

Press release: UK pledges protection for corals

The UK has joined a global battle to safeguard the world's coral reefs from climate change and rising sea temperatures, Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey announced today.

International work to protect these vital marine habitats is gathering momentum as coral reefs come under increasing pressure from climate change and human activity – and today the UK officially joined the Coral Reef Life Declaration, committing to safeguard coral reefs and bolster scientific research into the threats they face.

The announcement comes just one week ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, where member states will gather in London to agree further global measures to protect our oceans.

From Australia's iconic Great Barrier Reef, to 8,000 year-old cold-waters corals off the coast of the UK, the countries of the Commonwealth account for nearly half the world's coral reefs – and over 250 million people across the Commonwealth depend directly on coral reefs for food and income.

Speaking from the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, where High Commissioners and members of the UK's science community gathered today to celebrate marine science across the Commonwealth, the Environment Minister Thérèse Coffey said:

Few people know the waters around the UK contain riches to rival the tropics – with our waters home to a vast array of cold water coral reefs that protect important marine life.

Through tapping into the UK's world-leading marine science and working with our partners across the Commonwealth, we will help to safeguard this vital habitat and protect our oceans for future generations.

The [Coral Reef Life Declaration was launched by Prince Albert II of Monaco](#) at the Our Ocean conference in Malta in October last year to encourage countries to come together to protect coral reefs. So far 12 countries have signed the declaration, including Australia, Fiji and the Seychelles.

The UK's waters are home to cold-water corals over 8,000 years old, with the only known coral reef in English waters protected as a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ).

The [Canyons MCZ](#), located off the Cornish coast, covers an area of more than 650 km² and was designated in 2013 to protect the cold-water corals found there. There are also extensive reefs off the west coast of Scotland where

there are seven Marine Protected Areas safeguarding this fragile habitat from damage.

The UK's Overseas Territories also hold a huge array of tropical and cold water coral reefs. Through our [Blue Belt](#) programme we are currently on track to protect over four million square kilometres of ocean across the Overseas Territories by 2020, working with local communities to protect the coral species within.

This year has also been made the International Year of the Reef by the International Coral Reef Initiative – the leading organisation dedicated to protecting these habitats.