

# TURNING THE TIDE TOGETHER

How to unlock the benefits of wilder seas  
for and with coastal communities



# THE VALUE OF OUR SEAS

The Ocean Conservation Trust and Rewilding Britain have long been collaborating with communities to restore and rewild Britain's marine environments, helping to foster a stronger connection between people and nature. We've seen firsthand the benefits a healthy environment can provide to surrounding communities, from improved mental and physical health to supporting a thriving and sustainable economy.

As an island nation, our seas are one of our greatest assets. And we believe that coastal towns should play a key role in shaping them, positioned as they are to benefit from being at the heart of a dynamic and sustainable British economy underpinned by nature.

But the story today is that once rich and abundant marine ecosystems are collapsing, threatening our ability to tackle the nature and climate emergencies, as well as the sustainability of marine industries and the resilience of coastal communities. Recent reports highlight that Britain's coastal towns are 50% more likely to experience higher levels of deprivation than non-coastal towns, along with significantly slower population and employment growth. Young people in these areas are also much more likely to suffer from undiagnosed mental health issues than their inland counterparts.

How can we turn the tide for coastal communities, and kickstart a community-led approach to a wilder, healthier and wealthier future?

## **"WILDER, RICHER UK SEAS AND THRIVING COASTAL COMMUNITIES ARE WITHIN REACH."**



### **WHAT IS MARINE REWILDING?**

Marine rewilding encourages a balance between people and the rest of nature, so that we can thrive together. It can support and create new opportunities in coastal economies, allow living systems to provide the ecological functions on which we all depend, and help people connect with the ocean environment, fostering marine citizenship and stewardship. Crucially, marine rewilding can deliver multiple benefits for coastal communities – but it's vital that these communities are central in shaping the process.

# A SEA CHANGE FOR COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Rewilding Britain and the Ocean Conservation Trust are calling on the UK Government to implement three simple changes:

## 1 BOOST OCEAN LITERACY

An 'ocean-literate' community has a strong connection to the ocean, understanding the various values and services a healthy ocean provides, such as community wellbeing, a sense of place, and sustainable development. In the UK, Wales is leading with its *Y Môr a Ni*, the UK's first national Ocean Literacy Strategy. Such a strategy needs to inspire and motivate people across society to adopt behaviours that ensure a healthy ocean, sustaining all life now and in the future. We urge Westminster to accelerate the implementation of its own Strategy, which includes mechanisms to help people access the ocean, understand its ecosystem services, and integrate actions for ocean health into everyday actions and decision-making.

## 2 REMOVE LEGISLATIVE BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY ACTION

Coastal communities across the UK are eager to restore their marine environment, but are often blocked by a complex, costly, and outdated marine licensing system. This process is poorly suited to such initiatives, focusing only on potential damage to the marine environment without a scoring system to recognise the positive impacts of rewilding. We urge the UK Government to simplify marine licensing for non-commercial restoration, cutting costs and approval times to support more community-led projects. With large-scale restoration approaches able to bring many more benefits, we also call for the development of a seascape licence to support projects working across multiple habitats.

## 3 PROTECT OUR REMAINING COASTAL HABITATS

Inshore habitats like seagrass meadows, oyster reefs, and kelp forests are crucial for the health of our seas and communities, providing spawning and nursing grounds for fish, sequestering carbon, and protecting against storms and erosion. The ongoing loss of these ecosystems over the past century contributes significantly to the problems coastal communities face today. The government must take decisive action to protect inshore habitats. It should encourage the Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities to create community-led mechanisms that reduce destructive fishing practices and support low-impact inshore local fisheries alongside long-term funding which enables community engagement with their local habitats.

## HELPING OUR COASTS TO BOUNCE BACK

Our seas are struggling, and with them the UK's coastal communities. However, hope remains high – our ocean is hugely resilient, and when given the chance, it has bounced back at a pace once thought impossible. Wilder, richer UK seas and thriving coastal communities are within reach, but we must take bold and ambitious steps to make this a reality. We must connect with our ocean and empower coastal communities to take action for its recovery. The prosperity of our island nation depends on it.



# IN FOCUS: BLUE MEADOWS

Run by the Ocean Conservation Trust, Blue Meadows is the UK's largest subtidal seagrass restoration initiative, combining innovative habitat restoration techniques with a people-centred approach.

The scheme aims to protect existing seagrass meadows along the south coast from Dorset to Cornwall by minimising local threats to these habitats and encouraging lasting behaviour change within coastal communities.

Through ongoing community education and awareness campaigns, behaviour change workshops and the installation of sensitive habitat markers and voluntary no-anchor zones, Blue Meadows has engaged with over 10,000 people so far. Key to its success has been helping communities connect with seagrass not just as a species providing vital ecosystem services, but one which has a place in our local culture and is key to our health and wellbeing. It's this positive feedback loop between healthy coastal habitats and thriving local neighbourhoods that makes community-led restoration such an invaluable approach for addressing the challenges faced by our ocean and coastal communities today.



**"AMAZING, I LEARNED THINGS I NEVER KNEW"**

Engagement workshop attendee

## ABOUT US



The Ocean Conservation Trust's vision is a healthy ocean that sustains all life. We know that people are key to sustainable ocean recovery. We're calling for an Ocean Literacy Strategy for England as a vital roadmap to help society value the ocean and take meaningful action to restore it.

Visit [oceanconservationtrust.org/raising-our-voice](https://oceanconservationtrust.org/raising-our-voice)



Rewilding Britain is inspiring a movement of rewilders across Britain's land and seas – a groundswell of hope, so that together we can ensure a wilder, nature-rich future that benefits us all. We want to see 30% of our seas restored for nature by 2030, through seascape-scale action.

Help us turn the tide, visit [rewildingbritain.org.uk/marine](https://rewildingbritain.org.uk/marine)