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Blue jobs: investing in the future of coastal communities

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Key messages:

- ✓ Nature-based recovery presents a largely untapped source of employment and support for rural and coastal communities.
- ✓ Protecting marine health protects the jobs that depend on it, particularly those in the coastal recreation, tourism and leisure sector.
- ✓ Around 15–30 jobs are created for every \$1 million USD spent, six times more than the equivalent investment in oil and gas. Each restoration job has a multiplier effect and creates additional jobs.
- ✓ Ocean restoration can provide a tenfold increase on investment whilst delivering public good.

Introduction

The recently published State of Nature report describes the UK as one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth.¹ Recovery and restoration of our environment is paramount to meet our own domestic environmental targets and those outlined in international agreements such as the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF). It is essential to strengthen our resilience and adaptation to climate change, ensure food security, and protect the health and well-being of British people.

Nature-based recovery presents a largely untapped source of employment and support for rural and coastal economies.² Jobs are created through both the restoration and protection of coastal and marine ecosystems, many of which can fall within the local community.³ Further demand for jobs would originate from services such as technology used for surveillance and management.

The impacts from environmental degradation will be a constant across future political and economic cycles. To combat this, implementing a proactive, long-term approach will allow us to better prepare for these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that it presents.

Saving jobs

Protecting marine health protects the jobs that depend on it.

In a business-as-usual scenario of further ecosystem pressure and worsening water pollution, many jobs will be at risk as marine resources become depleted and the marine environment becomes less attractive to visitors and recreational users.

This could have huge impacts on the marine tourism, leisure and recreation industry. This is the sector of the UK's marine economy that supports the most jobs, estimated at 462,500 in 2014 or over 56% of all jobs linked to the coastal and marine environment.⁴

Amid high costs and falling fish stocks, the fishing industry is facing big challenges. UK fisheries statistics show that employment in the UK fishing sector has fallen from 21,000 in 1970 to 10,724 in 2021 – a drop of almost 50%.⁵

The number of fish landed in the UK by the domestic fishing fleet has also followed a similar trajectory over this time. Fishers are also expected to face increasing challenges to operations and safety due to the increasing frequency and magnitude of storms around the UK.⁶ However, restoring fish species to their maximum sustainable yields would create a more resilient fishing sector that supports small-scale fisheries and aquaculture businesses.⁷

Creating jobs

The unprecedented speed and scale of change we are experiencing within the natural environment cannot maintain a business-as-usual scenario indefinitely. Given our fundamental economic dependence on nature, this means that simply maintaining the status quo will likely bind us to a sinking baseline. Instead, it pays to look at what opportunities will arise in an economy that is able to adapt and react to a changing environment.

Coastal restoration creates new 'blue' jobs. Blue jobs should be seen as those that actively protect and enhance the value of the marine environment to society. Many of the jobs involved in coastal restoration require an active workforce that could not currently be replaced by AI, ensuring longevity and security for local communities.

The creation of jobs, predominantly in coastal rural areas, starts with short term jobs for the physical restoration work. This would then lead to further jobs in conservation, management, monitoring and research of protected sites. The long-time scale of marine restoration can see these jobs maintained over decades.

Protecting vital seagrass habitats in Portland Harbour, Dorset 📍 Salcombe Distilling Co.





Salcombe, Devon 📷 Natasha Ewins

The skills and local ecological knowledge developed in these areas are passed down through generations, creating coastal stewards and forming part of the local identity.

Analysis of restoration programmes in the US revealed that 15–30 jobs are created for every \$1 million USD spent.⁸ This creates six times more jobs than the equivalent investment into oil and gas. There is also an employment multiplier whereby each restoration job creates additional jobs – this multiplier is within the range of the oil and gas or livestock industries. Many of these jobs could be created in the service sector as a healthier marine environment creates new opportunities and attraction for coastal recreation, leisure and tourism.

Knock-on benefits from job creation in local economies extend to increased property values, higher tax revenues and greater recreational spending. Considering all socioeconomic benefits, restoration provides a tenfold increase on investment.⁹

Looking beyond statistics, these are jobs that would serve the benefits of society. Work to restore coastal habitats, for example, will protect many billions of pounds worth of infrastructure, property and business value from the threats of coastal flooding and erosion linked to climate change.¹⁰ Restored ecosystems would boost biodiversity, increase the resilience of marine food webs and sequester substantial volumes of carbon, keeping them locked in our marine sediments well beyond our own lifespans. All of this brings the UK closer to achieving commitments made at home and internationally, such as the KMGBF, and could restore the intrinsic link between coastal communities and our ocean.

Long-term benefits at a local scale

Adopting a community-based approach will give coastal communities ownership of coastal assets, ensuring that they are invested in their protection and beneficiaries of their success through jobs and related revenues. Long-term stewardship of coastal ecosystems depends on enduring community support, meaning that these jobs are supported beyond the short term. Investment in the protection and restoration of these habitats will therefore create multigenerational livelihoods that can shape local identities.



European seabass at Cawsand Bay, Cornwall 📷 Jon Bunker

We call on the UK Government to:

- **Lead** in the establishment of a sustainable blue economy through investment into coastal restoration.
- **Empower** coastal communities to be stewards of the marine environment, benefiting directly from job creation and economic opportunities.
- **Deliver** restoration projects, supported by public funding, that benefit communities and nature, in turn attracting further private investment.

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