



South Tyneside Council

Motion 2 – “Motion for the Ocean”

Local Context

South Tyneside Council is leading the way in tackling the climate emergency and has recognised the value of the ocean in both helping us meet our commitment to being carbon neutral by 2030 and in protecting our beautiful coastline. We are lead partners on the Stronger Shores project, which is pioneering the use of nature-based solutions for coastal protection and carbon storage, restoring marine habitats in order to protect the coast and communities of the North East.

We are founding partners of the SeaScapes scheme, the first of its kind in the UK, which is better connecting local communities with our maritime heritage, improving ocean literacy (understanding of the relationship between people and the ocean) and inspiring people and businesses to play their part in protecting it. We work towards more sustainable fisheries management as members of the North Eastern IFCA.

Our Economic Recovery Plan places the environment and green growth front and centre of our plans to create an inclusive, sustainable economy. We are active in the Tyne Estuary Partnership which has already delivered one project to extend carbon-storing saltmarsh habitats within the Borough, with other nature-based solutions in the pipeline.

South Tyneside Council is leading the way nationally too. We are lead authority for the Local Government Association’s Coastal Special Interest Group and are championing better coastal policy and funding for the benefit of all England’s coast and its communities.

It is natural that we would be one of the first local authorities in the country to declare an urgent need for ocean recovery.

Why is this declaration needed now?

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 (CO₂) emissions generated by human activity.

However, 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 ocean is 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.

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 our health, wellbeing and prosperity in our local communities.

In South Tyneside, like the rest of planet, we are witnessing the ocean crisis first-hand. Fish stocks continue to collapse from permitted and illegal overfishing and poor water quality is impacting seafood and safe bathing. Our beaches are covered in litter with each tide, much of it plastic, though this is just the tip of the iceberg of the amount of litter in our oceans. Marine microplastics have been found in all marine environments and in the bodies of many species, including humans and the species of fish we regularly eat.

Our residents are on the frontline of climate change and are being disproportionately impacted relative to inland communities. The impact of the climate crisis on the ocean is profound, from rising water temperatures and changes in ocean chemistry, to sea level rise and increased storminess, including in our local waters. This is changing what seafood is caught locally, accelerating the erosion of our coastline - increasing the risk to infrastructure and properties, and increasing the risk of flooding and storm damage.

Urgent action is needed to halt these devastating changes and recover the health of our ocean to enable it to deliver the full range of benefits, including climate regulation, carbon storage in coastal and marine habitats, coastal protection, a thriving local economy, clean safe recreation and happy, healthy coastal communities. We must play our part in recovering the health of the ocean.

In South Tyneside, the ocean is at the heart of our heritage and economy. From the expertise of South Shields Marine school and clusters of maritime and marine expertise around the Port of Tyne, to the millions of visitors who come to the borough to experience the sight, sound and feel of the ocean. The ocean can play a vital role in our economic recovery and we must strive to develop a sustainable and equitable blue economy that delivers both ocean recovery and local prosperity. We must ensure that ocean recovery is embedded in our relevant strategic decision-making, policymaking and budget-setting; as well as being considered in future strategies and plans, including those seeking to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents.

At present, not everyone has the opportunity or means to access and enjoy the ocean. Even within the borough, there are people of all ages who have never experienced the joy of our ocean. First-hand experience of the ocean is essential if people are to be motivated to play their part in protecting it, whether that is through disposing of their litter responsibly, recycling what they can or volunteering in ocean conservation with local organisations. Helping individuals develop their ocean literacy (understanding of the relationship between people and the ocean) is an essential part of this motion, as is individual and collective marine citizenship (promoting and demanding an ocean recovery through local, national and international policy changes).

Local authorities cannot solve the ocean crisis alone, but we can – and must – play our part.

This Council declares an urgent need for Ocean Recovery.

We recognise that we need ocean recovery to meet our net zero carbon targets, and we need net zero carbon to recover our ocean.

This Council pledges to:

1. Report to Full Council within 12 months on the actions and projects that will begin an ocean recovery in South Tyneside.
2. Consider ocean recovery in all strategic decisions, plans, budgets and approaches to decisions by the Council (particularly in planning, regeneration, skills and economic policy), aligning with climate change mitigation and adaptation requirements, and considering ocean-based solutions in our journey towards a carbon neutral and climate resilient future.
3. Promote closer working between the South Tyneside Council and the Marine Management Organisation and embed strong links between the Local Plan and the North East Marine Plan to support ocean recovery.
4. Ensure that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy strives to support ocean recovery.
5. Work with partners locally and nationally to deliver increased sustainability in marine industries and develop a sustainable and equitable blue economy that delivers ocean recovery and local prosperity.
6. Grow ocean literacy and marine citizenship in the borough, including ensuring all pupils are given the opportunity to experience the ocean first-hand before leaving primary school - striving to include home-schooled children - and promote equitable access to the ocean through physical and digital experiences for all residents.
7. Work with South Shields Marine School and South Tyneside College to continue to embed marine, maritime and blue carbon training at the heart of training provision.
8. Subject to available resources and other priorities, create an online portal of the Council website to update on ocean recovery progress, signpost to ocean literacy development opportunities, and marine citizenship pledges.
9. Write to the Government asking them to put the ocean into net recovery by 2030 by
 - a) Ensuring Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities and Natural England 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) Ensuring coastal communities have a meaningful say in the development of marine policy to ensure it delivers equitable and sustainable outcomes.
- c) Appoint a dedicated Minister for Coastal Communities.
- d) And by listening to marine scientific advice, including marine social science, 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 of ocean recovery, leaving no doubt the links between this and human lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing.
 - v) Stop plastic pollution at source by strengthening the regulations around single-use plastics and set standards for microfibre-catching filters to ensure that all new domestic and commercial washing machines are fitted with a filter that captures a high percentage of microfibres produced in the wash cycle.

Glossary

A “Blue Economy” is one which uses ocean resources sustainably or even regeneratively whilst improving community wellbeing and social equity. It is not simply marine or maritime economic activity.

“Ocean literacy” is where a person understands the ocean's influence on them and their influence on the ocean. For example, an understanding that the ocean stores carbon and an understanding that what they put down the drain can impact on ocean health.

“Marine citizenship” is where an individual practices their rights and duties relating to the health of the marine environment, e.g. a resident writing to their local Councillor to ask them to take action for ocean recovery; or collective marine citizenship, e.g. promoting or making local, national or international policy changes.

South Tyneside Council
13 January 2022

Signed

Councillors: Gibson
Foreman
Atkinson
McHugh
Ellison
Berkley