



## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Office of the Commissioner  
Government House,  
Stanley,  
Falkland Islands.

### **PRESS RELEASE: South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands Marine Protected Area**

The Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) today announced the establishment of a large sustainable use Marine Protected Area (MPA) covering over 1 million km<sup>2</sup> of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) Maritime Zone.

As part of a long-term management and conservation strategy for the Territory, today's announcement establishes in law one of the largest areas of sustainably managed ocean in the world. Nigel Haywood, Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, who formally signed the legislation, stated:

“The waters around South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are among the most productive in the Southern Ocean, with very high biodiversity. We remain committed to the highest standards of environmental management in this unique and globally important UK Overseas Territory.

Whilst today's MPA announcement represents a hugely significant step in our management of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, we will not rest on our laurels and will continually strive to improve our already excellent management of the Territory”

Dr Martin Collins, Chief Executive of the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands said:

“South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are remarkable places, supporting an amazing density of wildlife. Establishing the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands MPA is a key part of our long-term stewardship of the islands’

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“Our continued good management of this UK Overseas Territory demonstrates that, even in a place as special as South Georgia, you can have sustainable fisheries with minimum impact on the ecosystem.”

“This announcement is the culmination of a considerable amount of work by GSGSSI staff, the FCO and scientists from the British Antarctic Survey and our fisheries consultants MRAG”

Dr Phil Trathan, Head of Conservation Biology at the British Antarctic Survey, who advised the Government of South Georgia on the establishment of the MPA said:

“South Georgia is a globally important island that deserves the strongest level of protection. I believe that this is a major step forward for conservation, not just at South Georgia, but also for the wider Antarctic. As a first step, it creates an important legal framework that will provide opportunities to enhance conservation and protection into the future.”

David Attenborough, who recently presented the BBC’s Frozen Planet series, said:

“I am delighted to hear of the decision by the Government to create one of the world's largest marine reserves, which will help protect the unique and precious wildlife of South Georgia and Antarctica. This is extremely timely given the dramatic change that the polar regions are currently undergoing”.

The MPA declaration enshrines in law much of the existing marine protection policy, and creates one of the largest MPAs on the planet. Within the MPA all commercial bottom trawling will be prohibited and commercial bottom fishing (primarily longlining) will be restricted to depths greater than 700 m. The ban on bottom trawling protects the benthic marine environment from the damaging effects of bottom trawling, whilst the 700 m depth minima for bottom fishing protects juvenile toothfish.

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The MPA includes significant areas of no-take zone (IUCN Category I) around the coast of each island. These no-take zones (over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> in total, equivalent to the total area of Wales) will protect the foraging grounds of many of the Territory's land-based marine predators such as penguins, seals and seabirds and protect the spawning areas of many demersal fish species.

Fisheries campaigner and chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall said:

“Having just returned from a filming expedition to South Georgia, I welcome the new Marine Protected Area for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands as a vital step in protecting this extraordinarily abundant and diverse Southern Ocean marine habitat. And I know those who closely follow our Fish Fight campaign will welcome it too. As acknowledged by its creators, this MPA effectively enshrines in law the existing levels of protection and the current access to fishing in the seas around South Georgia.”

Fearnley-Whittingstall added:

“This is clearly a great step forward for marine conservation in the region, and the beginning of an outstanding opportunity. I count myself among the many conservationists and NGOs who would urge the South Georgia and UK governments to go further in the coming months. We would like to see the arbitrary 12-mile No Take Zone around South Georgia extended to include the entire continental shelf area and its margins, since this is a vital krill habitat and consequent feeding ground for the millions of krill-dependent fish, birds and mammals that inhabit South Georgia and its waters. Beyond that even, a fully fledged, no take Marine Reserve for the entire 200 mile zone surrounding these islands would set an outstanding global example of commitment to marine conservation. For many of us, that remains a visionary objective for this exceptional part of the ocean.”

GSGSSI will continue to licence fisheries for toothfish, icefish and krill in the MPA (outside of the no-take zones) and use the revenue to patrol the region to prevent illegal fishing and undertake research and monitoring. These fisheries are extremely carefully managed, with both the icefish and toothfish fisheries certified as sustainably managed by the Marine Stewardship Council.

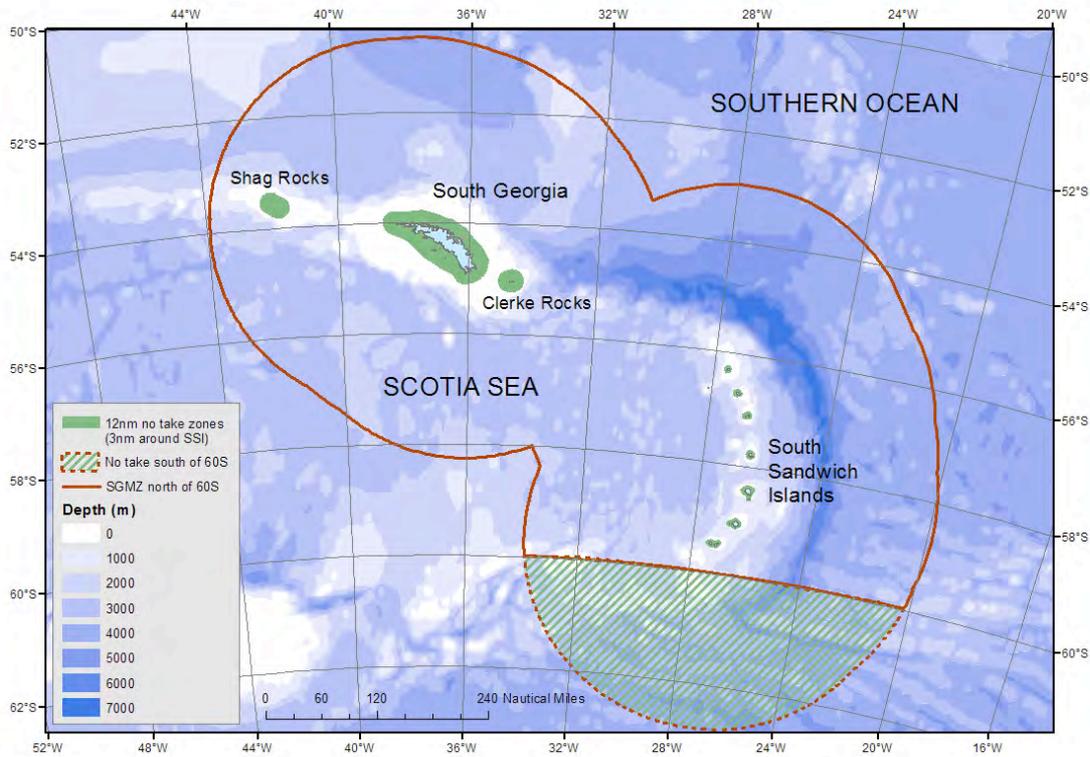
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A scientific workshop, to be held in Cambridge in April 2012, will consider the need for further spatial and temporal protection within the MPA.

**For further information please contact Dr Martin Collins, Chief Executive, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. E-mail: [ceo@gov.gs](mailto:ceo@gov.gs); Tel: +500 28214.**

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### Map showing the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Marine Protected Area.



#### NOTES:

1. The area south of 60°S that falls within the SGSSI Maritime Zone whilst not formally part of the MPA is already a no-take zone as no fishing licences are issued for this area.
2. The no-take zones around the South Sandwich Islands are smaller than those at South Georgia as the shelf areas in the South Sandwich Islands are relatively small.

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### **Key points**

- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands is one of the UK's most remote and environmentally pristine Overseas Territories. It is internationally recognised for its biological importance, including its biodiversity and breeding populations of seabirds and marine mammals and was regularly featured in the recent BBC series *Frozen Planet*.
- On February 27<sup>th</sup> 2012, as part of a long-term management and conservation strategy for the Territory, the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) has announced that a large (over 1 million km<sup>2</sup>) sustainable use Marine Protected Area (MPA) in a key part of the Southern Ocean.
- Declaration of the MPA, one of the largest in the world, enshrines in law the existing ban on bottom trawling throughout the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Maritime Zone (equivalent to an EEZ) and prohibits any bottom fishing (primarily longlining for toothfish) in depths less than 700 m.
- Within the MPA fishing continues to be highly regulated, with licences issued to fish for Patagonian toothfish, krill and mackerel icefish. The South Georgia Patagonian toothfish fishery is currently one of the highest rated of the Marine Stewardship Council certified fisheries.
- This multiple-use MPA includes over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> of no-take zones (equal to the size of Wales), which protect inshore, shelf areas from any form of fishing, and includes all depths less than 100 m. These no-take zones will protect the foraging grounds of many of the Territory's land-based marine predators such as penguins and seabirds (including several species of albatross) and also protect the spawning areas of many demersal fish species.
- The MPA is patrolled by a dedicated patrol vessel to prevent illegal fishing activity and ensure that the requirements of the MPA are upheld.
- The GSGSSI is committed to a programme of scientific research to determine requirements for further protection, including additional no-take zones in the Marine Protected Area.
- This work has been underpinned by scientific investigations undertaken by the GSGSSI, British Antarctic Survey, the Marine Resources Assessment Group and many other scientific organisations.