

# Ratification of the Global Ocean Treaty

## Westminster Hall debate

Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> April



### Background

- After nearly two decades of negotiations and campaigns by marine conservation groups, in March 2023 the [Global Ocean Treaty](#) was adopted by the UN Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. It was [hailed as a triumph](#) for nature and diplomacy when it was announced last year.
- The Treaty looks to provide a unified framework to manage and protect the “high seas”. The high seas are those outside the national jurisdiction of any one country (normally over 200 nautical miles from the coast). Nearly [two-thirds of the ocean](#) is classified as the “high seas”.
- The new agreement will enable measures such as [marine protected areas in the high seas](#), to conserve and sustainably manage vital habitats and the international seabed area.
- The Treaty also looks to achieve cleaner oceans. Parties must assess potential environmental impacts, such as plastic pollution, of any planned activities beyond their jurisdictions.
- Treaty provisions also recognize the rights and traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities, the freedom of scientific research, and need for the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources.
- The UK was a leading force in developing the Treaty and was [one of the first of 89 countries](#) to have signed the Treaty. In order to come into force, the Treaty needs 60 ratifications, of which it currently has four. The UK has yet to ratify the Treaty.

### Why do we need a Global Ocean Treaty?

- The Treaty is a key mechanism for delivering the 2030 target to protect 30% of the world’s oceans. This is a core pillar of the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) agreed at biodiversity COP15 in December 2022.
- The high seas are currently managed by a fragmented puzzle of organisations, resulting in major gaps in ocean protection. Only around [1% of the high seas](#) is currently protected.
- They are teeming with life and make up [95% of the habitable space](#) on our planet by volume. These waters serve as migratory routes for whales and sharks, and harbour remarkable ecosystems such as deep-water corals.
- The oceans are also a crucial ally in mitigating climate change. Oceans globally have already [absorbed 30% of the CO2](#) and 90% of the excess heat caused by human activities.
- More than [3 billion people](#) rely on the ocean directly for food and livelihoods. Protecting parts of the high seas from industrial fishing and mining can lock away carbon [while replenishing fish populations](#) that so many rely on.
- According to UN estimates there could be [more plastic in the sea than fish](#) by 2050 unless action is taken.

### Why should the UK ratify the Global Ocean Treaty now?

- The UK has been a leading force in this Treaty and in promoting the 2030 target to protect 30% of the world’s oceans as chair of the [Global Ocean Alliance](#).
- The UK now has an opportunity to sustain its leadership by becoming one of the first 60 nations to ratify the Treaty and bring it into force.

- The government has stated that it plans to ratify the UN Global Ocean Treaty [by June 2025](#). If we are to stay on track to meet the 30 by 30 goal, this is simply not fast enough.
- Kevin Foster MP has introduced a Private Members' Bill to ratify the Treaty. He has generated support from more than 30 MPs and Peers across parties to do so and for this debate.
- Alternatively, the Government could introduce its own legislation in this Parliament to ratify the Treaty.

#### **What do voters think?**

- Almost [three-quarters](#) (73%) of the UK public say ocean wildlife needs more protection, with just 11% believing that marine life is protected the right amount.
- [More than half](#) (53%) said the government should 'urgently' ratify the Global Ocean Treaty.

#### **Suggested interventions**

- Will the Government bring forward legislation in this Parliament to ratify the Global Ocean Treaty without delay?
- Will the Government support the Private Members' Bill to ratify the Global Ocean Treaty without delay?