

The Weekend Essay

What does 30x30 mean for

The Island has an obligation under international law to protect 30% of our marine and terrestrial environment. Now is the perfect time for the government to fulfil this responsibility, and this is why and how it can be done, says **Freddie Watson**, Jersey project manager, Blue Marine Foundation



■ Corbière Lighthouse atop its rocky promontory. Jersey's 120sq-km land area is dwarfed by the surrounding 2,455sq-km of territorial sea. Picture: MATT JARVIS

What is 30x30?

WITH the term '30x30' being thrown around by governments and environmentalists, it's important to understand where it has come from and what it means for our Island. It refers to the global goal of protecting a minimum of 30% of the world's environment by the year 2030 agreed in Montreal last December. In relation to the ocean, the value of 30% is widely recommended by leading scientists around the world in order to reverse adverse ecological impacts, preserve fish populations, increase resilience to climate change and sustain long-term ocean health.

Protecting 30% of the world's oceans is, as leading scientists around the world tell us, vital to restore marine wildlife. Globally, marine ecosystems have been heavily degraded and pushed to, and in many cases past, the brink of collapse. The devastating effects of overfishing, destructive fishing practices, marine pollution, plastic, ocean noise, development and climate change have caused wildlife numbers to plummet across all our oceans. From populations of large sharks collapsing by over

90% to the disappearance of thousands of acres of seagrass and kelp forests, the past few decades have seen our oceans suffer an unparalleled assault. Sadly, the UK and Jersey have not been immune from this decline.

Setting aside 30% of our seas for nature will allow marine life to recover and thrive once more. Most of us will not recall the abundance that existed underwater just a few decades ago. Examples from around the world have consistently shown that leaving some areas for nature delivers recovery of marine life, often to levels far above what was hoped for.

Last December, after four long years of negotiation, a huge environmental commitment, officially known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, was agreed by the vast majority of countries in the world. This framework sits under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, a treaty that originated at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The framework includes several targets relevant to the marine environment, notably the effective restoration of degraded habitats and at least 30% effective protection of marine habitats by 2030 (see shaded box).

The treaty's governing body is known as the Conference of Parties. This authority meets every two years to review progress against existing targets, set priorities going forward and commit to work plans – the meeting in Montreal was COP15.

The target of protecting 30% of global land and sea by 2030 (30x30), was the most widely supported target going into the meeting, supported by more than 115 countries, including the UK. The target has a strong basis in science and was adopted as one of the headline achievements of the global deal.

The Jersey link to 30x30

The UN biodiversity convention eventually came into force in the UK on 1 September 1994. On the same day, the treaty was extended to Jersey, making our island a signatory.

Crown Dependencies do not have the authority to independently enter into an international agreement, instead, they must choose whether or not they would like an

international agreement to be extended to them. Of the Crown Dependencies, only the Isle of Man and Jersey have chosen to have the convention extended to them, clearly setting Jersey's ambition for positive environmental change.

As a result of this extension of the convention from the UK to Jersey, the Island now has a responsibility to comply with the Kunming-Montreal Framework. This creates a special opportunity for Jersey to set a domestic target of meeting 30% protection by the year 2030, as the UK has done.

Jersey's marine estate

Let's move away from the complicated policy side of things and delve into the Island's incredible marine estate.

Jersey's land area covers 120sq-km but is dwarfed by the surrounding 2,455sq-km of territorial sea. The unique character and ecology of Jersey's environment support a diverse range of wildlife. Jersey is home to more than 3,000 known animal and plant species. Habitats range from kelp forests, seagrass and maerl beds to gravel and sand beds.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Targets 2 and 3 of the framework:

TARGET 2: Ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity.

TARGET 3: Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognising indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognising and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories.



■ Seagrass beds play a fundamental role in maintaining fish populations and can capture carbon 12 times faster than tropical rainforests. Picture: MATT JARVIS

Jersey and our environment?



■ Jersey's environment supports a diverse range of wildlife – the Island is home to more than 3,000 known animal and plant species, including oystercatchers Picture: MATT JARVIS

Together these habitats should support a healthy, functioning ecosystem and provide a variety of services to the Island including food provision, nutrient cycling, climate change mitigation, coastal protection and recreation and wellbeing. Jersey's marine waters are also rich with sites of cultural, archaeological and historical significance.

Jersey's huge 12-metre tides create 30sq-km of intertidal area at every low tide. This area holds some of the most diverse clam beds in northern Europe and the rocky intertidal zone and outlying reefs harbour flooded-gully and waterfall habitats known nowhere else in the region.

Kelp plays an important role in nutrient cycling along with other marine wildlife and micro-organisms. Extensive seagrass beds play a fundamental role in maintaining fish populations. Acting as a foraging ground, nursery area and refuge from predation, commercial species such as bream and cuttlefish, as well as more enigmatic fish including seahorses, can be found among Jersey's seagrass beds.

Seagrass is also capable of capturing carbon 12 times faster than tropical rainforests, drawing down and locking carbon in the seabed, a process which is also undertaken by seaweeds and molluscs. Current estimates put the weight of carbon that Jersey's marine environment removes approximately 8.6% of the Island's total carbon production annually.

Local maerl beds have been found to contain up to 173 species per square metre, the highest diversity of species within Jersey's marine habitats. Some of the maerl beds around the Island's shoreline are thought to be up to 1,000 years old. Maerl is also a critical nursery ground for juvenile scallops, one of the Island's most valuable commercially caught species.

Jersey's waters also host megafauna such as porbeagles (listed on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list as 'vulnerable'), blue sharks and dolphins. A plethora of seabirds are supported by the Island's waters and shoreline. Species including terns, gulls, razor-bills and puffins have important breeding sites in Jersey, although like the rest of the British Isles, their numbers are in decline.

Even across sandy areas, organisms such as sandmason worms promote habitats hosting the same level of biodiversity as seagrass meadows, by acting as an important structure-forming species.

Jersey's current state of marine protection

It's clear, therefore, that Jersey's marine biodiversity is substantial, impressive, but also of extremely high quality, but what is being done to protect and safeguard it?

Almost 190sq-km of intertidal habitat are recognised as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. However, this designation affords no legal protection to the habitats within their boundaries.

Aside from the Ramsar sites, of Jersey's 2,455sq-km of territorial sea, 6.5% is designated as Marine Protected Areas, primarily in the form of No Mobile Gear Zones and one No Take Zone, designated at Portelet Bay in 2022. Research to date has shown that the existing small network of MPAs is having a positive influence on diversity through increased numbers of species compared to open areas.

With Jersey's MPAs prohibiting the use of mobile fishing gear, they represent a gold standard approach to conservation. This is in stark contrast to the UK, where despite MPAs covering more than 38% of the UK's domestic seas, a mere 8% of this network is fully protected from damaging fisheries such as bottom-towed gears.

The MSP opportunity and final message

While the quality of Jersey's MPAs are high, they cover only 6.5% of territorial waters. So, the bad news is that over 93% of Jersey's seabed remains unprotected from mobile fishing gears and development such as offshore windfarms, including many of the sensitive habitats highlighted. This prevents these areas delivering the benefits to the Island that, given proper protection, they could.

A large proportion of Jersey's key marine habitats remain unprotected outside the current MPAs: shallow sandy reef (74%), kelp forest (85%), maerl beds (87%), and sand mason worm habitats (36%).

The good news is that the Government of Jersey is in the process of working on a Marine Spatial Plan, which includes the development of a network of MPAs. This is going to be a vital piece of work in deciding

the fate of our waters. The global climate and biodiversity crises are apparent, and the development of further MPAs will play a key role in securing the long-term health of our ocean, the habitats and species that lie within, and the numerous services they provide.

It's important to remember that MPAs don't have to mean 'no fishing'. Jersey's MPAs (apart from Portelet Bay) only prohibit the use of mobile fishing gears, such as trawling and dredging. All other 'static' fishing methods are still permitted in these protected areas, such as hook-and-line fishing, potting, netting, foraging, spearfishing and hand-diving.

With Jersey's responsibilities under the Montreal agreement now clear, the marine plan currently being developed is the perfect and only opportunity for Jersey to fulfil

the internationally agreed targets. The plan must have a strong focus on reflecting 30x30 in its recommendations from the perspective of the United Nations CBD, of which Jersey is a signatory.

If Jersey does not adopt 30x30, then it will not only fail to meet its agreed responsibilities on an international and domestic stage, but it will also be falling behind on the global and local mission to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.

The world is at a pivotal moment in safeguarding our natural environment, and a network of MPAs covering at least 30% of our territorial waters should be seriously considered as soon as possible. The government's marine plan can steer this, and its public consultation due for this autumn is a brilliant opportunity to have your say on the future of Jersey's seas.

■ A spider crab, Jersey's existing small network of Marine Protected Areas is having a positive influence on diversity through increased numbers of species compared to open areas Picture: MATT JARVIS

