This is a discussion paper for consultation throughout June 2019
Please share any feedback with the APPG Secretariat at
Surfers Against Sewage via info@oceanconservationappg.org
Britain is a unique island nation responsible for an area of ocean thirty-times greater than the dry land we call home. Our oceans and beaches have inspired generations and are an invaluable resource, for our economy as well as our health and happiness, but they’re at risk. Plastic pollution, global heating and over exploitation are wreaking havoc on marine life and the ecosystems that support it.

Progress has been made, via policy to tackle global heating and through marine conservation legislation, but it’s not enough. What we do in the next few years will be critical. Today’s politicians have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enshrine the laws and put in place the actions needed to save our seas.

I’m excited to play my part. As chair of the Ocean Conservation All Party Parliamentary Group, I look forward to working alongside colleagues from across the political spectrum. We will collaborate with civil society, academics, businesses, community leaders and others to explore the challenges we face and the solutions we need to better protect the marine environment.

Steven Double
Member of Parliament for St Austell and Newquay
Chair of the Ocean Conservation All Party Parliamentary Group
THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

The government is responsible for the health and wellbeing of our oceans, rivers, mountains and beaches. We have seen the effectiveness of parliamentary laws in protecting them. For example, the 5p bag charge has prevented at least 18 billion single-use plastic bags from entering the environment, and water quality legislation that has cleaned up UK waters and dramatically changed the lives of surfers, swimmers and holidaymakers alike.

However, the latest UK Marine Strategy shows we have a great deal to do. As of May 2019 the UK has met just four out of 15 indicators required for healthy oceans. This is a wake up call. Parliament needs to use its powers to prevent further environmental damage and ensure we improve our natural world for everyone and everything to enjoy.

THE SOLUTIONS WE NEED

— The UK government plans to retain many important European directives that protect our ocean once we leave the European Union. Post-Brexit we will need to put in place a new, independent national body or regulator to hold us fully to account in implementation of these vital laws. The UK should also match or exceed any new EU wide directives designed to save our seas, such as the Single Use Plastics Directive, no matter what happens with Brexit.

— The English government’s 25 Year Environmental Plan needs to be given statutory underpinning in the upcoming Environment Bill, in conjunction with equivalent plans across devolved governments. The resulting legally binding targets for our marine environment will drive the development of ambitious environmental policy and legislation to restore and protect our ocean.

— There has already been detailed consultation on a number of measures to reduce plastic pollution. From Bottle Deposit Return Schemes to new extended producer responsibility laws, the policy solutions exist to cut marine plastic pollution — we just need to implement them.

— To combat overfishing and restore ocean biodiversity we need practical conservation solutions, including the creation of large-scale marine reserves. More than 30% of the world’s ocean needs to be put under protection with clear and effective mechanisms for enforcement if the other two thirds are to be sustainably fished. The UK has made some good progress, committing to provide protection to the marine environment across the Overseas Territories, but we need a similar commitment at home.
There’s a lot to do, but we have the support to make it happen. Concern about the environment has never been higher, with recent polling placing global heating at the very top of voters concerns. The ‘Attenborough effect’ has put ocean conservation under the spotlight, with much of the population now conscious of the threats to our seas and coastlines.

— In a recent YouGov poll, a quarter of people put the environment among their top issues facing the country — about the same level as the economy and immigration.

— A recent poll by Opinium, found 63% agreeing — including 25% strongly agreeing — with the statement: ‘We are facing a climate emergency.’

— In a poll commissioned by the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 69% said global heating is already having an impact on the UK.

— 2019 saw a 22% increase in volunteers for the Surfers Against Sewage annual Big Spring Beach Clean, with 45,771 volunteers collecting 17,700 full bin bags of plastic waste from beaches, rivers and mountains across the UK.

— Millions have joined online campaigns calling on measures to tackle the plastic pollution crisis, with 329,000 signing Surfers Against Sewage’s petition for a bottle deposit return scheme.

This shift in consciousness is mirrored inside parliament with politicians from all parties and both houses standing up for our oceans.

“ONLY BY WORKING TOGETHER CAN WE PROTECT OUR SHARED HOME AND ENSURE OUR MARINE LIFE CONTINUES TO BE A SOURCE OF AWE AND WONDER FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.”
Michael Gove MP

“WE HAVE GOT TO GET AMBITIOUS IF WE ARE TO REVERSE THE CURRENT TREND IN PLASTIC POLLUTION AND TO DO THAT WE MUST CHALLENGE OUR THROWAWAY CULTURE.”
Alistair Carmichael MP

“OUR CHILDREN DESERVE TO EXPERIENCE THE WONDERS OF THE OCEAN BUT CLIMATE CHANGE POSES A TRIPLE WHAMMY OF THREATS FROM OCEAN WARMING, DEOXYGENATION AND ACIDIFICATION, WHICH ARE DECIMATING MARINE LIFE.”
Mary Creagh MP

“OUR SEAS ARE CHOKING WITH PLASTIC — AND BRITAIN SHOULD BE LEADING THE WAY IN TACKLING THIS CRISIS.”
Caroline Lucas MP
The APPG is a group of MPs and Peers from across the house united by a passion for the ocean and thriving coastal communities. Surfers Against Sewage acts as the secretariat for the group, facilitating interactions with experts, NGOs, media, business leaders etc. We have developed this strategy informed by dedicated research into APPG best practice commissioned by Surfers Against Sewage.

As the Protect our Waves APPG, we have already had impact — banning single use plastic across the Westminster estate and championing the bottle deposit return scheme policy soon to be adopted by the government. As the Ocean Conservation APPG we plan to build on this success.

— We will collaborate with stakeholders across society to ensure a strong voice for the ocean and coastline in Westminster. We will channel the energy of the ocean conservation movement into parliament.

— We will encourage innovation, policy change and progressive legislation. We will act as a space to explore ideas that creatively confront the challenges of ocean conservation and protection of our coastline.

— We will hold the government to account in developing, delivering and enforcing environmental policy and legislation to protect our ocean and beaches.

— We will serve to complement and enhance official parliamentary groups and processes including the Environmental Audit Committee, Environmental Select Committees, Early day Motions and Private Members Bills. We will work collaboratively with other APPGs whose interests align with ours.

Over the next three years we will have two key aims:

RAISE AWARENESS
Parliamentarians need to be given the opportunity to understand the multiple and often complex issues involved in ocean conservation and the connection to our decisions and actions in the UK. The APPG will seek to raise awareness across all parties and both houses by bringing together charities, NGOs, marine conservationists, scientists, academics, MPs, Ministers, business leaders and other key stakeholders for inclusive and diverse meetings and receptions.

DEMONSTRATE POSITIVE AND VIABLE SOLUTIONS
The UK parliament is in a strong position to lead the way in innovative policies. We have an exceptional history of marine science with some of the world’s leading research institutions, scientists and NGOs. The APPG will act as a conduit for this expertise. We will seek out those working on innovative solutions and champion them within Westminster.

We will focus on:

— Plastic pollution
— Water quality
— Climate crisis
— Marine protected areas

While we have chosen to focus largely on these four issue areas, we will examine other emergent or related issues should the need arise. We will concentrate where the threat to our oceans and beaches is greatest, and where our work can add value to existing parliamentary groups and structures.
PLASTIC POLLUTION

Plastic pollution is one of the biggest issues facing our marine environment. Our oceans are choking. The policies we need to start to turn the tide of plastic pollution are there, we just need to implement them.

— 8,000,000 pieces of plastic pollution find their way into the ocean everyday.
— 320,000,000 tonnes of plastic was created globally in 2016.
— 38,500,000 single-use plastic bottles are used every day in the UK. Only half of these are recycled. Many up on beaches and in our oceans.

In the last few years there have been numerous government consultations on bans, taxes, levies and charges to control the production and proliferation of single-use plastics. The 5p Bag Charge has seen the use of plastic bags drop by at least 18 billion since October 2015. Strong legislation like this can be replicated to tackle other items such as plastic bottles, with Scotland already announcing its plans for a Deposit Return Scheme and England banning straws, ear buds and stirrers with overwhelming public support.

There have been a number of noteworthy petitions and motions that have seen nearly a third of all MPs become engaged with plastic pollution since 2017. Surfers Against Sewage’s, Plastic Free Parliament Campaign received backing from 180 MPs. A number of Commons and Westminster Hall debates, EDMs and inquiries addressing plastic pollution and solutions have seen widespread interaction and show that the topic is at the forefront of political debate.

WATER QUALITY

Water is essential for all life on our planet. Pollution is bad for us and for wildlife. The laws that have cleaned up UK waters were made in Europe. As we prepare to leave the EU we must ensure we keep our coastline clean and safe for everyone to enjoy.

— In 1990, 27% of the 636 designated bathing waters around the UK were classified as excellent, good or sufficient.
— In 2019, that number is 98.5%.

When we surf, swim or play in sea water that has raw sewage in it we are at risk of gastroenteritis, ear, nose and throat infections, skin infections, and even hepatitis and e-coli. Many of these illnesses were commonplace amongst surfers and bathers in the UK in the 1980s.

When Surfers Against Sewage began, the organisation collated health evidence on the effects of coming into contact with raw sewage, put pressure on water companies to improve sewerage infrastructure and pushed decision makers for stronger legislation to protect water users. This resulted in a £5 billion investment by water companies dramatically changing the lives of surfers, swimmers and holidaymakers alike.

Water quality in the UK is at an all-time high. We must not to let standards slip and to continue to drive investment to create the best possible water standards for the public to enjoy and the environment to thrive.
CLIMATE CRISIS

The Earth is warming at an alarming rate. Increasing ocean temperatures affect all marine life, causing coral bleaching and the loss of breeding grounds for fish and mammals. They also affect the things we rely on from the ocean — threatening fish stocks, causing more extreme weather and coastal erosion.

— 2017 saw the hottest ocean temperatures ever recorded.
— Acidification, changing currents and rising sea levels — all caused by global heating — are significantly affecting marine life.

The UK has a huge role to play in protecting the ocean environment. With the fifth largest marine area of any nation, principally through overseas territories, and being custodian to the largest coral atoll on Earth, the government must act to protect the waters that give this planet life.

Progress has been made. The Climate Change Act, which has just celebrated its 10th anniversary, has been instrumental in emissions reductions over the past decade. Ratifying the Paris Agreement — which provides a framework for governments to keep global warming well below 2 degrees — was another strong signal that the government is committed to action.

There is so much more to be done however. The climate crisis is a key concern for the British public. The political space for action has never been bigger. The government must step-up and continue to be a global leader in tackling the biggest issue of our time.

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Overfishing has had a devastating impact on the biodiversity of our oceans. The consequences are far-reaching for the future of the food we eat and, because healthy oceans absorb half the CO2 we produce, for the stability of the climate.

— 90% of global fish stocks are fully or over-exploited and around 90% of large fish are gone.
— More than 30% of the world’s ocean needs to be put under some form of protection if the other two thirds are to be sustainably fished. Less than 4% of the global ocean is currently under protection.

Large scale marine reserves have been shown to aid the rapid recovery of biodiversity in the areas protected. The world’s leading scientists are agreed that we need to put at least 30% of our oceans under meaningful protection, but the world is not yet making effective collective progress against this goal. We have a long way to go to even get close to what the science says is necessary.

The UK can play a disproportionately large role in addressing this global problem. Our overseas territories mean that the UK has the fifth largest marine zone in the world. We have already made progress, having declared the intention to place at least four million square kilometres of ocean under a ‘Blue Belt’ of protection by 2020. This Blue Belt will include some of the most remote and pristine pieces of ocean left anywhere on Earth.

But we have a lot still to do at home. The seas around the British Isles have been fished at an industrial level for at least a century. Many habitats are badly damaged and need meaningful and purposeful protection.
The secretariat of the Ocean Conservation APPG at Surfers Against Sewage has been made possible with generous support from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation