MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE UK'S OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

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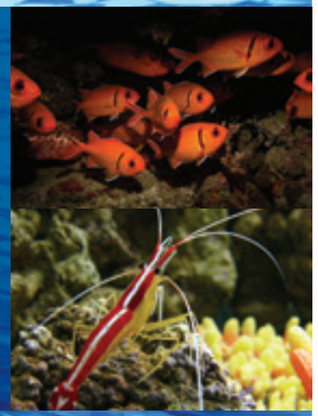
MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE UK'S OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

- The UK has the fifth largest marine zone in the world; most of which is around the UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs).
- Three of these Territories; the Pitcairn Islands, Ascension Island and South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands would greatly benefit from their waters being classified as fully protected marine reserves- an action that only the UK Government can take.
- With very little cost, the Government could protect vast areas of water from illegal fishing and drastic loss of biodiversity and at the same time make a major contribution to meeting global targets for ocean protection.

ONE BILLION PEOPLE RELY ON FISH FOR THEIR DIET AND 200 MILLION FOR THEIR LIVELIHOOD.



THE NEED FOR OCEAN CONSERVATION

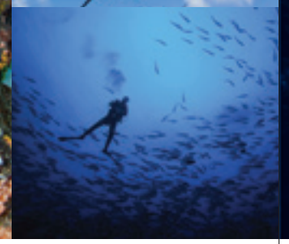
The oceans are under increasing pressure from the combined effects of climate change, overexploitation, pollution and habitat loss. Overall, it is estimated that 90% of all large fish are gone and that 15 of the 17 largest fisheries in the world are on the brink of collapse. A study published in Science predicted all the worlds' fisheries will collapse by 2048 if trends are allowed to continue. The United Nations have put the annual loss of revenue to global fishing fleets due to overfishing and poor management at $50bn.

The need for ocean conservation is not just about biodiversity. One billion people rely on fish for their diet and 200 million for their livelihood. Yet we continue to ravage the very ecosystems that provide this precious resource. For example, a staggering one third of all mangroves are gone (crucial breeding grounds for 85% of commercial fish), and only 5% of coral reefs are classified as pristine.

Recognising that unless action is taken, the world is in danger of losing entire marine ecosystems within the next generation, governments have agreed an international target of protecting 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020. However to date progress has been slow, with less than 3% being under any form of protection and less than 1% being fully protected. If this target is to be met and the world's oceans are to have a healthy future, Governments need to act now.

CREDIT: BOATSWAIN BIRD ISLAND (ASCENSION), DERREN FOX

CREDIT: SOOTY TERM, AIG



THIS COMMITMENT WOULD MAKE A SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS MEETING INTERNATIONALLY AGREED TARGETS TO PROTECT THE WORLD'S OCEANS AND FISH STOCKS, ESTABLISHING THE UK AS A GLOBAL LEADER IN OCEAN CONSERVATION.

THE OPPORTUNITY

The UK's Overseas Territories harbour 90% of the UK's biodiversity and through these, the UK has the fifth largest, and possibly the most diverse, marine zone in the world (6.8 million km^2, or 1.9% of the world's oceans).

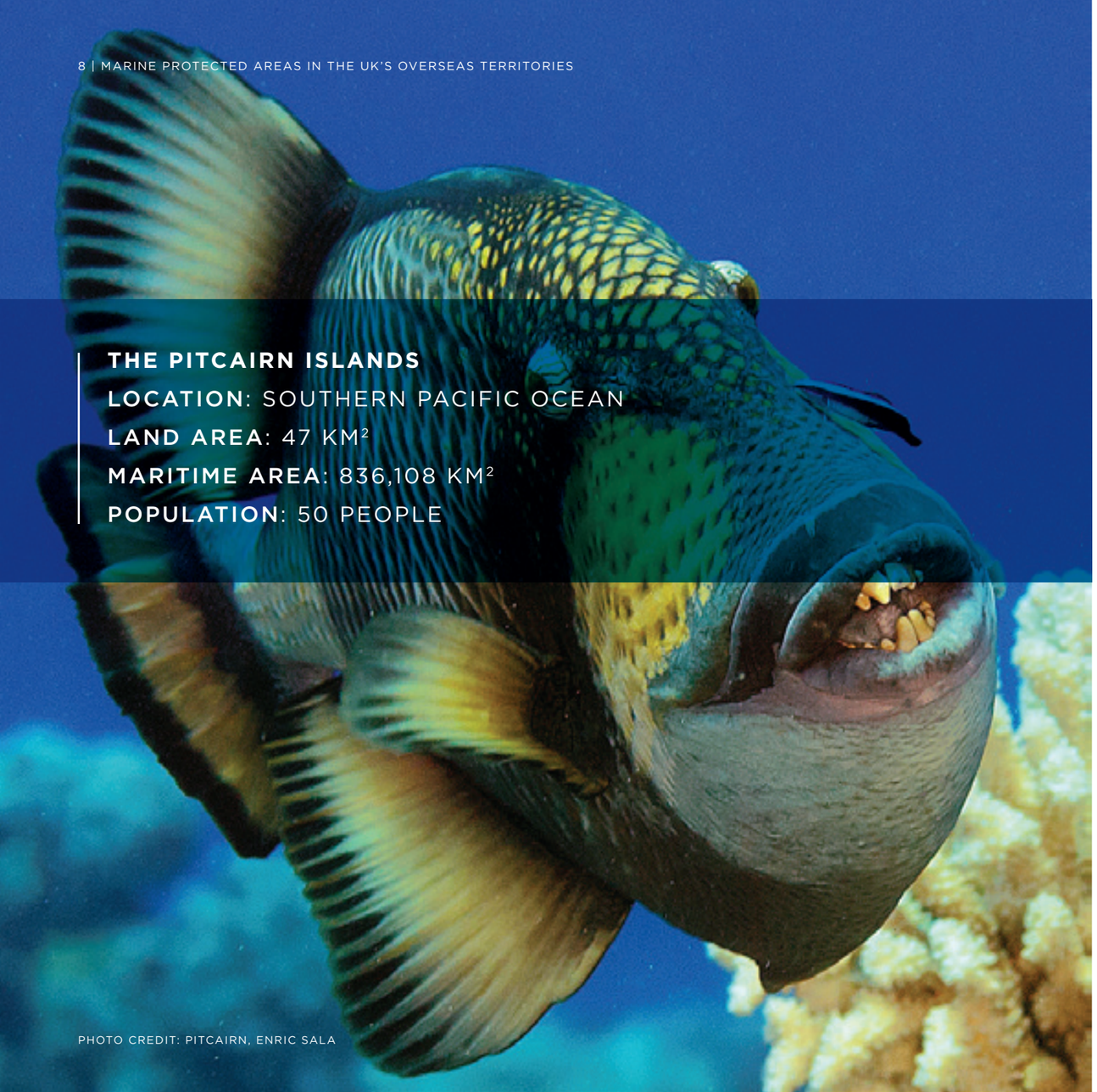
The establishment of fully protected marine reserves (areas safe from harmful extracting industries) in most of these Territories is a real and easily achievable solution to marine protection. This decision lies ultimately with the UK Government.

In 2010, the UK Government took a major step in global conservation by creating the world's largest fully protected marine reserve (over twice the surface area of the UK at 640,000 km^2) in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). This reserve protects the world's largest coral atoll (the Great Chagos Bank) and has one of the healthiest reef systems in the cleanest waters of the world, supporting nearly half the area of good quality reefs in the Indian Ocean.

Continuing their leadership in this area, the Government must now consider three more enormously important Territories, the Pitcairn Islands, the South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and Ascension Island.

Not only would fully protected marine reserves help safeguard the important biodiversity of these Territories, they would also give them a positive image and visibility- a global brand- which would move the Territories from being almost unknown islands into important and much more widely recognised global assets. Furthermore, this important environmental action can, in many cases, be achieved for a remarkably low cost and in ways that will benefit local communities.

Designating Marine Protected Areas around these three Territories would create the world's largest nature reserves, and would highlight the UK's good custodianship of the UKOTs. Additionally, this commitment would make a significant contribution towards meeting internationally agreed targets to protect the world's oceans and fish stocks, establishing the UK as a global leader in ocean conservation.



THE PITCAIRN ISLANDS
LOCATION: SOUTHERN PACIFIC OCEAN
LAND AREA: 47 KM²
MARITIME AREA: 836,108 KM²
POPULATION: 50 PEOPLE

PHOTO CREDIT: PITCAIRN, ENRIC SALA

THE PITCAIRN ISLANDS

The Pitcairn Islands are four islands (Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie, and Oeno) in the Southern Pacific Ocean that spread over several hundred miles of ocean and have a total land area of about 47 km². Pitcairn is populated by the descendants of the mutineers of the legendary HMAV Bounty and their Tahitian companions, and today it is the UK's only remaining territory in the Pacific.

Because of the Pitcairn Islands' remote location and low population size, the seas around the islands are exceptional, having never been polluted or over-fished. Whilst Pitcairn exists in an area of the Pacific Ocean which is not naturally rich in fish stocks (because it is far from any nutrient providing rivers or ocean upwelling), its marine wildlife still remains in an almost pristine state, with healthy fish populations including top predators such as sharks, some of the best coral reefs in the world, and intact deep sea habitats with many species new to science. These waters are however currently unprotected and unpoliced. It is only a matter of time before the area is damaged by commercial fishing.

A proposal for a highly protected marine reserve in the Pitcairn Islands was submitted jointly by the Pitcairn Island Council, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the National Geographic Society to the FCO in January 2013. Supported by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee as one of its formal recommendations, this marine reserve would protect these waters and give Pitcairn the much-needed global recognition that can help connect it to global marine science and tourism. With the unanimous support of the Pitcairn islanders, the proposed marine reserve would be the world's largest single fully protected area of ocean at 834,000 km².

THE SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS (SGSSI)

LOCATION: SOUTHERN ATLANTIC OCEAN

LAND AREA: 3,903 KM²

MARITIME AREA: OVER 1 MILLION KM²

POPULATION: UNINHABITED (EXCEPT FOR A FEW GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND SCIENTISTS)

PHOTO CREDIT: SOUTH GEORGIA, SUE SCOTT

THE SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS (SGSSI)

This uninhabited Territory has a vast marine area, recognised world-wide for the importance of its wildlife. Home to more than one hundred million seabirds and half the world's population of southern elephant seals, SGSSI are without a doubt one of the most diverse and scientifically significant regions on the planet. The islands have already been identified as a priority for protection by the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). A large-scale fully protected marine reserve would build on the area's current partly-protected status and could be implemented in the South Sandwich Island half of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) which stretches out to 200 nautical miles from its coast. This would have only a very minor impact on current fishing or fishery income, nearly all of which takes place in South Georgia's part of the EEZ. The government has an unprecedented opportunity to improve on the protection of SGSSIs' marine biodiversity at a minimal cost and to take a lead in implementing CCAMLR's protected area work programme.

The arguments in favour of declaring this fully protected marine reserve in the South Sandwich Islands are exactly the same as those that motivated the UK Government to successfully establish a marine reserve in the South Orkney Isles, just to the south of SGSSI.


NORTH AMERICA
NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN
NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
EUROPE
ASIA
AFRICA
NORTH PACIFIC OCEAN
SOUTH AMERICA
ASCENSION ISLAND
PITCAIRN ISLAND
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
INDIAN OCEAN
AUSTRALIA
SOUTH PACIFIC OCEAN
SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
THE SOUTH GEORGIA AND THE SOUTH SANDWICH ISLANDS (SGSSI)
SOUTHERN OCEAN
SOUTHERN OCEAN

ASCENSION ISLAND
LOCATION: SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN
LAND AREA: 88 KM²
MARITIME AREA: 443,000 KM²
POPULATION: NO PERMANENT RESIDENTS (800 TEMPORARY WORKERS)

PHOTO CREDIT: GREEN TURTLE, ASCENSION, AIG CONSERVATION

ASCENSION ISLAND

Often described as a 'fragment of paradise,' Ascension Island lies in the middle of the rich equatorial waters of the South Atlantic. The peak of a gigantic undersea volcano, it holds the second largest green turtle nesting site in the Atlantic and one of the most important tropical seabird breeding stations in the world. Its waters are full of significant populations of big ocean predators including tuna, dolphins, sharks, and record-breaking marlin, providing a sanctuary for stocks shared with developing West African nations. Its deep seas meanwhile incorporate over 200km of the Mid-Atlantic rift valley.

At present, there is no commercial fishery in its rich waters: a brief and poorly managed long-lining fishery, dominated by Asian vessels suspected of shark-finning, turtle bycatch and potential use of slave labour in these British waters was closed at the end of 2013. Temporary residents on the island only ever fish out to a maximum of 3 nautical miles (nm) from shore. A review of management options for Ascension's 443,000km² maritime area is now underway. The FCO should not reopen the commercial fishery again but instead grasp the opportunity to declare a very large and fully protected marine conservation area (from 5nm from shore out to 200nm) This would have zero impact on the island's working population, and would neatly complement the ongoing project of the Ascension Island Government to identify and protect areas of shallow marine biodiversity, which will conclude in 2016. The lucrative inshore sport fishery would also benefit greatly from being surrounded by such an offshore MPA and, if well-regulated and licensed, could provide an important source of sustainable financing for MPA enforcement.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The constitutional position of the UKOTs is similar to the position between the UK Parliament and other local authorities and devolved governments. Certain amounts of autonomy have been delegated to each UKOT but the UK remains responsible for each one.

A significant factor in creating MPAs is the involvement of the local people. As reported by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee during a recent inquiry, the UKOTs themselves are calling on the Government to help them establish MPAs. Their isolated and remote locations mean that the natural environment is an intrinsic part of their lives. The need here is to ensure that harvesting of fisheries and other natural resources remains as low impact as possible, meets the highest environmental standards and allows permanent inhabitants to locally and sustainably source their food without granting access to destructive large fishing vessels.

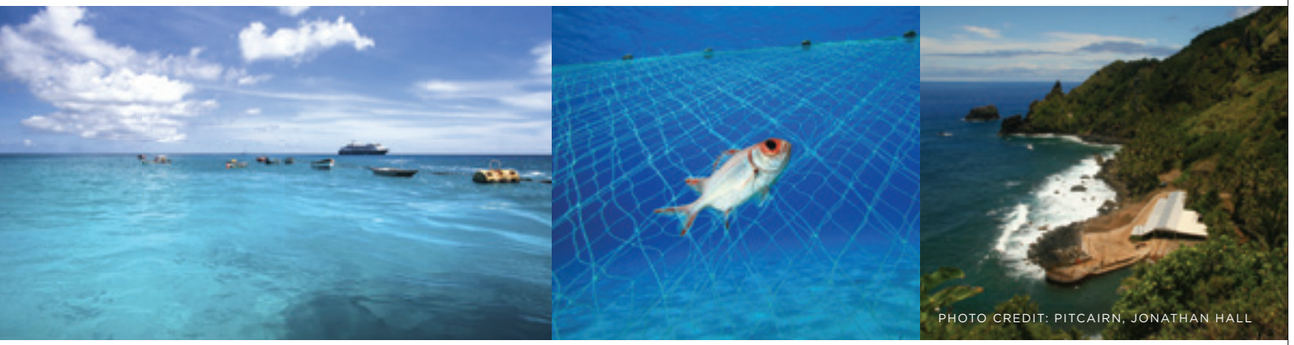


PHOTO CREDIT: PITCAIRN, JONATHAN HALL

ENFORCEMENT

The cost of enforcement is often raised as an obstacle to the implementation of marine reserves in the UKOTs. Half of the UK's seas have little or no enforcement (including areas where fishing is licensed). This widespread lack of surveillance and enforcement is an open invitation to illegal and unsustainable fishing. However, in the UK's National Strategy for Maritime Security published in May 2014, the Government commits itself to five maritime security objectives, of which one is "To protect the resources and population of the UK and Overseas Territories from illegal and dangerous activity, including serious organised crime and terrorism". In the explanation of why this action is important it specifically includes the threat posed by the deliberate or wilful failure to observe laws to protect resources such as fish stocks or Marine Protected Areas. In some of the Overseas Territories there is work to do to deliver effectively on this laudable objective.

Clearly marine enforcement cannot be the responsibility of the Territories alone. In SGSSI, there are no local inhabitants, Ascension has around 800 non-permanent residents and the Pitcairn Islands has only approximately 50 people who do not have the capacity to enforce a marine area more than three times the size of the UK. An alternative is to establish a central point of information and responsibility within the UK Government for delivering better UKOT marine security. This office could collaborate with others to collate and combine the large amount of pre-existing information (military, VMS (Vessel Monitoring Systems), local intelligence, etc) about activity within Territory EEZs, and thus build up a comprehensive picture of suspected illegal activity.

The Pitcairn Islands currently has no long range marine enforcement capability and the UK has undertaken neither surveillance nor any enforcement measures there for over 13 years. The following actions would provide

practical surveillance and enforcement in Pitcairn's waters whilst bearing in mind financial constraints.

1. New legislation to ensure that illegal fishermen can be prosecuted appropriately.
2. A programme of surveillance by: encouraging web-based voluntary reporting; the placement of acoustic buoys around the three uninhabited islands; and monitoring of Automatic Identification System (AIS) data on ships' movements. Cost: around £175,000 pa; though much of the AIS data and analysis is already available through NMIC and thus the cost is likely to be considerably less than this.
3. Periodic detection patrols through an agreement with the French navy and occasional charter of a vessel (e.g. the current supply vessel Claymore II). Patrols would be targeted spatially and temporally based on historical information on illegal fishing hot spots or hot periods. Cost: around £400,000 pa, but only necessary if surveillance reveals significant illegal activity.

If funds permitted, the provision of more sophisticated satellite surveillance and a dedicated fast vessel would further improve enforcement.

The South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands already have enforcement capability provided through a dedicated patrol ship (Pharos), periodic visits from the Royal Navy, and occasional overflights by the RAF. Enforcement would be improved by the use of more sophisticated satellite data to determine whether there is illegal fishing taking place and to increase military security and this could be provided by the National Maritime Information Centre.

The cost of the Pharos is funded from fisheries revenue, most of which comes from the South Georgia part of the EEZ. The costs of military patrols is borne by the UK Government. The proposed marine reserve in the South Sandwich part of the EEZ does not impact much of the fisheries revenue (the Toothfish revenue lost would be less than £200,000, and any krill fishing could be done in South Georgia's part of the EEZ). The marine reserve would not

change matters as far as military patrolling is concerned. Thus the proposal for a fully protected marine reserve in the South Sandwich islands would not significantly change the current enforcement capacities in this Territory.

Ascension Island currently has no long range marine enforcement or civilian surveillance regime. However, a partnership between the US military and RAF personnel stationed on Ascension should be explored, as unlike the other two UKOTs, Ascension is home to a major military airbase and associated surveillance technology. It is also visited by UK and US military vessels every month, which could be asked to enter Ascension waters from specific angles and report any illegal activity detected. Other specific and cost-effective measures to be potentially adopted include:

1. Additions to pre-existing legislation to ensure that illegal fishermen can be prosecuted appropriately and more easily (e.g. through requiring fishing vessels to have their gear stowed whilst within the Ascension EEZ if they do not have a license to fish).
2. Improving surveillance via: Use of a VMS, possibly shared with either St Helena or the Falkland Islands and SGSSI (cost: around £20,000pa if shared); Installation of an AIS, or gathering redacted data from the US Military's AIS receiver (cost: approx >£10,000pa); Working with Royal Navy vessels transiting the Ascension EEZ to/from the Falklands for "on the water" surveillance and deterrent effect (cost: free).
3. Periodic charter of enforcement vessel (1-2 months per year). Unannounced random patrol period with effort targeted spatially and temporally based on historical information on illegal fishing periods and hotspots. Cost: up to £300,000 pa, but only necessary if surveillance reveals significant illegal activity.

It should be noted that AIS information is already available to the UK Government. Whilst this is not a complete solution, it provides basic surveillance where further enforcement measures can be developed.

SERIOUS AND DRASTIC MEASURES NEED TO BE TAKEN TO TACKLE THE INDUSTRIAL OPERATORS WITH 1% OF THE WORLD'S FLEETS ACCOUNTING FOR 50% OF CATCHES.

CONCLUSION

The need for conserving the ocean has never been more important. Serious and drastic measures need to be taken to tackle the industrial operators. 1% of the world's fleets accounting for 50% of catches. New laws need to be put in place but there are very few areas of the oceans where conservation could be achieved so easily or cheaply than in these three UKOTs.

MPAs are proven to work. During World War II when fishing was prevented in the North Sea, fish populations quickly recovered. Spain has a poor record when it comes to fishing but catches close to the famous Tabarca Marine Reserve (the country's first) were 85% higher than elsewhere after just 6 years of protection. Another example of a successful MPA is Cocos Island in Costa Rica which has twice as many large fish, five times more large fish biomass and a stunning 14 times more shark biomass than fished areas.

Establishing these three protected marine reserves that form the focus of this report is an important, but comparatively easy, environmental gain for a British government, and would be widely recognised and applauded. It would also clearly demonstrate the UK's leadership in marine conservation and its good stewardship of the natural resources of the Territories.

THE GOVERNMENT HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE THE WORLD'S LARGEST MARINE RESERVES, AT MINIMAL COST.

PROPOSED MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

The Government has an opportunity to create the world's largest marine reserves, at minimal cost. However it requires political will.

Until now the Government has spent about £2 million a year on conservation amongst its Overseas Territories, compared with £460 million in the UK. This means that the areas most important to global biodiversity are the least resourced.

This report calls for manifesto commitments from political parties to preserve and enhance the environment of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories, through active conservation management, through sponsoring the sensitive exploitation of natural resources in close consultation with the communities of these Territories; and through the implementation of large fully protected marine reserves.

WRITTEN BY ZAC GOLDSMITH MP IN COLLABORATION WITH:

The Pew Trusts
Blue Marine Foundation
The RSPB (on Ascension)
Isabella Gornall

CONTACT

ZAC@ZACGOLDSMITH.COM
020 8939 0321
372 UPPER RICHMOND ROAD WEST
LONDON SW14 7JU