



# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

## THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS BEGINNING TO WAKE UP TO THE FACT THAT THE WORLD'S OCEANS ARE IN CRISIS.

In June 2017 the United Nations hosted its first Ocean Conference in a bid to create a similar international cooperative effort as we have seen to tackle climate change.

Just as the United Kingdom has shown global leadership in climate policy so can we, in partnership with our Overseas Territories, lead on ocean conservation. We have made remarkable progress over the past six years, committing nearly four million square kilometres of British waters to a 'Blue Belt' of protection by 2020.

The UK must now support implementation of these Blue Belt commitments in full and, as we leave the European Union, take the opportunity as Global Britain to lead the world in ocean conservation through the following actions:

- ▶ Support ambitious implementation of the Blue Belt in our UK Overseas

  Territories (UKOTs), with specific focus on the South Sandwich Islands, Saint
  Helena. Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha.
- ▶ The Government has already committed £4.8 million of funding per year from 2016 to 2020 to the Blue Belt. **This funding must be maintained and extended** up to the end of this parliament in 2022 if Britain is to continue in its position as a global leader in ocean conservation.
- ▶ Blue Belt funding should, where possible, **be spent in the Territories** rather than within UK Government agencies.
- ▶ Replace the upcoming loss of EU environment funding for the Territories so that the UK can continue to protect the communities and wildlife of these precious places.
- Extend monitoring and surveillance efforts out to a 100 nautical mile 'buffer zone' around each of the existing Blue Belt sites.
- ▶ Lead in the **United Nations** diplomatic effort to create marine protected areas on the High Seas.
- Lead in securing more effective conservation performance from Regional Fisheries
   Management Organisations (RFMOs).



## INTRODUCTION

LIFE ON EARTH DEPENDS ON THE OCEANS - FOR OXYGEN, FOOD AND CLIMATE STABILITY - BUT UNTIL NOW THE OCEANS HAVE BEEN UNDER-VALUED AND UNDER-GOVERNED. IN CONSEQUENCE, MARINE LIFE FACES GROWING THREATS FROM OVER-FISHING, CLIMATE CHANGE, ACIDIFICATION AND PLASTIC POLLUTION.

The UK can play a leading role in valuing and protecting the oceans, for its domestic waters and its Overseas Territories together represent the fifth largest marine estate in the world. Spread across the world's oceans, the 14 Overseas Territories possess some of the clearest waters and the largest fish on the planet. They contain breeding grounds for endangered turtles, a third of the world's albatrosses, a quarter of the world's penguins and the world's largest coral atoll. Some 94% of the unique biodiversity for which Britain is responsible is found in its Overseas Territories.

One of the ways to reverse decline in marine ecosystems and to enhance resilience to climate change is to establish marine reserves. The UK Government has already made what has been described as "the greatest environmental commitment by any government ever" in pledging to create a "Blue Belt" around its Overseas Territories and to complete a network of marine protected areas at home.

The challenge is how to bring about exemplary levels of protection to the four million square kilometres of ocean the UK has pledged to protect by 2020 – an area greater than the size of India. This includes the British Indian Ocean Territory, Pitcairn, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, Saint Helena and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, among them are some of the places least impacted by human activity left on Earth.

The task does not end there. Marine reserves will be ineffective if the oceans around them decline and therefore in the interests of conservation and good governance, an independent Britain should champion stronger cooperation within the bodies that manage international waters and support the case for marine reserves upon the High Seas which cover more than 45% of the Earth's surface.



BRITISH ANTARCTIC TERRITORY

A total of 14 Overseas Territories come under the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the UK. The inhabited UKOTs are mostly small islands with varying levels of internal self-government, with the UK retaining responsibility for defence, foreign relations and good governance. UK appointed civil servants meanwhile retain all executive power in the uninhabited Territories. While not forming part of the UK, the approximately 250,000 inhabitants of the UKOTs are British nationals, and the UK has an international responsibility to help protect their environment.





# GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS ALREADY MADE

In September 2016, at the Our Ocean conference in Washington DC, Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan MP announced:

- Designation of the Pitcairn Islands Marine Reserve in the Pacific.
- Designation of a marine protected area around Saint Helena in the South Atlantic.
- ▶ A commitment to designate a fully protected marine reserve around Ascension Island in the South Atlantic by 2019.
- ▶ A commitment to support a locally-led designation of a marine protection regime around Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic by 2020.
- ▶ £20 million of funding to support UKOT Governments to design, monitor and manage these marine protections to 2020.

The 2017 Conservative Party manifesto went further. Along with a commitment to "increase" fish stocks in UK waters after Brexit, it said:

"We will champion greater conservation co-operation within international bodies, protecting rare species, the polar regions and international waters. We will work with our Overseas Territory governments to create a Blue Belt of marine protection in their precious waters, establishing the largest marine sanctuaries anywhere in the world." (Forward Together, The Conservative Party Manifesto 2017)

Commitments to greater protection of the marine environments also featured in Liberal Democrat, Labour and Green Party 2017 General Election manifestos.



# THE BLUE BELT 2017-2022

THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENTS ARE OF GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE. HOW THEY ARE IMPLEMENTED OVER THE COMING YEARS WILL BE CRITICAL TO THEIR SUCCESS.

THE UK GOVERNMENT SHOULD PRIORITISE THE FOLLOWING NEXT STEPS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BLUE BELT, TO BE CARRIED OUT CONCURRENTLY ▶

### SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS 2018 MARINE PROTECTED AREA REVIEW

#### POLICY GOAL

RECLASSIFICATION OF THE EXISTING SUSTAINABLE USE MARINE PROTECTED AREA AROUND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS TO A FULLY PROTECTED MARINE SANCTUARY – TWICE THE SIZE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM – AND ENHANCED PROTECTION OF THE WATERS AROUND SOUTH GEORGIA

The waters of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) are of overwhelming conservation importance, supporting one of the largest and most varied populations of seabirds and marine mammals on Earth. The Territory harbours a quarter of the world's penguins and breeding colonies of several species of albatross, along with Antarctic fur seals and southern elephant seals. Whale species, now recovering from exploitation, include southern right, sei, fin, humpback, minke, blue and sperm whales.

The Government of SGSSI created a 1.07 million square kilometre marine protected area throughout its waters in 2012. However, only approximately 2% (20,000 square kilometres) of the Exclusive Economic Zone is fully protected from fishing activity and other resource extraction. In the remainder of the marine area, the three commercial fisheries, for krill, toothfish and icefish, are managed to prevent conflict between the ecosystem and fisheries.

The SGSSI Marine Protected Area is to be reviewed in 2018. The review provides an opportunity for the Government and others to explore whether existing fishing management provisions are sufficiently precautionary. Options to strengthen the existing marine protected area could include the designation of a large closed area around the pristine South Sandwich Islands. Management measures should be considered in a regional ecological context, as the survival of many of the species found in SGSSI depends on the management of the Scotia Sea between the islands and the Antarctic Peninsula.

### **ASCENSION ISLAND OCEAN SANCTUARY DESIGNATION BY 2019**

THE ASCENSION ISLAND GOVERNMENT TO BE SUPPORTED TO SSFULLY DELIVER ITS SCIENTIFIC ROADMAP AND DESIGNATE A FULLY PROTECTED MARINE RESERVE COVERING AT LEAST 50% OF ITS EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE BY 2019.

The Atlantic is without any large fully-protected marine reserves. Ascension would be the first and the largest. Straddling the Mid Atlantic Ridge, Ascension's waters harbour globally significant marine biodiversity. Ascension has the second-largest green turtle breeding population in the Atlantic. It is a hotspot for large predators, including sharks, tuna, swordfish and some of the largest recorded Atlantic blue marlin. It is also a significant bird colony, with its own unique frigatebird. Its inshore waters harbour a number of fish species found nowhere else on earth.

One of the few landmasses in the tropical Atlantic, Ascension presents the UK with the opportunity to protect an area of 440,000 square kilometres of ocean (nearly twice the size of the UK). Current plans are to designate half of Ascension's Exclusive Economic Zone as the Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary in 2019. There is the opportunity to go further and protect up to 100 per cent of Ascension's offshore waters. Given restored air access, Ascension would be one of the most accessible large-scale marine reserves in the world.

The MoD recently closed Ascension's runway to direct flights from the UK until 2020. This is a setback but also represents a chance to forge a new vision for the island that takes account of military and conservation needs and yet does not impose a burden upon local people. The development of eco-tourism is key to enhancing the long-term sustainability of the island's economy but this will require more accommodation and the restoration of the island's heritage assets.





## SAINT HELENA: RESOURCING, MONITORING AND ENFORCING THE RESERVE ANNOUNCED IN 2016

#### POLICY GOAL

SAINT HELENA TO BECOME THE FIRST JURISDICTION IN THE WORLD TO PERMANENTLY DECLARE ITS WATERS RESTRICTED TO 'ONE BY ONE ONLY' COMMERCIAL TUNA FISHING – ONE PERSON, ONE FISH – WITH A BAN ON LONG-LINING AND PURSE SEINING. THE UK WILL NEED TO SUPPORT THIS AID-DEPENDANT ISLAND FOR THIS INSPIRING STRATEGY TO SUCCEED.

Saint Helena is small and remote, like Ascension, but has even more unique species – around 500 of them - of which at least 50 are marine based. Whale sharks, the largest fish in the ocean, are recorded in high numbers around Saint Helena and may well breed there. Habitats include the open-ocean zone, with tunas around the seamounts (underwater mountains) and inshore rocky reefs. Little is known about what lives on the several seamounts in St Helena's waters, all 444,916 square kilometres of which were designated an IUCN category VI 'Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources' in 2016.

Saint Helena's fishermen have long opposed foreign fleets fishing in their waters. The protected area, larger than Germany, will offer the island both biodiversity protection and the opportunity for local fishermen to develop a high-value, low-volume tuna fishery. Much work remains to be done to support this new fisheries strategy.

## TRISTAN DA CUNHA DESIGNATION BY 2020

#### POLICY GOAL

THE TRISTAN DA CUNHA COMMUNITY TO BE SUPPORTED TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN REGIME FOR PROTECTING THE WATERS OF THEIR ENTIRE EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE BY 2020. THIS WILL BE MANAGED TO THE HIGHEST INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND FULLY FINANCED BY THE UK GOVERNMENT.

The 270-person community on Tristan da Cunha has made the visionary commitment to establish a science-based and Tristan-led protection regime for their entire 754,000 km² marine zone by 2020.

Tristan da Cunha is the world's most remote inhabited island and in its vast and near pristine marine zone the warm waters of the South Atlantic meet colder waters from the south. This results in an area of enormous productivity. Famed for its Marine Stewardship Council-certified sustainable lobster fishery, Tristan's waters also support some of the world's most important seabird breeding islands, vast populations of seals, iconic penguin colonies, globally threatened tuna and breeding grounds for southern right whales and blue sharks.

The UK Government needs to fully finance this vast new area of marine protection and help the Tristan community protect it from illegal fishing pressure.

# GLOBAL BRITAIN -GLOBAL OCEAN LEADER

The UK Government can use the Blue Belt as a platform to call for improved international governance of the High Seas (those areas beyond national jurisdiction), where poor governance of fisheries has been shown to go hand in hand with security and human rights abuses such as smuggling, piracy, slavery and suspected murder.

Improved monitoring and enforcement is a global priority and satellite technology is transforming this task.

While the priority for the UK Government must be to deliver on the Blue Belt commitments in the Overseas Territories, the Government will have an opportunity to further assert its leadership in ocean conservation as it manages the UK's transition out of the European Union.

With this in mind, the UK Government should seek a global leadership role in the following four areas:

- I. Fully implement the Blue Belt, with specific focus on supporting the maximum appropriate protection in SGSSI, Saint Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha, while also completing the marine protected area network in UK seas.
- 2. Extend monitoring and surveillance efforts out to a 100 nautical mile 'buffer zone' around each of the existing Blue Belt sites. This would extend improved management to an additional 3.89 million square kilometres of relatively lawless ocean.
- 3. The United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) requires a new implementing agreement to include the protection of biodiversity on the High Seas. This new agreement should include the ability to create marine protected areas on the High Seas. The UK should exert a positive diplomatic influence on the UN negotiations taking place up to 2020, building on the progress made at the UN Ocean Conference held in New York in June 2017.
- Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) are the primary vehicle for international cooperation on the shared use of migratory fish stocks and sometimes the only form of governance on the high seas. The UK has been poorly represented by the EU on these bodies allowing fish stocks we depend on to decline. The opportunity presents itself for the UK to take its own seat at the table beside its Overseas Territories and exert a conservation focused role in these forums.



