

Business Secretary launches working groups to help unleash Britain's growth potential

Press release

Business Secretary Alok Sharma is creating 5 new business-focused groups to unleash Britain's growth potential and create jobs, as part of the government's plans to help the economy bounce back from the coronavirus pandemic.



Beginning this week, Mr Sharma will chair the first meetings of new 'recovery roundtables' bringing together businesses, business representative groups and leading academics. They will consider measures to support economic recovery and ensure we have the right skills and opportunities in place for our workforce over the next 18 months.

They will also explore key domestic and global challenges to support a green and resilient recovery and ensure the UK is at the forefront of new and emerging industries.

Focused on 5 key themes, each group will explore how business can work with government to deliver economic growth and jobs:

- The future of industry: How to accelerate business innovation and leverage private sector investment in research and development
- Green recovery: How to capture economic growth opportunities from the shift to net zero carbon emissions
- Backing new businesses: How to make the UK the best place in the world to start and scale a business
- Increasing opportunity: How to level up economic performance across the UK, including through skills and apprenticeships
- The UK open for business: How to win and retain more high value investment for the UK

This initiative builds on the close engagement between the UK's business

community, the Business Department and across Whitehall as we have responded to the pandemic.

This includes 5 new ministerial-led taskforces to develop further plans for how and when closed sectors can safely reopen, following the publication of the Prime Minister's roadmap out of lockdown.

Secretary of State for Business Alok Sharma commented:

These roundtables are a redoubling of our efforts to listen to and work with the business community and academic experts as we consider the measures needed to support our economic bounce-back. This will undoubtedly lead to a cleaner, greener, more resilient economy which will create new jobs.

The output from this initiative will feed directly into the government's work on economic recovery and will help deliver the commitments we made to the British people only last December, which now take on an even greater sense of urgency and importance.

Notes to editors

The membership of the 5 working groups will be published in due course.

Each working group, which aims to be representative of UK industry, will consist of approximately 20-25 participants and will be chaired by BEIS Secretary of State Alok Sharma.

There will also be an opportunity for other parties and individuals interested in this initiative to share written submissions with the Business Department.

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[Independent review backs introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas](#)

An independent review led by former Fisheries Minister Richard Benyon, and published today on World Ocean Day, is calling for the introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas in English waters. The review was commissioned on last year's world ocean day by then Environment Secretary Michael Gove as part of the Government's drive to protect our waters.

These highly protected marine areas would enable a greater recovery of the marine ecosystem and enhance the Government's commitment to a national 'Blue Belt', which has already seen an area of 92,000 square km protected – 40% of English seas.

The UK currently has a range of protections in place through a network of 355 Marine Protected Areas, which offer protections for a designated feature or habitat within their boundaries. Highly Protected Marine Areas would go further by taking a 'whole site approach' and only permitting certain activities within their boundaries such as vessel transit, scuba diving and kayaking. Activities that could have a damaging effect on habitats or wildlife, including fishing, construction and dredging would be banned. The review claims the introduction of such areas could lead to a significant biodiversity boost for our seas by giving our marine life the best chance to recover and thrive.

The review, which was supported by a panel of independent experts, also sheds light on the potential social and economic benefits of introducing highly protected marine areas. These benefits include increased tourism and recreational activities, opportunities for scientific research and education, and positive effects for human health. It also suggests that any potential fishing restriction could be counterbalanced by a stronger and biodiverse marine wildlife – with potential long-term benefits for the fishing industry from providing areas where sea life can develop and breed undisturbed.

Three Marine Protected Areas: Flamborough Head, Lundy Island and the Medway Estuary currently have in place 'no take zones' which prohibit all methods of fishing.

The panel has made a number of recommendations which will now be considered by Government with a formal response made in due course.

Key recommendations include:

- the introduction of Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) within the existing network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to allow for the full protection and recovery of marine ecosystems
- a "whole site approach" to protect all species and habitats within the HPMA boundaries
- potential sites should be identified on the basis of ecological principles. Once these are met, the selection of sites should seek to minimise any negative effects on stakeholders. To do this, Government should agree the identification and regulation of these sites in partnership with sea users
- 'blue carbon' habitats are identified for protection during the HPMA site selection process to help combat climate change

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

Our 'Blue Belt' of Marine Protected Areas has already raised the bar for marine protection and we are committed to the highest

standards of sustainability for our seas that set a gold standard around the world.

That's why we asked the panel to conduct this review and I am very grateful to them for their work. I welcome and agree with the spirit of ambition, which is in line with our 25 Year Environment Plan, and we will now carefully consider the recommendations set out in the review.

Chair of the Independent review Panel Richard Benyon said:

The sea has provided food, materials and recreational opportunities for thousands of years. However, human activities have significantly impacted these habitats and species, which we now know need greater protection.

Our review demonstrates that in order to deliver the protections our most threatened habitats need, Highly Protected Marine Areas need to be introduced, and I hope that government will engage with local communities and stakeholders to more forward plans to designate these new sites.

Chair of Natural England Tony Juniper, said:

I welcome the recommendations put forward by the Panel. This review is an important marker of how we can use highly protected areas to mitigate the impact of human activities on the ocean, and support its recovery to a more natural state.

I thank the panel for their work and look forward to working with Defra as they consider how best to take forward the recommendations.

Lewis Pugh, endurance swimmer and UN Patron of the Oceans, said:

The coronavirus pandemic has shown us how important our relationship with nature is. The beauty of nature is that it can bounce back – but only if we give it proper protection. There is little point in having protected areas that are not pulling their weight.

The UK has some of the richest and most diverse sea life in the world. I'm excited that we may soon have a pilot programme of Highly Protected Marine Protected Areas in England, but this must amount to more than dipping a toe in the water.

I urge the UK government to show the same leadership as with their call for 30% of the world's oceans to be protected. They must act urgently to strengthen protection, as in a few years' time it will be too late to fix the crisis in our oceans.

Richard Benwell, Chief Executive of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said:

The panel's work shows strong consensus from conservation, industry and fisheries perspectives: highly protected areas are essential in reviving the ocean. We urge Ministers to now implement the recommendations quickly and create fully protected HPMA's for our seas. These will help recover our seas for people, nature and climate and be a vital addition to the UK network of marine sites. This would set Government at the cutting edge of ocean action and reinforce its leadership role in the Global Ocean Alliance as it calls to protect 30% of the world's oceans.

On World Ocean Day, this review builds on the UK Government's commitment to further advance ocean protection measures including last year's designation of a further [41 Marine Protection Zones](#) protecting species and habitats such as the rare stalked jellyfish, short-snouted seahorse and blue mussel beds. The Government is currently putting in place management measures for Marine Protected Areas, including seeking new powers through the Fisheries Bill, and through implementation of the 25 Year Environment Plan.

This news comes as seven new countries joined the UK led Global Ocean Alliance, an initiative aimed at securing protection of 30% of the world's oceans by 2030. There are now a total of 20 countries in the Alliance following today's announcement. Germany and Italy are amongst the major new players to join, other joiners include Fiji, Cabo Verde, Monaco, Senegal, and Luxemburg.

This complements a wide programme of overseas engagements, including through the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance and the Commonwealth Litter Programme, aiming to prevent plastic waste from reaching the ocean.

The Government has also committed to a £500 million Blue Planet fund to export UK expertise in marine science around the world, supporting overseas countries to protect marine habitats.

The [Benyon Review into Highly Protected Marine Areas](#) was announced on [World Oceans Day 2019](#) by the then Environment Secretary Michael Gove .

This review covers the English inshore, offshore and Northern Irish offshore waters. Collectively these are referred to as Secretary of State waters.

Chair of the review:

Richard Benyon is a former MP and Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries. He is actively interested in environmental issues, and is a former chair of the All Party Parliamentary Environment Group and a former member of the Environment Audit Committee. He is widely respected within the fishing industry, and during his time at Defra worked closely with marine conservation groups, fishermen, and coastal communities during the development of the first tranche of Marine Conservation Zones.

Panel Members:

Peter Barham, Chair of the Seabed User and Developer Group, a representative group of UK marine industries.

Peter has over 20 years' experience as a senior manager in public and private sectors delivering environmental and sustainable development solutions.

Joan Edwards, Director of Marine Conservation at The Wildlife Trusts.

Joan has substantial experience working on marine issues in the Wildlife Trusts for over 30 years and led the NGO campaign for the Marine and Coastal Access Act and its implementation.

Michel Kaiser, Professor of Fisheries Conservation, Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh.

Michael is a board member of Fisheries Innovation Scotland and a member of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Fisheries Expert Group.

Susan Owens OBE, FBA, Emeritus Professor of Environment and Policy, University of Cambridge, and Fellow Emerita of Newnham College.

Susan was a member of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution that produced the 'Turning the Tide' report which addressed the impact of fisheries on the marine environment.

Callum Roberts, Professor of Marine Conservation, University of York.

Trustee of Nekton Oxford Deep Ocean Research Institute; Trustee and Chief Scientific Advisor to the Blue Marine Foundation; Member of WWF-UK's Council of Ambassador.

Nathan de Rozarieux, inshore fisherman and fisheries consultant.

Nathan has been a Board Member of the Sea Fish Industry Authority since 2018 and was a committee member of the Cornwall Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority.

Benj Sykes, Vice-President of Ørsted's Offshore wind business.

Co-chair, Offshore Wind Industry Council. Benj is also on the Board of RenewableUK and is a Fellow of the Energy Institute with over 30 years' experience in the energy sector.

[COVID-19 tests offered to every care home for elderly or those with dementia](#)

Press release

Test kits have been offered to every care home for over-65s or those with dementia in England, reaching the testing target for 6 June.



- Target to offer test kits to every care home for over-65s by 6 June has been met
- Whole care home testing kits delivered to nearly 9,000 settings
- Tests offered to eligible care homes regardless of symptoms

All eligible care homes who need them will have received tests regardless of symptoms, with kits being delivered across the country.

Since the launch of whole care home testing the government has provided 1,071,103 test kits to 8,984 care homes, and we are now able send out over 50,000 test kits a day.

As well as testing kits that have been sent to homes directly, tens of thousands of care home workers and residents have also been tested by Public Health England or at drive-through testing sites and mobile testing units. This is in addition to care home workers receiving test kits to their own homes through the separate employer and employee portal.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We have now managed successfully to offer tests to every care home that is eligible, both for staff testing and for residents to be tested.

What that means is that for about three-quarters of a million people living and working in nearly 9,000 eligible care homes, the tests have been delivered.

To ensure every care home has the support it needs, the government sent test kits to all eligible care homes unless they stated they did not want to receive them. Test results for residents will be communicated to the care home managers.

Testing asymptomatic workers and residents helps prevent and control outbreaks. It means those who test positive can be isolated, reducing the number of people who can spread the virus and protecting the most vulnerable. It also helps to build up a strategic understanding of the prevalence of the virus in local areas and the sector as a whole.

This is in addition to the new Test and Trace service which has an important role in limiting the spread of the virus, and thousands of those who have tested positive have already been contacted and their close contacts traced.

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Good karma: British travellers rescued by Deputy High Commissioner via mountain roads, 'elephant corridor' and a breakdown in a tiger reserve.

Deputy High Commissioner Jeremy Pilmore-Bedford and his team of five drove 12 hours from Bangalore to Cochin, while another team embarked on a 13 hour journey from Chennai to Trivandrum, to help British nationals board their charter flight home on April 15.

The groups had been stranded across Kerala and Tamil Nadu for four weeks after flight options in Southern India abruptly ceased when the pandemic escalated.

But on twisty and notoriously rough Western Ghats mountain roads on the way

from Bangalore, the Foreign Office rescue team picked up a puncture in the middle of Bandipur Tiger Reserve. The reserve, which recently featured in the Sir David Attenborough-narrated documentary Wild Karnataka, is home to the second-biggest tiger population in India, with nearly 400 big cats believed to be roaming in the area.

With the team standing lookout, the Deputy High Commissioner raced to change the tyre under the blazing sun and rising humidity of the tropical forest. To add to the adventure, the road also runs through the middle of an elephant migration corridor, and the group encountered a female elephant during the ordeal.

“The breakdown was definitely a low point in our journey,” said Jeremy, “But we had so many people counting on us, we couldn’t end up as a tiger’s tiffin. Changing tyres isn’t your average diplomatic activity, but there was nothing we weren’t prepared to do to get our people home.”

After successfully changing the tyre, the team ploughed on to Cochin, arriving just in time to help the 260 stranded travellers onto an emergency Foreign Office flight – many of whom had spent between six and 12 hours on transport arranged by the High Commission to meet the flight.

Meanwhile, a group of 42 students and teachers from an international school, stranded in the hills of Ooty, also in the Western Ghats region, negotiated a tough 8-hour journey across state borders to meet an exhausted FCO staff member, who had driven 36 hours and 2,000km from Chennai to Kerala to meet the group and hand-deliver an emergency travel document to allow them to fly.

Protocol Assistant at the Deputy High Commission in Chennai, Rajesh Bhaskaran, who made the gruelling journey said: “Though the journey was arduous and riddled with multiple police checkpoints, at the end it was a hugely satisfying experience to help stranded British nationals from remote parts of southern India fly back home safely.

“But almost zero traffic during the lockdown made me feel like a ‘King of the road’ to deliver emergency travel documents in the nick of time.”

Despite the extreme efforts to get British travellers home from Cochin, the team’s work did not stop there, and on return to Bangalore, they supported a further three charter flights to get around 400 British travellers home. British eight-year-old Mayzia Richardson, from Derby, who was among the travellers, summed up the jubilation of travellers on their way home, singing ‘A Million Dreams’ from hit film the Greatest Showman at the check-in desk of her Foreign Office charter flight home.

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World Food Safety Day 2020 – food safety is our business too

World Food Safety Day, on 7 June 2020, is an opportunity to recognize the people who help keep our food safe. Food safety is a shared responsibility between producers, businesses, governments and consumers. Everybody has a role to play from farm to table to ensure the food we consume is safe.

Since inception in 1875, food safety has been the business of the Government Chemist. Our role, to protect the public from harm, fraud, and malpractice is as relevant today as it was then. It has been shaped to:

Protect consumers in our changing world

We protect everyone's right to make safe choices by keeping under review developments to secure national and international regulatory compliance and by providing definitive resolution of increasingly more complex referee cases to ensure legislation protecting consumers from unacceptable levels of risk is upheld.

We regularly act as a referee in cases where undeclared allergens might be present and are involved in wide ranging activities including improving metrological traceability and [food allergen quantitative risk assessment](#).

Support businesses and Government across the UK

We provide world class measurement science that supports an innovative and growing UK food and feed sector to trade sustainably on a global basis. This is achieved through the provision of impartial and unbiased technical advice and scientific measurement functions, not only as a route of technical appeal for the UK Government and industry but also as a valued expert resource.

We continue to advise stakeholders on [potential food choking hazards](#) and are currently investigating [untargeted and portable technologies](#) to look at their fitness for purpose for multiple food samples and a wide range of applications

Maximise the UK measurement infrastructure to address future challenges

By maintaining our position as an impartial operator in the food and feed sector and growing our links within the supporting scientific community, we will enhance and future proof existing capabilities and maximise collaborative synergies between stakeholders.

The increased use of recycled packaging materials in the food industry presents new [technical challenges and possible risks](#). One of our current

capability projects aims to research methods required to investigate the possible risks presented by recycled food packaging materials and novel alternative packaging materials and coatings.

Grow collaborative national skills initiatives

The value of the referee function and advisory role will be extended beyond first-line stakeholders through greater knowledge transfer and dissemination activities central to the function of the Government Chemist.

We publish the results of all the referee cases with associated learned lessons in [Annual Reviews](#) and other peer-reviewed publications and organise regular [training events](#) in collaboration with stakeholders.