

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

1st November 2010

Chagos Becomes a No-Fishing Zone

Conservation groups welcome the creation of the world's largest marine reserve

LONDON – Commercial fishing around Chagos ended yesterday (October 31st) making it officially the largest no-take marine protected area (MPA) in the world.

The remaining fishing licenses expired yesterday at midnight, following the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (FCO) decision to create the MPA on 1st April. This landmark date comes on the same day that conservationists from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) highlight in a new paper the damaging effects of over-exploitative commercial fishing in the area.

It is estimated that around 60,000 sharks, an equivalent number of rays, and potentially countless other species, have been legally caught as by-catch from commercial fisheries over the past five years in Chagos, something that will be prevented as a result of the fishing ban.

The paper also draws together evidence that large-scale MPAs can have a positive effect on migratory species such as tuna. Until today, tuna was the main target of commercial fishing around the Chagos Archipelago.

Conservationists now hope this scientifically important MPA, which has the world's cleanest sea water, can potentially be used as a comparative site to ailing reefs affected by human impact, climate change and rising sea temperatures.

Dr Heather Koldewey, who manages ZSL's international marine and freshwater conservation programme, says: *"The implementation of a no-take marine reserve in the Chagos will provide a highly unique scientific reference site of global importance for studies on both pelagic and benthic marine ecosystems and the effects of climate change on them."*

"Governments across the world have the power to stop over-exploitation in marine protected areas. We need more ocean reserves like the Chagos Archipelago if we are ever to sustain the world's oceanic ecosystems."

Currently it is estimated that 1.17 per cent of the world's ocean is under some form of marine protection, with only 0.08 per cent of these protected areas classified as no-take zones. Scientists are urging governments to establish more MPAs if they are ever to meet the agreed target of 10 per cent by 2012, agreed at the 2002 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

Alistair Gammell, director of the Pew Environment Group's Chagos campaign, said: *"We are thrilled that the protection of the Chagos announced by the British Government has come into effect. This end to commercial fishing in the Chagos will help its marine wildlife to recover and thrive."*

~ Ends ~

Editors' Notes:

- The paper '*Potential benefits to fisheries and biodiversity of the Chagos Archipelago/ British Indian Ocean Territory as a no-take marine reserve*' is published online in the Marine Pollution Bulletin on Sunday 31 October. Read it online here: [on Protect Chagos](#), or [via Science Direct](#).

- **The Chagos Archipelago** is located in the middle of the Indian Ocean. They 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 base, is inhabited (by military personnel and employees). The other 54 tiny islands add up to only 16 square kms (8square miles) in total. The Chagos are the world's largest coral atoll and 55 tiny islands in quarter of a million square miles of the world's cleanest seas. It is Britain's greatest area of marine biodiversity.

- **The Chagos Environment Network (CEN)**, a collaboration of nine leading conservation and scientific organisations is seeking to protect the biodiversity of the Chagos Islands and surrounding waters. CEN members are The Chagos Conservation Trust, The Linnean Society of London, The Marine Conservation Society, The Pew Environment Group, The Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, The Royal Society, The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Zoological Society of London, and Professor Charles Sheppard of Warwick University. Further information: www.chagos-trust.org

- **Zoological Society of London (ZSL)** founded in 1826 is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity: our key role is the conservation of animals and their habitats. ZSL runs ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo, carries out scientific research in the Institute of Zoology and is actively involved in field conservation in other countries worldwide. For further information please visit www.zsl.org