# UK to legislate ratification of High Seas Treaty by end of 2025



The UK government has committed to introducing legislation by the end of 2025 that aims to ratify the High Seas Treaty, a landmark agreement designed to protect marine life on a global scale. Marine Minister Emma Hardy announced this initiative on 10 June 2025, highlighting its significance in reaffirming the UK’s leadership in international climate and biodiversity efforts. The treaty will establish a legal framework for the creation of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in international waters, which comprise about two-thirds of the world's oceans.

The High Seas Treaty, officially called the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty, was signed in 2023 but has yet to come into force. For this to happen, it requires ratification by at least 60 countries; currently, 49 have ratified it. This innovative treaty offers the first legally binding mechanism to protect ocean biodiversity, which has been increasingly threatened by overfishing, climate change, and planned activities like deep-sea mining. According to various sources, only 3% of the world's oceans are currently protected, making the treaty’s implementation crucial for enhancing the resilience of vulnerable marine ecosystems, including species such as sharks, sea turtles, and whales.

Hardy underscored the urgency of this initiative by stating, “Our oceans are dying. Without urgent action, they will be irreversibly destroyed.” The UK’s support for the treaty aligns with broader international efforts, as evidenced by its participation in the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France, where more than 90 countries have reiterated commitment to an ambitious Plastic Pollution Treaty slated for negotiation in Geneva this August.

The conference's backdrop highlights the dire state of the oceans, with reports indicating that less than 3% are under effective protection, despite their critical role in global biodiversity and climate regulation. The High Seas Treaty specifically mandates environmental impact assessments for commercial activities, ensuring that marine resource management is equitable and sustainable.

In addition to the ratification plans, the UK government is also proposing an expansion of a ban on bottom trawling in its own waters. This ban—which is set to cover an additional 30,000 square kilometres across 41 Marine Protected Areas—aims to prevent damage to delicate marine habitats. This proposal has garnered the attention of prominent conservationists, including naturalist David Attenborough and Prince William, who have advocated for immediate action against harmful fishing practices.

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry echoed these sentiments at the conference, emphasising the crucial moment for global marine conservation. He called for action against harmful practices and underlined the need for leadership in adopting measures that protect invaluable marine ecosystems. Kerry, like others at the conference, acknowledged that the rapid adoption of the High Seas Treaty marks a significant step toward reversing the alarming trend of ocean degradation.

As the world approaches the critical threshold of 60 ratifications, the High Seas Treaty stands as a beacon of hope for marine conservation. Its successful implementation could catalyse a new era of collaborative international efforts aimed at protecting the planet's oceans, ultimately benefiting both marine life and human wellbeing.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.watermagazine.co.uk/2025/06/11/government-to-legislate-for-high-seas-treaty-by-end-of-year/), [[2]](https://www.watermagazine.co.uk/2025/06/11/government-to-legislate-for-high-seas-treaty-by-end-of-year/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/what-is-high-seas-treaty-protect-world-oceans-2025-06-09/), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/53ad46ae3cf8737ec82d925761a3d089)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/9d46d372dc1f2d44bedbe41c84598bc8), [[6]](https://www.ft.com/content/83427cfc-e422-4dae-b3dd-0b823a299742)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-seeks-extend-ban-bottom-trawling-fishing-english-seas-2025-06-08/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.watermagazine.co.uk/2025/06/11/government-to-legislate-for-high-seas-treaty-by-end-of-year/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.watermagazine.co.uk/2025/06/11/government-to-legislate-for-high-seas-treaty-by-end-of-year/> - The UK government has announced plans to introduce legislation by the end of 2025 to ratify the High Seas Treaty, aiming to protect marine life globally. This treaty will establish the first legal framework for creating protected areas in international waters, covering approximately two-thirds of the world's oceans. The initiative seeks to conserve rare and valuable marine species, enhancing their resilience against threats like unsustainable fishing and industrial activities. Marine Minister Emma Hardy emphasized the urgency of this action to prevent irreversible damage to the oceans.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/what-is-high-seas-treaty-protect-world-oceans-2025-06-09/> - The High Seas Treaty, officially known as the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty, was signed in 2023 to provide a legal framework for creating marine protected areas in international waters. Despite widespread support, the treaty has not yet come into force, requiring ratification by at least 60 countries—currently, only 50 have ratified it. The treaty comprises 75 points aimed at the sustainable use and conservation of ocean biodiversity, including mandatory environmental impact assessments for international economic activities and equitable resource access. Presently, only 3% of oceans are protected, despite covering two-thirds of Earth’s surface.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/53ad46ae3cf8737ec82d925761a3d089> - During the U.N. Ocean Conference in Nice, France, 18 additional countries ratified the High Seas Treaty, bringing the total to 49—just 11 short of the 60 needed for it to enter into force. Officially named the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, the treaty aims to create the first legally binding framework to protect marine biodiversity in international waters, which comprise nearly two-thirds of the ocean. These areas face mounting threats from overfishing, climate change, and potential deep-sea mining. The treaty facilitates the creation of marine protected areas, regulates harmful activities, and fosters international scientific cooperation. Upon reaching 60 ratifications, a 120-day countdown will begin before the treaty is enacted, leading to the designation of protected areas and establishment of oversight mechanisms. U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized the urgency, noting the unprecedented speed of the treaty’s adoption compared to past international agreements. The first Conference of the Parties (COP1) will follow within a year of enactment to initiate governance and implementation structures. Environmental groups advocate not only for achieving 60 ratifications but for broader participation to ensure effective, equitable governance of the high seas ecosystem. The recent surge in ratifications may signal a promising turning point for global ocean conservation efforts.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/9d46d372dc1f2d44bedbe41c84598bc8> - The third U.N. Ocean Conference has begun in Nice, France, aiming to turn longstanding promises into tangible protections for the ocean. With only 2.7% of the ocean currently under effective protection, the conference focuses on pressing nations to fulfill the '30x30' goal of conserving 30% of land and sea by 2030. Central to the agenda is the ratification of the 2023 High Seas Treaty, which would enable the establishment of marine protected areas in international waters. As of now, 49 countries have ratified the treaty, just shy of the 60 needed to bring it into force.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/83427cfc-e422-4dae-b3dd-0b823a299742> - John Kerry, former US Secretary of State and current climate envoy, highlights the dire state of the world's oceans, which are overwhelmed by pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction. With less than 3% of the ocean under high protection and over 90% of coral reefs at risk of disappearing by 2050, urgent action is needed. He emphasizes the critical opportunity presented by the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC) in Nice, France, to catalyse meaningful global marine conservation. Key initiatives include finalising a treaty on plastic pollution, ending harmful fishing subsidies, ratifying the High Seas Treaty to protect international waters, and implementing the Green Shipping Challenge to reduce maritime emissions. Kerry calls on France, with the largest exclusive economic zone, to lead by banning destructive practices like bottom trawling in protected areas. The conference aims to reinforce international collaboration and restore faith in multilateral action, vital in addressing the worsening ocean crisis and achieving the '30 by 30' global target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030.
7. <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/uk-seeks-extend-ban-bottom-trawling-fishing-english-seas-2025-06-08/> - The British government announced plans to expand a ban on bottom trawling in English seas to protect marine life, responding to growing concerns voiced by naturalist David Attenborough and Prince William. The proposed ban would cover approximately 30,000 square kilometres across 41 Marine Protected Areas, increasing from the current ban that protects 18,000 square kilometres of seabed. Bottom trawling, which involves dragging nets along the sea floor, is considered highly destructive to marine habitats and species such as lobsters, clams, soft corals, and langoustines. Environment Minister Steve Reed emphasised the urgency of protecting marine wildlife to prevent irreversible ocean damage. The proposal comes as the United Nations Ocean Conference begins in France, where global action is being sought against overfishing and other harmful activities. Ahead of the conference, Prince William called for immediate political and commercial leadership, and Attenborough expressed deep concern over the devastation to ocean floors, calling it unconscionable if done on land. The UK government will consult stakeholders in the marine and fisheries sectors before finalising the extension of the ban.