



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

Statement: Thursday 1 April 2010

NEW PROTECTION FOR THE MARINE LIFE OF THE BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY

Foreign Secretary David Miliband today announced the creation of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the British Indian Ocean Territory. This will include a “no-take” marine reserve where commercial fishing will be banned.

The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) consists of 55 tiny islands which sit in a quarter of a million square miles of the world’s cleanest seas.

Announcing the creation of this MPA, David Miliband said:

I am today instructing the Commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territory to declare a Marine Protected Area. The MPA will cover some quarter of a million square miles and its establishment will double the global coverage of the world's oceans under protection. Its creation is a major step forward for protecting the oceans, not just around BIOT itself, but also throughout the world. This measure is a further demonstration of how the UK takes its international environmental responsibilities seriously.

The territory offers great scope for research in all fields of oceanography, biodiversity and many aspects of climate change, which are core research issues for UK science.

I have taken the decision to create this marine reserve following a full consultation, and careful consideration of the many issues and interests involved. The response to the consultation was impressive both in terms of quality and quantity. We intend to continue to work closely with all interested stakeholders, both in the UK and internationally, in implementing the MPA.

I would like to emphasise that the creation of the MPA will not change the UK's commitment to cede the Territory to Mauritius when it is no longer needed for defence purposes and it is, of course, without prejudice to the outcome of the current, pending proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights.

Ends

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Chagos Islands have belonged to Britain since 1814 (The Treaty of Paris) and are constituted as the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). Only Diego Garcia, where there is a military base, is inhabited (by military personnel and employees).

The idea of making the British Indian Ocean Territory an MPA has the support of an impressive range of UK and international environmental organisations coming together under the auspices of the "Chagos Environment Network" to help enhance the environmental protection in BIOT. Also, well over 90% of those who responded to the consultation made clear that they supported greater marine protection

Pollutant levels in Chagos waters and marine life are exceptionally low, mostly below detection levels at 1 part per trillion using the most sensitive instrumentation available, making it an appropriate global reference baseline.

Scientists also advise us that BIOT is likely to be key, both in research and geographical terms, to the repopulation of coral systems along the East Coast of Africa and hence to the recovery in marine food supply in sub-Saharan Africa. BIOT waters will continue to be patrolled by the territory's patrol vessel, which will enforce the MPA conditions.

Further information

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FCO press office: 020 7008 3100