

Press release: UK Hydrographic Office supports G7 Healthy Oceans commitments

Ocean plastics, coastal resilience and the Blue Economy were high on the agenda at the G7 summit in Canada earlier this month, where a commitment to support and drive ocean science and sustainability was signed. The Charlevoix Blueprint for Healthy Oceans, Seas and Resilient Coastal Communities sets out G7 commitments on ocean plastics, and creates a blueprint for the development of a more sustainable and climate-resilient future for oceans and coastal communities, with a focus on ocean science and effective, transparent data gathering and utilisation.

As a leading maritime nation, the UK is well placed to support many of the goals set out in the Blueprint and is ready to spearhead the expansion of global interest in ocean data. Through the UK Hydrographic Office's (UKHO) marine geospatial expertise, the organisation is well placed to support the delivery of many of the commitments set out in the Blueprint. Marine geospatial information provides the foundations for critical decisions affecting trade, maritime safety and security decision-making, the sustainable use of marine resources and development of marine infrastructure, as well as protecting habitats and ensuring resilience against forces of nature.

As well as supporting the UK's position as a great maritime nation, the UKHO is also the Primary Charting Authority for 71 coastal states around the world, and supports safe navigation globally through the provision of nautical charts, publications and services to over 90% of ships trading internationally. In addition, the UKHO is currently working with partners on two programmes across the globe to support emergency preparedness and recovery, support the management of coastal zones, expand ocean data observation and seabed mapping, and manage fisheries and marine protected areas (MPAs) – all initiatives identified by the Blueprint as priorities for healthy oceans and economies globally.

The UKHO is contributing to projects across 31 coastal states. The Overseas Territories Seabed Mapping Programme, funded by the UK Government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) and co-ordinated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), is focused on undertaking seabed mapping in territories under the jurisdiction and sovereignty of the UK, such as Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the Cayman Islands and Montserrat. Furthermore, the UKHO also plays a leading role in the FCO's Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) Programme, alongside the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the National Oceanography Centre (NOC). The CME Programme aims to unlock over £2bn return for the economies of 17 Small Island Developing States (SIDS), some of which are the most economically vulnerable states in the world, through a range of Blue Economy developmental work.

John Humphrey, Chief Executive of the UKHO, commented:

We worked long and hard with our partners across Government to underpin the development of effective global goals for healthy oceans and sustainable Blue Economy growth in advance of the G7 summit.

It is extremely gratifying to see this global coalition of leaders commit to ocean goals that the UKHO knows from experience have a direct benefit on individuals and economies in coastal communities and nations around the world.

For example, we are continually building our capacity and understanding of how best to support emergency preparedness and recovery efforts. Meanwhile, we have also seen first-hand how accurate and up-to-date seabed mapping can contribute to dual aims of marine protection and the development of the Blue Economy. The associated positive economic benefits of hydrography are clear: with the average return of approximately £7.50 for every £1.00 spent. However, this ratio can exceed 1:250 for more remote, more geographically challenged and less developed nations.

As a world leading marine geospatial data agency, we look forward to continuing to support our partners achieve the goals of the Charlevoix Blueprint for Healthy Oceans, Seas and Resilient Coastal Communities signed at the G7 summit earlier this month.

Recognising the importance oceans play in the global climate system, supporting communities, jobs and livelihoods, food security, human health, biodiversity, economic prosperity and way of life, the Blueprint commits the G7 to:

1. Support better adaptation planning, emergency preparedness and recovery
2. Support innovative financing for coastal resilience
3. Launch a joint G7 initiative to deploy Earth observation technologies and related applications to scale up capacities for the integrated management of coastal zones
4. Increase the availability and sharing of science and data
5. Address Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and other drivers of over-exploitation of fish stocks
6. Support strategies to effectively protect and manage vulnerable areas of our oceans
7. Take a lifecycle approach to plastics stewardship on land and at sea, moving towards the more resource efficient and sustainable management of plastics

The UKHO is continuing to invest in its technology, staff and facilities in its office in Taunton, to ensure they can continue to provide leading global marine information for decision makers across the globe. The UKHO is expanding marine geospatial capabilities through data science and software development and will be working with government partners to support active strategies to achieve the G7 Blueprint.