

Marine and coastal areas linked with better health and well-being

[A new study](#) suggests that exposure to coastal environments can play a significant role in boosting human health and well-being, due to the 'therapeutic effects' marine and coastal landscapes have.

In England, 271 million recreational visits are made to coastal environments annually and more than 22 million people live within 5 miles of the coast. The Defra and [UK Research and Innovation](#)-led review in collaboration with [Plymouth Marine Laboratory](#) and [Exeter University](#), showed that Brits spending time by the sea reported increased happiness, better general health and were more physically active during their visit, compared to visits to other types of environment.

The report highlights the important role of marine conservation work as visits to marine and coastal areas with designated or protected status and those with higher levels of biodiversity were associated with higher levels of calmness, relaxation and revitalisation, compared to locations without this status.

The government has taken steps to expand its 'Blue Belt' of marine protection for Britain's overseas territories and its own coast, [last year designating a further 41 Marine Protection Zones](#), protecting species and habitats such as the rare stalked jellyfish and blue mussel beds.

Domestic Marine Minister, Rebecca Pow, said:

Whether it is to enjoy a sport, take a walk, watch the wildlife or to simply admire the landscape, for many of us spending time by the sea is not only hugely enjoyable, but it has a welcome impact on our well-being too.

This realisation makes it all the more important that we take care of our environment, and our ever-expanding national 'Blue Belt', protecting more than 40% of English waters, is helping to safeguard these precious habitats for future generations.

Professor Nicola Beaumont, Head of Science for Sea and Society at Plymouth Marine Laboratory, said:

Our research demonstrates that marine and coastal areas play an important role in supporting people's well-being. However, we have also shown that these benefits are threatened by marine pollution, coastal development, climate change and exposure to extreme

weather.

With millions of us visiting the coast every year, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we have the right measures in place to allow our marine environment to thrive. Getting these measures right is not easy and requires transformative, multidisciplinary research, with an aim to support sustainable and responsible ocean stewardship for the conservation of the environment and to ultimately improve lives.

Professor Lora Fleming, Director of the Exeter University European Centre for Environment and Human Health, said:

This project has shown that our coast helps to cater for a variety of human needs, from keeping healthy, to connecting with others.

There are, however, a number of evidence gaps which we wish to further explore, such as the effects of marine environments on obesity prevalence in children and Vitamin D in adults, or the life stage at which nature-based interventions are most effective, and how they may vary among economic, social and cultural groups in the population.

The report also warns that in the coming decades, climate change and extreme weather has the potential to jeopardise sensitive marine habitats, demonstrating the importance of the UK's network of Marine Protected Areas.

Through the implementation of the [25 Year Environment Plan](#), the UK continues to consider the need for further domestic protection, and is putting in place new management measures for Marine Protected Areas, including seeking new powers through the Fisheries Bill, which is currently before Parliament.

The government is also considering the recommendations of a [recent review](#) led by former Fisheries Minister, Richard Benyon, which found that there is a case for higher protections in some marine areas, with a total ban on all human activity to allow wildlife to flourish.

Internationally the UK continues to push for greater protection of marine habitats on the world stage with 20 countries joining the UK-led Global Ocean Alliance, which aims to secure protection for at least 30% of the world's oceans by 2030.

Methodology:

This research (Evidence Statement) was drawn from 46 peer-reviewed papers. Additional cited references were provided by members of the steering group.

The Evidence Statement was reviewed by a steering group of experts from Cefas, Defra, Marine Management Organisation, Plymouth Marine Laboratory, The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, University of Aberdeen, University of Exeter, and University of Hull. The work was completed between 9 April 2019 and 23 August 2019.