

# MPA NEWS



Published on *MPA News* (<https://mpanews.openchannels.org>)

## UK intends to designate large no-take MPA around part of Ascension Island; UK's Pitcairn Islands MPA on track for 2016 designation

The UK Government has announced its intent to designate a large no-take MPA around part of Ascension Island, a remote and lightly populated UK territory in the mid-Atlantic Ocean, just south of the Equator.

Although formal declaration of the MPA's boundaries may not happen until 2017 or later, the UK Government and Ascension Island Government are taking a first step this year, closing an area covering 234,291 km<sup>2</sup> (or 52.6%) of the island's waters. This closure is intended to allow research to scope the eventual boundaries of the MPA.

The UK Government promised last year to create a "blue belt" around each of the country's 14 overseas territories. The Ascension announcement is the latest move in that direction. The UK designated an MPA around the Chagos Archipelago in the Indian Ocean in 2010 ([MPA News 11:6](#)) and around the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands in 2012 ([MPA News 13:5](#)). In 2015 the Government announced its intent to designate one around the Pitcairn Islands in the South Pacific ([MPA News 16:4](#)).

Ascension's newly closed area comprises everything within 50 nautical miles of the island and all waters south of 8 degrees south. The area was selected to create a buffer around ecologically important inshore areas, while also including seamounts.

### Commercial fishing will still be allowed north of Ascension

Commercial fishing, primarily by foreign longline fleets, will continue to be allowed to the north of the island but will be monitored to ensure best practices are used, including a ban on shark finning and catch restrictions on certain vulnerable shark species. Vessels will be required to carry de-hookers and dip nets to support the live release of incidentally caught seabirds, turtles, and sharks.

In parallel, Ascension Island has enacted a strengthened Fisheries (Conservation and Management) Ordinance 2015. This new legislation provides the legal framework to prosecute any illegal vessel, or any licensed vessel fishing in contradiction to its licensing terms, with a maximum fine of £2 million (US \$2.8 million). The improved licensing regime also ensures adequate safety provisions (e.g., mandatory life jackets for all on board, in-date flares, life rafts, etc.), thereby improving vessel standards.

James Duddridge, UK Minister for Overseas Territories, said the eventual fully protected reserve will comprise at least 50% of Ascension's maritime zone.

The Ascension news was announced in a press release by the UK-based Blue Marine Foundation, which negotiated the plan with the UK and Ascension Island Governments (<https://ocf.to/ZkK>). The Blue Marine Foundation also helped secure a £300,000 (US \$420,000) grant from The Bacon Foundation to cover costs related to enforcing the closure (via satellite and patrol vessel) and conducting research.

Ascension Island is located roughly midway between Brazil and West Africa, and has fewer than 1000 human residents. It is home to several endemic fish species and one of the world's largest populations of green turtles.

### Status of Pitcairn MPA plans

The UK Government's plan to designate an 834,334-km<sup>2</sup> MPA around the Pitcairn Islands, with nearly all of it no-take, is on track for designation later this year (2016), according to a source in the UK Government. However, the source told MPA News that Pitcairn's remote location means designating an MPA poses significant challenges around surveillance and enforcement.

"The UK and the Government of the Pitcairn Islands are currently undertaking a test to evaluate the effectiveness of various [surveillance/enforcement] options," said the source. "The trial has been timed to coincide with the peak fishing season - October 2015 to March 2016. We will analyze the results to identify the level of threat and determine how to implement an effective monitoring and enforcement plan."

The UK Government indicated in early 2015 that designation of the Pitcairn MPA would rely in part on identifying adequate enforcement methods at a cost that can be accommodated within existing naval expenditure limits.

## Box: UK designates second tranche of Marine Conservation Zones

In January 2016, the UK's Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) designated 23 new Marine Conservation Zones around England's coast, adding to the 27 MCZs designated in November 2013 ([MPA News 15:4](#)).

With the new designations, 20% of English waters are now considered protected. However, the new MCZs do not yet have management plans, which are still under development. A third tranche of MCZs will be submitted to consultation in 2017 and designated in 2018.

More information on the MCZs is at <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-4525>

Source URL: <https://mpanews.openchannels.org/news/mpa-news/uk-intends-designate-large-no-take-mpa-around-part-ascension-island-uks-pitcairn#comment-0>