

Draft UK speech for OSPAR Ministerial 1 October – Lord Zac Goldsmith

It is a pleasure to make a statement on behalf of the United Kingdom.

We know beyond all doubt that health of our people, our economies, and our planet are inextricably, unavoidably, profoundly linked.

Almost every day now the evidence mounts up – from scientists and economists, from indigenous peoples and local communities, and from events themselves.

I won't produce all the facts and figures, because you'll know them.

But it's worth reminding ourselves that just as we are stripping the ocean of life, we are filling it back up with trash.

That two thirds of marine mammals and half of the world's seabird species are already affected.

And all of this against the backdrop of worsening climate change.

The single most important action we can take at COP26 for the ocean – is to work towards the goals of the Paris Agreement, to reduce emissions and limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

A gigantic carbon sink, our ocean has absorbed around a quarter of the CO₂ we've emitted, and more than 90% of excess heat – playing a unique, irreplaceable role in regulating our climate.

We've lost oxygen from every part of the ocean – given that the ocean provides the oxygen in every second breath we take, that matters enormously

Marine heatwaves have doubled since the 1980s.
And the rate of ocean acidification that we're now seeing is unprecedented in the last 26,000 years at least.

That is why the UK is pleased to host the Global Ocean Acidification Observing Network hub, monitoring the impact on our region as part of the global network.

The situation we are in is not just an ecological tragedy – it is an unfolding human catastrophe as well.

The ocean underpins the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people around the world – including so many coastal communities in the North East Atlantic.

And globally, an estimated billion people depend on fish as their main source of protein.

So it is hard to exaggerate the importance of the ocean – or the importance of the marine environments in our region

...tidal mud flats, cliffs and estuaries, kelp forests and beds of seagrass, cold-water coral reefs and more.

So I am pleased that this strategy is focussed on action – including the use of nature-based solutions to meet net zero and become more resilient ...and that it is genuinely ambitious, including a commitment to halt and reverse the decline in biodiversity by 2030.

We know that marine protection works for people and planet simply because we can measure the results – for wildlife, for commercial stocks, and for coastal communities.

The UK is proud to be co-leading global alliances to protect at least 30% of the world's land and ocean by 2030 – with the whole G7 committed, both domestically and internationally.

It is wonderful news that OSPAR is now committed to that same ambition.

And I am absolutely delighted that we are creating a new North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea-basin marine protected area for seabirds of more than half a million square kilometres.

This is just the sort of ambition we need more of for seabirds and a whole range of migratory species.

And as we pursue negotiations on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction through the Convention on Biological Diversity, our region will speak to the rest of the world with one voice.

I hope that will also be the case when we have the chance to raise global ambition on marine pollution at the United Nations Environment Assembly in February as well.

We've set ourselves stretching targets for reductions in marine and beach litter across the region.

As part of that, the UK is committed to building on the progress we've made in tackling waste at home – not least by fundamentally shifting the burden from consumers to producers, and developing the tools and the rules to transition to a more circular economy.

But this is a global problem, and one people everywhere want fixed.

So the UK is supporting other countries – from Nigeria to Indonesia.

And we're asking governments to agree a new global agreement to coordinate action on marine plastic litter and microplastic – in the way that the Paris Agreement has done for climate change, or the Montreal protocol for ozone depletion.

The majority of UN member states are already on board – and I hope you will join us.

At this point, no government can honestly claim to be doing enough.

But the UK is committed to continuing to work with all of you to make this the year the world finally wakes up to the scale of the crisis

...and to make this the decade we begin to mend our fractured relationship with the natural world.

And from the Mid-Atlantic Ridge to the North Sea, and the North Pole to the Azores – this new strategy for OSPAR will help us achieve it.

Thank you.