

Frequently Asked Questions

South Coast Marine Recovery Programme Development

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What is the programme called?

During our initial Development Phase, the programme will use the current working title of the '*South Coast Marine Recovery Programme*'. However, this is only intended as a short-term placeholder; what the wider programme or projects within it should be called once we come to our Delivery Phase is something we will co-create with communities and partners over the coming year.

What is 'Marine Recovery'?

Marine Recovery means restoring the richness and abundance of life in our seas, strengthening their resilience and delivering benefits to people that live by, work on or visit the coast. *Marine Recovery* will support a more sustainable maritime economy, cleaner seas and beaches, and greater protections for our oceans, alongside stronger connections between people and nature, improved health and wellbeing, and new opportunities for coastal communities.

What do you mean by the South Coast?

For this programme, the South Coast means the English Channel seas covered by our partnership of local Wildlife Trusts in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Sussex. In practice, this means the sea from Land's End at the western tip of Cornwall to Camber Sands at the eastern edge of Sussex. It will not be including Kent, the Isles of Scilly, or Devon & Cornwall's north coasts simply due to the capacity of the development team and the individual Trusts.

How far out to sea will you be working?

The project's main focus is on recovering inshore waters, from the high-tide line out to 6 nautical miles from shore, where key habitats are concentrated. Across our South Coast programme area, this inshore space alone covers an enormous 8,326 km² of sea area. Since this environment is connected to coastal and river catchments on land, and marine areas further out to sea (i.e. via the movement of sediment, water and species), activities in these domains may also be included where impacts are likely to influence recovery of inshore seas.

Why is this project needed?

Our South Coast seas are at a critical moment. They support extraordinary wildlife, coastal communities, livelihoods, recreation and wellbeing, but they are also under increasing pressure from a range of activities on land and at sea. There is clear evidence of long-term and widespread decline in marine nature, alongside growing pressure on the livelihoods and communities that depend on healthy seas. At the same time, we know that recovery is possible. There are proven approaches that can help restore marine habitats, reduce damaging pressures and support more sustainable use of our seas. Across the South Coast, a great deal of valuable work is already happening, from habitat restoration and fisheries management to community-led initiatives, research, advocacy and seascape-scale projects. However, this work is often limited by being fragmented, geographically bounded or focused on individual species, habitats or issues rather than the wider system. Our programme aims to connect and strengthen what already exists, identify where the gaps are, and support coordinated action at the scale needed.

Isn't marine wildlife already recovering?

There are some positive signs, but not yet at the consistency or scale needed. In recent years, there have been some encouraging stories from our South Coast seas, including the return of bluefin tuna, increased whale sightings, and successful conservation and restoration work for important habitats such as seagrass. These examples show that recovery is possible when the right conditions are in place. However, the overall picture is not yet one of broad-scale recovery across marine ecosystems or species. Several vital traditional fisheries have declined significantly, pollution continues to affect water quality, and many industrial and recreational pressures on marine life are continuing or increasing.

What does the programme hope to achieve?

Our vision is to build a connected movement for marine recovery along England's South Coast, supporting wildlife, people and healthier seas. To achieve marine recovery at scale, we need to create the conditions for nature to thrive. This means reducing widespread pressures. The programme will bring together communities, partners, sectors and decision-makers to improve how we understand, value and protect marine wildlife. It will strengthen the evidence needed to inform effective action, connect existing work across the coast, and support a more consistent voice for South Coast seas. By the end of the Development Phase, the programme will produce a roadmap for South Coast marine recovery, alongside a portfolio of practical actions that can be taken forward during the Delivery Phase.

What is the timeline for the programme?

The programme is currently in its Development Phase, which runs from January 2026 to March 2027. During this phase, we are drawing on expertise across the Wildlife Trusts, gathering perspectives and evidence from communities and stakeholders, and speaking with authorities, organisations and sectors involved in marine management, nature recovery and coastal decision-making. Towards the end of 2026, we will bring this information together into a roadmap for South Coast marine recovery. We expect the Delivery Phase to run for at least 6 to 8 years, subject to successful funding and partnership development.

What is the programme doing during this Development Phase?

During the Development Phase, we are finding out what people who live by, work on, manage or visit the South Coast see as the main opportunities and challenges for marine recovery in the places they care about. We are doing this through conversations, workshops, events, partner engagement and a public questionnaire. We are also bringing together existing ecological, environmental and socio-economic evidence to better understand the current state of South Coast seas and the pressures affecting them. This work is helping us build a coalition of supportive partners, identify priority themes and

areas for marine recovery, and understand the barriers and opportunities for stronger protection and pressure reduction. By the end of the Development Phase, we will have created a roadmap for South Coast marine recovery, alongside a set of practical actions designed to guide future delivery.

What approach will the programme take?

The programme will work by connecting people, evidence and action across the South Coast. Rather than creating a standalone programme, it aims to build a connected system that enables coordinated action, sustained collaboration and impact at the scale needed for long-term marine recovery. Co-creation is being embedded from the start of the programme and will continue through delivery. This means communities, partners and sectors will not simply be consulted, but will help shape the direction, priorities and actions of the programme. The aim is to build shared ownership, support more inclusive and lasting outcomes, and create the conditions for marine recovery to happen at a meaningful scale.

Why not focus on active restoration?

Active restoration of species and habitats plays an important role in marine recovery. Projects that actively restore seagrass, oysters, saltmarsh, kelp and other important habitats can help rebuild marine life and reconnect people with the sea, and may play a supporting role in this programme. However, we believe this programme can provide wider scale benefit by reducing pressures such as damaging fishing practices, poor water quality, pollution and unmanaged recreational impacts, restoration efforts risk being limited, undermined or reversed. This programme therefore places strong emphasis on pressure reduction. Pressure reduction is not about stopping people from using the sea. It is about finding better ways to manage activities so that marine ecosystems, coastal communities and sustainable livelihoods can thrive together over the long term.

Isn't marine recovery the responsibility of government?

Government has a vital role to play in marine recovery. Strong policy, regulation, enforcement and long-term investment are essential if our seas are to recover at the scale and pace needed. Successive UK governments have committed to protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, and the UK's network of Marine Protected Areas covers a significant proportion of our seas. However, designation alone does not guarantee effective protection or recovery; effective management of pressures to arrest environmental declines and enable regeneration is needed for that. So while marine recovery cannot be delivered by government alone, it also cannot happen without government and linked agencies making it a priority. The role of this programme is to help build the evidence, partnerships, community support and practical proposals needed to strengthen action for South Coast seas. By bringing together Wildlife Trusts, communities, sectors, partners and decision-makers, the programme aims to support

more coordinated action and help ensure that local evidence and experience carry greater weight in future marine management.

What does this mean for our South Coast MPAs?

Marine Protected Areas, or MPAs, are an important tool for marine conservation, and 50 MPAs already cover almost 40% of the South Coast's inshore seas. However, their ability to stimulate recovery depends on the implementation of effective management, not simply the designation of the site. Current site designations typically focus only on specific listed features, such as particular species, habitats or geological features which are present, rather than the wider health of the whole marine ecosystem. As a result, management tends to be framed on the listed features, such that areas can be designated as protected, and the designated feature even be assessed as recovering, while the wider site is still exposed to major pressures that cause environmental degradation and prevent marine recovery. Across the South Coast's inshore MPAs, 40% of their total area is still open to bottom-towed fishing gears like trawls and dredges, and chronic issues such as pollution and disturbance are just as bad in MPAs as undesignated areas. Our programme will not replace the formal role of government, regulators or statutory agencies in managing MPAs. Instead, it aims to support stronger, more joined-up action by bringing together evidence, local knowledge, community perspectives and partner expertise.

Will this programme stop people from fishing?

Commercial and recreational fishing are not inherently incompatible with thriving seas, and indeed stand to benefit hugely from marine recovery and healthier, more nature-rich seas. Experienced fishers often hold valuable knowledge about local wildlife, habitats and environmental change in the seas they live by and work in, and many already play important roles as ocean stewards, as well as underpinning the wild seafood sector, which supports nutrition, food security, livelihoods and local economies. However, it is also true that not all fishing is done sustainably. This programme is exploring how parts of our seas could be managed differently to strike a better balance for marine nature, sustainable fishing and the many coastal businesses whose long-term future depends on healthy, life-filled seas.

How will the programme balance the needs of people and nature?

Healthy seas are essential for people as well as wildlife. The programme does not see people and nature as separate priorities. Coastal communities, livelihoods, health, wellbeing, recreation, food and local identity all depend on thriving marine environments. The aim of the programme is not to prioritise nature at the expense of people, but to support a future where marine ecosystems, coastal communities and sustainable livelihoods flourish together.

Will the programme address climate change?

Climate change is arguably the biggest long-term threat to healthy marine ecosystems. Its effects are already being seen through marine heatwaves, ocean acidification, changing species distributions, rising sea levels, and more frequent and intense storms, with the South Coast seemingly a hotspot for warming and associated ecological flux. Climate change is global in scale though, so regional impacts it cannot be addressed alone by regional actions. However, local actions to enhance nature-based solutions contribute to the fight against climate impacts, and by reducing the pressures that weaken marine ecosystems, the programme should help South Coast seas become more resilient to change. The programme will also look for opportunities to embed climate-positive thinking into future planning, decision-making and delivery on the South Coast, ensuring that marine recovery supports wider climate and nature goals wherever possible.

Why are the Wildlife Trusts leading the development of this programme?

The Wildlife Trusts are well placed to support coastwide marine recovery because they combine local relationships with regional and national influence. As a federated movement, the Wildlife Trusts work across the South Coast through local Trusts in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and Sussex. This means they can connect place-based knowledge and community relationships with wider policy, advocacy, evidence and partnership work. The Wildlife Trusts also work across land, freshwater and marine environments, all of which influence the health of coastal seas. The Wildlife Trusts cannot deliver marine recovery working alone, but by supporting collaboration among communities, organisations, sectors and decision-makers, we can create the conditions for more coordinated and impactful action across the South Coast.

Will other organisations be involved in the programme's Delivery Phase?

Absolutely, yes. Marine recovery at the scale needed across the South Coast cannot be achieved by one organisation alone. Across the coast, there are already many projects, organisations, partnerships, groups and individuals working effectively for recovery. This programme does not aim to replicate or replace them. Instead, it aims to connect, align and amplify existing work, while identifying where there are gaps, where more evidence is needed, and where coordinated action could make the greatest difference. We will work with a wide range of partners, including community groups, environmental organisations, marine sectors, researchers, local authorities, regulators, funders and policymakers, and by bringing them together, will build a broad coalition that supports more joined-up action for marine recovery across the South Coast.

How can I help the programme or get involved?

Please visit our [website](#) to complete our **survey** and sign-up to our **mailing list**. For further information on how you can get involved, contact your local Wildlife Trust, or email southcoast@wildlifetrusts.org.