**Media Contact: Liz Carney, The Wildlife Trusts, Tel: 01636 670075, Mob: 07887 754659  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 10 MAY 2019**

**SOS for sea-life - UK Marine Strategy shows spectacular failure to protect our seas**

Conservation and environment groups are highlighting the spectacular failure of UK Governments to deliver on their collective promises to keep our seas healthy and biologically diverse shown in the revised UK Marine Strategy (published late yesterday, 9 May). Conservation experts are calling on Governments across the UK to radically up the ambition and plans outlined in the proposals in order to tackle the current ocean emergency.

The new UK Marine Strategy shows that to date the UK has only succeeded on 4 out of 15 indicators needed for healthy oceans.[1] Yet despite this failure and dire warnings of biodiversity declines on land and sea by the UN this week[2] this key UK framework, which aims to help ensure marine ecosystems recover to a healthy condition, is worryingly weak. Environmentalists are warning that without a step-change in approach we risk losing not only iconic nature, but also the benefits that a healthy marine environment provides for people.

In addition to disastrous declines in marine biodiversity, letting our seas suffer has clear and dramatic implications for the key issue of climate change and the ramifications of global warming for us all, as our oceans absorb one third of our CO2 and 90% of all heat produced by humans.[3] As we close in on new global AICHI targets to restore nature in 2020, the collective UK Governments’ admission that our oceans are in poor health is a wake-up call that we must grasp this once in a lifetime opportunity to turn the tide for our seas. The UK Marine Strategy should be the first step toward this - with proposals being consulted on for the next six weeks.

**Chris Tuckett, Director of Programmes at Marine Conservation Society, and Chair of Wildlife and Countryside Link’s Marine Group, said:** *‘*Such a wholescale failure to meet our own targets for healthy oceans must be a wake-up call on behalf of our seas. If our oceans are ever to become healthy again it is vital that all Governments in the UK set legally binding targets which are ambitious and rapid. Time is running out for the waters and wildlife that we love.*’*

**Alec Taylor, Head of Marine Policy at WWF, said:** ‘We are facing a climate and environment emergency and the crisis is playing out below the waves as well as on land. The vast array of life that lives in our waters is disappearing, as plastic chokes our seas, seabirds starve and marine noise levels rise. We’re harming ourselves as well as our ocean wildlife, as healthy seas are vital in the fight against climate change and crucial for a sustainable fishing industry. This long-awaited Marine Strategy is extremely welcome, but it needs to set much bolder targets, if we’re going to halt the loss of nature now and put it on a path to recovery by 2030 and beyond.

**Gareth Cunningham, Head of Nature Policy at RSPB, said:** *‘*Business as usual is no longer an option when it comes to protecting the seas, wildlife such as seabirds are in serious decline across the UK. Decisive leadership is urgently needed to reverse these trends and put our seas and wildlife back on an even keel.’

**Dr Lissa Batey, Senior Policy Manager at The Wildlife Trusts, said:** ‘Today’s report is a startling wake up call, demonstrating that the losses we’ve observed on land are just as apparent in our seas. It is shocking that as the UK we are failing on so many aspects of the UK Marine Strategy. For instance setting up a noise registry does nothing to address the little known impacts of this ever increasing pollution on our seas. However, the Governments have an opportunity now to ensure that in a further six years’ time they are not reporting on failures once more - they must do better, doing more to ensure nature’s recovery on land and sea.’

**Further quotes from additional environment organisations including Client Earth, Friends of the Earth and CHEM Trust can be found** [**here**](https://www.wcl.org.uk/additional-quotes-on-uk-marine-strategy.asp)**.**

Failure to prevent the spread of invasive species, and allowing fishing to exceed scientifically recommended limits has had a huge impact on the biodiversity of marine ecosystems as reported by the UN IPBES report this week [4]. Some of our seabird populations have plummeted by more than half. At the same time contamination, litter, chemical and noise pollution levels have rocketed, with plastic found in a third of UK caught fish and half of orca populations set to be wiped out by chemical pollution alone.[5]

Conservationists are urging the Governments across the UK to up their ambition on the targets and timelines for helping our seas to recover, and effectively resource the delivery of the UK Marine Strategy, including compliance, enforcement and monitoring. Specific actions needed include:

* **Increased protection for wildlife:** through a well-managed network of UK Marine Protected Areas (see [EAC criticism](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/news-parliament-2017/sustainable-seas-government-response-published-17-19/) yesterday of the current network), ambitious conservation strategies, for vulnerable species and habitats, and robust measures to protect against invasive non-native species;
* **Delivering recovery and restoration**: through a highly ambitious conservation programme, including helping restore carbon rich ecosystems to help limit climate change;
* **Ensuring sustainable fishing and aquaculture:** through an exacting UK Fisheries Bill, and potential new UK devolved fisheries legislation, that builds on and improves existing EU environmental standards and effective secondary legislation on the reduction and elimination of bycatch;
* **Reducing pollution of our seas**: through a wide range [of measures](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link%20plastics%20position%20paper%20FINAL.pdf) to slash waste at the source, boost recycling, phase out  the most harmful products, and tackle complex chemical pollution;
* **Cutting ocean noise pollution**: through a comprehensive strategy working with countries that share our seas;
* **Delivering an effective marine planning system by 2021:** that robustly considers the man made impact on our seas and the interaction between land and sea.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors:**

Organisations supporting these calls include: CHEM Trust, Client Earth, Earthwatch Europe, Friends of the Earth, IFAW, The Mammal Society, Marine Conservation Society, Marine Conservation Society Scotland, National Trust Scotland, Northern Ireland Environment Link, RSPB, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Environment Link, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Wales Environment Link, Whale and Dolphin Conservation, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Wildlife Trusts, WWF UK

**1.** See MOAT [breakdown of the assessment](https://moat.cefas.co.uk/summary-of-progress-towards-good-environmental-status/): Good Ecological Status was only met in four indicators (eutrophication, contaminants, contaminants in seafood, and changes in hydrographical conditions) partially met on five indicators (cetaceans, seals, oceanic habitats, food webs, and noise pollution) and not met on six out of the fifteen indicators (birds, fish, litter, seafloor habitats, non-indiginenous species, commercial fish and shellfish)

**2.** IPBES 2019 Report: [‘Nature’s Dangerous Decline ‘Unprecedented’; Species Extinction Rates ‘Accelerating’](https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment)

**3.**See WWF’s *‘Life Below Water Report’*, p2, for sources

**4.** IPBES 2019 [Report](https://www.ipbes.net/sites/default/files/downloads/spm_unedited_advance_for_posting_htn.pdf), p4

**5.**Plymouth University [research](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0025326X12005668) 2013.

**6.**  Half of the world’s [Orca populations](https://www.wcl.org.uk/killer-whale-wipe-out-warning-prompts-calls-for-urgent-government-action.asp) are likely to be wiped out in the next 30-50 years by invisible chemical pollutants (polychlorinated biphenyls - PCBs) in our oceans.

**FACTFILE:**

* The UK’s resident Orca population is at high risk of [extinction](http://uk.whales.org/blog/2017/05/shocking-news-on-uks-only-resident-pod-of-orcas), down to just eight members with no calves for 20 years
* Seabird populations are in decline across the UK falling by 22% in the last 40 years, with the [Kittiwake down by 60%](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/pdf/2017%20SUKB.pdf) UK wide, failing recovery targets set over 6 years ago . The UK hosts internationally important numbers of seabirds (8 million), and is globally important for a number of seabird species. The UK Government has promised to act to reverse this decline (OSPAR 2017).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Species** | **Millions** | **% Global population** |
| **Manx shearwater** | **0.6** | **80\*1\*** |
| **Great skua** | **0.01** | **60** |
| **Northern Gannet** | **0.6** | **56** |
| **Lesser black-backed gull** | **0.1** | **38** |
| **European shag** | **0.05** | **34** |
| **Razorbill** | **0.02** | **20** |
| **Common guillemot** | **2.0** | **13** |
| **Herring Gull** | **0.3** | **12** |
| **Atlantic puffin** | **1.2** | **10** |
| **Northern Fulmar** | **1.0** | **8** |
| **Black-legged kittiwake** | **0.8** | **8** |

The above global population % figures are taken from [JNCC data](http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-3201#species)

* By 2050 the ocean will contain more plastic by weight than fish, [according to research](https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/assets/downloads/EllenMacArthurFoundation_TheNewPlasticsEconomy_15-3-16.pdf) by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation.
* Plastic bottles make up almost a fifth of non-fishing plastic debris in the oceans ([source](http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0111913)).
* The [Great British Beach Clean 2018](https://www.mcsuk.org/media/gbbc-2018-report.pdf) found 182.6 pieces of plastic per 100m on British beaches