

# Plans To Introduce Significant Enhancements to Marine Protection in The Southern Ocean

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**Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands announces plans to introduce significant enhancements to marine protection in the Southern Ocean.**

**The announcement of an additional 166,000km<sup>2</sup> of 'No Take Zones', covering an area 8 times the size of Wales, will result in 449,000km<sup>2</sup> of highly biodiverse marine habitat being closed to all fishing activity.**

The Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) has today announced plans to extend the spatial extent of No Take Zones in the SGSSI Marine Protected Area (MPA), increasing their area from 283,000km<sup>2</sup> to 449,000km<sup>2</sup>. These additional measures will result in 36% of the SGSSI Maritime Zone being closed to fishing activity. An additional 17,000km<sup>2</sup> will be closed to krill fishing through the introduction of additional pelagic closed areas.

These enhanced restrictions will supplement existing marine protection measures in SGSSI waters, where tourism and sustainable fisheries are strictly controlled. Current measures already include seasonal closures that limit fishing activity to the winter months in order to reduce potential interactions with breeding seals and seabirds, and the prohibition of bottom trawling across the entire maritime zone.

During the 5 months when highly regulated, licensed fishing is permitted, 40% of the MPA will now be closed to krill fishing, with 95% closed to longline fishing. The greatly enlarged network of No Take Zones prohibits fishing in the most biodiverse and potentially vulnerable habitats as well as covering regions identified by International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) experts as Important Marine Mammal Areas (IMMAs).

This announcement follows the conclusion of the second 5-yearly review of the 1.24 million km<sup>2</sup> MPA, which was established in 2012. A panel of independent experts determined that the MPA is meeting intended objectives as laid out in the Management Plan. There was widespread praise that the waters around South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands are already exceptionally well managed, with a very high level of compliance with protection measures.

The MPA review brought together a diverse range of stakeholder groups who highlighted the rigour of the review process and commended GSGSSI's commitment to adaptive management, noting that this method of review could be used as model for other MPA's in the future.

Since the previous review, the introduction of a Research & Monitoring Plan and the SGSSI MPA GIS and Data Portal have helped focus scientific efforts towards priority areas, with substantial investment in research activities to support the management of the MPA. From the smallest plankton to mighty whales, over 300 peer reviewed scientific papers relating to the MPA have been published since the last review, covering all aspects of the ecosystem.

The Government of SGSSI would like to thank all those who participated in the review for their thoughtful deliberations and valuable contributions to the ongoing sustainable management of the MPA. The review was supported by the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, which assists the UK Overseas Territories with the protection and sustainable management of their marine environments.



Map of the South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands Marine Protected Area, highlighting the new closed areas which have been announced by the Commissioner today.