



# THE FUTURE OF UK SEAS

## RESTORING MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

Following the referendum on EU membership, WWF is calling on governments across the UK to build on all the environmental protections that have come from Europe, including those that cover the UK's seas, and to go further.

Our marine environment is a crucial underpinning to our economy and society, and we must secure and restore its health for future generations.

WWF is committed to working with all marine stakeholders and decision-makers to ensure that the UK continues to develop effective and sustainable marine management that delivers long-term benefits for society and the environment.

### A briefing for decision-makers

## MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (MPAs)

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives recently went through the most thorough reviews in their history and have repeatedly been shown to be fit for purpose<sup>1</sup>. Before the EU Referendum, the UK Government stated that it would not alter these bedrocks of environmental protection, but ensure their proper and effective implementation<sup>2</sup>.

### Whatever the future holds, all UK governments should commit to:

- maintain and enhance the existing levels of legal protection and management for all MPAs, backed by effective accountability mechanisms. The focus should then be on ensuring that these MPAs are well-managed, monitored and enforced to deliver proper ecosystem recovery
- retain the requirement to apply a precautionary approach in the assessment of environmental impacts, as currently required under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive
- complete national MPA designations around the UK by 2018 to create a world-leading, ecologically coherent network of sites, including an ambitious third tranche of English Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Discussions on leaving the EU should not delay the delivery of this 'Blue Belt' of MPAs, which was promised in the 2015 Conservative Party Manifesto
- deliver non-EU commitments on MPAs that still apply, in particular the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi target for at least 10 percent of seas to be covered by well-managed MPAs, as well as the delivery of a coherent and well-managed network of MPAs under the OSPAR Convention
- manage fisheries sustainably, ensuring that any new UK fisheries framework includes the need for fisheries measures and assessment that comply with environmental legislation

## WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

In addition to MPAs, the UK needs a healthy wider marine environment. This means using marine areas in ways that reduce the collective pressures of human activities, including litter, noise, damaging fishing practices, pollution and nutrient runoff. Together, these pressures are currently addressed by the need to achieve Good Environmental Status under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) and to apply an ecosystem approach to marine spatial planning (MSP).

The UK was one of the first countries to give MSP a basis in domestic legislation, but MSP also depends on strong environmental assessment at the project and strategic level, much of which comes from EU law.

As such, the UK Government and Devolved Administrations should also commit to:

- deliver marine plans for all UK waters by 2021, embedding the requirements under Article 5 of the EU MSP Directive to apply an ecosystem approach and using MSP to preserve, protect and improve the environment, including by building resilience to climate change impacts
- create an ambitious 25 Year Environment Plan for England that aims to restore marine ecosystems for future generations, integrating the management of fisheries, marine licensing, freshwater quality and MPAs at a wider seas scale
- deliver truly integrated ecosystem-based management for Welsh waters through the collective implementation of the Environment (Wales) Act, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act and Marine and Coastal Access Act
- retain the standards and obligations of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directives. They are an essential part of the marine planning and licensing regimes

- ensure that the aims and provisions of the EU MSFD are fully covered by UK marine legislation and policy, including the requirement for a regionally coordinated approach with neighbouring countries. This should be framed by a reaffirmed commitment to the UK High Level Marine Objectives as part of the shared UK Government vision of "clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas"<sup>3</sup>
- call upon OSPAR to increase its proactive engagement on MSP, as well as continuing to develop and implement common standards and approaches on marine monitoring and MSFD implementation.

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### References

- 1 [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness\\_check/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/fitness_check/index_en.htm)
- 2 <http://www.parliament.uk/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2016-01-12/HLWS453>
- 3 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-seas-a-shared-resource-high-level-marine-objectives>

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