



EVENT BRIEFING - Restoring our Oceans: The Future of UK Policy – Thursday 28th January 2:00-3:00pm GMT

Panel:

Rt. Hon Richard Benyon, former MP for Newbury/Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Natural Environment, Water, and Rural Affairs, lead on the Highly Protected Marine Areas Review, and Blue Marine Foundation Trustee

Dr. Chris Tuckett, Marine Conservation Society

Dale Rodmell, Assistant Chief Executive, National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations

Laura Farris MP, Vice Chair of Environment APPG and MP for Newbury

In this event, panellists will discuss key priorities for the future of marine conservation policy in the UK, as well as how parliamentarians can support policy that will help marine habitats recover, ensuring UK seas are healthy, free from pollution, and properly protected.

The importance of ocean recovery and the need for action

True ocean recovery means simultaneously restoring the health of our marine life, supporting coastal and fishing communities and their livelihoods, and combating climate change. The economic case for ocean recovery is compelling, with benefits estimated to exceed £50 billion.ⁱ Likewise, the UK fishing and aquaculture industry remains significant, contributing £446 million to the economy in 2019, with an estimated fleet of 12,000 UK fishers, although this marked a decline from 20,000 in the mid-1990s.ⁱⁱ Despite the challenges facing the industry, important work is being done to consider environmental impacts alongside livelihoods, and work towards healthier marine habitats.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2016, the Government launched its [Blue Belt Programme](#) to enhance marine protection across four million square kilometres of marine environment in UK overseas territories. Last year, the Fisheries Bill was also passed, outlining provisions for greater control of UK sustainable fisheries management. This year, expanding on this work, the UK Government paints a picture of a 'new era' for UK ocean recovery. Within the backdrop of a 'Super Year' for international and domestic action, there is a unique window of opportunity for change on our waters.^{iv}

Where we are now

UK seas

- Under the UK's Marine Strategy, we are **failing 11 of the 15 key indicators for marine health**^v.
- **Just 5% of the UK's Marine Protected Areas prohibit bottom trawling** (a fishing method which has damaging impacts for huge areas of the seabed).^{vi}

Fishing

- The lack of robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms is a significant barrier to ocean recovery – **currently less than 1% of fishing activities across UK fleets are independently monitored**.^{vii}
- **Fishing quotas are being set above scientifically recommended sustainable levels year on year**, preventing fish stock recovery.^{viii}
- Current fisheries management **does not protect key carbon-storing marine habitats** (known as blue carbon).

Marine plastics

- **12 million tonnes of plastic end up in our oceans each year**, choking our sealife and contributing to climate change.^{ix}

Potential Steps to ensure Ocean Recovery

The Marine Conservation Society, who are taking part in this event, have proposed the following priorities. Other perspectives will also be considered by panellists during the event.

✓ **Urgent action to effectively manage our Marine Protected Areas for both nature and climate**

To help fight the climate crisis, Marine Protected Areas must protect the seabed. The Marine Conservation Society's new report '[Marine Unprotected Areas](#)' reveals that **bottom-towed trawling is taking place in 98% of the UK's offshore Marine Protected Areas** intended to protect vital seabed habitats.^x Newly gained powers in the [Fisheries Act](#) could be utilised to address this problem, and more effectively protect the seabed in Marine Protected Areas.

✓ **The introduction of an all-inclusive deposit return scheme for drinks containers**

Over the last 26 years, data collected by the Marine Conservation Society shows a 32% increase in beverage containers across the UK's beaches.^{xi} The Scottish Government has committed to an all-inclusive **Deposit Return Scheme**, with a start date of July 2022. There is great potential for the UK to show leadership by following suit and launching a second consultation for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland on DRS, as well as bringing forward an implementation date for its roll-out.

✓ **Lead ocean-based climate solutions as President of COP26 and develop a 'Blue Carbon Strategy'**

If we want to make real progress to combat climate change and meet our legislated commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050, the important role of ocean-based solutions should be considered as part of climate recovery plans. **To take full advantage of the potential of our seas in tackling the climate crisis, the development of a holistic 'Blue Carbon Strategy' to deliver on ocean recovery could bolster Government commitments to develop world-leading environmental policies.**

✓ **The Environment Bill**

In order to deliver on commitments for ocean recovery, **it is vital that the government make amendments to fully account for the marine environment, both in Part 1 of the Bill and through the targets framework.**

NOTE: This briefing was prepared by the Environment APPG and does not reflect the views of the Chair and Officers.

ⁱ WWF, Value of restored UK seas report, January 2021 [here](#)

ⁱⁱ UK Fisheries Statistics: House of Commons Library [here](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations: Responsible Fishing [here](#)

^{iv} Rebecca Pow, A vision for UK seas, January 2021 [here](#)

^v DEFRA, Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status, October 2019 [here](#)

^{vi} Marine Conservation Society, Marine Unprotected Areas, January 2021 [here](#)

^{vii} WWF, Remote Electronic Monitoring: Why camera technology is a cost-effective and robust solution to improving UK fisheries management, September 2017 [here](#)

^{viii} DEFRA, Fisheries Minister Correspondence to the chair of the Select Committee on the EU, April 2020 [here](#)

^{ix} McKinsey & Company, Stemming the tide: Land-based strategies for a plastic-free ocean, September 2015 [here](#)

^x Marine Conservation Society, Marine Unprotected Areas, January 2021 [here](#)

^{xi} Marine Conservation Society, Deposit Return Scheme, [here](#)