

Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill

Second reading

16 October 2025

Background

- The [Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Bill](#) will put into action the UK's commitment to protect the two-thirds of the world's oceans which are outside of national borders. The Bill is a big step forward for the UK's international nature leadership.
- By passing the Bill, the UK takes steps towards ratifying the Global Ocean Treaty (also known as the High Seas Treaty) which it originally signed in 2023. After the bill is passed, further secondary legislation will then formally ratify the agreement.
- 145 countries have signed the Global Ocean Treaty, with 75 having now [formally ratified](#) it – including France, Ireland, Spain and Greece. The treaty will come into force on 17th January 2026, 120 days after it was ratified by the 60th country.
- This legislation will help the UK to meet the targets set out in the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), including the headline goal to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.
- Environment APPG supporters [wrote to](#) then Leader of the House of Commons, Lucy Powell MP, in June this year to ask for urgent parliamentary time to pass this vital legislation. At the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, the UK agreed to find parliamentary time to pass this bill before the end of 2025.

Why are oceans beyond national borders so important?

- The [ocean](#) produces at least 50% of the planet's oxygen, is home to most of earth's biodiversity, and globally more than 3 billion people [rely](#) on the ocean for their livelihoods, jobs, and food security. Unfortunately, society is taking more from the ocean than can be replenished, with 90% of big fish populations depleted and 50% of coral reefs destroyed.
- The international waters (known as the "high seas") that will be protected by the Global Ocean Treaty are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including from industrial overfishing and oil drilling. Currently, [less than 1%](#) of the high seas – which comprises almost two-thirds of the world's ocean – is fully or highly protected from human activities.
- Historically the High Seas were [spared much](#) of the environmental damage driven by human activity seen in more accessible coastal waters. But as coastal resources have dwindled and regulations increased, industries have turned to the high seas, exploiting these largely unprotected waters.
- The government should keep up the momentum and pass the Bill without delay so the UK can ratify the treaty before it enters into force on 17 January 2026. The very first [Ocean COP](#) is on the horizon for next year and this will give the UK a seat at the table. The UK should then champion ambitious proposals for the first generation of High Seas sanctuaries, including the [Sargasso Sea](#) in the Atlantic.

What else can the government do to protect marine biodiversity?

- Alongside ratification of the Global Oceans Treaty, there is also further action the government can take to protect our seas and the marine life within them.

- The Environmental Audit Committee has backed calls from marine organisations for bottom trawling to be banned in Marine Protected Areas. Bottom trawling is a [method of fishing](#) that can damage the seabed, kill animals and plants, and release carbon from the seafloor which then drives climate change. In September, Defra [told](#) the EAC that it would not roll out an outright ban on bottom trawling in MPAs, meaning it is only completely banned in England's three Highly Protected Marine Areas.
- Overfishing is having a major impact on UK fish populations, with 27% of commercial fish stocks critically low and another quarter being overexploited. Marine groups are [urging](#) government to introduce a strategy to tackle overfishing by the end of 2026, including catch limits and a fair deal for fishers adjusting to lower catch limits.

What do voters think?

- 80% of people think that marine wildlife should be treated with the same care as land-based wildlife, [found](#) July polling from The Wildlife Trusts.
- 81% of British adults would like to see bottom trawling banned in Marine Protected Areas, [according to](#) polling from Oceana.

Suggested interventions

- Will the government ensure that legislation to ratify the Treaty is passed before the Treaty enters into force on January 17th 2026?
- Will the government reconsider its decision not to ban damaging bottom trawling in Marine Protected Areas?
- Will the government take action to restore UK fish populations which have been impacted by overfishing?