

# Motion for the Ocean

## Ocean and Coastal Recovery Declaration

### Why is this Declaration needed now?

#### International and National context

The health of our ocean is inextricably linked with our climate and with human health, wellbeing and prosperity. A healthy ocean is fundamental in regulating the global climate system and is an essential ally in our fight against climate change. The ocean absorbs more than 90% of the excess heat in the climate system as well as absorbing around 20% of annual carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions generated by human activity. However, the ocean has been largely missing from climate conversations.

Decades of irresponsible marine exploitation and pollution have led to significant levels of degradation, and this together with the detrimental impacts of our changing climate on marine ecosystems has led to national and global recognition that the world's oceans and their coastlines are in crisis.

An unhealthy ocean does not absorb or store carbon as effectively as a healthy one, further worsening the impacts of the climate crisis. Marine microplastics have been found in all marine environments and in the bodies of many species, including humans. Fish stocks have collapsed and water quality is a significant issue in many of our coastal waters. We see increased storms and rises in the sea level. This has the effect of accelerating the erosion of our coastline and increasing the risk of flooding along our coast and estuaries.

The UK government's recent Marine Strategy assessment confirms that our marine environment is not healthy. An ocean in crisis is not only bad news for our climate, but also for our local fishing and tourism industries and for the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our coastal communities.

2021 was the first year of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. It was the year the UK hosted COP26 in Glasgow and the year the G7 came to Cornwall. The UK Government has publicly declared its ambition to be a global leader in marine conservation. All eyes are on the ocean.

Urgent action is needed to recover the health of our ocean and coasts to enable them to deliver the full range of benefits, including capturing and storing carbon through coastal salt marshes and seagrass beds, regulating our climate, supporting a sustainable and equitable blue economy, with equitable access to clean, safe recreation and nature experience for happy, healthy communities. Action is needed at all levels, from individuals developing their ocean literacy (understanding of the relationship between people and the ocean), individual and collective marine citizenship (promoting and demanding an ocean recovery through local, national and international policy changes).

Water quality is an issue of great concern, and is often influenced by a wide range of factors, including land management, farming practices, road run-off, leachates from historical sources (e.g. mine tailings, gas works and closed landfill), pollution from shipping and individual actions.

However, recent focus has been on combined sewage overflows and we note that government has failed to hold the water companies accountable for dumping sewage into waterways. Water companies

discharged raw sewage into waterways 400,000 times in 2020, (including 42,000 times by South West Water), amounting to more than 3 million hours of discharges. We note that:

1. The longest discharges lasted more than 8,000 hours.
2. Just 14% of the UK's waterways are in a good ecological condition.
3. More than half of England's rivers fail to pass cleanliness tests.
4. Water companies made £2.2 billion in profits in 2020.

The Government was forced into a “u-turn” on its Environment Bill early in November after at first rejecting a proposal from the House of Lords to force firms to end the discharge of raw sewage during heavy downpours.

After a public outcry, it put a legal duty on firms to make “progressive reduction in the adverse impact of discharges from their storm overflows”.

## **Local context**

In Teignbridge the ocean and coastline are a fundamental component of our economy and environment, and the health, wellbeing and prosperity of our community. The District Council has a role to play in leading the way in connecting people to the ocean through integrated management of our iconic coast, shoreline and estuaries. We can also support moves towards achieving a sustainable fishing industry. We are advocates for good marine and integrated coastal management and put these principles into practice through hosting and leading the Teign Estuary and Coastal Partnership, the South West Regional Coastal Monitoring Programme and supporting the Devon & Severn Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority. We have recently lobbied the Marine Management Organisation for controls on dumping of Exmouth Marina deposits in Lyme Bay and worked with IFCA to better monitor and control shellfish stocks and removal in Teign Estuary. Marine research and maritime culture are recognised as being at the heart of our economic recovery programme.

In 2019 we declared a climate emergency and have made significant moves to reduce both the Council's own carbon footprint and that of the District through close working with our community partners Action on Climate in Teignbridge, driving our journey towards carbon neutrality in 2025. In 2020 we also declared an Ecological Emergency and have built on our existing work to encourage ecological recovery in our District. It is important that we also recognise the roles the ocean and coast have in contributing to our climate and ecological emergency declarations, as well as the wider objectives of a resilient and sustainable economy, and the health and wellbeing of our residents.

## **Therefore, this Council declares an urgent need for Ocean Recovery.**

This Council pledges to:

- 1 Report to Full Council within 6 months on the actions and projects that will begin an ocean recovery in Teignbridge
- 2 Embed ocean recovery in all strategic decisions, budgets and approaches to decisions by the Council (particularly in planning, regeneration, skills and economic policy), aligning with climate and ecological emergency plans.

- 3 Ensure that the Local Plan supports ocean recovery, and the health of our coastal environments both naturally and socio-economically.
- 4 Work with partners locally and nationally to deliver increased sustainability in local marine industries and support investment in the development of a sustainable and equitable blue economy, including the local fishing industry and the vital work of relevant partners, including Devon & Severn IFCA, the Environment Agency and Marine Management Organisation.
- 5 Create an online portal of the Council website to update on ocean recovery progress, signpost to ocean literacy development opportunities, and marine citizenship pledges.
- 6 Write to South West Water to request details of their urgent and revised plans to eradicate the practice of sewage discharges to rivers and coastal waters around Teignbridge.
- 7 Work where possible with South West Water, the Environment Agency, Catchment and Coastal Partnerships, developers and other agencies to combat threats to the quality of water being discharged into the rivers and coastal waters around Teignbridge.
- 8 Call on government to:
  - a. Set meaningful targets and deadlines for water companies to end sewage discharges and introduce a Sewage Tax on water companies' profits to fund the cleanup of waterways.
  - b. Reduce the number of licences given to water companies permitting them to discharge sewage into rivers.
  - c. Strengthen Ofwat's powers to monitor the annual financial plans and reports of the water companies in order to compel them to achieve a fair and transparent balance between consumer prices, shareholder dividend, staff remuneration and ongoing long-term investment in storm water infrastructure.
  - d. Add local environmental groups onto water companies' boards.
  - e. Promote a public benefit company model for water companies, so that particular economic and environmental policy objectives must be considered explicitly in the running of the companies.
  - f. Work with local authorities to ensure water companies protect our rivers and seas by:
    - i. Water companies being required to invest upfront in sewerage infrastructure to reflect environmental objectives in Local Plans and planning applications.
    - ii. Identify powers of local authorities under the statutory duty to promote wellbeing of the area and provide councils with the funding to meet this duty.
    - iii. Cease making cuts to Environment Agency funding and ensure that it has enough staff to significantly improve its monitoring of the threats of inadequate storm-water infrastructure and pollution from sewage and agricultural nitrates.
- 9 Further call on the Government to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 by:
  - a. Ensuring Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities have the resources they need to effectively research and monitor our growing number of marine protected areas, and to set and enforce appropriate fishing levels that support local economies and deliver environmental sustainability.
  - b. Incorporating social scientific evidence and lived experience to improve community co-production of policy and develop more effective and equitable solutions.
  - c. Listening to marine scientific advice to update the Marine Policy Statement and produce a national Ocean Recovery Strategy which will:

- i. Enable the recovery of marine ecosystems rather than managing degraded or altered habitats in their reduced state.
  - ii. Consider levelling up, marine conservation, energy, industrial growth, flood and coastal erosion risk management, climate adaptation and fisheries policy holistically rather than as competing interests.
  - iii. Develop a smarter approach to managing the health of the entire ocean that moves beyond Marine Protected Areas and enables links to be made across sectors towards sustainability.
  - iv. Establish improved processes for understanding the benefits from ocean management, leaving no doubt the links between this and human lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing.
- d. Recognising the value of, and contribute resourcing towards, multi-agency Integrated Coastal Management Partnerships which operate at the local geographic level and are able to respond to issues and opportunities which effect the local maritime environment and adjacent communities.