

Mr Hilary Benn MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs
Defra
Nobel House
17 Smith Square
London
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Dear Mr Benn

Re. UK Government signing the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa (MoU).

I am writing to urge you to support efforts to protect and conserve endangered marine turtles in the waters off West Africa by signing the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) Memorandum of Understanding concerning Conservation Measures for Marine Turtles of the Atlantic Coast of Africa (MoU).

As you know, all seven remaining species of marine turtle are listed in the 2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. There are considerable threats to marine turtles along the Atlantic coast of Africa and adjacent waters, including bycatch in artisanal and foreign industrial fisheries, habitat disturbance and destruction due to development, as well as the directed take of turtles and their eggs for food. The MoU and its Conservation and Management Plan for Marine Turtles outline clear actions to be taken by the range states to mitigate against these threats.

Marine turtles do not recognise national boundaries. The waters of the United Kingdom, Ascension Island and St Helena host aggregations of endangered leatherback turtles that also migrate to West African waters. Endangered green turtles hatched on Ascension Island's beaches use West African waters for foraging as juveniles. West African waters are important for the same turtles that are protected in the UK and the UK Overseas Territories.

As one of the most politically influential Governments in the world and a member of the European Union, as well as a regionally important English-speaking state in the East Atlantic, by signing the MoU and facilitating financial, political and scientific support, I believe the UK would provide much needed momentum in the development and implementation of this MoU and associated Conservation and Management Plan. Such support would provide significant benefits to the conservation of globally significant and highly threatened marine turtle populations found along the Atlantic coast of Africa and throughout the region, including those populations and aggregations found in UK and UK Overseas Territorial waters.

I therefore urge the UK Government to sign the MoU, thereby further fulfilling the UK's commitment under the Convention on Migratory Species, as well as its commitment to halt the decline of biodiversity under the Convention on Biodiversity.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this issue and I look forward to your support of this important initiative.

Yours sincerely