

How research and real-world action sparked the Motion for the Ocean

The Motion for the Ocean - also known as the Local Government Ocean Recovery Declaration - was born out of a simple but urgent idea. Local councils everywhere should have the evidence and practical tools to protect our seas.

Dr Pamela M. Buchan, a researcher specialising in marine citizenship, noticed that governments often overlook coastal waters in their climate plans. As a Councillor, she saw first-hand how local policies could be strengthened to embrace Ocean conservation, but only if public representatives had the right insights, resources, and community support.

Determined to bridge this gap between research and real-world action, Dr Buchan connected with colleagues who shared her passion for coastal and marine issues. Emily Cunningham from the Local Government Association Coastal Special Interest Group helped shape the draft, ensuring it spoke the language of local authorities and could be adapted to different regional needs. At the same time, Nicola Bridge, Head of Ocean Advocacy and Engagement at the Ocean Conservation Trust, joined forces to champion the Motion, bringing the charity's expertise in public engagement and marine education.

Their goal was to create a model motion any council could adapt, coastal or inland, to declare an urgent need for Ocean recovery and tackle issues like water quality, sustainable fisheries, and Ocean literacy. The model motion could then easily be used by marine citizens across the country to empower them to ask their council for Ocean action.

Launched in November 2021, the Motion for the Ocean quickly gained momentum. The model motion provides councils with a ready-made framework for declaring an urgent need for Ocean recovery, linking scientific insights to practical pledges. Early adopters, like Plymouth City Council, demonstrated how evidence-led pledges could be integrated into local planning, budgeting, and community outreach. Since then, more councils across the UK have followed suit, including some inland, recognising that everyone has a stake in a healthy Ocean.

Today, this collaborative effort stands as a powerful example of how marine science and engaged citizenship can drive concrete policy changes. By uniting researchers, environmental advocates, and council leaders, the Motion for the Ocean continues to spark new declarations nationwide—building support for the belief that a thriving Ocean is vital for climate resilience, local economies, and our collective wellbeing.