

Briefing for Parliamentarians | May 2021

Blue carbon

Ocean-based solutions to fight the climate crisis

A report by the Marine Conservation Society and Rewilding Britain

We call on UK Governments to:

- ✓ Scale up the rewilding of our seas for biodiversity and blue carbon.
- ✓ Integrate blue carbon protection and recovery into climate mitigation and environmental management policies.
- ✓ Work with the private sector to develop and support sustainable and innovative low-carbon commercial fisheries and aquaculture.

Summary: Ocean-based solutions must be part of the urgent and varied measures required to address the climate crisis.

Launched 4th May 2021, in collaboration with the Marine Conservation Society and Rewilding Britain, the report *Blue Carbon – Ocean-based solutions to fight the climate crisis* – makes the case for the development of a consistent and overarching strategy to protect and restore the UK's marine habitats. This will be vital to halt biodiversity loss and to meet our legislated commitment to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and net zero by 2045 for Scotland.

Nature-based Solutions could provide one-third of the climate change mitigation required to address the climate crisis, but currently attract less than three percent of the funds invested globally in addressing climate change. Internationally, the UK is leading the way by committing to significantly increase its spending on nature-based solutions, including those offered by the ocean. These must be matched by equally ambitious action at home to ensure ocean-based solutions are adopted with pace and at scale by 2030.

What is Blue Carbon?

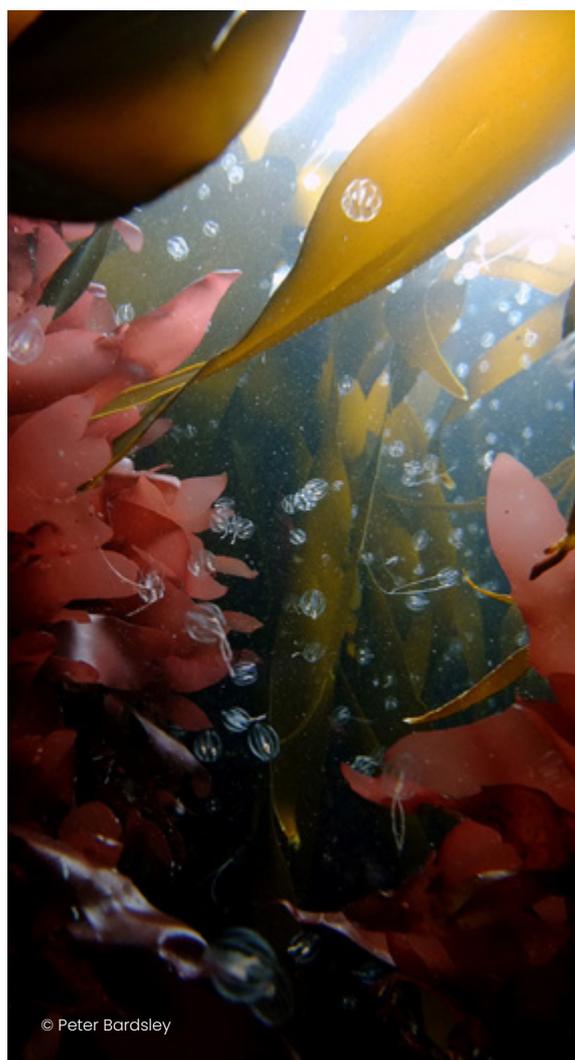
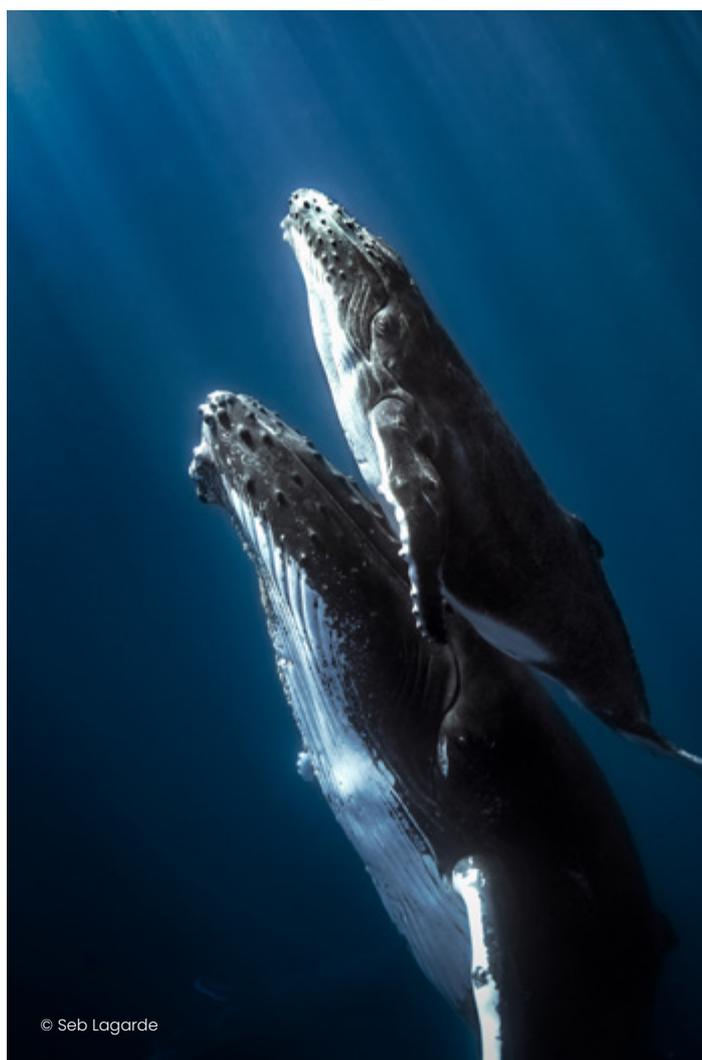
Blue carbon refers to the carbon held within marine and coastal plants, animals and habitats including in saltmarsh, seabed sediments, seagrass, shellfish and kelp forests. The UK's woodlands and peatbogs are regarded as being critical to our carbon strategy, so the Marine Conservation Society is calling on UK governments to treat carbon contained in marine and coastal ecosystems in the same way.

Why is it important?

Our report reveals that 500,000 km² of the UK's shelf seas – those no deeper than 200 metres – hold an estimated 205 million tonnes of carbon, 50 million tonnes more than the entire quantity held within the UK's forests.

In fact, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates that 320,000 km² of saltmarsh, mudflat, and sand coastal habitats, draw down and store (sequester) the equivalent of between 10.5 and 60.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually – **this has an estimated value of between £742 million and £4,259 million.**

Shellfish beds and kelp forests are also critical carbon sinks across the UK, storing millions more tonnes of blue carbon. In comparison, terrestrial ecosystems sequester an estimated 28 million tonnes of carbon a year. But harmful fishing practices such as bottom trawling, and other activities such as dredging, disturb the seabed sediments and have the potential to result in the loss of 13 million tonnes of carbon from this sink over the next decade.



Addressing the Problem

It is vital that we better protect ocean ecosystems, as ocean-based solutions to the climate crisis, for both biodiversity and blue carbon.



1. Scale up the rewilding of our seas for biodiversity and blue carbon.

- Deliver at least 30% of UK seas as Highly Protected Marine Protected Areas (hpMPAs), including at least a third (so 10% of UK seas) as Fully Protected Marine Protected Areas (fpMPAs) by 2030. This should start with the exclusion of bottom-towed trawling and dredging from all offshore MPAs designated for benthic features in UK waters, by 2024 at the latest.
- Implement bottom-towed fishing gear free-zones around the entirety of the UK coast in nearshore waters, the extent of which should be dependent on local and regional considerations, to recover marine ecosystems, support the recovery of fish and shellfish stocks and protect and restore blue carbon habitats.
- Support ambitious projects to restore key blue carbon habitats such as seagrasses, saltmarshes, native oyster reefs and kelp forests around the UK coast.
- Unlock the value of the natural capital of our ocean, alongside the innovation and resources of the private sector, through the development of sustainable market finance initiatives.



2. Integrate blue carbon protection and recovery into climate mitigation and environmental management policies.

- As part of a 'Blue Carbon Strategy,' commit the UK governments to specific and ambitious blue carbon habitat recovery, restoration and protection targets in the UK's next Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Climate Agreement in 2025.
- Fully account for blue carbon in UK carbon budgeting.
- Develop a comprehensive 'Ocean Charter' that integrates ocean-focused nature and climate policies, including those for Blue Carbon, alongside policies to deliver a sustainable Blue Economy by 2030. This will provide a pathway for the UK to meet its commitments to Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the Decade of Ocean Science for countries to develop national 'Sustainable Ocean Plans' to deliver a sustainable Blue Economy, by 2030.



3. Work with the private sector to develop and support sustainable and innovative low-carbon commercial fisheries and aquaculture.

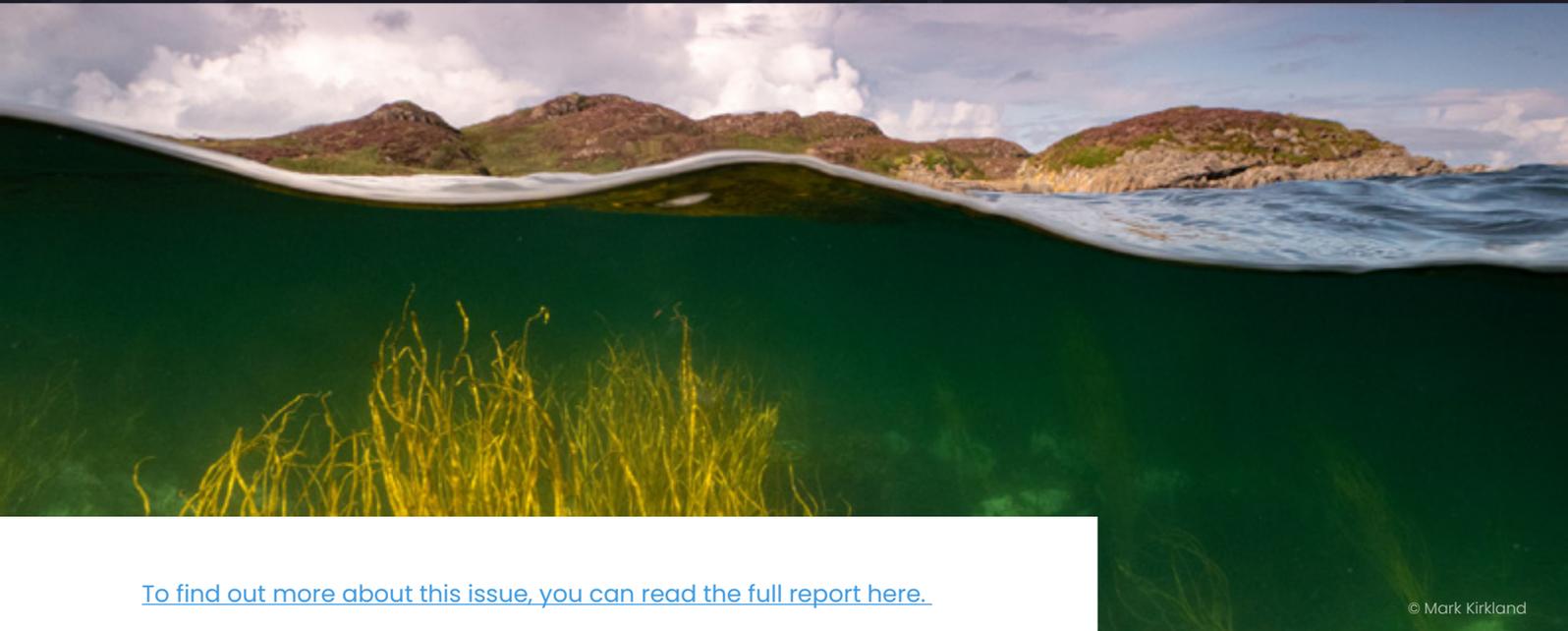
- Commit to fully sustainable management of UK commercial fish and shellfish stocks, applying an ecosystem-based approach and halving fisheries-related carbon emissions by 2030, to deliver climate and nature positive fishing.
- Fully invest in the development of innovative low-carbon aquaculture technologies and best practice, including processing and feed production, to halve UK aquaculture carbon emissions by 2030.
- Support and invest in the development of UK markets for sustainable, low-carbon wild-caught fish and innovative aquaculture products, with a roadmap for delivery produced by 2022/23.

The role of Parliamentarians

The UK-led COP26 conference is six months away and your support will be crucial in ensuring that Nature-based Solutions, and particularly ocean-based solutions, play a sufficient part of the varied solutions adopted to address the climate crisis.

How you can help:

- 1** Become a '**Blue Carbon Champion**' in Westminster to support our campaign and receive the latest updates on progress. We welcome your support in raising the profile of blue carbon and our report's asks in parliamentary debates, questions and with your colleagues.
- 2** Call on the UK Government to urgently produce a Blue Carbon Strategy that will commit to ambitious targets for blue carbon habitats in the UK's next Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Climate Agreement in 2025.
- 3** Attend our **online briefing meeting Tuesday 18th May 2-3pm**. Details to follow. If you are unable to attend, but wish to know more, please do get in touch to organise an alternative briefing meeting.



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[To find out more about this issue, you can read the full report here.](#)

Contact

If you would like to be a voice for our seas and climate change by pledging to be a 'Blue Carbon Champion' for Westminster, please contact our public affairs officer **Alice Watson** alice.watson@mcsuk.org

If you would like to find out more information on the report's findings or to arrange a briefing meeting, please contact our public affairs manager **Anna Gelderd** anna.gelderder@mcsuk.org

If you are interested in raising the report's findings in the press, please contact our press manager **Victoria Riglen** victoria.riglen@mcsuk.org