

## **Government response to the Environment and Climate Change Committee report ‘An extraordinary challenge: Restoring 30 per cent of our land and sea by 2030’**

The Government thanks the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee for its report ‘An extraordinary challenge: Restoring 30 per cent of our land and sea by 2030’. Our responses to the Committee’s recommendations are below, focused on England. Our numbering of recommendations and responses below refers to the relevant paragraph numbers of the report’s *Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations* section.

The government is committed to protect 30% of land and of sea by 2030. This is a UK-wide requirement for honouring the Convention on Biological Diversity’s Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. We are working with devolved administrations towards this goal. Delivering this commitment will ensure our most important areas for wildlife have the long-term, effective management needed for biodiversity to thrive. We have already exceeded the required designation of marine sites to meet this target. We intend to set out how terrestrial sites will be included by the end of the year, going beyond the statutory designations to include other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).

**2. Recommendation:** *We recommend that all existing designations for nature conservation in England be retained as a basis for the 30 by 30 target. They will require investment in resources and incentives for better management to meet clear nature conservation objectives, in addition to investment in effective monitoring. (Paragraph 18)*

### **Response (2):**

Delivering our commitment to 30 by 30 will ensure our most important places, at the core of nature’s recovery, have the long-term, favourable management needed for biodiversity to thrive.

The Environmental Improvement Plan confirms our commitment to delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan goal to restore 75% of our SSSIs to favourable condition by 2042. It also set two interim targets – that by January 2028:

- All SSSIs will have an up-to-date condition assessment; and
- 50% of SSSIs will have actions on track to achieve favourable condition.

Through a combination of regulation; public funding; support for the development of private funding; evidence and guidance; the government is acting to restore nature across and within landscapes and support the processes and functions nature needs to respond to a changing climate. In turn, this will support our progress towards 30 by 30.

To support marine conservation and progress towards 30 by 30, the government has placed resources into delivering the Environment Act’s MPA Target for 70% of designated features in the MPA network to be in favourable condition by 2042, with the remainder in recovering condition, and is implementing appropriate management to achieve this.

**4. Recommendation:** *We are pleased to see that the Government will be publishing a map this year on what counts towards 30 by 30. We recommend that alongside the map, the Government produce an action plan addressing the extent, condition, management and monitoring of areas to achieve the target. This must address how the significant gap between current designations and the 30 per cent target on land will be addressed. (Paragraph 26)*

**14. Recommendation:** *Alongside the publication of the map, the Government should indicate what proportion of sites are currently in adequate condition to count towards 30 by 30. The Government should publish a clear plan with realistic targets to deliver steady progress on moving more SSSIs into favourable condition. Future progress should be clearly evidenced and publicly available. (Paragraph 50)*

**Response (4 and 14):**

On land, 26% of England is currently designated as a protected area. This includes protected sites which cover approximately 8% of land in England and Protected Landscapes which cover 24.5%, which will play an important role in delivering 30 by 30. We also recognise the contribution that areas not covered by existing designations will play, including the opportunity presented by Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs). For SSSI improvement, as stated above in response to recommendation 2, we have confirmed our commitment to restore 75% of our SSSIs to favourable condition by 2042. Natural England have developed a SSSI improvement plan to meet this target and is working with the Major Landowners Group to deliver a prioritised programme of SSSI improvement.

This includes working with farmers to provide advice and help them secure funding to implement necessary land management changes; working at a catchment scale with partners to improve water quality and supply issues; and delivering regulation in a fair and proportionate manner to prevent harm and improve site condition. This work includes targeting eight key areas covering 145 SSSIs to drive a wider programme of site improvement.

There is a key role for Local Nature Recovery strategies to contribute to improving biodiversity. LNRS responsible authorities will work with stakeholders across the country to identify opportunities and areas for nature recovery. They will support delivery of biodiversity net gain (BNG) and may bring in further sites and potential opportunities.

Defra also already taking action to improve nature in our Protected Landscapes by:

- Legislating in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act to ensure Protected Landscapes' Management Plans contain plans and targets to contribute to their statutory purposes and the Environment Act 2021 targets. The legislation also strengthens the duties on relevant authorities to contribute to the delivery of the statutory purposes and the strengthened Management Plans. This will ensure Protected Landscapes organisations and their partners collaborate effectively to create a national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces.

- Funding projects through our Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme which deliver improvements for nature in line with local priorities and has already supported more than 2,500 projects since its launch.
- Developing a new outcomes framework for Protected Landscapes, which sets targets for their contributions to national environment and climate commitments, to be embedded in their management plans.
- Updating Protected Landscape management plan guidance to ensure consistency.
- Supporting the creation of a new partnership between the National Association for AONBs, National Parks England, National Trails UK and Natural England to deliver a range of exciting projects and programmes on nature recovery and widening access to nature.

**6. Recommendation:** *We are pleased the Habitats Regulations were not included in the list of retained EU law which will be revoked by 31 December 2023 under the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023, but there is still a possibility of their substantial dilution. We recommend that the Habitats Regulations are retained and are not subject to amendment without an appropriate degree of parliamentary scrutiny or where the protections afforded by the regulations are weakened. (Paragraph 29)*

**Response (6):**

The government made this commitment during the passage of the REUL Act not to use the Act to make such changes. We remain committed to our ambitious plans in the Net Zero Strategy and the Environment Improvement Plan 2023.

**8. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government develops a whole-site protection and monitoring approach to protected areas on land, in addition to the feature-based monitoring and assessment that is currently used. (Paragraph 36)*

**10. Recommendation:** *While the Committee recognises the challenges posed by a constrained budget, the Government needs to develop an effective policy with a sustained funding commitment to deliver regular monitoring of SSSIs and for each site to be monitored every six years. The monitoring should produce transparent and accessible data and the Government should also seek to make use of voluntary contributions to data collection and monitoring, such as citizen science programmes. (Paragraph 43)*

**26. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government expand the role of robust citizen science programmes in protected areas to support monitoring and condition assessment programmes. (Paragraph 80)*

**Response (8):**

From April this year, Natural England is taking a dual approach to SSSI monitoring. In addition to subdividing SSSIs into units and making assessments of condition at the unit scale, they are also now assessing the condition of special features across the whole of a SSSI. This approach, known as Whole Feature Assessment, helps them to better

understand what is affecting features and how SSSIs function as part of their wider landscape.

There are many benefits to this feature monitoring approach, including enabling a greater understanding of the impacts of actions both within and out with sites, sitting the sites in their landscape context to support interventions both at a local scale and strategic level.

Natural England are also investigating mechanisms to monitor the ecosystem functions of sites and how they are connected with the wider landscape. Initially this is intended to supplement whole feature assessments. Monitoring ecosystem function will enable a greater understanding of the pressures impacting the protected sites and what can be done to manage them.

### **Response (10 and 26):**

The Environmental Improvement Plan set interim targets on protected sites, including that all SSSIs will have an up-to-date condition assessment by 31 January 2028.

Natural England has developed an interim monitoring plan and are developing a desk-based assessment process to review the condition of features and are identifying opportunities to use data collected through citizen science projects where appropriate. Progress against the interim target will be published in the Environmental Improvement Plan progress report.

They are also developing a long-term, prioritised monitoring programme based on a variety of risk factors to determine when individual features need to be reassessed in future. It should be noted that JNCC standards have moved away from the 6 yearly cycle to a risk-based process as set out on JNCC website <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/>.

Natural England are increasingly using new technologies, such as eDNA, eco-acoustics and digital IT to achieve the target. They are drawing on expertise and data from farmers, landowners and contractors, as well as work carried out by staff to inform assessments.

Using data collected by others is already used in the condition assessment process and drives efficiency. Projects run by organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology support the assessment of non-breeding bird features and the data collected by volunteers from Botanical Society for Britain and Ireland (BSBI) supports condition assessments for vascular plant features. Natural England are also looking to develop relationships with other organisations who use citizen science including the Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust, Buglife and Butterfly Conservation.

**12. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government use the next legislative opportunity to place a statutory duty on Natural England for monitoring of SSSIs and that the resulting data is made publicly available. (Paragraph 45)*

**28. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government enable and resource Natural England to develop and publicise accessible digital and offline tools and communications to enable members of the public to learn about and engage with their local protected areas. (Paragraph 83)*

## Response (12):

Natural England have set up a delivery programme to ensure they achieve the interim target for all SSSIs will have an up-to-date condition assessment by 31 January 2028, working to improve the efficiency of SSSI monitoring and making better use of new technologies such as remote sensing and greater partnership involvement. We do not consider it necessary to add further statutory duties in this regard.

There are several platforms through which the public can access information on local protected areas. [Designated Sites View](#) is the dedicated Natural England platform for information on protected areas. Natural England intend to replace this with a modern interactive service enabling members of the public to better access information and learn about their local protected areas. The [England Green Infrastructure Mapping Database](#) is available to the public and provides maps of accessible greenspaces and Public Rights of Way, particularly useful also for local planners and greenspace managers, developers and community/ neighbourhood groups.

## Response (28):

As part of the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan's commitment that 'everyone should live within 15 minutes' walk of a green or blue space, Natural England are working to improve access to the outdoors and engage people with the natural environment. This includes tackling lack of public awareness of local protected areas and keeping the balance between public access and nature conservation.

Natural England has recently undertaken the first stage of research into the interactions between people and nature on protected sites with the aim to enable the public to learn about and engage with their local protected areas in a way that minimises any disturbance to wildlife and enhances the achievement of biodiversity targets, keeping sites in good condition.

Natural England are also working to improve digital access to protected sites evidence and to better meet the needs of the organisation and the public.

**16. Recommendation:** *We recommend that areas contributing towards 30 by 30 should comply with the guidance set out by the IUCN which requires that protected areas are "clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values". Further, we recommend that the longevity criteria for 'long-term' conservation be set at more than 30 years. (Paragraph 54)*

**34. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government launch a consultation to identify and classify potential OEEMs in England and the contribution they could make to 30 by 30. (Paragraph 104)*

**36. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government set out those ELMS they believe have the best potential to identify sites to count towards the 30 by 30 target in line with international guidance and ensure protection for more than 30 years. (Paragraph 111)*

**40. Recommendation:** *We recommend that any BNG sites that contribute to 30 by 30 must have specific nature conservation objectives, effective management to deliver these, proper monitoring and a guarantee of sufficient longevity beyond the normal requirement of the BNG regime (more than 30 years). (Paragraph 121)*

**Response (16):**

Our approach to the assessment of areas contributing towards 30 by 30 is based on decisions adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity. We recognise that there is global best practice and international guidance, including that published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. We expect our approach to support the delivery of the interim and long-term biodiversity targets in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

**Response (34)**

Defra recognises the important role that OECMs could play in meeting 30 by 30 alongside Protected Areas. We want to continue working with stakeholders to recognise the value of all land that is delivering improved outcomes for nature in the long term and how this can contribute to 30 by 30.

**Response (36):**

We recognise the need to work with farmers, as custodians of the countryside, to help manage these important sites and to ensure we can balance farming and food production with nature recovery. Our new Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes will collectively pay farmers and land managers to deliver, alongside food production, significant and important outcomes for the climate and environment that can only be delivered by farmers and other land managers in the wider countryside.

We welcome the Committee's recognition of the potential role for areas under ELM schemes to contribute towards 30 by 30 where this works effectively for farmers and farm businesses.

**Response (40):**

We welcome the Committee's recognition of the role that Biodiversity Net Gain could play in achieving our 30 by 30 target.

Offsite biodiversity gain sites will create or enhance habitat. Landowners who choose to provide biodiversity gains will have to ensure that they undertake effective management and meet the monitoring and reporting obligations set out in their legal agreement.

**17. Recommendation:** *Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) on land and at sea and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) should have been monitored in the last six years or in the six years preceding*

*the target date of 2030, as is consistent with the JNCC common standards monitoring for designated sites. Sites that achieve a condition status other than “destroyed” could be included in the 30 by 30 target. They should have a management plan and actionable timeframe for delivery. Sites that are declared to be “destroyed” do not meet the criteria for 30 by 30 and should not be included. (Paragraph 55)*

**Response (17):**

Our approach to 30 by 30 continues to be based on international guidance. Our protected sites can play a key role in achieving our goal and we are committed to improving their condition so that they are delivering improved outcomes for nature in the long-term, as set out in the EIP.

As discussed in response to recommendation 10, for terrestrial sites the interim target will ensure all sites will have an up-to-date assessment by 31 January 2028. Natural England is developing a long-term, prioritised monitoring programme based on a variety of risk factors to determine when individual sites need to be reassessed in the future. It should be noted that JNCC standards have moved away from the 6 yearly cycle to a risk-based process.

As part of the assessment the actions needed to restore sites to or maintain sites in a favourable condition will be identified and be used to inform site management plans. Natural England are tracking actions as part of the interim target to have 50% of SSSI with actions on track to achieve favourable condition and will report on progress annually.

For marine sites, our MPA network already covers 40% of English waters. Our statutory target is for 70% of designated features to be in favourable condition by 2042, with the remainder in recovering condition. We work closely with JNCC and Natural England as they continue to monitor MPAs and develop plans to determine the most effective monitoring approaches for MPA assessment in line with the statutory MPA target (70% of designated features in the MPA network to be in favourable condition by 2042, with the remainder in recovering condition) and in attaining site conservation outcomes. The JNCC Common Standards refer to the condition of features, rather than the condition of the whole site.

**19. Recommendation:** *We welcome the resourcing of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs), but for them to deliver on the creation of sites to achieve connectivity, not just identify them, they must be given sufficient weight in the planning system as described further at paragraph 129. (Paragraph 65)*

**42. Recommendation:** *We recommend that Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) be appropriately resourced for their role in helping deliver LNRSs. (Paragraph 124)*

**44. Recommendation:** *The Government should ensure that LNRSs will be considered and given due weight in the planning system, including through statutory underpinning at the next legislative opportunity. Local authorities should be required to deliver the objectives of the LNRSs as part of their development plans. (Paragraph 129)*

**Response (19 and 44):**

The Government agrees it is important that LNRSs have weight and meaning across a range of government policies to support delivery on the ground, especially planning. That is why Government amendments to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act will require relevant plan-makers to take account of LNRSs in the preparation of development plans, including areas that could become of particular importance for nature recovery and other environmental benefits. This requirement will help ensure that opportunities for nature recovery can be properly integrated into the land use planning system. Working with the new forthcoming requirement for mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, this will help the planning system play a more proactive role for nature and the environment.

**Response (42):**

Defra recognises the valuable role that LNPs already play in planning and delivering nature recovery for their areas. We expect that responsible authorities (RAs) will wish to involve their LNP in LNRS preparation. RAs may choose to commission and fund an LNP within their area to prepare an element of the LNRS. Government has already provided funding to RAs for the creation of the LNRS.

**22. Recommendation:** *We recommend that alongside the publication of the map, the Government make clear the relationships and other partners whom they will work alongside to deliver 30 by 30. This should recognise the roles of—as well as the partnerships between—the statutory bodies, volunteer and other relevant organisations, and government departments in delivering, managing and monitoring the range of designations and mechanisms to be used for nature recovery. (Paragraph 70)*

**Response (22):**

We agree that delivering the 30 by 30 target effectively will be achieved in partnership; we recognise the important role that wider partners including landowners and land managers will play in achieving this target. We look forward to working with these groups on achieving 30 by 30 and on the delivery of the interim and long-term biodiversity targets in the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

**24. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government prioritise establishing effective partnership working with the devolved administrations and the UK Overseas Territories. This will require an investment of time and the sufficient allocation of resources to support activities in the UK Overseas Territories and effective collaborative working with the devolved administrations. (Paragraph 75)*

**Response (24):**

The UK government is working with the devolved administrations on implementing the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), developing or revising national strategies in response to the GBF and other domestic priorities. While this is a responsibility for the UK government, ministers have agreed to collectively develop a UK-wide response to the GBF through the UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP). The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) is facilitating the cross-UK work necessary



for developing the UK NBSAP. We intend to publish the UK NBSAP and a summary of our national targets by summer 2024.

Primary responsibility for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management in the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) is held by the OT governments. The UK Government provides support to the OTs through a number of initiatives. Through Darwin Plus, Defra has committed to make available £10 million each year until 2025 for biodiversity and conservation projects in the OTs. The programme has so far invested over £47 million in more than 250 projects in the OTs. The FCDO's Blue Belt Programme has supported the OTs to enhance marine protection and sustainable marine management across more than 4.3 million square kilometres of marine environment since its inception in 2016.

Supported by the JNCC, Defra is currently working closely with OT Governments, FCDO and other HMG Departments to develop a new shared Overseas Territory Biodiversity Strategy. The Strategy is being designed as a tool to guide and attract future, long-term investment in OT biodiversity.

**30. Recommendation:** *The Government should publish the findings and its response to the consultation on implementing the Landscapes Review as a priority and in advance of the publication of the map that details what will count towards 30 by 30. (Paragraph 94)*

**Response (30):**

We intend to publish our response to the consultation on implementing the Landscapes Review in due course. This will set out our action plan to ensure Protected Landscapes can deliver their full potential for nature, climate, people and place.

**32. Recommendation:** *We recommend that:*

*(i) National Parks and AONBs are given at the next legislative opportunity an additional statutory duty to protect nature to sit alongside their existing purposes.*

*(ii) Sites within National Parks and AONBs should be identified for specific nature conservation potential, for which nature conservation objectives are developed and appropriate levels of protection and management agreed to deliver these objectives. (Paragraph 96)*

**Response (32):**

We are focussed on achieving the Government's vision for protected landscapes as 'a coherent national network of beautiful, nature-rich spaces that all parts of society can easily access and enjoy' through both non-statutory measures and statutory measures. As above, we legislated through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act to enhance Protected Landscape management plans to ensure they contribute to national environmental targets. We will publish guidance for relevant authorities on these strengthened duties and undertake periodic reviews of this guidance to ensure its continued relevance. We have also committed

to developing a new outcomes framework for Protected Landscapes, which sets targets for their contributions to national environment and climate commitments, to be embedded in their management plans.

**38. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government work with Natural England to design and implement an advisory mechanism that will support farmers in navigating ELMS to maximise the amount of land that is currently or may in the future be able to contribute to 30 by 30. This will require resources to help deliver. This mechanism should include:*

*(a) A named advisory officer for each key farm; and*

*(b) A free advisory service for land managers. (Paragraph 117)*

**Response (38):**

To support farmers through the Agricultural Transition and ensure they can benefit from our reforms, the Future Farming Resilience Fund (FFRF) is designed to provide free business support to farmers and land managers in England during the early years of the transition. It does this by awarding grants to organisations who help farmers and land managers to:

- understand the changes that are happening
- identify how, what and when they may need to adapt their business models
- access tailored support to adapt.

For 2024, ELMS is introducing Countryside Stewardship Plus, which will reward farmers and landowners working together to achieve greater environmental outcomes than if they worked alone. We are working with our delivery organisations to better engage and support land managers to raise awareness, drive aspiration and uptake, and to secure delivery of our environmental, productivity and welfare objectives.

**46. Recommendation:** *We recommend that alongside the map of what will count towards 30 by 30 the Government produce an action plan for achieving 30 by 30 at sea. (Paragraph 134)*

**Response (46):**

The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) sets out our 30 by 30 marine targets, including the actions we are taking to restore and protect marine habitats and wildlife. These include delivering the UK Marine Strategy, which sets our ambition for Good Environmental Status (GES) across our seas. To help achieve GES we have created an extensive network of 181 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) covering 40% of English waters to protect and restore our marine biodiversity. These sites will all contribute towards meeting the 30 by 30 target. We are now focused on making sure their designated features are properly protected. All MPAs are protected through the planning consents and marine licensing regimes and these cover

most marine industries. Through our EIP we confirmed our aim to have all necessary MPA fisheries management measures in place by the end of 2024.

These measures will also help to achieve our legally binding target for MPA condition and our interim target for 48% of protected features in MPAs to be in a favourable condition with the remainder in recovering condition.

The first three Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in Secretary of State waters came into force on 5 July 2023, covering an area of almost 1000 km<sup>2</sup>, and work continues to explore identification of additional HPMA sites to designate. These sites have the highest levels of protection – protecting all species, habitats, and associated processes within the site boundary, including the seabed and water column, and complement the MPAs, and the contribution to 30 by 30 targets.

**48. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government expand the current marine monitoring programme both inshore and offshore to develop a robust baseline of data that should be made publicly available. This programme should increase the frequency of monitoring and limit data extrapolation by ensuring that a larger sub-section of sites is being monitored on a more regular basis than the current ‘sentinel’ approach. The Government should also explore the option of remote electronic monitoring in the marine monitoring programme. The data produced from the monitoring should be easily accessible and understandable for all to track progress and demonstrate recovery of marine ecosystems. (Paragraph 149)*

**50. Recommendation:** *We recommend an uplift in funding for marine monitoring to ensure more rigorous data collection at sea. (Paragraph 151)*

#### **Response (48 and 50):**

Defra, NE, JNCC, and Cefas are collaborating to effectively monitor our progress towards our MPA target. The monitoring data currently collected is compliant with data accessibility standards as outlined by the Marine Environmental Data and Information Network (MEDIN) and stored in publicly accessible repositories. We have started to bring in Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) in our wider marine monitoring programmes, such as in fisheries and bycatch monitoring, this is informing our development of REM techniques for MPA monitoring whilst working alongside MMO, EA and the AIFCA. In our wider marine monitoring, the Government works closely with JNCC, NE, Cefas, EA, MMO, AIFCA and other partners to ensure data is collected in a robust manner and made accessible. Assisting with innovation in MPA monitoring, the government created the marine Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment programme to design and implement innovative methods to monitor the marine environment.

Marine monitoring is challenging and funding requirements for marine monitoring initiatives and approaches will be considered by government.

**52. Recommendation:** *We recommend that the Government better regulate the use of bottom trawling at sea, particularly in MPAs and move to a more holistic site management approach at sea. (Paragraph 157)*

**Response (52):**

Marine regulators make evidence-based, site by site assessments on the fishing activities that could prevent MPAs from achieving their conservation objectives. Nearly 60% of the 181 English MPAs are already protected from damaging fishing activity. The IFCAs have permanently closed over 3980km<sup>2</sup> of inshore MPAs to bottom trawling and we have used post-Brexit powers to ban bottom towed gear over sensitive features in the first four offshore sites. We have designated the first three HPMAs in English waters with the intention to protect, and fully recover to a natural state, the whole marine ecosystem within each site by prohibiting extractive, destructive and depositional activities, including fishing activity. Regulators are progressing management measures to prohibit fishing activity within the new HPMAs and we are exploring options for additional HPMAs.

Regulators continue to assess fishing activity in MPAs and, where necessary, restrict damaging activity to protect them. The Government is aiming to have all MPAs in English waters protected from damaging fishing activity by 2024.

More broadly, the UK Marine Strategy Programme of Measures is designed to support UK waters to be clean, safe, healthy, biologically diverse and productive. This includes a range of measures to address the pressures faced by benthic habitats, including from bottom towed fishing.

**54. Recommendation:** *We endorse the recommendation of the 2023 report of the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Protecting Marine Mammals in the UK and Abroad, published on 28 June 2023: “We call on the Government to publish an ambitious timescale for the designation of HPMAs and to outline their monitoring and enforcement strategy by the end of 2023.” (Paragraph 160)*

**Response (54):**

We have designated the first three pilot HPMAs and are exploring options for further sites. Baseline surveys for the newly designated HPMAs are expected to commence in September 2023. We have also developed criteria to evaluate HPMAs from an ecological, social and economic perspective and intend to take a natural capital approach to evaluation. Evaluating social and economic effects can start relatively soon after designation because of the immediacy of some of the impacts. This will establish the first timepoint in a series to evaluate site recovery from a whole-ecosystem basis in the future. The complexity of the marine environment means that evaluating recovery of ecosystems will take longer.

There is already an MMO compliance strategy in place to inform monitoring and enforcement for all MMO byelaws and licensable activities, including for HPMAs. The above actions, duties and byelaws and compliance strategy will ensure that we have the tools we need for effective monitoring and enforcement of HPMAs.