

MEDIA BRIEFING, EMARGOED UNTIL 00:01, 20th MARCH 2024

Marine Conservation Society's State of our Beaches report 2023

The Marine Conservation Society has released its annual report, [State of our Beaches 2023](#), on data collected by their beach clean volunteers.

In Scotland, 3,200 volunteers took part in the charity's beach clean programme, collecting and recording all rubbish found on 100 metre stretches of beach. This data adds to the charity's 30-year dataset and paints a picture of how litter across the nation is changing, as well as highlighting what needs to be done to tackle it.

Catherine Gemmell, Scotland Conservation Officer at the Marine

Conservation Society, said, "Over three thousand volunteers collected vital data from across Scotland last year, showing the need to cut the amount of single-use plastic we use and curb sewage pollution.

"Thanks to more volunteers taking part in the islands, we now have a clearer idea of the sorts of litter washing up in these areas, which differs from the mainland. Data provides us with valuable information that we can use in collaboration with coastal communities, industry and government to reduce the amount of litter turning up on Scottish beaches."

The need for a circular economy

- Single-use plastic items such as bottle caps and lids, drinks bottles and packets make up three of the top five items found across Scotland's beaches. Metal drinks cans were the tenth most common item found. The charity is calling for governments across the UK to introduce compatible all inclusive deposit return schemes as soon as possible. This would see aluminium cans, and plastic and glass bottles have a 20p deposit which would be returned when recycled which would reduce drinks-related pollution.
- The Marine Conservation Society is hopeful that the Circular Economy Bill, introduced by the Scottish Government in June 2023, which is currently working its way through the Scottish Parliament, will help reduce beach litter by moving towards a society of reuse, refill and repair.
- Data from the Marine Conservation Society also shows what policies are already working to tackle litter. Following the ban on single use cotton buds, beach clean volunteers recorded a decrease of 16% from 2022-2023. The carrier bag charge is also still working, with an 11% drop observed from 2022-

2023, showing that economic incentives and bans can work in tackling beach litter and should be used to tackle other items such as single use cups.

Sewage-related litter

- Volunteers found sanitary waste on 59% of beaches surveyed in Scotland last year
- Over 15,000 wet wipes collected and recorded by volunteers. This is a 50% decrease from 2022, showing that the work of the Marine Conservation Society and others to tackle sewage pollution is starting to make a difference.
- The Marine Conservation Society supports the Scottish Water *Nature Calls* campaign and urges the Scottish Government to implement the ban on plastic in single-use wet wipes as soon as possible.
- As well as a ban on plastic in wet wipes, the charity is calling for increased monitoring of the sewerage network and action to stop them spilling into rivers and seas.

Litter from fishing and aquaculture

- With the support of the Scottish Islands Federation, the Marine Conservation Society saw an increase of 112% of the number of surveys submitted from across the Scottish Islands.
- Fishing and aquaculture gear made up 49% of the litter recorded on Scottish Islands versus 9% of the litter on mainland Scotland.
- The Marine Conservation Society hopes that by recording this kind of litter, it can work with stakeholders to develop solutions to reduce the amount washing up on our beaches.

Please get in touch if you would like to speak with a member of the team about any of these topics.

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Notes to Editors

The **Marine Conservation Society** is the UK's leading ocean charity, working towards cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity highlights the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with governments, communities, and industry to take action to restore and protect the marine environment. The charity has run a dedicated Scotland programme from its Edinburgh office, established in April 2000.