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Scottish beach litter increases by 42%

- **Marine Conservation Society reveals results of 2022 Great British Beach Clean**
- **In Scotland, overall litter increased by 42%, with wet wipes increasing by 150%**
- **Drinks-related litter was found on 93% of surveyed beaches**

The results are in from the [Marine Conservation Society](#)'s annual Great British Beach Clean, which took place from 16th – 25th September 2022, and was sponsored by soup brand, Cully & Sully.

In Scotland, **13.51km of beach were cleared and surveyed by over 1,200 volunteers, who filled over 400 bags of litter, weighing 1,830kg.** All pollution cleared from beaches protects the ocean and vulnerable wildlife which can ingest or become entangled in litter and debris.

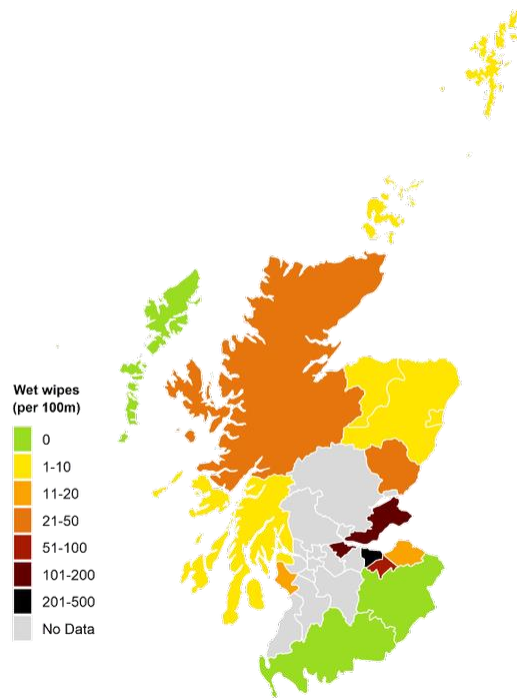
By taking part in the Great British Beach Clean, volunteers not only clear beaches of litter but help tackle ocean pollution by gathering vital data used by the charity to lobby governments and create change for cleaner seas and a healthier planet. Data in previous years helped result in the introduction of the carrier bag charge, bans on certain single-use items, and the commitment to the establishment of a Deposit Return Scheme in Scotland next year.

Data collected shows a staggering **42% increase in litter levels** in comparison to last year's Great British Beach Clean in Scotland. The main reason behind this increase is not clear, but what stands out is a serious issue with unsustainable consumption and pollution ending up in the marine environment. While environmental charities await the introduction of the Scottish Government's Circular Economy Bill, these results demonstrate an urgent need to move away from a single-use society to one which invests in and promotes reuse, refill and repair across the supply chain, from manufacturer to consumer.

Wet wipes up by 150%

Over 7,000 wet wipes were recorded by volunteers, concentrated on beaches in Scotland's central belt, resulting in an increase of 150% from 2021. This means that an average of 63 wet wipes were recorded for every 100 metres of Scottish beach surveyed.

Heatmap of wet wipe pollution



Many of these wet wipes will have found their way onto beaches via overflowing sewage pipes, known as Combined Sewage Overflows (CSOs). Since 2015, wet wipes have been an increasing trend in Scotland, with annual fluctuations. Comparing 2015 to 2021, wet wipes have increased almost fourfold (372%).

The Marine Conservation Society is calling for the Scottish Government to ban plastic in single-use wet wipes as soon as possible. Wet wipes are choking beaches, blocking pipes, and resulting in sewage spills and sewage pollution at sea, contaminating water for both bathers and marine life.

As well as a ban, the charity is calling for increased monitoring of CSOs and action to stop them spilling into rivers and the sea. The Marine Conservation Society wants the Scottish Government to set progressive reduction targets for spills from CSOs by the end of 2022 and install electronic monitoring on all overflows by 2024, with data published on an annual basis as a minimum.

Catherine Gemmell, Scotland Conservation Officer at the Marine Conservation Society said, "No one wants to go to a beach and find themselves surrounded by washed-up wet wipes. We have been talking about this for far too long, and our beaches and wildlife are suffering as a result."

“Bold action needs to be taken now. We need Scottish Government to ban plastic in single-use wet wipes and invest in the sewage network to stop spills from sewer overflows polluting our seas.”

The charity supports Scottish Water in calling for a ban on plastic in single-use wet wipes as part of the *Nature Calls* campaign. However, they are also asking for the water company to improve monitoring and invest in Scotland's sewer system at the same time.

Deposit Return Scheme can't come soon enough

93% of all surveys in Scotland found plastic bottles, glass bottles, lids and/or metal drinks cans.

From August 2023, a 20p deposit will be returned upon recycling of metal drinks cans and glass and plastic bottles. With 31 drinks-related items found on average per 100 metres of Scottish beach surveyed, the Marine Conservation Society hopes to see them disappear from beaches as more people are incentivised to recycle them to receive 20p back.

Top ten most common litter items on Scottish beaches (average per 100m)

1. Plastic and polystyrene pieces – 167.5
2. Wet wipes – 63.3
3. Crisp and sweet packets, lollipop sticks etc. – 38.3
4. Cotton bud sticks – 18.9
5. Plastic lids and caps – 16.6
6. String or cord – 15.3
7. Glass items – 12.4
8. Other plastic or polystyrene items – 10.4
9. String or cord 1cm+ – 10
10. Cloth fragments – 7.5

The charity coordinates beach cleans throughout the year, with survey results contributing to a global database, the International Coastal Cleanup.

The charity's data shows that visible litter on UK beaches is of great concern, but the Marine Conservation Society is also campaigning to tackle invisible chemical pollution which is poisoning marine life across the globe. The #StopOceanPoison campaign is demanding the UK Government turn off the tap on chemical pollution. Find out more and sign the petition, which now has over 10K signatures, [here](#).

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

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Images

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

Press Contact

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Notes to Editors

The [Marine Conservation Society](#) is the UK's leading ocean charity, fighting for cleaner, better-protected, healthier seas. The charity works to highlight the importance of our ocean, and the life within it, through working with government, industry and education, 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.

You can find the Marine Conservation Society's updated Scottish Parliamentary Briefing on Sewage Related Debris [here](#).