

Speech: Environment Minister speaks at the UN Climate Change Conference

I am delighted to be here at COP23, working with other nations, international organisations and of course Peter Thomson.

I thank Fiji for their leadership in the Presidency and Germany for being great hosts.

We have had feedback that the UK can play a greater role globally and we are happy to do that.

Oceans make up around two thirds of our planet and our lives are inextricably linked with our blue seas. However, our oceans are changing and we must take action to save them.

We now have nearly 300 Marine Protected Areas in UK waters, and by 2020 we will deliver a network of Marine Protected Areas that will cover 25 per cent of the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone. In addition, the UK is on track to protect 4 million square kilometres of ocean across its Overseas Territories by 2020.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life. Action on plastic bag use has been taken across the UK, for instance, the 5p plastic bag charge in England has cut the use of plastic bags by over 80 per cent, or over 9 billion in just one year, and our microbead ban will be one of the toughest in the world.

We recognise the particularly damaging effects of climate change on developing countries. That is why the UK has committed at least £5.8 billion of international climate finance between 2016 and 2020 to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

One example of this is the £10 million we have committed to tackle mangrove loss in Madagascar that will benefit over 100,000 people in coastal communities by providing protection against natural disasters and supporting their livelihoods. It will deliver around 13 million tonnes of CO2 savings.

It is only by collaboration on a global scale that we can truly address marine climate issues, including ocean acidification.

We have already seen the devastating impact of rising sea levels on our coastal communities. We should be clear that ocean acidification could threaten the very basis of life itself. I say that because acidification threatens the whole basis of the marine ecosystem, as it literally attacks the building blocks of life as key organisms fail to develop fully, which is starting to disrupt the food web.

Earlier this year we published a synopsis of our [UK Ocean Acidification Research Programme](#) and, based on current projections, cold water corals will

be 20-30 per cent weaker, causing reef disintegration and losing the rich biodiversity that they support.

The programme provided an extremely successful collaborative science partnership across the UK and internationally, particularly with the EU European Project on Ocean Acidification and the German BIOACID programme. Science is the spur to action and the more we can collaborate across nations, the more we can innovate.

The UK set up the Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP) to provide verifiable evidence of the effect of climate change. This brings together scientists, government, its agencies and NGOs and has just published "Marine Climate change Impacts – 10 years' experience of science to policy reporting".

However, there is more that we can do. This is why the UK Government is committed to a new United Nations Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which will deliver real protection across the world's oceans.

Oceans Action Day reminds us of the importance of the two thirds of our world and that our blue spaces are just as precious as our green spaces – and that actions on land have consequences for all parts of this blue planet, especially those actions which are altering our climate.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the United Kingdom will today sign up to the "Because the Oceans" declaration and I encourage others who have not done so, to do the same.

Thank you.