

REWILDING OUR WATERS IN AN ERA OF OFFSHORE WIND

POLICY BRIEF, VERSION 1, JUNE 2026

BASED ON THE FINDINGS OF A COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH PAPER COMMISSIONED IN 2025

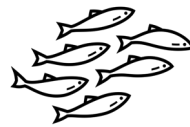
As a nation that has lost much of its marine life, Britain must not miss today's narrow window to reverse this decline and support a transition to wilder seas. The unprecedented scale of offshore wind's planned rollout represents a decisive turning point: while the expansion of this infrastructure may be inevitable, our influence over its ecological and social legacy is not.

The negative impacts of poorly planned developments are too great to ignore. By acting now to integrate rewilding into offshore wind policy, we can ensure clean energy provision serves as a vital catalyst for the regeneration of our seas and coastal communities, securing a resilient future for our marine ecosystems and the people who depend on them.

OFFSHORE WIND SUPPORTING NATURE AND PEOPLE

For offshore wind to deliver real benefits for people and planet, we propose that the policies supporting its deployment are developed in line with rewilding principles:

- **SUPPORT PEOPLE AND NATURE TOGETHER**
- **LET NATURE LEAD**
- **CREATE RESILIENT LOCAL ECONOMIES**
- **WORK AT NATURE'S SCALE**
- **SECURE BENEFITS FOR THE LONG TERM**



At its best, offshore wind must help Britain forge a new model of coexistence where clean energy delivery actively drives marine recovery. Because compensating for environmental damage is complex and must remain a last resort, it is key to minimise and avoid impacts in the first place. Wind farms are only truly sound if they contribute to the rewilding of our seas. We must harness these investments to enable large-scale restoration, support local livelihoods, and empower coastal communities to shape the seascapes of tomorrow.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1 SITE OFFSHORE WIND STRATEGICALLY AND ADOPT NATURE-INCLUSIVE DESIGN

It's essential that offshore wind infrastructure is sited on degraded or homogenous seabeds, avoiding the most important, special or rare ecological features. To minimise their footprint, wind farms should be designed with nature-inclusive features from the outset. And they must be managed adaptively with robust, long-term monitoring – so helping guide the marine infrastructure of the future.

2 ENABLE LARGE-SCALE RESTORATION BY REFORMING LICENSING AND FUNDING FRAMEWORKS

For the scale of investment that's powering this industrial revolution to also support the marine habitats it depends upon, we must urgently develop a Marine Net Gain framework, to unlock private funds for nature recovery. Alongside these financial mechanisms, a review of the licensing system for marine restoration is critical to support these initiatives and encourage seascape-scale projects built in genuine partnership between developers and local communities.

3 CHAMPION AND PURPOSEFULLY MANAGE DE-FACTO 'MARINE PROTECTED AREAS'

To safeguard marine life and blue carbon, we need to capitalise on the accidental marine sanctuaries created by offshore wind farms, which naturally deter damaging bottom trawling. The government should formally recognise, protect, and manage these areas as OECMs (Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures) and integrate co-location plans (i.e. locating multiple compatible activities in the same place) to maximise spatial opportunities.

4 ELEVATE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LOCAL ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

Currently, local economies face significant financial leakage during construction and operation. By investing in regional training, infrastructure, and domestic supply chains, the Government can anchor labour demand locally – generating stable 'blue jobs' and securing a just transition toward long-term, sustainable employment. We must also develop models for community benefit funds rooted in local trust and collaboration, incentivising developers to include these in lease applications.



5 SUPPORT OCEAN LITERACY AND CULTURAL CONNECTION

The expansion of offshore wind places our seas firmly in the spotlight, offering a unique window to foster public understanding of marine ecosystems and climate solutions. This visibility provides an ideal opportunity to strengthen the UK Government's forthcoming Ocean Literacy Strategy with citizen science, educational initiatives and creative public projects around offshore wind.

7 ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE TO FIND SHARED SOLUTIONS

To bridge gaps in the scientific knowledge base surrounding offshore wind impacts, it's critical that we convene open, transparent cross-sector stakeholder groups. Bringing together government, developers, NGOs, scientists, fishers and communities will facilitate the meaningful dialogue needed to explore genuine coexistence, co-location, and collaborative solutions.

6 DEVELOP A SENSITIVE DECOMMISSIONING STRATEGY

We must deepen ecological monitoring around offshore wind infrastructure to gather evidence on whether these structures can behave as thriving artificial reefs over time. These insights will enable a decommissioning strategy sensitive to the new ecosystems inhabiting these structures, providing long-term certainty for developers and decision-makers.

NEXT STEPS



We hope you find this briefing helpful. If you have any questions, please contact:

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We look forward to hearing from you.

