Introducing the Blue Belt Programme

Funded by UK Government

Centre for Environment Fisheries & Aquaculture Science

Marine Management Organisation

Introduction

The Blue Belt Programme supports delivery of the U.K. Government's manifesto commitment to provide long term protection of over four million square kilometres of marine environment across the UK Overseas Territories. It provides

£20 million over four years (2016 to 2020) to:

- Improve scientific understanding of the marine environment;
- Develop and implement evidence-based, tailored marine management strategies including surveillance and enforcement; and
- Ensure management is sustainable and long term.

The UK and the UK Overseas Territories are custodians to the fifth-largest marine estate in the world. These territories and their waters are home to globally significant biodiversity, from vast penguin colonies in the South Atlantic to tropical rainforests in the Caribbean. Some of their species and habitats are found nowhere else on earth.

- 94% of British endemic species are found within the territories.
- 85% of the Critically Endangered species (for which the UK Government is responsible) are within the territories.

The Blue Belt Programme is initially focused on seven islands and archipelagos: British Indian Ocean Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Antarctic Territory, Pitcairn, St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha.

The programme is being delivered in partnership between the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). We are also working closely with the UK Overseas Territories on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The Blue Belt Programme is also committed to working with NGOs, academics and external stakeholders, to ensure we have access to world-leading research and experience as we move forward with the delivery of the programme.

UK Overseas Territories

1. Pitcairn Islands
2. British Antarctic Territory
3. South Georgia and Sandwich Islands
4. Tristan da Cunha
5. St Helena
6. Ascension Island
7. British Indian Ocean Territory

What will Blue Belt Look like in 2020?

The programme's overall focus is to ensure that, in each OT, there are marine protection strategies that are:

- **Designed** based on the best available scientific knowledge. We will ensure that strategies are designed taking into account current and potential local marine uses, so that the plans balance the environmental protection with local social and economic needs;

- **Legally Designated** in accordance with domestic legislation where appropriate;

- **Effectively managed** in accordance with comprehensive, locally-agreed Management Plans. These plans will bring together scientific baseline information with an analysis of current and future threats;

- **Environmentally monitored**, on the basis of cost-effective and sustainable plans to ensure the objectives and the designations are being delivered into the long-term; and

- **Enforced** through proven surveillance and enforcement tools. Enforcement will be targeted, risk based and intelligence led.

Ascension Island

Ascension Island is an isolated tropical island in the middle of the Atlantic. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) around the island is 440,000 km². Ascension Island is a globally significant nesting site for green turtles and home to breeding seabirds, including the endemic Ascension frigate bird. The island and seamounts provide an oasis in the Atlantic, supporting aggregations of pelagic fish, sharks and cetaceans. Tuna fisheries operate in the area and a licensed fishery has operated in the EEZ since 1988.

In January 2016 the administration made a commitment to establish a Marine Reserve which will prohibit all fishing in at least 50% of the EEZ, by 2019. The administration has also developed a "roadmap" to deliver that commitment. As an interim measure, the area within 50 miles of the island and the southern half of the EEZ is now closed to commercial fishing.

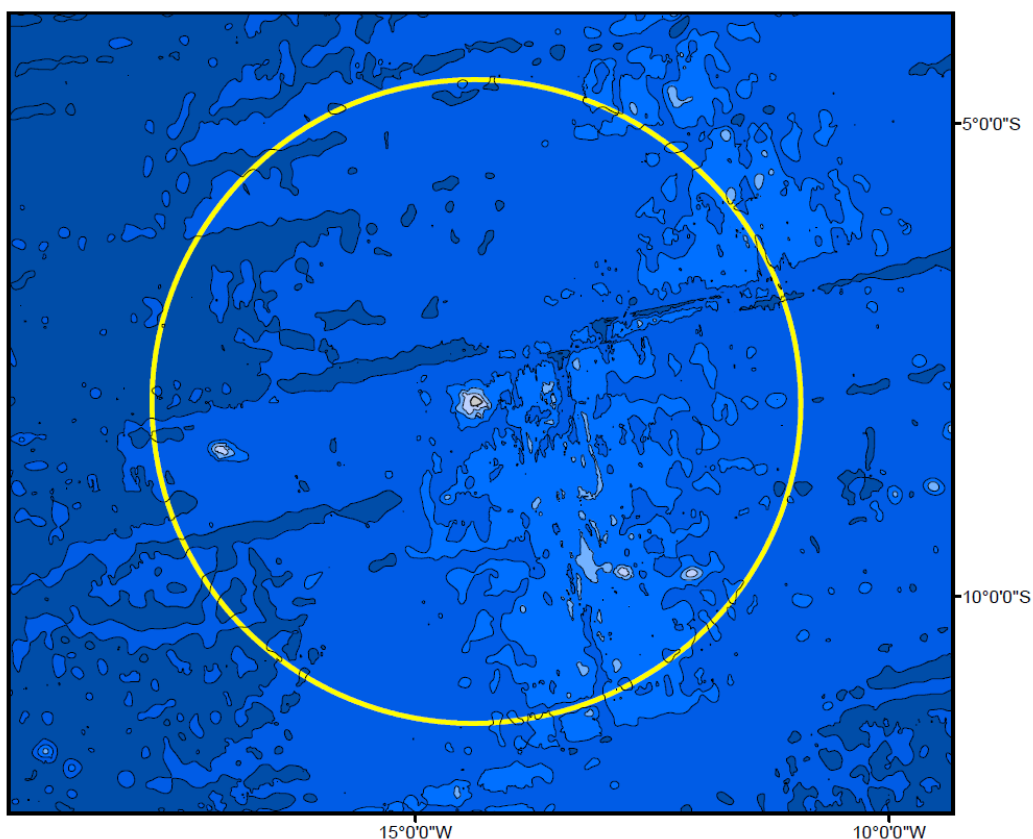# Delivering the Blue Belt Programme on Ascension Island

Working with the Ascension Island Government, the Blue Belt Programme will:

- Determine sustainable fishery harvest levels. We will work with the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) to develop appropriate regional management of tuna, billfish and pelagic shark.
- Develop a better understanding of marine biodiversity.
- Provide scientific support. This will help ensure that marine spatial planning and the development and implementation of the Marine Protected Area (MPA) will be based on scientifically robust evidence.
- Evaluate and mitigate threats to the marine environment posed by non-native species and human activities.
- Advise on the development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.
- Undertake capacity building, training and data management.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017, we have:

- Provided training for Ascension Island Government staff on the methodologies for undertaking fish age-determination.
- Undertaken near real-time analysis of satellite data to build intelligence on Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), as a precursor to targeted enforcement.
- Worked with Ascension Island Councillors to develop the appropriate legislation and policies to underpin marine management'

Ascension

British Antarctic Territory

British Antarctic Territory (BAT) comprises of the land south of 60°S latitude and between 20 and 80°W. It includes the Antarctic Peninsula, the South Shetland Islands and the South Orkney Islands. In accordance with the Antarctic Treaty, all territorial claims to the region are suspended, with the marine area of BAT managed by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The BAT area is an important home to large numbers of breeding penguins and seals. The surrounding waters are also seasonal foraging grounds for baleen whales, and fisheries operate for Antarctic krill and toothfish. In 2010, a UK initiative created the first "high seas" MPA, around the South Orkney Islands.

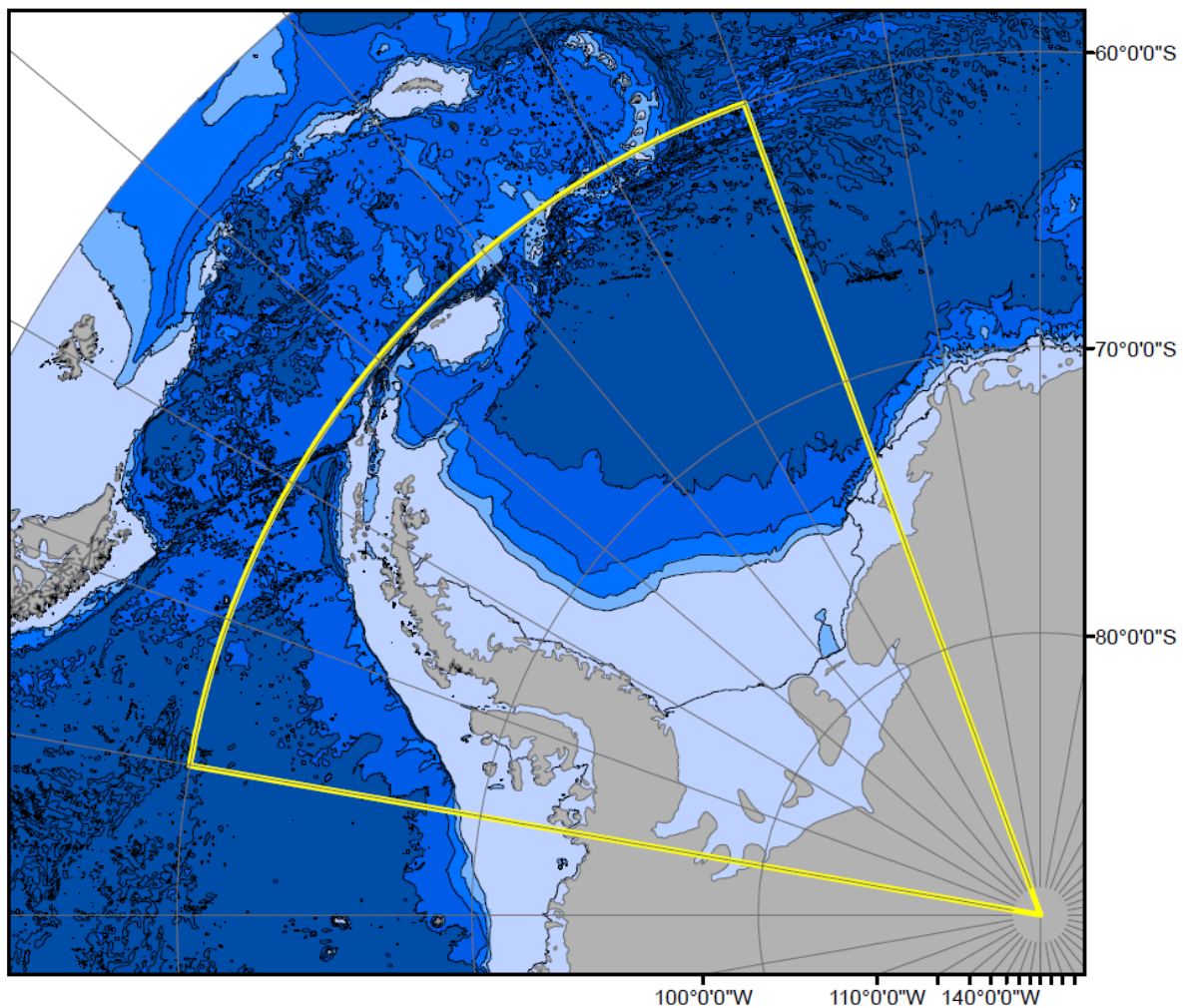# Delivering the Blue Belt Programme
on British Antarctic Territory

The Blue Belt Programme will help:

• Develop legislation and policies.
• Develop a better understanding of marine biodiversity.
• Advise and support the 2019 review of the South Orkneys MPA.
• Advise on the development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017, we have:

• Acquired a deep-water camera system to support research surveys around the South Orkneys. This allows us to assess the sea bed environment and any impacts of fishing.
• Undertaken near real-time analysis of satellite data to build intelligence on IUU fishing, as a precursor to targeted enforcement.

BAT

British Indian Ocean Territory

The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which lies 500 miles south of the Maldives in the tropical Indian Ocean, consists of five low lying coral atolls. There are 55 islands in total, surrounded by a 640,000 km^2 maritime zone. Licensed fisheries (which focused mainly on tuna fishing) operated in the zone until 2010.

In 2010, the maritime zone was declared an IUCN Category I Marine Protected Area. The majority of BIOT waters are tropical and oligotrophic, with around 6,000 km^2 of shallow reef zones. The remainder are bathyal and abyssal depth (>2,000 m). The reefs are relatively pristine, but have been subjected to major bleaching events.

The UK will implement the Dispositif of the Arbitration between the UK and Mauritius over the MPA, which concluded in 2015. The UK is committed to working with Mauritius to agree the best way to meet our obligation to ensure fishing rights in the territorial sea remain available to Mauritius, so far as practicable. The Arbitral Award did not require the termination of the MPA but the UK will continue to approach discussions with an open mind about the best way to ensure proper conservation management of this unique marine environment.

Delivering the Blue Belt Programme on British Indian Ocean Territory
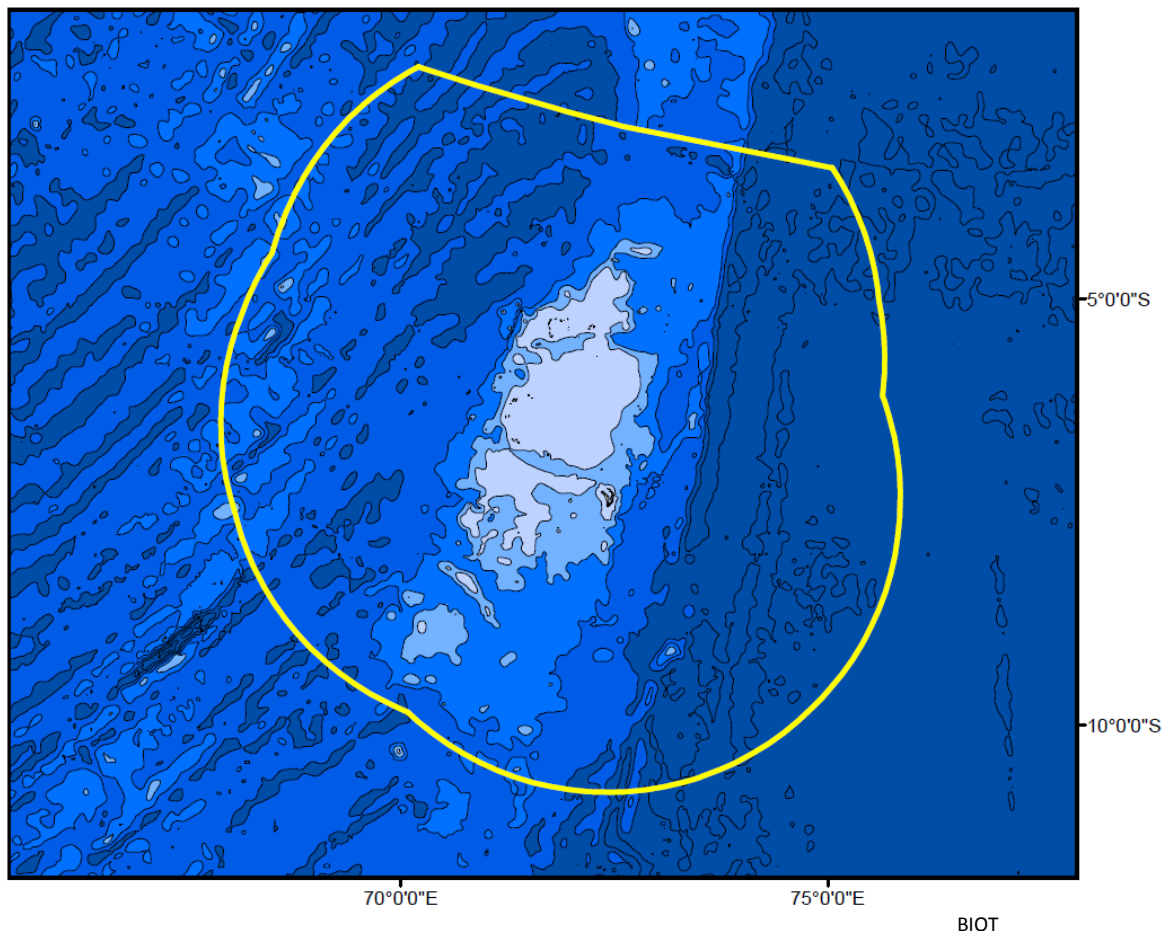
The Blue Belt Programme will assist the BIOT Government by:

- Developing legislation and policies to underpin the MPA.
- Developing a better understanding of marine biodiversity, including the movement and habitat use of pelagic predators.
- Advising on the development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.
- Evaluating and mitigating threats to the marine environment posed by non-native species and human activities.
- Determining the benefits of the MPA.
- Delivering capacity building, training and data management.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017:

- We have developed a training package to help support fishery patrol officers around BIOT, working in partnership with BIOT's legal advisors.
- Working in partnership with the Bertarelli Foundation, the Zoological Society of London and Stanford University, as part of the Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science, we are developing a tuna and shark tagging programme for the territory.
- We undertook near real-time analysis of satellite data to build intelligence on Illegal IUU fishing, as a precursor to targeted enforcement.

BIOT

Pitcairn Islands

The Pitcairn Islands are an archipelago of four small volcanic islands (Pitcairn, Oeno, Henderson, and Ducie) in the remote South Pacific. Only the second largest island, Pitcairn, is inhabited, with approximately 48 permanent residents. The four islands are an emergent section of the Foundation Seamount chain running through the central South Pacific.

The EEZ, which covers an area of 834,000 km^2 was (with the exception of the inshore area around Pitcairn) declared an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category I MPA in 2016. Tuna fisheries operate in the region and there is a significant plastic pollution problem in the area, manifested by a large amount of plastic debris on the beaches of Henderson Island.

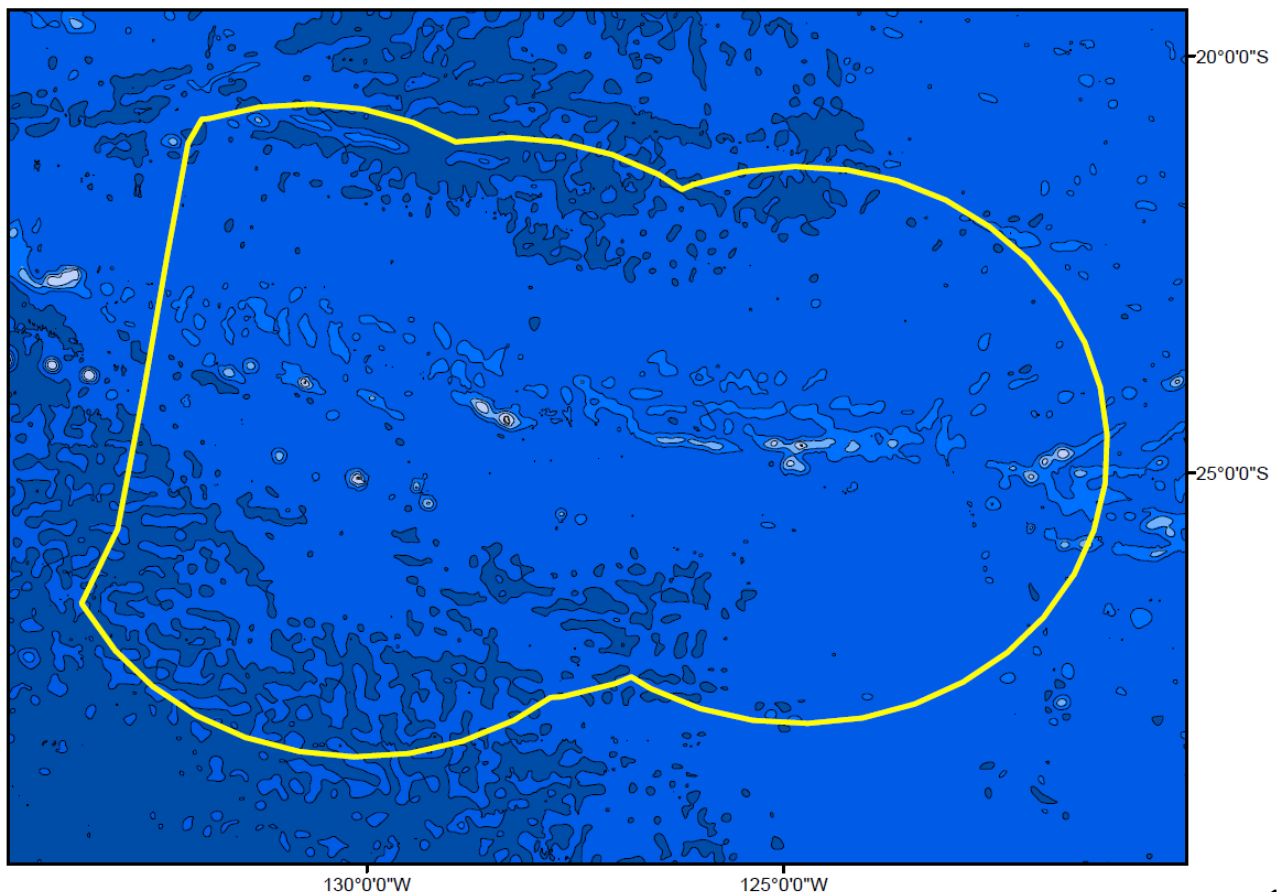# Delivering the Blue Belt Programme
on the Pitcairn Islands

The Blue Belt Programme will assist the Pitcairn Government with:

- The development of legislation and policies to underpin the MPA.
- The development of a better understanding of marine biodiversity.
- Determining sustainable harvests for fisheries (including lobsters and sharks) in the nearshore area. We will also advise on sustainable fisheries strategies, management plans and support the engagement of regional fisheries management.
- The development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.
- The Evaluation and mitigation of threats to the marine environment posed by non-native species and human activities.
- Capacity building, training and data management.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017:

- We worked in partnership with the New Zealand Royal Navy and the National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC) to deliver an aerial patrol over targeted areas in the Pitcairn Island EEZ. We have specifically targeted our work at identifying vessels who have disabled their Automatic Identification System (AIS) tracking devices.

Pitcairn Islands

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) is a sub-Antarctic archipelago that is home to globally important breeding populations of seabirds and marine mammals. There are no permanent residents on the islands but the British Antarctic Survey operates two science bases on South Georgia. The SGSSI Maritime Zone (north of 60^0 S) was designated as a Sustainable Use MPA in 2012, with additional measures added in 2013. The MPA includes a prohibition on bottom trawling, and a range of spatial and temporal closures. Sustainably managed fisheries for toothfish, icefish and krill operate in the MPA.
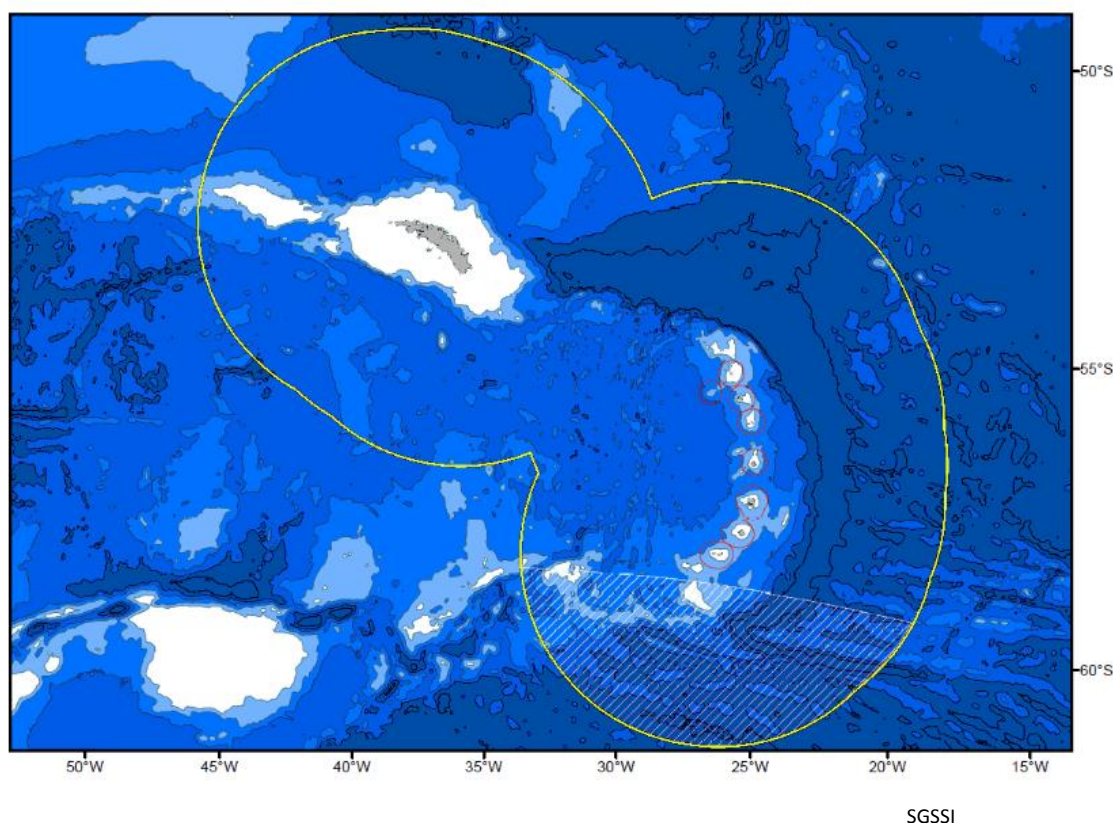
Delivering the Blue Belt Programme on SGSSI

The Blue Belt Programme will assist the SGSSI Government with:

- The development of legislation, management strategies and policies.
- An improved understanding of the biodiversity of the marine environment.
- A comprehensive investigation into the potential impact of longline fishing gears on vulnerable marine habitats and fauna.
- A review of longline induced seabird mortality and the development of a mitigation strategy.
- The 2018 review of the MPA.
- The development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies that are commensurate with the threats to marine life.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017:

- We acquired a deep-water camera system to support research surveys around SGSSI. This allows us to assess the sea bed environment and any impacts of fishing.
- We provided legal peer review and policy advice to the SGSSI administration, to help them develop a points system for fishing offences, and to update their application requirements system.
- We undertook near real-time analysis of satellite data to build intelligence on Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU), as a precursor to targeted enforcement.

SGSSI

St Helena

St Helena is an isolated island in the tropical South Atlantic. Its EEZ is 446,000 km^2, which includes 17 seamounts. The island and seamounts are oases in an otherwise unproductive ocean, supporting important populations of whale-sharks, humpback whales, tuna, billfish and seabirds. The EEZ was declared a sustainable use MPA in September 2016. St Helena has local, small-scale fisheries for tuna, grouper and lobster. The industry has recently committed to only use pole and line methods throughout the MPA.

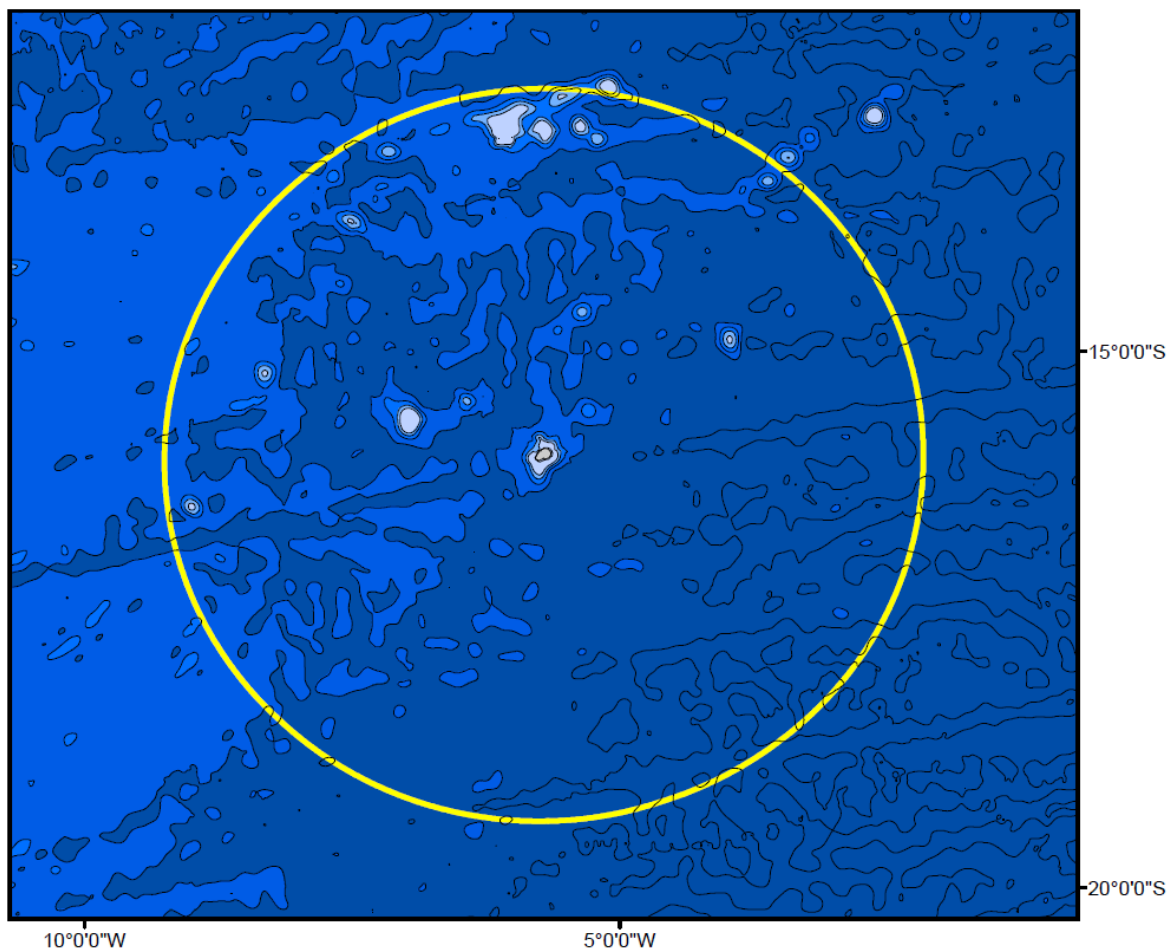# Delivering the Blue Belt Programme on St Helena

The Blue Belt Programme will assist the St Helena Government with:

- The development of legislation and policies.
- The identification of sustainable fishery harvest levels, including working with Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs).
- The development of a better understanding of marine biodiversity.
- The evaluation of threats to the marine environment from non-native species and human activities.
- The development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.
- Capacity building, training and data management.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017:

- We reviewed fisheries-related legislation and provided advice on revised fisheries legislation.
- We analysed the first phase of tuna tagging data and helped demonstrate the retention of yellowfin tuna around the island.
- Undertaken near real-time analysis of satellite data to build intelligence on IUU fishing, as a precursor to targeted enforcement.

Saint Helena

Tristan da Cunha

With a population of around 260, Tristan da Cunha is the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world. The archipelago consists of four principal islands: Tristan da Cunha, Nightingale, Inaccessible and Gough.

The EEZ covers 754,000 km^2. It spans the sub-tropical convergence and supports globally significant seabird populations (including 4 endemic species). Fisheries for lobster and blue-nose warehou operate inside the EEZ, and tuna fisheries operate just outside the EEZ. The area around Gough and Inaccessible Islands is designated as a natural World Heritage Site.

Delivering the Blue Belt Programme
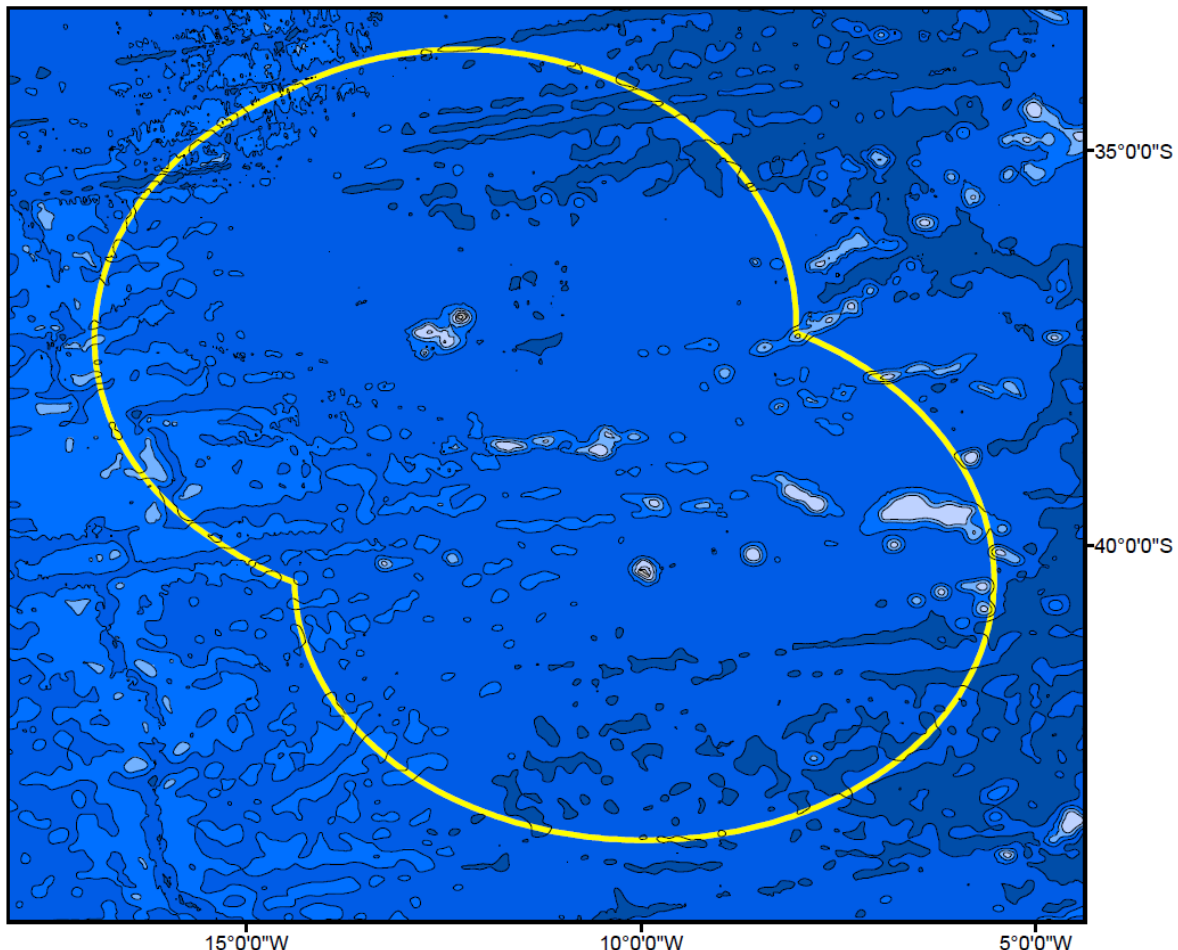# on Tristan da Cunha

Working with other partners, the Blue Belt Programme will assist the Tristan da Cunha Government to:

- Develop legislation and policies.
- Determine sustainable fishery harvest levels, including working with RFMOs.
- Develop a better understanding of marine biodiversity.
- Evaluate the threats to the marine environment from non-native species and human activities.
- The development and implementation of cost effective monitoring and enforcement strategies.
- Capacity building, training and data management.

Blue Belt Programme Highlights

In 2017:

- We assisted the Tristan da Cunha government with the organisation of workshops to develop a plan to implement a marine protection strategy by 2020.
- We prepared data collection protocols, an observer manual and provided advice on licence conditions for the new longline bluenose fishery.
- Together with the Tristan da Cunha administration, we undertook a fisheries patrol around the outer edge of the Tristan da Cunha EEZ. Working with Satellite Applications Catapult, we reviewed and analysed satellite imagery over the patrol period.
- We worked closely with the NMIC to analyse intelligence around IUU fishing around Tristan da Cunha.
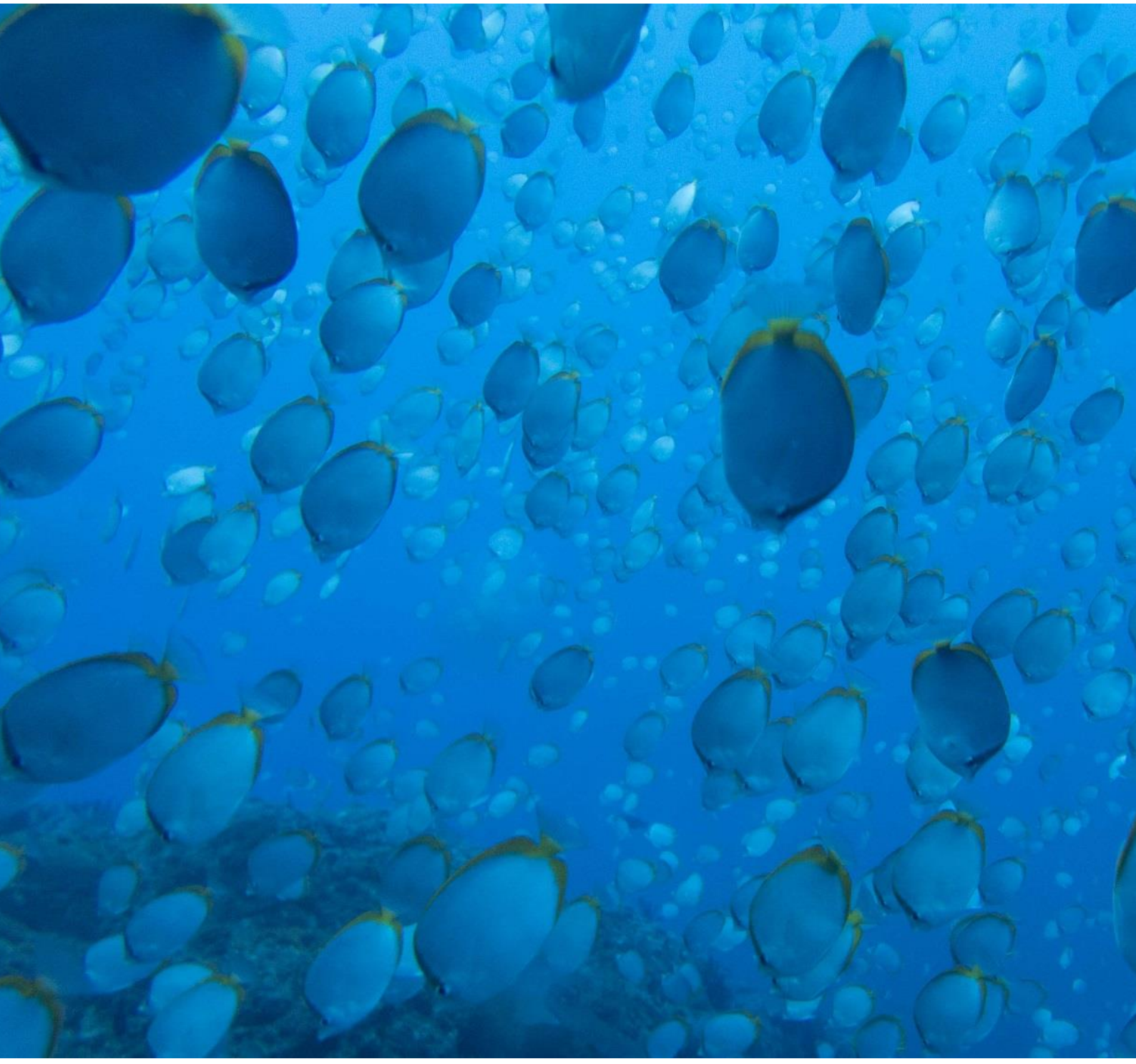
Want more information?

We are committed to working closely in partnership with the administrations of Overseas Territories, external stakeholders and NGOs.

For Programme updates, you can follow us on Twitter: @ukgovbluebelt

For more information on the Blue Belt programme please contact the Programme Directors (Craig McGarvey, MMO and Sergio Vettese, Cefas) via the Programme Office at: CSSF.OT.Bluebelt@cefas.co.uk