

State of beaches

Beachwatch report



2023

Thank you to everyone who took part in or organised a beach clean last year.

Your litter surveys helped paint a picture of the state of our beaches and the pollution they face. From across the UK and Channel Islands, volunteers cleaned **over 148,000 metres** of beach, removing **17,208kgs** of litter from our coast.

Even more of you got involved last year, and we saw a **320% increase in volunteers** from Northern Ireland! Across the UK and Channel Islands, **14,271 volunteers** headed to the beach and safely removed and recorded litter, preventing it from causing further harm to the marine environment.

2023 saw the highest number of litter surveys received in 30 years of Beachwatch! This important data allows us to understand which types of litter are most widespread on our beaches so we can campaign for action to reduce the pollution making its way into our blue spaces and harming wildlife.

Sewage-related debris continues to plague our beaches, with **72%** of those surveyed reporting these items. We took the UK Government to court last year over its failings to address sewage pollution and will continue to push for sewage-free seas.

Why not send a copy of this report to your local politician and ask them what action they're taking to tackle litter pollution?



For a breakdown of our litter data and what this tells us about the state of our beaches, scan the QR code here:
mcsuk.org/beachwatch-report



In 2023...

Volunteers removed 480,343 litter items from the coast – a 22% increase from 2022

656 more volunteers got involved in beach cleans compared to 2022

92 miles of beach were cleaned across the UK and Channel Islands

We received 1,199 litter surveys – 3% more than in 2022 and our highest number ever

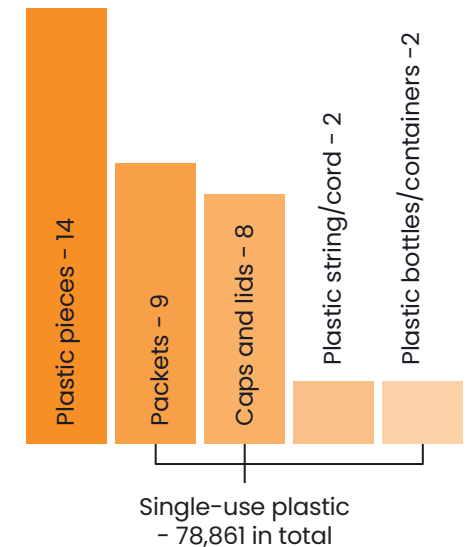
Volunteers spent 23,043 hours cleaning and recording litter on beaches



Action needed on single-use plastics

Three out of the top five litter items were single-use plastics, accounting for **17% of litter collected**. The continued presence of single-use plastics on beaches highlights the need for a circular economy where consumers have more options and access to use refill products. We know that policies tackling single-use products work and we will continue to push for further change to protect our seas from plastic pollution.






Top 5 litter items found
(per 100m)



The UK and Channel Islands' 2023 beach litter story

What did we find?

On average, 167 litter items were found per 100m on UK beaches, an **↑ increase of 1.2%** from 2022.

-  1. Plastic pieces (2.5-30cm)
-  2. Packets
-  3. Caps and lids
-  4. Plastic string/cord (0-1cm)
-  5. Plastic bottles and containers

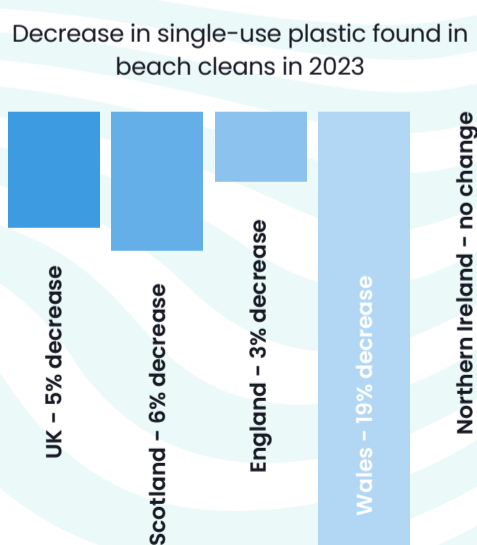
The need for a Deposit Return Scheme

Plastic bottles and lids are being found on more beaches across the UK and Channel Islands. **73% of surveys recorded plastic bottles** - an increase of **4%** compared to 2022. Plastics caps/lids were also found more, with **32,783** recorded across **89%** of surveys. These findings highlight the urgent need for Deposit Return Schemes across the UK, and we will continue to advocate for their introduction.

-  An average of **16 drinks-related litter items** were found per 100m - up **14%** compared to 2022
-  **8,584** plastic bottles were found on beaches in 2023
-  Plastic caps/lids were recorded on **3% more** surveys than in 2022
-  Metal cans were found on **66%** of cleans - **4% more** than in 2022

Policies work

Although still in the top 10 litter items, plastic cutlery, trays, and straws were **recorded on 5% fewer beaches** than in 2022, which could have been helped by the bans introduced between 2022-2023. There was also a **14% year on year decrease** in the presence of cotton budsticks, demonstrating that policies banning single-use products work.



Source to Sea Litter Quest

Despite living inland, **1,413** of you did something amazing for our ocean by taking part in our Source to Sea Litter Quest.

35,461 items were removed from our towns, parks and rivers - **3.5x more** than 2022

1,017 bags of litter were collected - an increase of **over 400%** vs. 2022

Single-use plastics made up **three of the top five** items

42% of inland cleans found vapes - **940** in total

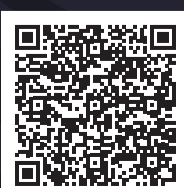
92% of inland cleans recorded plastic bottles and lids

91% of inland cleans found metal drinks cans - **8,640** in total



What is a Deposit Return Scheme?

You pay a small deposit on top of the price of a drink. When finished, you return the drinks container to a collection point where you get your money back. This helps reduce waste, carbon emissions, and keeps litter off our beaches.



Join us today and together we can do even more to help fight pollution - www.mcsuk.org/join



Get involved!

Join or organise a beach clean

Our **beach cleans** and litter surveys happen all year round. Check whether there's one happening near you – if not, why not organise your own? We provide the resources and training you need to get started.

If you can't get to the beach, don't worry – you can still do your bit and help prevent litter reaching our coast. By taking part in a **Source to Sea** litter quest you'll be recording and clearing pollution from inland spaces, stopping it from entering our waterways and helping to build a bigger picture of pollution in UK seas.

If you're looking for a team building or volunteering day for your company, why not join our experts on a beach clean for a day of fun, while doing something worthwhile for the environment? Our **team beach cleans** are a fun and fulfilling day out for you and your team.

Head to mcsuk.org/beach-cleans to find out more.

Support our Manifesto for Our Seas

Our ocean is amazing but it's under strain. We're working hard to relieve the pressures placed on our seas, and our **Manifesto for our Seas** contains policy solutions that would allow it to be cleaner, healthier, and better-protected. You can join our calls for ocean action by telling your MP about our solutions at mcsuk.org/manifesto-for-our-seas

Become a member of the Marine Conservation Society

By pledging your ongoing support, you make our hands-on conservation work possible. Join our community of ocean enthusiasts from as little as £5 per month – £6 could support a beach cleaning volunteer. Join us at mcsuk.org/join

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