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Stop Ocean Poison: UK Government fails to protect ocean from chemical pollution crisis

- Charity's campaign calls on people across the country to contact their MP to support chemical pollution protection
- Marine animals continue to suffer due to high levels of harmful chemicals in the ocean
- Global chemical production has been projected to double by 2030
- Just 7% of people polled know what 'forever chemicals' are and what their impacts could be.



The [Marine Conservation Society](#), the UK's leading ocean charity, is launching a campaign to address the chemical pollution crisis – **Stop Ocean Poison**. At a time when environmental laws are under attack, UK Government must deliver what they have promised. That means a strong, fit-for-purpose UK Chemicals Strategy and tackling harmful forever chemicals.

Harmful chemicals are polluting the ocean and planet. PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) or 'forever chemicals' are just one group – containing thousands of individual chemicals – of ocean

poisons. There's now clear evidence that harmful chemicals are in all water on Earth, building up constantly, creating a toxic legacy.

Research has proven links between harmful chemicals and the health of animals, including harm to animals' nervous systems, immunity and ability to reproduce, alongside reducing their resilience to other stressors such as climate change and disease. This is just the tip of the iceberg, with more studies on the long-term effects of chemical pollution published regularly. Research is showing the frightening real-world consequences of inaction on chemical pollution on our blue planet.

Dr Francesca Bevan, Chemicals Policy and Advocacy Manager at the Marine Conservation Society: "My heart breaks every time I see another study detailing the impacts of chemical pollution on the planet, wildlife or people. We've been waiting patiently since 2020 for a Chemicals Strategy as promised by the UK Government. But enough is enough, we're running out of time, the ocean is running out of time.

"Hazardous chemicals, including 'forever chemicals', shouldn't be used in consumer products, and UK Government action should be taken to stop the most harmful chemicals being used. Instead, the pollution continues."

Global chemical production has been projected to double by 2030*, with an increase in chemical pollution likely to follow closely behind.

Forever chemicals are widely used, but far less often labelled – an invisible 'ingredient' used to make products resistant to heat, water and grease. But consumers aren't being told that these harmful chemicals are in everyday products like saucepans and waterproof coats, washing into waterways and finding their way into the ocean. A recent YouGov survey found that just 7% of those polled knew what forever chemicals were and what their impacts could be.

The Marine Conservation Society wants to see urgent action, including a robust UK Chemicals Strategy that prioritises the protection of the environment, as promised in the 25 Year Environment Plan, and a ban on all PFAS from all non-essential uses. By contrast, the UK Government's deregulation agenda, which seeks to review, remove or update EU law, could see existing chemical pollution protections scrapped.

Sandy Luk, Chief Executive of the Marine Conservation Society: "The impact of chemical pollution on our blue planet is profound. If we're going to prevent further environmental breakdown and fight the biodiversity crisis, we must address chemical pollution.

"The UK Government's recent announcements pit growing the economy against maintaining environmental protections. But there can be no long-term economic growth or national food

security if our environment is a chemical crime scene. We can't allow progress on protection from chemical pollution to be put in jeopardy. We need a strong UK Chemicals Strategy to address the huge scale of the chemical pollution crisis. Instead, the UK Government is proposing ripping up existing laws and taking a massive step back on progress."

The Marine Conservation Society is asking people to email their local MP, raising the issue of chemical pollution and the risks of inaction with them. A template email can be found on the charity's website: www.mcsuk.org/stop-ocean-poison (live from Wednesday 12th)

Ella Daish, Campaigns Officer at the Marine Conservation Society: "The UK Government is currently allowing the use of harmful chemicals which are poisoning our blue planet. This is a crime, but it isn't illegal. We can't allow protections to be forgotten while our ocean and wildlife suffer the consequences.

"This is a critical time to act on the chemical pollution crisis. Take part in our campaign and join us in demanding the UK Government stop ocean poison. Let's show them that while chemical pollution may be invisible, it can no longer be ignored!"

For more information on the Marine Conservation Society's work on chemical pollution, please visit the charity's website: www.mcsuk.org.

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Images

Please find a selection of high-res images linked in this [Dropbox folder](#).

Press Contact

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Notes to Editors

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,690 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 14th - 15th February 2022. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

*[UN report](#): *Urgent action needed to tackle chemical pollution as global production is set to double by 2030*

Case studies on impacts of persistent chemicals:

- **Otters in England and Wales are living with forever chemicals.** According to the study, animals that had died between 2014-2019 all contained two types of restricted PFAS. 50 otters that died between 2007-09 all

had PFAS in all of them as well. The findings showed that **80% of the animals had at least 12 different types of the chemicals in their livers.**

- **Polar bears will struggle to survive in an already hostile environment** as forever chemicals impact their behaviours and hormonal balance – from searching for food to mating. Polar bears' survival is reliant on a good memory and sharp senses when navigating their surroundings, any influence on this as a result of chemical pollution could prove fatal.
- **In the next century, a complete collapse of the UK's killer whale population is likely.** In the last two decades there have been no new calves from the UK's killer whale populations. Frighteningly, if this continues, the population could completely collapse within the next 100 years. (Desforges et al., 2018). This has been suggested to be consistent with severe PCB pollution
- **Infectious disease is the first cause of death reported for harbour porpoise stranded on the UK coast.** Harbour porpoises are at an increased risk of infectious diseases as a result of an accumulation of harmful chemicals in their systems. At current concentrations, the population's risk of disease has increased by a staggering 41%. This reduced immunity is – literally – killing these animals in UK seas. (CSIP, 2019).
- **Harmful chemicals in young, already vulnerable, marine mammals are impacting their ability to survive.** Following a study of grey seals on the coast of Scotland between 2015 and 2017, scientists found that 18-day old seal pups have already accumulated high enough levels of POPs in their blubber to impact function, which may negatively impact their ability to survive their first year of life at sea.

The Marine Conservation Society campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, the charity raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. The Marine Conservation Society provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the Good Fish Guide as well as involving thousands of volunteers in projects and surveys such as Beachwatch. www.mcsuk.org.