on them. This is a collective problem, so it demands collective action.

The UK must be a leading voice for oceans and seas internationally.

A sustainable and resilient approach is possible: built on the concept of a 'global ocean', where the consequences of our actions are, quite literally, carried across the waves and felt around the world.

Box 4. About the Marine & Coastal Science Community

The **Marine & Coastal Science Community** is a community of professionals promoting an interdisciplinary approach to marine and coastal issues to support the sustainable management of our coasts and oceans.

They aim to develop tailored professional development opportunities to support researchers and professionals in the marine and coastal sector and to further advance the specialism through the promotion of their work and engagement with key stakeholders.

Our Community's '**Turning The Tide: Systems thinking for a sustainable ocean**' project concluded in 2024, bringing together the marine and coastal science community and championing a systems thinking approach to issues affecting the marine and coastal environment. It was endorsed by the **UN Decade of Ocean Science** for Sustainable Development.

1. Strengthen leadership and governance on the marine and coastal environment, informed by systems thinking for a sustainable ocean.

- i. Fill the **governance** gap on UK oceans with new ministerial leadership and review the extent of joint efforts across departments, including the work of COAST (the **Coast and Ocean Applied Systems Thinking Committee**).
- ii. Produce transparent guidance for Ministers and public bodies, including GB Energy and the Crown Estate, on decisions affecting the marine and coastal environment informed by marine spatial mapping and systems thinking.
- iii. Take a leadership position on marine conservation and restoration in global forums and negotiations, including the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance. Share technology, tools and implementation methods, and champion a fair approach to oceans, recognising the needs of Small Island Developing States.

This will support the **Government's commitment** to **"strengthen Britain's influence abroad"** and will deliver the Environment Secretary's aspiration to **'put Britain back on the global stage to support nature's recovery'**.

2. Urgently deliver marine conservation and restoration to increase coastal resilience and meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.

- i. Produce the promised strategy for achieving the UK's 30x30 commitment, with an implementation plan in place by the end of 2025 that clarifies responsibilities for marine conservation and restoration initiatives.
- ii. Tackle the biggest sources of marine pollution, including by delivering commitments on deposit return schemes, banning plastic wet wipes, and through the UK Chemicals Strategy. Ban bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas.
- iii. Support relevant local authorities to co-produce strategies for marine conservation and adaptation with coastal communities.

This is essential to meeting the UK's international obligations, in line with the **Environment Secretary's recognition** that **"Nature underpins everything, but we stand at a moment in history when nature needs us to defend it."**

This would be a key step towards meeting the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"tackle the ... nature emergency, including the unforgivable pollution of our rivers and seas."**

3. Scale up public and private investment in the sustainable Blue Economy to create economic growth, blue jobs, and food security.

- i. Produce ambitious, just, and sustainable **Blue Economy** plans that take a regenerative approach to the ocean's natural assets, similarly to those developed in **Scotland** and **Portugal**.
- ii. Work with environmental scientists to close the gaps in the blue carbon evidence base identified by the **UK Blue Carbon Evidence Partnership**. Facilitate private investment in blue carbon solutions, including through clarifying and expanding the definition of blue carbon to include important habitats such as kelp forests, oyster beds and biogenic sediments.
- iii. Explore pilot schemes for public and private investment mechanisms to limit delays and barriers to new blue carbon projects.

This aligns with the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"strategically use public investment where it can unlock additional private sector investment."**

4. Work with environmental scientists to unlock the potential of marine science and ocean mapping, as called for by the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

- i. Support innovative seabed mapping and ocean monitoring technologies to improve UK marine data, including through the development of autonomous and remote sensing technology.
- ii. Promote the work of the **Marine Environmental Data & Information Network** (MEDIN) to make UK marine data accessible and interoperable. Embrace international data sharing and advocate for a standardised global marine reporting framework and data platform.
- iii. Ensure that the introduction of the marine net gain metric reflects the full value of marine habitats, including carbon sequestration, improved biodiversity, natural value, and environmental resilience (such as coastal flood defence).

This will realise the Government's **aspiration in its Manifesto** to embrace **"a new way of doing government that ... harnesses new technology"**, in the context of the marine environment.

5. Raise the profile of oceans, seas, and coasts in the UK's approach to tackling environmental challenges, from global negotiations to local delivery.

- i. Urgently produce a **public engagement strategy** on climate change that recognises the importance of coastal communities and the interactions between oceans and climate change.
- ii. Develop marine and coastal citizenship by incorporating ocean literacy into the national curriculum, promoting understanding of the ocean as a complex, interconnected system with the ability to offer multiple ecosystem benefits.

These recommendations support the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"transfer power out of Westminster, and into communities"**, giving coastal communities the power to make decisions about their local area.