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Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs Committee

Protecting Marine Mammals in the UK and Abroad

Sixth Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

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The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee

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Committee staff

Alexander Bellis (Committee Specialist), Guy Cowman-Sharpe (Inquiry Manager), Mark Doyle (Senior Media and Communications Officer), Andy French (Committee Specialist), Tim Jarrett (Second Clerk), Sean Kinsey (Clerk of the Committee), Jennifer McCormick (Committee Operations Manager), Gary O'Key (Committee Specialist / Impact Manager), Charlie Parkin (Committee Specialist), Annabel Russell (Committee Operations Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1119; the Committee's email address is efracom@parliament.uk.

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Summary

Global biodiversity is in crisis. The current rate of decline is unparalleled in human history and the UK has been cited as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. In the marine environment, mammals such as whales, dolphins and seals play a vital role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem in a variety of ways, including cycling nutrients and playing different roles in the food chain, as well as helping to combat climate change. Marine mammals are also some of the most charismatic creatures on earth and for this reason have become flagship species for marine conservation and a boost for coastal recreation and tourism. These species, however, are facing increasing pressures from a variety of sources which threaten population numbers and welfare.

One of the biggest problems in protecting marine mammals is the lack of data available. They are difficult to monitor and assess because they are highly mobile, primarily underwater species. Defra should launch a new initiative specifically to encourage the development of new technological solutions to marine mammal monitoring, with ring-fenced funding that at least matches the existing £1.5m Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA) innovation competition, which was completely inadequate at tackling issues in this specific policy area.

Government initiatives to support marine mammals include the Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy and the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative. These are very welcome but need to move at a faster pace, be more joined up between Defra and the Devolved Administrations, and contain more rigorous assessment mechanisms including SMART targets, if they are to yield results.

Other key findings and recommendations are:

The legal framework to protect of marine mammals is incoherent and not sufficient to effectively preserve these precious species. UK measures contain concerning loopholes and are in stark contrast to best practice exemplified internationally by the 1972 US Marine Mammal Protection Act. In the short term, seals should be added to the list of species in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act as soon as possible. In the medium term, Defra should take urgent steps to close the loophole that allows the transit of cetacean products through UK ports. In the long term, the Government should bring forward primary legislation on marine mammal protection.

Current levels of bycatch monitoring are insufficient to gain an accurate picture of the numbers of marine mammals killed or injured in this way, despite the requirement for vessels to report marine mammal bycatch. We recommend that the Government introduces mandatory bycatch monitoring, phased in over several years, with smaller vessels given extra time and, where necessary, financial support to meet their obligations. We would like to see an action plan to achieve this, with targets and milestones, by December 2023.

We also urge the Government to raise issues of marine mammal welfare with those countries who still engage in hunting, such as Iceland, Norway, Japan and the Faroe Islands, whenever bilateral and/or multilateral talks are taking place, including trade and fisheries negotiations. We recommend that the UK should not agree any new trade deal that does not include a specific commitment to marine mammal conservation.

1 Introduction

The importance of marine mammals

1. Global biodiversity is in crisis. The current rate of decline is unparalleled in human history¹ and the UK has been cited as one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world.² The 2021 report of the Independent Review on the Economics of Biodiversity, led by Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta, concluded that our current “unsustainable” relationship with Nature is “endangering the prosperity of current and future generations”.³ New scientific research led by the China University of Geosciences, published in March 2023, meanwhile, is even more stark, suggesting that unless urgent action is taken to reverse wildlife losses, the world is heading towards an inevitable total ecosystem collapse.⁴ This would have a significant impact on humans, who rely on healthy ecosystems to provide clean air, water and food.⁵

2. In the marine environment, mammals such as whales, dolphins and seals play a vital role in maintaining a healthy ecosystem in a variety of different ways. They are key species in the cycling of nutrients - for example, bringing nitrogen and other chemical compounds to the surface, leading to phytoplankton growth which in turn provides food for several other marine organisms and increases ocean productivity.⁶ Marine mammals occur throughout the world’s oceans and can be herbivores, batch feeders (on plankton and small fish), and both intermediate and apex predators.⁷ They can also help combat climate change—according to recent research, a great whale removes the equivalent of ten Britons’ annual carbon footprint,⁸ giving it an economic value as a carbon-capture asset over a 60-year lifespan of between \$2.5m and \$3m.⁹ Marine mammals are also some of the most charismatic and loved creatures on earth. They are important in recreation and tourism which helps support coastal economies and communities, as well as being inspiring flagship species for marine conservation.¹⁰

3. Larger marine mammal species are also often championed as ‘indicator’ or ‘sentinel’ species, meaning that the health of their populations can be seen to reflect the health of the marine environment more generally.¹¹ This is due to several factors, including their range, relatively long life spans and responses to environmental variability - for example, changing migration patterns can be indicative of sea temperature rises due to climate

1 Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), [Press release](#), May 2019

2 Environmental Audit Committee, First Report of Session 2021–22, [Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust?](#), HC 136, June 2021, p5

3 [The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review: Headline Messages](#), February 2021, p1

4 Yuangeng Hang et al, [The stability and collapse of marine ecosystems during the Permian-Triassic mass extinction](#), Current Biology Volume 33 Issue 6, 27 March 2023, Introduction

5 World Health Organization, [Fact Sheet: Biodiversity and Health](#), 3 June 2015

6 Joe Roman, James J. McCarthy, [The Whale Pump: Marine Mammals Enhance Primary Productivity in a Coastal Basin](#), Public Library of Science One, 11 October 2010, Introduction

7 U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, [Resource Collections: Marine mammals](#), 1 February 2019

8 The Times, [Whales can combat climate change by capturing carbon](#), 19 December 2022

9 Scientific American, [Can Putting a Price on a Whale Save the Environment?](#), 24 April 2023. The term “great whale” covers the 13 largest species

10 [Q2](#)

11 Hazen et al, [Marine top predators as climate and ecosystem sentinels](#), Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 4 November 2019, Abstract

change;¹² while analysis of whale blubber can reflect the levels of chemical pollutants in the areas where they live.¹³ Similarly, changes in marine mammal distribution, abundance and behaviour can give clues as to changes lower down the food chain, while many marine mammal species share coastal environments with humans and consume similar food stocks, and as such can also be potential sentinels for public health problems.¹⁴ For all these reasons, marine mammals can be seen as offering up early warning signs of potentially significant environmental issues.¹⁵

4. These species, however, are facing increasing pressures from a variety of sources which threaten population numbers and welfare. This includes bycatch—when marine mammals are caught in fishing operations targeting other species—as well as noise from shipping and offshore development; vessel strikes from increasing marine traffic; pollution from both chemicals and plastic; and climate change.¹⁶ Despite significant advances in recent years, species such as whales, dolphins and walrus also continue to be hunted by a small number of countries for commercial reasons, including for meat, fur and body parts.¹⁷

5. It was against this backdrop that a group of hundreds of marine mammal experts from more than 40 countries published a statement in 2020 expressing “grave concerns” about the “real and imminent” extinction risk to many species and populations. The statement accused policymakers of failing to take “concrete action” to address the many threats to marine mammals and charged countries with lacking political will.¹⁸

Our inquiry

6. We launched this inquiry on 29 April 2022 with the following terms of reference:

- What is the status of marine mammal populations?
- How, and for what purpose, are marine mammals being killed?
- Beyond whaling, what human behaviours are affecting whale populations and how?
- How effective are the global protections of marine mammals?
- What role can the UK Government play to protect and promote the conservation of marine mammals internationally?

7. The inquiry looked at domestic policy concerning marine mammal protections (which is largely a devolved matter) as well as the UK’s role on the global stage. The primary focus was on cetaceans, a class of marine mammal which includes whales, dolphins and porpoises. This is largely down to the fact that cetaceans account for more species than all

12 Moore, *Marine mammals as ecosystem sentinels*, Journal of Mammalogy, 5 June 2008, Abstract

13 Inside Science, *Research Shows Range of Contaminants in the Blubber of Whales and Dolphins*, 16 September 2020

14 Sea Mammal Research Unit, *Marine mammals as indicators of change*, 2016

15 Hazen et al, *Marine top predators as climate and ecosystem sentinels*, Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 4 November 2019; Q3

16 OceanCare, Under Pressure: *The need to protect whales and dolphins in European waters*, April 2021, p11–12

17 OceanCare, Under Pressure: *The need to protect whales and dolphins in European waters*, April 2021, p12

18 *The Real and Imminent Extinction Risk to Whales, Dolphins and Porpoises: An Open Letter From [>360] Cetacean Scientists*, accessed 6 June 2023

other classes combined¹⁹ - a factor reflected in the balance of the evidence we received. However, we also considered pinnipeds (a class which includes seals and walruses) and, to a lesser extent, sirenians—a class of large aquatic plant-eating mammals such as manatees and dugongs.

8. We received over 30 pieces of written evidence and held oral evidence sessions with conservation specialists, scientists, campaigners, and ministers and officials from both Defra and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). We would like to thank everyone who contributed evidence to the inquiry.

The status of marine mammals

9. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)—a membership union which comprises more than 1400 organisations from across governments and civil society—is the global authority on the status of the natural world.²⁰ It regularly publishes its ‘Red List’ of threatened species which categorises species according to their vulnerability, taking into account the best available evidence.²¹

10. The latest data from the IUCN Red List (version 2022–2) show that, globally, 34 of the 92 cetacean species fall into a threatened or near threatened category. Of these, 12 species are endangered including the blue whale, sei whale and Amazon river dolphin. Five are critically endangered: the Yangtze river dolphin, vaquita, Atlantic humpback dolphin, North Atlantic right whale, and Rice’s whale. In addition to this, four of the five species of manatee and dugong are classed as vulnerable, with numbers decreasing. The picture in relation to seals is more positive, with 14 of the 19 species categorised as Least Concern.²²

11. Defra told us that 28 species of cetacean are recorded in the UK, with 12 regularly seen.²³ Five threatened species can be found in UK waters: the North Atlantic right whale, blue whale, sei whale, fin whale and sperm whale. Two species of seal are found in the UK - the grey seal and common (or harbour) seal.²⁴ Grey seal numbers have surged in recent years; indeed, Britain now accounts for 40% of their global population.²⁵ Harbour seals are faring less well, with numbers declining since 2019,²⁶ though they are still classified as Least Concern.

12. We heard from Prof David Lusseau of the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group that there can be significant variability in how species are faring in different parts of the world.²⁷ Similarly, Rob Deaville, project manager of the UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), stressed that species-level assessments can sometimes miss serious issues with smaller populations. As a stark and sobering example, he told us: “The community of killer whales off the west coast of Scotland is the last remaining

19 The Society for Marine Mammalogy, [List of Marine Mammal Species](#), accessed 7 June 2023

20 IUCN [website homepage](#), accessed 7 June 2023

21 International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN], [IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria, Version 3.1 Second Edition](#), 2012, accessed 6 June 2023

22 IUCN, [Red List of Threatened Species](#), Version 2022–2, accessed 6 June 2023; IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group, [Status of the World’s Cetaceans](#), accessed 6 June 2023

23 Defra ([MM015](#)), p1

24 Defra ([MM015](#)), p1

25 The Wildlife Trusts, [Grey Seals](#), accessed 6 June 2023

26 [Q7](#)

27 [O12](#)

population of killer whales left around the UK in terms of coastal distribution. They now number between four and five individuals... That population will go extinct in our lifetime.”²⁸

2 Threats to Marine Mammals

Mosaic of threats

13. Scientific research and the evidence received by our inquiry details numerous factors which threaten the population numbers and welfare of marine mammals. Among the most prominent of these are:

- **Bycatch/entanglement:** These terms refer to marine mammals being incidentally caught in fishing equipment which is intended to catch other species. It can affect different populations and species in different geographical areas. Gillnets pose the highest risk,²⁹ though other fishing gears can also be problematic. Bycatch is commonly held to be the most significant single threat to marine mammals;³⁰ Chapter 5 examines this in greater detail.
- **Commercial factors and hunting practices:** Despite protections afforded by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) moratorium [see also Chapter 6], cetaceans, dugongs, manatees and walrus are still killed in some countries for commercial reasons, including for meat, fur and body parts (such as tusks).³¹ Though we heard hunting is now largely a ‘managed threat’ in terms of conservation,³² it is still being undertaken by various countries including Norway, Iceland, Japan and the Faroe Islands.³³ It remains as a welfare issue - something brought sharply into focus by the September 2021 “grind” hunt in the Faroe Islands which resulted in the deaths of over 1400 white-sided dolphins, sparking condemnation³⁴ and leading to a debate in the UK Parliament.³⁵
- **Noise:** There are many sources of underwater noise including shipping; offshore development and drilling; and military operations. Impacts on marine mammals can range from masking communications through to disturbance of normal behaviours and physical impacts.³⁶ The fact that hearing is the primary sense for marine mammals³⁷ means noise can have a disproportionate effect.
- **Vessel strikes:** Collisions with vessels have been shown to affect at least 75 species and this is an increasing concern as marine traffic around the world grows in both volume and speed. Vessel strikes can lead to fatal or serious injury.³⁸
- **Climate change:** Another threat increasing in significance in recent years, climate change impacts can take a number of forms. These range from the effects of extreme weather events such as severe storms, which in some cases can

29 IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM019](#)), p4

30 IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM019](#)), p4

31 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM014](#)), p2

32 [Q38](#)

33 Professor David Lusseau [[MM0024](#)] p1; p3; p4

34 Whale and Dolphin Conservation, [Even locals outraged as 1400 dolphins die in Faroese hunt](#), 15 September 2021

35 HC Deb, 11 July 2022, [Volume 718](#) [Westminster Hall]

36 Mark Simmonds ([MM0016](#)), p3, lines 93–97

37 [Q53](#)

38 Schoeman et al, [A Global Review of Vessel Collisions With Marine Animals](#), *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 19 May 2020

result in strandings, to longer term impacts related to ocean warming. These include changes to migratory patterns which can affect breeding habitats and prey abundance.³⁹

- **Pollution:** Chemical pollutants such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs)⁴⁰ and per- and poly- fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS - sometimes known as ‘forever chemicals’)⁴¹ have been found in a variety of marine mammals in levels exceeding known toxicity thresholds which is likely to cause population declines. This is despite PCBs being phased out in the 1980s. Meanwhile, plastic pollution, including discarded fishing gear, can also harm or kill marine mammals via ingestion and/or entanglement.⁴²
- **Disease:** Marine mammals are susceptible to diseases including phocine distemper, which has previously depleted seal numbers in the UK following outbreaks in 1988 and 2002⁴³, and potentially Avian influenza, which was reported earlier this year to have killed thousands of sea lions in South America⁴⁴ and warrants further research.

14. We heard how the combined effect of these multiple stressors - described by Rob Deaville as “a mosaic of threats”⁴⁵ - is very complex but that they could be interacting in ways that amplify the impact on species and/or individual populations.⁴⁶ As Dr Carol Sparling, Director of the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), told us: “We have maybe replaced one single, more directly manageable impact of hunting and exploitation with a whole myriad of different stressors that are very hard and complex to research and manage”.⁴⁷

Data deficiency and the precautionary principle

15. Several respondents to our inquiry told us that a lack of data means there is a great deal of uncertainty around population trends.⁴⁸ Around 10% of cetacean species are categorised by the IUCN as data deficient.⁴⁹ Whilst this is a significant improvement on the situation 20 years ago,⁵⁰ it remains the case that not enough is known about the status of many species and populations, particularly those which are deep diving and highly mobile. In addition, we heard how new species and populations are still being discovered

39 Mark Simmonds ([MM0016](#)), p4

40 Jepson et al, [PCB pollution continues to impact populations of orcas and other dolphins in European waters](#), Nature, 14 January 2016

41 Fair and Houde, [Marine Mammal Ecotoxicology Chapter 5 - Poly- and Perfluoroalkyl Substances in Marine Mammals](#), Science Direct, 2018

42 WWF Australia, [Plastic in our oceans is killing marine mammals](#), 1 July 2021

43 [Q7](#)

44 Natural History Museum, [Bird flu kills thousands of South American sea lions as outbreak continues](#), 9 March 2023

45 [Q15](#)

46 [Q32](#) [Professor Lusseau]

47 [Q16](#)

48 World Cetacean Alliance ([MM0006](#)), p1; Marine Mammal Observer Association ([MM0007](#)), p2; Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust ([MM0008](#)), p1

49 IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM0019](#)), p2

50 [Q21](#) [Professor Lusseau]

which can then rapidly be recognised as being threatened, as is the case with Rice’s whale, first recognised in 2021⁵¹ having been previously wrongly identified as a subpopulation of Bryde’s whale; and the Orca population in the Strait of Gibraltar.⁵²

16. In light of this, respondents to our inquiry including Dr Sparling;⁵³ Whale and Dolphin Conservation;⁵⁴ and Mark Simmonds, Director of Science at OceanCare;⁵⁵ advocated the use of a precautionary principle approach to policy-making. This would mean that, in the absence of enough scientific data to fully inform conservation and mitigation plans, policies should err on the side of caution in terms of marine mammal protection. As Rob Deaville told us: “We could be having a profound impact on some of these populations without even knowing they are there.”⁵⁶

17. The Government’s Environmental Principles Policy Statement⁵⁷ details five principles which should be applied to support environmental protection and enhancement. Policymakers should consider and use the principles iteratively from the outset and during subsequent stages in policy development. They should identify the potential environmental effects (positive or negative) and use the principles to inform and influence the design of the policy. The Environment Act 2021 places a legal duty on Ministers of the Crown to have due regard to this statement,⁵⁸ the final version of which was laid in Parliament in January 2023 following a lengthy consultation period, though this duty does not come into force until 1st November 2023.⁵⁹ Among the principles is the precautionary principle. The guidance on the applicability of the precautionary principle states that gaps in the scientific evidence base “should not be used as a reason for inaction” if there is a “plausible and real” risk of serious or irreversible harm, as long as the choices considered to prevent or reduce the environmental degradation in question are cost-effective - though it goes on to state that the precautionary principle “should not be applied speculatively”.⁶⁰

18. Species-level assessments can sometimes mask profound issues with specific populations or communities of marine mammals; for example, it is thought that the last remaining coastal community of killer whales in the UK will disappear within our lifetimes. It is also the case that new cetacean species and populations are being discovered which are then very quickly found to be threatened. For these reasons, taking a precautionary approach to policymaking is particularly important for marine mammal conservation. We also condemn the abuse of IWC guidelines whereby certain countries carry out de facto commercial operations under the guise of scientific research. *While we acknowledge that the legal duty to have due regard in policymaking to the Environmental Principles Policy Statement, including the precautionary principle, does not come into force until 1 November 2023, Defra should prioritise marine mammal protection in the application of this principle when formulating relevant policy in advance of that date. Defra should also consider further research into disease in marine mammals.*

51 Mark Simmonds (MM0016), p1, lines 31–33

52 i News, [How many killer whales are left in the world? How long orcas live and why they are known as data deficient](#), 9 February 2023

53 [Q21](#)

54 Whale and Dolphin Conservation (MM0017), p5

55 [Q51](#)

56 [Q9](#)

57 Defra, [Environmental Principles Policy Statement](#), updated 31 January 2023, accessed 7 June 2023

58 Defra, [Environmental Principles Policy Statement landing page](#), updated 31 January 2023, accessed 7 June 2023

59 Defra, [Environmental Principles Policy Statement landing page](#), updated 31 January 2023, accessed 7 June 2023

60 Defra, [Environmental Principles Policy Statement](#), updated 31 January 2023, accessed 7 June 2023

3 Monitoring

Latest assessments

19. Data is vital for drawing accurate conclusions on population size, dynamics and changes over time, all of which are necessary prerequisites for an informed and effective policy response. However, as noted in Chapter 2, robust monitoring data is lacking. The 2013–18 assessment of cetacean conservation status for UK waters carried out by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) - the public body that advises the UK Government and devolved administrations on nature conservation - found that all cetacean species were listed as ‘unknown’,⁶¹ and as such it is not possible to know whether populations are stable, in decline or increasing.

20. The Government’s UK Marine Strategy⁶² provides the framework for assessing and monitoring the status of our seas and putting in place measures needed to achieve good environmental status (GES). There are eleven descriptors used to aid GES assessment, including the extent of biological diversity, contaminants, eutrophication (the process by which a body of water becomes progressively enriched with minerals and nutrients) and underwater noise.⁶³ The latest assessment, conducted in 2018 by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas)⁶⁴ - an executive agency of Defra - painted a mixed picture for marine mammals; while GES was achieved for some species, such as the minke whale and grey seal, again data was, as Rt Hon Lord Benyon, Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs at Defra, told us, “Not sufficient to confidently understand the status of many other species”.⁶⁵

21. In light of this, many contributors to the inquiry, such as the SMRU,⁶⁶ Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC)⁶⁷ and the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group,⁶⁸ believe more investment is needed in marine mammal monitoring, including establishing baselines, population trends and mortality.

Marine mammal monitoring programmes

22. Ministers told us that the Government supports a range of marine mammal monitoring initiatives both in UK waters and on a broader spatial scale, most notably through OSPAR - the mechanism (named after the Oslo and Paris Conventions) by which 15 governments together with the EU work together to protect the marine environment in the North-East Atlantic. Monitoring programmes and associated methodologies are developed with the devolved administrations, other Government departments and with scientists in the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy (UKMMAS) evidence groups.⁶⁹ Key cetacean programmes to which UK authorities contribute include:

61 Joint Nature Conservation Committee, [Article 17 Habitats Directive Report 2019: Species Conservation Status Assessments 2019](#), accessed 7 June 2023

62 Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), [Introduction to UK Marine Strategy](#), accessed 7 June 2023

63 Defra, [Marine Strategy Part One: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status](#), October 2019, p13–14

64 Cefas, [Abundance and distribution of cetaceans other than coastal bottlenose dolphins](#), 2018

65 [Q88](#)

66 Sea Mammal Research Unit ([MM0020](#)), p11

67 Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([MM0017](#)), p1

68 IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM0019](#)), p7

69 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p2–3

- The Small Cetacean Abundance in European Waters and the North Sea (SCANS) survey, which conducts large-scale multilateral aerial and ship surveys to provide comprehensive abundance and distribution data for cetacean species. For the fourth iteration of the SCANS survey in 2022, Defra provided £550,000 of funding and Marine Scotland contributed £50,000.⁷⁰
- The Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP), which investigates the causes of death of stranded animals to improve our understanding of the threats to marine mammals. Defra is providing over £3m of funding for CSIP alongside approximately £590,000 from the Welsh Government, via a ten-year contract from 2021–2031.⁷¹
- The Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme (SMASS), which has received £480,000 of funding from the Scottish Government on a three-year basis. SMASS was previously integrated with CSIP but, as of 2021, is managed as a separate project, though the two schemes continue to collaborate and share data.⁷²
- The Bycatch Monitoring Programme, which estimates bycatch rates for marine mammals across UK fisheries. Ministers told us in January that Defra recently tendered for a new three-year contract for this programme that will “expand it and diversify the monitoring methods that are used”.⁷³ Bycatch is dealt with in more detail in Chapter 5 of this report.
- The East Coast Marine Mammal Acoustic Study (ECOMMAS), run by Marine Scotland since 2013, which uses echolocation click detectors at 30 sites on the east coast of Scotland to monitor dolphin and harbour porpoise populations.⁷⁴

23. Seal monitoring is carried out by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU), which is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).⁷⁵ We heard from SMRU’s Director, Dr Carol Sparling, how their funding had remained flat since 2018, amounting to a real terms cut of 20%, and how this in turn meant the frequency of surveys had been reduced.⁷⁶ Dr Sparling also told us that she believed the monitoring of cetaceans lacked top-down governmental influence compared to seals and was instead “driven from individual scientists and their relationships with cross-European organisations”.⁷⁷

Improving the efficiency of monitoring

24. We heard how accurate monitoring of highly mobile marine mammal species in deep offshore waters is a particularly difficult and costly endeavour. As Prof Lusseau told us, the most reliable current method of monitoring is still to visually count individuals via ships or aerial surveys, and this is “very expensive to do”.⁷⁸ Respondents to the inquiry cited two

70 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p3

71 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p3

72 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p3

73 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p3

74 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p3

75 NERC is one of seven research councils brought together under [UK Research and Innovation](#)

76 Sea Mammal Research Unit ([MM0028](#)), p1

77 [Q22](#)

78 [Q17](#)

principal ways to improve the efficiency of monitoring: greater application of emerging technological solutions and increased use of ‘citizen science’ - collection and analysis of data typically by volunteer groups and members of the public.

Use of technology

25. We heard several examples of how new technology is being, or could be, used for marine mammal monitoring. Among the most prominent are:

- Remote electronic monitoring (REM), which refers to the use of integrated on-board systems of cameras, fishing gear sensors, video storage and Global Positioning System (GPS) units.⁷⁹ Its principal use is to collect data on bycatch.
- Passive acoustic monitoring (PAM), which entails using submerged microphones to record long time-series sounds which can be used to determine species presence.⁸⁰ This enables a finer picture to be built up than the broader snapshot produced by visual surveys such as SCANS.
- The use of low altitude satellites that can automatically detect larger-bodied cetaceans in images.⁸¹
- Distributed acoustic sensing (DAS), a new technique which can convert existing underwater fibre optic cables into hydrophones (essentially underwater microphones - which are usually very expensive).⁸²

26. These approaches have the potential to revolutionise the collection of marine mammal data. Prof Lusseau cited PAM and the use of satellites as the most promising avenues,⁸³ while Dr Sparling suggested AI might assist in future.⁸⁴ However, emerging technologies still require some research and development and are not without their challenges. This includes access to and interrogation of the relevant technologies (in the case of DAS),⁸⁵ understanding how many animals are under water compared to those seen on the surface (when using satellites)⁸⁶ and the resources and expertise required to process colossal amounts of data (in the case of PAM).⁸⁷

27. When questioned on Government support for new monitoring technology, James Smith, Deputy Director, International Marine Environment at Defra, cited their Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA)⁸⁸ as a new “flagship programme”⁸⁹ and referenced the importance of competition to technological advancement. Ministers told us of a £1.5m innovation competition with industry, under the Marine NCEA, to help improve observation of biodiversity, “including marine mammals”.⁹⁰ In May 2023, Innovate UK and UKRI announced that eleven projects had been awarded a share of

79 Marine Conservation Society, *What is Remote Electronic Monitoring?*, accessed 7 June 2023

80 WWF, *Acoustic Monitoring For Conservation and Ecological Research*, accessed 7 June 2023

81 [Q18](#)

82 The Independent, *Scientists are eavesdropping on whales -- and it could save their lives*, 6 July 2022

83 [Q18](#)

84 [Q20](#)

85 [Q19](#) [Dr Sparling]

86 [Q18](#)

87 [Q19](#) [Dr Sparling]

88 Cefas, *Introducing the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment Programme*, 13 April 2022

89 [Q141](#)

90 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p4

the first round of funding, totalling £835,415.⁹¹ While a small number of these have the potential to assist in marine mammal monitoring - notably the project to develop a deployable instrument for use by marine biodiversity assessors to quantitatively measure and analyse DNA obtained from marine water samples - the majority are focused on other aspects of the marine environment.⁹²

Citizen science

28. We were told by Rob Deaville and Dr Carol Sparling that citizen science initiatives, both externally-funded and volunteer-driven, could add considerable value to more formal programmes such as their own, providing adequate training and data protocols were in place.⁹³ Examples of successful citizen science ventures include marine conservation charity ORCA, which works to identify and protect critical whale and dolphin habitats in UK waters and beyond via teams of volunteers;⁹⁴ and British Divers Marine Life Rescue, which contributes valuable data to organisations like CSIP.⁹⁵ However, the Marine Mammal Observer Association caution that volunteers and citizen science should not be relied upon and stress the need for qualified observers with comprehensive training in paid jobs in marine conservation.⁹⁶

29. Lord Benyon told us that “we must be using all data sources” including citizen science.⁹⁷ Part 2 of the UK Marine Strategy acknowledges that there are opportunities to “use citizen science data or emerging technology more effectively” to address “gaps in our monitoring programmes”,⁹⁸ while the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy aims to ensure data is made openly available for long-term access and use, thereby yielding economic, societal and scientific benefits by reducing duplication of effort and applying best practice data management procedures.⁹⁹ The Joint Cetacean Data Programme (JCDP),¹⁰⁰ which sits under the JNCC, provides such a framework; this was funded by Defra from 2019 until the launch of the platform in 2022¹⁰¹ but is now managed by a working group sitting under the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) - an intergovernmental marine science organisation.¹⁰² Through the Marine NCEA programme, Defra is also reviewing and developing robust protocols for citizen science (through Natural England) and scoping the possibility of mobilising acoustic evidence held by citizen groups.¹⁰³

91 UKRI, [Winners announced to improve observation capabilities in UK waters](#), 24 May 2023

92 UKRI, [Winners announced to improve observation capabilities in UK waters](#), 24 May 2023

93 [Q29](#)

94 [Orca.org.uk](#)

95 [Q29](#) [Rob Deaville]

96 Marine Mammal Observer Association ([MM0007](#)), p3

97 [Q98](#)

98 Defra, [UK Marine Strategy Part Two: UK updated monitoring programmes](#), October 2022, p14

99 Marine Environmental Data & Information Network, [A data strategy for the UK Marine Monitoring and Assessment Strategy \(UKMMAS\) community](#), April 2022, p2

100 JNCC, [Joint Cetacean Data Programme](#), 14 April 2022

101 JNCC, [The evolution of the JCDP](#), 14 April 2022

102 ICES, [Working Group on the Joint Cetacean Data Programme](#), accessed 7 June 2023

103 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p5

30. **Monitoring of marine mammals is difficult and costly. However, without sufficient monitoring data it is not possible to tailor a properly informed policy response to the challenges these animals face. It is therefore vital not only that support for monitoring programmes is increased but also that all opportunities are taken to make monitoring more efficient. We heard that increased use of technology and citizen science are two key ways in which to seek to achieve this.**

31. **We believe investment in new technological solutions is the most effective way of upscaling marine mammal monitoring and filling the data gaps which currently hamper policy responses in this area. Among the most promising technologies are passive acoustic monitoring and the use of low-altitude satellites, while AI could also play a role. When asked about its commitment to technological solutions to marine mammal monitoring, the Government cited the £1.5m innovation competition with industry aimed at improving observation of biodiversity, under the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA). However, the vast majority of the projects awarded funding under the first round of this initiative have little or no focus on marine mammals specifically, meaning this approach is completely inadequate in this context. *We recommend that a new initiative should be launched specifically to encourage the development of new technological solutions to marine mammal monitoring, with ring-fenced funding that at least matches the existing £1.5m Marine NCEA innovation competition.***

4 UK Policy and Legislative Framework

Patchwork of legislation

32. Marine mammals are protected in UK waters by a complex series of inter-related pieces of legislation, including:¹⁰⁴

- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981
- Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985
- Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995
- Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017
- Conservation of Seals Act 1970
- Marine (Scotland) Act 2010

33. Chris Butler Stroud, Chief Executive of Whale and Dolphin Conservation, told us this amounts to “a series of pieces of legislation that all interconnect but do not quite add up as a whole”.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Simmonds et al conclude that the UK “does not have an adequately coherent and effective set of laws and regulations to properly protect marine mammals in UK waters”.¹⁰⁶ They also point out that some measures which seek to protect marine mammals use legislation designed to regulate the fishing industry, and that this gives rise to an “inherent tension”.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, we heard how the lack of coherence in the legislative landscape had given rise to certain loopholes, particularly around intentional or reckless disturbance and harassment (which is currently an offence for whales and dolphins but not for seals)¹⁰⁸ and the transit of cetacean products through UK ports (which remains legal despite the UK’s strong stance against hunting).¹⁰⁹ Witnesses contrasted the situation in the UK with the US Marine Mammals Protection Act, which we heard was a much more coherent approach that provides certainty of process for both the conservation community and the fishing industry.¹¹⁰

34. When questioned on whether consolidated legislation was necessary to properly protect marine mammals, Lord Benyon told us the current situation was “not bad at covering the issues at hand” but conceded that “I am not sure you would have started from here. You would probably start with a bespoke piece of legislation that covered all of this... Perhaps we should have done that in the Marine Act in 2009”.¹¹¹ He did, however, caution that Parliamentary time was often an issue.¹¹² In relation to the loopholes described above,

104 Defra ([MM0015](#)) p6

105 [Q44](#)

106 Simmonds et al ([MM0027](#)), p3–4

107 Simmonds et al ([MM0027](#)), p4

108 [Q46](#); [Q82](#) [Lucy Babey]

109 [Q44](#); [Q46](#)

110 [Q43](#); [Q44](#)

111 [Q100](#)

112 [Q100](#)

Lord Benyon informed us that the JNCC had submitted recommendations to environment ministers across Great Britain for changes to the species on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act which would add seals to the list.¹¹³ Regarding the transit of cetacean products through UK ports, Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith, Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment at FCDO, told us that there were very few incidents of this but agreed even one was too many and that “this is a loophole that ought to be closed”.¹¹⁴ We heard from Lord Benyon that this would require primary legislation;¹¹⁵ however, Whale and Dolphin Conservation suggested to us that the use of bylaws and/or the introduction of a statutory instrument to amend current legislation could also achieve the same aim.¹¹⁶

35. The current UK legal framework around the protection of marine mammals is incoherent and not sufficient to effectively preserve these precious species. UK measures are in stark contrast to best practice exemplified internationally by the 1972 US Marine Mammal Protection Act, and, as ministers conceded to us in evidence, there are concerning loopholes that harm marine species. We strongly endorse the JNCC’s recommendation that seals be added to the list of species in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to protect them from reckless disturbance, and wish to see this implemented as soon as practicable. We also recommend that Defra should work with stakeholders and their legal advisers to explore ways to close the loophole which currently allows the transit of cetacean products through UK ports. We call for an assessment by the Department of options and their feasibility, in a supplementary response to this Report, by December 2023.

36. We further recommend that the Government should bring in bespoke primary legislation on marine mammal protection over the course of the next Parliament.

Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy

37. The UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy (DPCS)¹¹⁷ is a joint initiative developed by the Scottish Government in collaboration with Defra and other devolved administrations and agencies. A draft version was consulted on in March 2021, yet over two years later no final version has been published. The strategy aims to achieve and/or maintain favourable conservation status for the most common dolphin and porpoise species in UK waters (plus the minke whale) by managing key pressures and initiating new actions where necessary, through collaborative working.

38. Stakeholders have broadly welcomed the strategy in terms of its aims and intent¹¹⁸ but have questioned the lack of accompanying SMART targets to galvanise and structure implementation.¹¹⁹ As Chris Butler Stroud told us, “when aspirations are too widely described then you can get a lot of talk but very little action”; conversely, he said that when targets are set, “productivity seems to go up enormously”.¹²⁰ We also heard concerns about the scope of the strategy. While Defra’s own written evidence to the inquiry stated that, of

113 [Q102](#)

114 [Q105](#)

115 [Q105](#)

116 Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([MM0029](#)), p2–5

117 Scottish Government, [UK dolphin and porpoise conservation strategy: high level strategy](#), 22 March 2021

118 [Q49](#); Simmonds et al ([MM0027](#)), p4

119 SMART = Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

120 [Q50](#)

28 cetacean species recorded in the UK, 12 are “regularly seen”,¹²¹ the DPCS only covers eight species of dolphin and porpoise, plus the minke whale. Mr Butler Stroud told us this was an insufficient level of granular detail and that “really we should be looking at that 17 to 27 species we find in UK waters”.¹²²

39. When giving evidence, Lord Benyon was clear that “the species we are talking about know no boundaries, so, even though the management of them is a devolved issue, we have to work very closely with the devolved governments to make it happen”.¹²³ Asked directly about the need to work collaboratively with the devolved administrations, he said: “It is vital that we do”.¹²⁴ Ministers later told us that the UK administrations were planning to reconvene in 2023 to discuss next steps further to the consultation, including the consideration of targets and action plans “for each Administration”.¹²⁵

40. We are disappointed that, two years on from the consultation, there is still no final version of the Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy. We recommend that Defra works closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that SMART targets be included in the final strategy for each species covered, on which the Administrations should work together (as opposed to each having their own targets and action plans). Defra should also work with the Scottish Government to expand the strategy to cover all 12 species cited as “regularly seen” in UK waters. The final strategy, including all these elements, should be published no later than January 2024.

Highly Protected Marine Areas

41. In June 2019, Lord Benyon (then a backbench Conservative MP) led an independent review into the possible introduction, in English inshore and offshore and Northern Ireland offshore zones, of the strongest protections for areas of sea, known as highly protected marine areas (HPMAs).¹²⁶ These focus on achieving full recovery of marine ecosystems, giving nature “the best chance to thrive” and have been described by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) as “an essential cornerstone of responsible ocean stewardship”.¹²⁷ Prohibited activities in HPMAs include commercial and recreational fishing, dredging, construction and anchoring. In its final report in June 2020, the Benyon review made 25 recommendations on how HPMAs should be introduced and managed. In its June 2021 response to the review,¹²⁸ the Government agreed with the bulk of the recommendations and said the first HPMAs would be piloted by the end of 2022. Following consultations on five pilot sites, it was announced in February 2023 that three would be formally designated by July, two of which - Dolphin Head and North East of Farnes Deep - are known to be marine mammal habitats.¹²⁹ However, the other two have not been progressed. The Scottish Government launched its own consultation on HPMAs in December 2022.¹³⁰

121 Defra ([MM0015](#)) p1

122 [Q50](#)

123 [Q92](#)

124 [Q98](#)

125 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p1

126 Defra, [Independent report: Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HPMAs\) review 2019](#), 8 June 2019

127 Office for Environmental Protection, [OEP response to consultation on HPMAs](#), 13 October 2022

128 Defra, [Government response to the Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HMPAs\) review](#), 8 June 2021

129 Defra, [Policy paper: Highly Protected Marine Areas \(HMPAs\)](#), accessed 8 June 2023

130 Scottish Government, [Scottish Highly Protected Marine Areas](#), accessed 8 June 2023

42. The summary of the 915 responses to the 2022 consultation on HPMAs¹³¹ reported that overall, 56% supported the designation of pilot HPMAs in English waters and 36% were opposed, with the main reasons for opposition being the direct and indirect impact on livelihoods. We heard similarly mixed views. Chris Butler Stroud welcomed their introduction, calling the Benyon review “excellent”,¹³² but stressed that effective implementation was key—a view echoed by Wildlife and Countryside Link.¹³³ Conversely, fishing industry representatives are worried that HPMAs would reduce catching opportunities and further exacerbate the ‘spatial squeeze’ cited by fishers as a major concern to their business. The Benyon review report acknowledges these concerns.¹³⁴ However, Lord Benyon told us that “when it is done right, the greatest supporters of them tend to be the fishermen, because out of them comes an enormous biomass fish that they can exploit”.¹³⁵ He acknowledged that such support was vital if they were to succeed,¹³⁶ and also told us proper management plans would be in place by 2024.¹³⁷

43. We believe HPMAs are an important tool in marine mammal conservation which can play a key role in ensuring sustainable marine ecosystems. We support the rollout of the three HMPAs due to be formally designated by July 2023 and wish to see others follow. It is vitally important that their introduction is subject to comprehensive and ongoing engagement with the fishing industry, especially given increasing spatial pressures. We call on the Government to publish an ambitious timetable for the designation of HPMAs and to outline their monitoring and enforcement strategy by the end of 2023.

131 Defra, [Highly Protected Marine Areas pilot sites consultation outcome: Summary of responses](#), 28 February 2023

132 [Q56](#)

133 Wildlife and Countryside Link, [The route to success for new Highly Protected Marine Areas](#), accessed 8 June 2023

134 [Benyon Review Into Highly Protected Marine Areas: final report](#), 8 June 2019, p9

135 [Q108](#)

136 [Q110](#)

137 [Q139](#)

5 Bycatch

44. Bycatch - the unintentional catching of non-target species in fishing operations - was consistently cited by contributors to our inquiry as the biggest single issue faced by marine mammals both globally and in the UK, killing more animals than any other threat.¹³⁸ Rob Deaville told us bycatch had been “the consistent and main direct driver of manmade mortality in the UK over the 30 years we [CSIP] have been running” and was “a significant UK issue”.¹³⁹ Estimates vary, but a 2021 report commissioned by Humane Society International and WDC indicates over 1000 cetaceans a year are bycaught in UK waters,¹⁴⁰ while a scientific paper from 2006 suggested over 650,000 marine mammals are killed in this way each year globally.¹⁴¹ The degree of suffering for marine mammals which become entangled in fishing gear has led to it being described as “one of the grossest abuses of wild animal sensibility in the modern world”.¹⁴²

Bycatch monitoring

45. Defra’s Bycatch Monitoring Programme has been in operation since 1996,¹⁴³ and in 2021 a licence condition was introduced for all commercial vessels fishing in the UK’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to report any bycatch of marine mammals within 48 hours of the end of the trip.¹⁴⁴ However, we heard concerns that there was significant underreporting of bycatch despite this requirement.¹⁴⁵ This has led to suggestions from some witnesses that the current self-reporting regime should be replaced and that mandatory bycatch monitoring, using on-board observers and/or Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM), should be introduced.¹⁴⁶

46. Lord Benyon accepted that “bycatch monitoring is key and there are some data holes we need to fill”.¹⁴⁷ He referred to a new pilot project worth over £1 million over three years to expand and diversify monitoring techniques.¹⁴⁸ However, he also stressed the importance of collaboration and consent, telling us: “There was a lot of bad feeling in the fishing industry when we were forcing them to have cameras monitoring bycatch. Gradually, they came round to it and I think that it is actually quite accepted now” – though he did add that this was more of a challenge for smaller vessels.¹⁴⁹ We heard that putting observers on a small fishing boat can mean having to take a member of the crew off and therefore that mandatory monitoring was a far greater burden on smaller vessels than on larger ones.¹⁵⁰ When asked about the potential impact on competitiveness of mandating bycatch monitoring, Lord Benyon suggested that “We might have to find some

138 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0014](#)), p1; Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([MM0017](#)), p2; IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM0019](#)), p3; Sea Mammal Research Unit ([MM0020](#)), p7

139 [Q31](#)

140 Leaper, *An Evaluation of Cetacean Bycatch in UK Fisheries: Problems and Solutions*, February 2021, p2

141 Read et al, *Bycatch of Marine Mammals in U.S. and Global Fisheries*, JSTOR, February 2006; IUCN Species Survival Commission Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM0019](#)), p3

142 Leaper, *An Evaluation of Cetacean Bycatch in UK Fisheries: Problems and Solutions*, February 2021, p2

143 Defra, *Policy paper: Marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative*, 10 August 2022

144 Marine Management Organisation, *Guidance: Marine Mammal Bycatch Reporting Requirements*, 5 November 2021

145 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0031](#)), p1;

146 RSPB ([MM0010](#)), p2; Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0014](#)), p3; [Q86](#) [Lucy Babey]

147 [Q115](#)

148 [Q115](#)

149 [Q116](#)

150 [Q117](#)

differential assistance that allows the smaller fishers and artisanal vessels some access to some innovation fund. We have plenty of areas of funding for sustainability in the fishing sector. That may be something we want to explore... We need to make sure we are being fair by those whose income is least”.¹⁵¹

47. Current levels of bycatch monitoring are insufficient to gain an accurate picture of the numbers of marine mammals killed or injured in this way, despite the requirement for vessels to report marine mammal bycatch. While we heard suggestions that mandatory remote electronic monitoring (REM) should be introduced, we are mindful of the significant burden such a requirement would place on the fishing industry, especially smaller vessels. We therefore recommend that the Government introduces mandatory bycatch monitoring, but that this is phased over several years, with smaller vessels being given extra time and, where necessary, financial support to meet their obligations. We would like to see an action plan to achieve this, with targets and milestones, by December 2023.

Bycatch Mitigation Initiative

48. The UK Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI)¹⁵² was published in August 2022 by Defra and the devolved administrations and seeks to identify high-risk areas, gear types and/or fisheries, and implement effective measures to reduce and, where possible, eliminate bycatch. This builds on previous action such as Clean Catch UK 1, a collaborative research programme run by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) to which Defra has contributed £1.1m over the project duration (2019–2023), and is due to be succeeded by a second phase, Clean Catch 2, from August 2023.¹⁵³ Clean Catch 1 focused primarily on Cornwall and included trials of acoustic deterrent devices (‘pingers’). We heard how the evidence of the effectiveness of pingers is somewhat nuanced, with some studies indicating they can be effective, and others suggesting that the noises can, over time, become a ‘dinner bell’ for marine mammals who learn to associate them with an abundance of prey.¹⁵⁴ The BMI includes objectives to support the development of modified and alternative gears, and to identify and adopt effective incentives for fisheries to implement such measures - something which was acknowledged as an important consideration by a number of witnesses.¹⁵⁵

49. As with the Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy referred to in Chapter 4, stakeholders were largely positive in their assessment of the overall intent of the BMI, but somewhat critical of the lack of action plans and targets. As Lucy Babey, Deputy Director and Head of Science and Conservation at ORCA, told us: “It is fantastic that the UK has this. The document includes all the critical areas required”. But she added: “the vision and rhetoric are there, but unfortunately it is the action that is missing”.¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Wildlife & Countryside Link advocate the introduction of SMART targets with progressive reductions in bycatch numbers.¹⁵⁷ While ministers told us that the BMI is a joint document by the UK Government and Devolved Administrations, they

151 [Q118](#)

152 Defra, [Policy paper: Marine wildlife bycatch mitigation initiative](#), 10 August 2022

153 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p4

154 [Q35](#); [Q76](#); [Q78](#)

155 [Q43](#); [Q45](#); [Q77](#)

156 [Q67](#)

157 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0014](#)), p5

said implementation was “a matter for individual fisheries policy authorities, which have different circumstances and priorities and are at different stages in the policy cycle”. They therefore deemed it “not appropriate for the BMI to prescribe the exact method or timeframe that the fisheries policy authorities will use to develop and implement policies”, adding: “it will be for each fisheries policy authority to set time bound targets, where appropriate, within their area of competence”.¹⁵⁸

50. We also heard of the need to develop solutions that are specific to different areas depending on gear type, species caught as bycatch, and consideration of mitigation methods.¹⁵⁹ While ministers concurred with the need for such a targeted approach, Lord Benyon suggested further research was needed to properly understand this.¹⁶⁰ However, Simmonds et al told us there was already sufficient evidence to warrant a more urgent approach in “known and well researched fleets”, in the Celtic Sea, the south-west of England and elsewhere.¹⁶¹

51. Accidental bycatch in fishing gear is the biggest single threat to marine mammals and has been described as “one of the grossest abuses of wild animal sensibility in the modern world”. While the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative and Clean Catch programmes have made some progress on this issue, efforts to tackle bycatch need to be stepped up. This must be done in close consultation with scientists, NGOs and the fishing industry, who must be supported to take part in appropriate trials, including via financial incentives where necessary. We recommend that Defra and the devolved administrations work together to produce a UK-wide action plan with SMART targets to significantly bring down bycatch numbers. These targets should be developed in consultation with scientists, NGOs and the fishing industry and include consideration of risk factors such as location, gear type and species. Action should begin in the high-risk fleets cited by our witnesses as soon as practicable, and at the very latest be in place by June 2024.

158 Defra and FCDO ([MM0030](#)), p2

159 National Federation of Fishermen’s Organisations ([MM0004](#)), p3

160 [Q119](#)

161 Simmonds et al ([MM0027](#)), p1; [Q77](#)

6 The UK on the International Stage

International Marine Mammal Protections

52. The International Whaling Commission (IWC), initially established in 1946 as the global body responsible for sustainable management of whaling activities, has been a key mechanism for conservation initiatives. A global moratorium on commercial whaling was introduced via the IWC in 1982.¹⁶² Whaling classed as Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling (ASW) is not subject to the moratorium. ASW refers to limited whaling carried out in places where whale products play an important role in the nutritional and cultural life of native peoples; this is carried out by Denmark (Greenland), Russia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and the USA (Alaska).¹⁶³ A number of other countries also still hunt large whales for commercial purposes, including Norway,¹⁶⁴ Iceland¹⁶⁵ and Japan.¹⁶⁶ Other key international protections include:

- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which regulates, and aims to ensure the sustainability of, international trade in marine mammal specimens;¹⁶⁷ and
- The UN Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), which aims to protect species by conserving or restoring their habitats.¹⁶⁸ One of its primary functions has been to facilitate regional “daughter agreements” for various species and populations. One of the most significant of these is ASCOBANS¹⁶⁹—the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North-East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas, to which the UK is a party

53. Defra told us that, while the UK accepts whaling for subsistence purposes where there is a clearly defined need, it is a strong supporter of the global moratorium on whaling.¹⁷⁰ We also heard about the work done via the IWC Conservation Committee, which the UK chairs, to further emphasise the nation’s opposition to hunting.¹⁷¹ Witnesses acknowledged and praised the UK’s leading stance on cetacean conservation and welfare issues internationally¹⁷² and stressed that there was no humane way to kill a whale at sea.¹⁷³ A recent report from the Icelandic food and veterinary authority backs this up, concluding that larger whales can take up to two hours to die after being harpooned, raising questions as to whether hunting large whales can ever meet animal welfare objectives.¹⁷⁴

54. Defra told us that “The UK has and will continue to raise our opposition to commercial whaling with whaling countries at every appropriate opportunity”.¹⁷⁵

162 IWC, [Commercial Whaling](#), accessed 9 June 2023

163 IWC, [Aboriginal Subsistence Whaling](#), accessed 9 June 2023

164 Whale and Dolphin Conservation, [Whaling in Norway](#), accessed 9 June 2023

165 Whale and Dolphin Conservation, [Whaling in Iceland](#), accessed 9 June 2023

166 Whale and Dolphin Conservation, [Whaling in Japan](#), accessed 9 June 2023

167 CITES, [What is CITES?](#), accessed 9 June 2023

168 CMS, [About CMS](#), accessed 9 June 2023

169 ASCOBANS, [About ASCOBANS](#), accessed 9 June 2023

170 Defra ([MM0015](#)), p3

171 [Q126](#) [James Smith]; [Q128](#) [James Smith]

172 [Q60](#) [Mark Simmonds]; [Q79](#)

173 [Q40](#) [Rob Deaville]; [Q80](#)

174 The Guardian, [Whales take up to two hours to die after being harpooned, Icelandic report finds](#), 8 May 2023

175 Defra ([MM0015](#)), p7

Similarly, then-Minister Victoria Prentis, when asked about the extent to which the UK was raising conservation and welfare issues such as hunting in fisheries negotiations with relevant countries, told our Committee in February 2022 that “This is something we raise regularly”,¹⁷⁶ including with Norway¹⁷⁷ - a country which took 577 Minke whales for purposes other than ASW in 2021 according to the IUCN.¹⁷⁸ However, the agreed record of the annual negotiations between the UK and Norway¹⁷⁹ which gave rise to the bilateral fisheries agreement for 2023¹⁸⁰ - announced in November 2022 - contains no references to marine mammals, hunting or whaling.

55. The 15th Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), also known as COP15, which took place in December 2022 in Montréal, was a crucial moment for global biodiversity. We wrote an interim letter to Lord Benyon in November 2022¹⁸¹ to highlight what witnesses to this inquiry had told us about the importance of securing an ambitious deal at COP15, and urged the Government to do everything in its power to ensure the ‘30by30’ target of protecting 30% of the world’s oceans by 2030 was part of the final agreement. We were therefore delighted when it was confirmed this would be the case.¹⁸² Similarly, we heard about the importance of agreeing a High Seas Treaty to extend habitat protections for marine mammals to the 61% of the ocean which lies beyond national jurisdictions¹⁸³ - something seen as integral to the effective delivery of 30by30¹⁸⁴ - and asked the Government to push for urgent talks to secure this following several rounds of failures.¹⁸⁵ We were therefore also extremely pleased when it was announced in March 2023 that the High Seas Treaty had finally been agreed after a decade of negotiations.¹⁸⁶

56. Whilst these agreements are steps in the right direction, the focus now turns to implementation and enforcement. In relation to protected areas, Chris Butler Stroud told us that the UK did not currently have enough management conservation plans in place to confidently claim it was adequately protecting more than around 8% of its own designated areas, and intimated that drastic improvements were needed if the UK was to lead by example on the international stage.¹⁸⁷ Lord Benyon disputed this figure and reiterated that the Government was committed to “really meaningful protection” as opposed to “lines on a map”.¹⁸⁸ He told us that “proper management plans” would be in place for protected areas “by 2024”.¹⁸⁹

176 Oral evidence taken on 2 February 2022, HC (2022–23) 1016, [Q45](#)

177 Oral evidence taken on 2 February 2022, HC (2022–23) 1016, [Q47](#)

178 Professor David Lusseau [[MM0024](#)], p3

179 UK Government, [Agreed record of fisheries consultations between the European Union, Norway and the United Kingdom for 2023](#), 9 December 2022

180 Defra, [Fisheries: bilateral agreement with Norway for 2023](#), 25 November 2022

181 EFRA Committee, [Letter from the Chair to Defra Minister, Lord Benyon, regarding Marine Mammals and COP15](#), 16 November 2022

182 Convention on Biological Diversity, [Press release: COP15: Nations Adopt Four Goals, 23 Targets for 2030 in Landmark UN Biodiversity Agreement](#), 19 December 2022

183 Whale and Dolphin Conservation [[MM0017](#)], p4; [Q56](#)

184 WWF, [WWF: High Seas Treaty critical to achieving 30% global ocean protection goal](#), 14 February 2023

185 EFRA Committee, [Letter from the Chair to Defra Minister, Lord Benyon, regarding Marine Mammals and COP15](#), 16 November 2022, p2

186 The Guardian, [High seas treaty: historic deal to protect international waters finally reached at UN](#), 5 March 2023

187 [Q56](#)

188 [Q138](#)

189 [Q139](#)

57. We heard a number of examples of the UK being cited as a leader internationally when it comes to marine mammal welfare and conservation. Given that this is an issue which transcends national borders, it is vital that the UK seeks to maximise its soft power in this arena. A key part of this is leading by example. *We recommend that the Government accelerates action in relation to protected areas in UK waters, such that all such designated areas, including HPMAAs, have proper management plans in place by the end of 2023. We also urge the Government to raise issues of marine mammal welfare with those countries who still engage in hunting, such as Iceland, Norway, Japan and the Faroe Islands, whenever bilateral and/or multilateral talks are taking place, including trade and fisheries negotiations.*

Trade

58. The final report of the UK Trade and Agriculture Commission from March 2021 recommended that “the UK should draw on its strengths in animal welfare to show world leadership in embedding it into trade policy”.¹⁹⁰ In a similar vein, the independent review of net zero conducted by Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP, which reported in January 2023, calls on the Government to establish baseline environmental and climate protections in free trade agreements by 2024.¹⁹¹ A number of contributors to our inquiry, including Blue Seas Protection,¹⁹² Wildlife and Countryside Link¹⁹³ and the SMRU,¹⁹⁴ also suggested the UK should use diplomatic and trade levers to put pressure on countries engaging in dubious animal welfare practices - for example, suspending the UK trade agreement with the Faroe Islands until whale and dolphin hunts there end.

59. However, campaigners have raised concerns that the opposite may be happening; for example, according to the RSPCA, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) which the UK is scheduled to join in July 2023, contains no explicit references to animal welfare standards in its formal conditions, something they described as “another potential nail in the coffin for animal welfare standards back home”.¹⁹⁵ Also, while the FTAs with Australia¹⁹⁶ and New Zealand¹⁹⁷ contain explicit references to promoting the long-term conservation of marine mammals, the agreements with Japan,¹⁹⁸ and with Norway and Iceland¹⁹⁹ - all countries with an established whaling culture - stop short of this, instead committing only to the “sustainable use” of marine ecosystems.

60. When questioned on this issue, Lord Goldsmith told us: “It would be dishonest to pretend there is full alignment at this point, but we want to move as much in that direction as we can, aligning our trade policy with our broader international aspirations.

190 UK Government, [UK Trade and Agriculture Commission Final Report](#), March 2021, p16, Recommendation 4

191 UK Government, [Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero](#), 13 January 2023, p260

192 Blue Seas Protection ([MM0018](#)), p2

193 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0014](#)), p9

194 Sea Mammal Research Unit ([MM0020](#)), p11, para. 40

195 RSPCA, [New Trans-Pacific trade deal a 'nail in the coffin' for animal welfare, fears RSPCA](#), 3 April 2023

196 UK Government, [UK-Australia FTA Chapter 22: Environment](#), 16 December 2021, p11, para. 4

197 UK Government, [UK-New Zealand FTA Chapter 22: Environment](#), 28 February 2022, p10, para. 5

198 UK Government, [UK/Japan: Agreement for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership - Volume 1](#), 23 October 2020, p331, Article 16.8, para. 1

199 UK Government, [Free Trade Agreement between Iceland, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Kingdom of Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - Volume 1](#), p239, Article 13.26, para. 2, 16 July 2021

This is a work in progress”.²⁰⁰ He referred to discussions between the FCDO, Defra and the then Department for International Trade to achieve this, about which he told us more information would be made public “before long”.²⁰¹ A particularly notable example of the use of trade policy to enhance animal welfare is that of the US Marine Mammal Protection Act,²⁰² also referred to in Chapter 4. This was recently amended to include certain foreign import provisions stipulating that seafood cannot be imported into the USA without the source country providing evidence (via certification process) that the provisions of the Act were not violated.²⁰³ The SMRU told us this has incentivised countries to better monitor marine mammals and bycatch rates in their national waters to avoid being prevented from exporting fish to the USA.²⁰⁴

61. We strongly support greater integration of environmental considerations including animal welfare in free trade agreements and feel much more can be done in this regard than at present. We are pleased to hear that there are ongoing discussions between the FCDO, Defra and the now Department for Business and Trade on how this might be achieved. *We request that further details be provided to this Committee on these discussions in its response to this report. We also recommend that the UK should not agree any new trade deal that does not include a specific commitment to marine mammal conservation.*

200 [Q131](#)

201 [Q131](#)

202 U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, [Laws & Policies: Marine Mammal Protection Act](#), accessed 9 June 2023

203 U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, [International Marine Mammal Bycatch Criteria for U.S. Imports](#), accessed 9 June 2023

204 Sea Mammal Research Unit ([MM0020](#)), p9

Conclusions and recommendations

Threats to Marine Mammals

1. Species-level assessments can sometimes mask profound issues with specific populations or communities of marine mammals; for example, it is thought that the last remaining coastal community of killer whales in the UK will disappear within our lifetimes. It is also the case that new cetacean species and populations are being discovered which are then very quickly found to be threatened. For these reasons, taking a precautionary approach to policymaking is particularly important for marine mammal conservation. We also condemn the abuse of IWC guidelines whereby certain countries carry out de facto commercial operations under the guise of scientific research. *While we acknowledge that the legal duty to have due regard in policymaking to the Environmental Principles Policy Statement, including the precautionary principle, does not come into force until 1 November 2023, Defra should prioritise marine mammal protection in the application of this principle when formulating relevant policy in advance of that date. Defra should also consider further research into disease in marine mammals.* (Paragraph 18)

Monitoring

2. Monitoring of marine mammals is difficult and costly. However, without sufficient monitoring data it is not possible to tailor a properly informed policy response to the challenges these animals face. It is therefore vital not only that support for monitoring programmes is increased but also that all opportunities are taken to make monitoring more efficient. We heard that increased use of technology and citizen science are two key ways in which to seek to achieve this. (Paragraph 30)
3. We believe investment in new technological solutions is the most effective way of upscaling marine mammal monitoring and filling the data gaps which currently hamper policy responses in this area. Among the most promising technologies are passive acoustic monitoring and the use of low-altitude satellites, while AI could also play a role. When asked about its commitment to technological solutions to marine mammal monitoring, the Government cited the £1.5m innovation competition with industry aimed at improving observation of biodiversity, under the Marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment (NCEA). However, the vast majority of the projects awarded funding under the first round of this initiative have little or no focus on marine mammals specifically, meaning this approach is completely inadequate in this context. *We recommend that a new initiative should be launched specifically to encourage the development of new technological solutions to marine mammal monitoring, with ring-fenced funding that at least matches the existing £1.5m Marine NCEA innovation competition.* (Paragraph 31)

UK Policy and Legislative Framework

4. The current UK legal framework around the protection of marine mammals is incoherent and not sufficient to effectively preserve these precious species. UK measures are in stark contrast to best practice exemplified internationally by the 1972

US Marine Mammal Protection Act, and, as ministers conceded to us in evidence, there are concerning loopholes that harm marine species. *We strongly endorse the JNCC's recommendation that seals be added to the list of species in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act to protect them from reckless disturbance, and wish to see this implemented as soon as practicable. We also recommend that Defra should work with stakeholders and their legal advisers to explore ways to close the loophole which currently allows the transit of cetacean products through UK ports. We call for an assessment by the Department of options and their feasibility, in a supplementary response to this Report, by December 2023.* (Paragraph 35)

5. *We further recommend that the Government should bring in bespoke primary legislation on marine mammal protection over the course of the next Parliament.* (Paragraph 36)
6. *We are disappointed that, two years on from the consultation, there is still no final version of the Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy. We recommend that Defra works closely with the Scottish Government to ensure that SMART targets be included in the final strategy for each species covered, on which the Administrations should work together (as opposed to each having their own targets and action plans). Defra should also work with the Scottish Government to expand the strategy to cover all 12 species cited as "regularly seen" in UK waters. The final strategy, including all these elements, should be published no later than January 2024.* (Paragraph 40)
7. *We believe HPMAs are an important tool in marine mammal conservation which can play a key role in ensuring sustainable marine ecosystems. We support the rollout of the three HPMAs due to be formally designated by July 2023 and wish to see others follow. It is vitally important that their introduction is subject to comprehensive and ongoing engagement with the fishing industry, especially given increasing spatial pressures. We call on the Government to publish an ambitious timetable for the designation of HPMAs and to outline their monitoring and enforcement strategy by the end of 2023.* (Paragraph 43)

Bycatch monitoring

8. *Current levels of bycatch monitoring are insufficient to gain an accurate picture of the numbers of marine mammals killed or injured in this way, despite the requirement for vessels to report marine mammal bycatch. While we heard suggestions that mandatory remote electronic monitoring (REM) should be introduced, we are mindful of the significant burden such a requirement would place on the fishing industry, especially smaller vessels. We therefore recommend that the Government introduces mandatory bycatch monitoring, but that this is phased over several years, with smaller vessels being given extra time and, where necessary, financial support to meet their obligations. We would like to see an action plan to achieve this, with targets and milestones, by December 2023.* (Paragraph 47)
9. *Accidental bycatch in fishing gear is the biggest single threat to marine mammals and has been described as "one of the grossest abuses of wild animal sensibility in the modern world". While the Bycatch Mitigation Initiative and Clean Catch programmes have made some progress on this issue, efforts to tackle bycatch need to be stepped up. This must be done in close consultation with scientists, NGOs*

and the fishing industry, who must be supported to take part in appropriate trials, including via financial incentives where necessary. *We recommend that Defra and the devolved administrations work together to produce a UK-wide action plan with SMART targets to significantly bring down bycatch numbers. These targets should be developed in consultation with scientists, NGOs and the fishing industry and include consideration of risk factors such as location, gear type and species. Action should begin in the high-risk fleets cited by our witnesses as soon as practicable, and at the very latest be in place by June 2024.* (Paragraph 51)

The UK on the International Stage

10. We heard a number of examples of the UK being cited as a leader internationally when it comes to marine mammal welfare and conservation. Given that this is an issue which transcends national borders, it is vital that the UK seeks to maximise its soft power in this arena. A key part of this is leading by example. *We recommend that the Government accelerates action in relation to protected areas in UK waters, such that all such designated areas, including HPMAs, have proper management plans in place by the end of 2023. We also urge the Government to raise issues of marine mammal welfare with those countries who still engage in hunting, such as Iceland, Norway, Japan and the Faroe Islands, whenever bilateral and/or multilateral talks are taking place, including trade and fisheries negotiations.* (Paragraph 57)
11. We strongly support greater integration of environmental considerations including animal welfare in free trade agreements and feel much more can be done in this regard than at present. We are pleased to hear that there are ongoing discussions between the FCDO, Defra and the now Department for Business and Trade on how this might be achieved. *We request that further details be provided to this Committee on these discussions in its response to this report. We also recommend that the UK should not agree any new trade deal that does not include a specific commitment to marine mammal conservation.* (Paragraph 61)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 20 June 2023

Members present

Sir Robert Goodwill, in the Chair

Ian Byrne

Barry Gardiner

Dr Neil Hudson

Cat Smith

Derek Thomas

Draft Report (*Protecting Marine Mammals in the UK and Abroad*) proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 61 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 27 June 2023 at 2.00 p.m.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 11 October 2022

Professor David Lusseau, Professor of Marine Sustainability, National Institute of Aquatic Resources, Technical University of Denmark; **Dr Carol Sparling**, Director, Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU); **Rob Deaville**, Project Manager, UK Cetacean Strandings Investigation Programme (CSIP)

[Q1–40](#)

Chris Butler Stroud, Chief Executive, Whale and Dolphin Conservation; **Lucy Babey**, Deputy Director and Head of Science & Conservation, ORCA, cetacean conservation charity; **Mark Simmonds OBE**, Director of Science, Ocean Care

[Q41–86](#)

Tuesday 10 January 2023

The Rt Hon. the Lord Benyon, Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; **The Right Hon. the Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park**, Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **James Smith**, Deputy Director, International Marine Environment, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; **Lowri Griffiths**, Acting Deputy Director Ocean Policy, FCDO

[Q87–142](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

MM numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anonymised ([MM0002](#))
- 2 Blue Seas Protection - Marine Conservation Registered Charity 1189529 ([MM0018](#))
- 3 Blue Green Future LLC ([MM0021](#))
- 4 Born Free Foundation ([MM0012](#))
- 5 Deaville, Rob ([MM0025](#))
- 6 Defra ([MM0015](#))
- 7 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office ([MM0030](#))
- 8 Energeo Alliance ([MM0022](#))
- 9 Hague, Emily (PhD Researcher, Heriot-Watt University) ([MM0005](#))
- 10 Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust ([MM0008](#))
- 11 IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group ([MM0019](#))
- 12 Lasseau, Professor David ([MM0024](#))
- 13 Lasseau, Professor David ([MM0026](#))
- 14 Marine Mammal Observer Association (MMA) ([MM0007](#))
- 15 National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations (NFFO) ([MM0004](#))
- 16 OBE, Mark Simmonds ([MM0027](#))
- 17 Orkney Marine Mammal Research Initiative ([MM0023](#))
- 18 RSPB ([MM0010](#))
- 19 Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme ([MM0013](#))
- 20 Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) ([MM0028](#))
- 21 Sea Mammal Research Unit, University of St Andrews ([MM0020](#))
- 22 Seal Alliance; and Seal Research Trust ([MM0003](#))
- 23 Simmonds, Mr Mark Peter (Director of Science, OceanCare) ([MM0016](#))
- 24 Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([MM0029](#))
- 25 Whale and Dolphin Conservation ([MM0017](#))
- 26 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0031](#))
- 27 Wildlife and Countryside Link ([MM0014](#))
- 28 World Cetacean Alliance ([MM0006](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture	HC 23
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-designate of the Environment Agency	HC 546
3rd	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste	HC 22
4th	Rural mental health	HC 248
5th	Species Reintroduction	HC 849
1st Special	Tree Planting: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2021–22	HC 323
2nd Special	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 412
3rd Special	Australia FTA: Food and Agriculture: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 700
4th Special	The price of plastic: ending the toll of plastic waste: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 1044

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Moving animals across borders	HC 79
2nd	Environmental Land Management and the agricultural transition	HC 78
3rd	Tree planting	HC 356
4th	Labour shortages in the food and farming sector	HC 713
5th	Pre-appointment Hearing: Chair of Ofwat	HC 1253

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	COVID-19 and food supply	HC 263
2nd	Pre-appointment hearing for the Chair-Designate of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	HC 1042
3rd	The UK's new immigration policy and the food supply chain	HC 231

Number	Title	Reference
4th	Flooding	HC 170
5th	Air Quality and coronavirus: a glimpse of a different future or business as usual	HC 468
6th	Public Sector Procurement of Food	HC 469
7th	Covid-19 and the issues of security in food supply	HC 1156
8th	Seafood and meat exports to the EU	HC 1189