

# South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands Marine Protection

November 2023



## Background

- South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) is a UK overseas territory, made up of a group of islands with no permanent population located more than 1,050 miles from the tip of South America, in the South Atlantic Ocean. These islands are potentially the single largest concentration of marine species in the world and a wealth of biodiversity for the UK.
- South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands provide a home for the last remaining 6,000 South Georgia pipits, endemic to South Georgia, alongside 95% of the world's population of Antarctic fur seals, the world's largest colony of chinstrap penguins, and increasing numbers of Sperm, humpback, fin and other whales.

## What protections exist currently?

- The UK government counts all SGSSI waters, over 1 million square kilometres, as a marine protected area (MPA)
- However, only 23% is currently off limits to commercial extraction. In the remaining waters industrialised krill fishing remains legal, which many feel undermines protections according to international standards.

## How can the UK set a gold standard for international marine protection in the SGSSI?

- The SGSSI Government is reviewing the MPA with the FCDO at the end of this year, as part of a five year process, meaning there is one opportunity to significantly increase the protection of the marine species found on the islands ahead of an election.
- This review is an opportunity to enhance protection of SGSSI by:
  1. Significantly expand the no-take zone around the South Sandwich Islands – potentially adding up to 400,000 square kilometres in new full protections.
  2. Closing offshore areas of South Georgia to krill fishing, which are proven to be critical to returning and recovering whale populations.
  3. Setting a more precautionary catch limit for krill around South Georgia.

## What do voters think?

- [Research](#) commissioned by DEFRA in 2022 found more than 80% of the UK public support the creation of Marine Protected Areas.
- [Polling](#) found that only 12% of respondents thought the government is currently doing enough to protect the UK's seas from industrial fishing.
- Further [polling](#) from Wildlife and Countryside Link found almost three quarters (73%) of British people surveyed think ocean wildlife needs more protection.