AGM 2026: Members' questions

Contents

Our impact and plans 3

What are the three most significant (impactful) improvements to the UK marine environment in 2026 due to the actions of the Marine Conservation Society? 3

What are the three most significant (impactful) improvements to the UK marine environment that the Marine Conservation Society wants to achieve in 2027, and what are the main barriers to be overcome to make them a reality? 4

Conservation and policy 5

How do we get both Government and the public to understand the urgency of protecting our seabeds, which are being destroyed at an alarming rate? 5

I would like to hear about progress on making MPA's really protected and stopping all bottom trawling 6

Are we really winning the war against the dumping of plastic waste in our ocean? .. 7

What is the latest on basking shark numbers? 8

Is there any systematic or statutory monitoring of marine populations around offshore wind farms? 8

Is there a Net Zero for marine welfare as there is for the energy industry? 9

Are you working with the NFU on addressing farming run-off? 10

Youth engagement 10

What is the strategic plan for the next three years with regards to working with schools in the UK, specifically Suffolk Coastal? 10

What more can we do to encourage younger generations to become actively involved in marine conservation, not just as volunteers but as future decisionmakers and advocates? 11

Membership & the Board 13

Virtual training events are a great way to keep us all informed/ engaged. Please can we have more in the calendar! 13

Are you looking for new trustees? 13

Financial performance 13

What is the return on fundraising spend – i.e. how much is raised for every £ spent on fundraising? 13

How does this year's financial forecast compare to last year's full year outturn? Do you anticipate further revenue decline? 14

Other 14

Can we join efforts with the National Emergency Briefing process to achieve more awareness and support? 14

I thought that crab fisheries were suffering massively from the influx of octopus in the Southwest. There are several strong negatives, it seems. Crabs are surely highly significant components for balance - all species - and this does not look like balance. 15

Does the Marine Conservation Society have a stance on the use of AI within its work, and how challenging is it to find the balance of usage when the boundary of value versus negative impact is hard and also a big talking point in the world today? 15

Do you have some examples of how AI can help the Marine Conservation Society? 16

Our impact and plans

What are the three most significant (impactful) improvements to the UK marine environment in 2026 due to the actions of the Marine Conservation Society?

As we've seen from the annual impact report, and from the AGM, there have been many wins and great strides forward for ocean recovery. Three of our major successes from 2026 are:

1. **PFAS Plan announced:** This year, the UK Government announced its first ever PFAS Plan to tackle 'forever chemicals'. This includes a co-ordinated framework for action across government, regulators and businesses, and provides a much-needed starting point that we can use to leverage further action on PFAS pollution. As well as the Plan itself, we influenced the language the Government and its bodies use about PFAS. Adopting the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's definition of PFAS, which we pushed for, closes off routes for harmful chemical substitution and strengthens the basis for future regulation.
   Understanding the severity of the issue is key to taking effective action on it; we therefore welcome the Government's shift towards a clearer recognition of the scale and persistence of the problem. As the Plan progresses, we will continue our advocacy to ensure that it delivers a universal restriction on PFAS, and that the UK meets standards that are at least as good as the European Union's.

2. **Strengthening marine protections in Scotland:** We helped secure the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 which will require nature recovery targets to be developed across land and sea, and an amendment to the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 that will require Scottish Ministers to consider the extent that designating a Marine Protected Area contributes to the mitigation of and adaptation to climate change.

3. **DRS including glass in Wales:** We have always called for an all-in Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) across the UK, and we are delighted to see that ambition realised in Wales, which is including glass and pathways to reuse in its scheme. Our Beachwatch data has been vital to this, and has been used in consultation responses and parliamentary briefings for the Senedd. We also conducted a field trip to Latvia with our friends at Reloop and created videos on glass and reuse in its successful DRS; these were shown in our event at the Senedd in January this year ahead of the regulations being passed to include glass.

What are the most significant (impactful) improvements to the UK marine environment that the Marine Conservation Society wants to achieve in 2027, and what are the main barriers to be overcome to make them a reality?

We have big plans for next year that we're already working towards. Key improvements we want to see to our marine environment are:

1. **DRS implemented on time across the UK:** Over the last ten years, we have been working to push for a commitment from governments across the UK to implement a Deposit Return Scheme across all four nations, which is now set to go ahead in October 2027. We will continue to keep up the pressure and support policy and legislation to ensure there are no further delays to the implementation of these schemes. There is widespread support for the schemes, which our DRS Fan Club has helped demonstrate, and evidence on the impact DRS has on reducing litter in other countries with schemes backs our case.

2. **Atlantic Coast regeneration:** We will continue to build our Atlantic Coast Programme to deliver regeneration across the West coasts of England, Wales and Scotland. This will include installing eco-friendly moorings (Advanced Mooring Systems) in the waters of the Isle of Eigg, as well as other community-led initiatives in Scotland and Wales, like oyster ponds and reefs, seagrass planting, 'no anchor' zones and regenerative blue mussel farming. To ensure we can turn these plans into a reality, securing funding is key. This is becoming increasingly difficult in the current economic climate, and we will be applying for funding grants to support the development and delivery of our projects.

3. **Water reform**: We will seek to influence development and passage of the forthcoming Water Bill to strengthen pollution prevention, secure improved monitoring of PFAS 'forever chemicals' and microplastics, and promote a source-to-sea approach that better aligns freshwater and marine environmental objectives. This will be delivered through policy engagement with government and regulators, parliamentary advocacy, and collaboration with partners through coalitions such as Clean Water Now. The main barriers are the exact timing and scope of the Bill, both of which remain uncertain. There is also a risk that political focus remains primarily on sewage, water company performance and governance reform, and does not also focus on wider issues such as emerging contaminants, source-control measures and marine environmental outcomes.

4. **Scottish inshore MPA measures**: Once the consultation for protecting 160 inshore MPAs and Priority Marine Feature (PMF) areas with new fisheries measures closes in January 2027, we will continue to work with the Scottish Government to safeguard these ecologically important areas for wildlife, people

and planet. As members of Scottish Environment LINK's Marine Group, we will also be suggesting ways that protection can and should go further for a small number of MPAs and for the tranche of PMF areas, to ensure these measures deliver the best results for Scotland's vital marine habitats and species.

Which organisations does the Marine Conservation Society work most closely with?

Working with partners is a core principle of the Marine Conservation Society. We work with many organisations and communities and have different partners for different work areas. For example, we are in many coalitions with others to have a stronger influence on policy, such as Wildlife & Countryside Link in England and its equivalents in Wales and Scotland.

Communities are fundamental to what we do, and we engage with them and partners for many of our restoration and regeneration projects, such as Natur am Byth!, Restoration Forth, the Dornoch Environmental Enhancement Project, and our new Atlantic Coast Programme.

We also have partnerships with businesses, like FatFace, who provide invaluable support for our projects and activities. Collaboration and partnership are key to maximising the impact, change and positive difference our work has.

Conservation and policy

How do we get both Government and the public to understand the urgency of protecting our seabeds, which are being destroyed at an alarming rate?

Through our marine management work, we're driving improvements in fishing and farming practices to help minimise damage to vulnerable habitats and species, including those on the seabed.

We're calling on the UK Government to support a transition to well-managed, low-impact fishing and for an end to all practices that damage marine habitats and species, including a phase-out of bottom-towed gear. We recently updated our Good Fish Guide methodology to favour fisheries with lower impacts on the marine environment, such as those that do not use bottom-towed fishing gear which damages the seabed.

We have long been campaigning for the UK Government to ensure our Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are truly protected and are safeguarded from destructive fishing practices. We published research showing the economic benefit that protecting

offshore MPAs from bottom trawling will have on society and have engaged with MPs and MSPs to raise the issue.

To date, our work has resulted in over 50 MPAs in inshore waters receiving bans on damaging fishing activity, like bottom trawling and dredging, and has helped to secure protection for over 175,000km^2 of Scotland's vast offshore MPAs. We lobbied governments of the UK, which enabled legislation in Scotland, England and Wales, and our campaigns have mobilised over 100,000 UK citizens to call for truly protected Marine Protected Areas.

The Scottish Government's current consultation (closing 18th Jan 2027) could see over 160 inshore MPAs and Priority Marine Feature (PMF) areas protected with fisheries measures. To ensure these spaces have the best possible protection, we are currently working with partners to gather public support for measures that will safeguard a wide range of seabed habitats and wildlife.

A key area of our work is regenerating marine habitats which have been damaged or lost. We have been working with partners, communities and volunteers to restore native oyster reefs in Scotland and Wales, and seagrass beds across the UK. Throughout these projects, our teams have been raising awareness among stakeholders of the importance of protecting these seabed species and the long-term, knock-on effects regeneration will bring.

Our next big goal is to regenerate seabed habitats – oyster and blue mussel reefs and seagrass and kelp meadows – all along the UK's Atlantic coast. We're currently working with partners, community organisations and corporate supporters to raise awareness and support for this work.

By working collaboratively with others, engaging with governments across the UK, raising awareness and educating people about the issue, and actively regenerating seabed habitats, we believe that we can and we will protect our vital seabeds.

I would like to hear about progress on making MPAs really protected and stopping all bottom trawling

We are proud to be taking a 'whole seas' approach, which aims to ensure that 100% of our seas are sustainably managed. As a fluid environment, we must work to improve the health of the ocean to support marine life wherever it roams or lives. Our work continues to tackle MPAs, which are an integral part of this but are under threat from a number of issues as our seas become increasingly busy. Bottom-towed fishing gear, alongside the rapid expansion of renewable energy are two direct threats to the health of our seabed. Meanwhile, pollution continues to affect marine life everywhere.

Despite large swathes of designations, which we helped to secure, progress on managing fisheries has happened in fits and starts. We have – alongside our partners in likeminded charities – secured some big wins, however, like the end of sandeel fishing in the North Sea, and in October 2025, protections for over 177,000km^2 of Scotland's 20

offshore MPAs – many of them vast, including the largest in Europe – from bottom-towed fishing gear.

We are currently working with partners to gather public support for the best possible protection for over 160 special new sites (including MPAs) in Scotland's inshore waters and are working with the new Government of Wales as they consider new sites in the new year too.

Are we really winning the war against the dumping of plastic waste in our ocean?

There are definitely causes for ocean optimism linked to progress on marine litter and ocean plastic, but there is still a long way to go.

Thanks to the efforts of volunteers, we have over 30 years of beach litter evidence from Beachwatch showing both where progress has been made and where challenges remain. That evidence has been vital to demonstrate the need for policies such as the carrier bag charges, bans on certain single-use plastics and circular economy measures like Deposit Return Schemes.

It has also shown how these policy interventions work, with an 80% drop on bags on beaches recorded since the introduction of the carrier bag charges. We hope to see downward trends for the single-use plastic bans on items such as cotton buds, plates, cutlery and single-use wet wipes containing plastic in the coming years.

However, plastic is still the most common type of litter recorded during Beachwatch surveys. In 2025, more than 14,000 volunteers collected over 600,000 items of litter from beaches around the UK and Channel Islands. Although average litter levels fell compared with the previous year, 87% of the litter recorded was still plastic, and plastic pollution was found on almost every beach surveyed.

Too much plastic is still being produced, used and discarded and we are continuing to raise awareness of the problem, the alternatives, and the solutions among the public, businesses and governments. Clean-ups are an important part of the solution, but ultimately success will be measured by how much pollution we prevent from reaching the ocean in the first place.

Moving to a circular economy, where we reduce waste and keep products and materials in use for longer through reuse, repair and recycling, is vital to easing pressure on natural resources and preventing pollution from reaching our seas. That's why we continue to use Beachwatch data to call for stronger policies like the upcoming Deposit Return Scheme for bottles and cans, greater producer responsibility, more reuse and refill systems, impactful marine litter strategies and an ambitious Global Plastics Treaty that addresses plastic pollution at its source.

We couldn't do it without our volunteers. Every item collected, every survey completed

and every piece of data recorded helps build the evidence needed to influence decision makers and create cleaner, healthier seas for future generations.

What is the latest on basking shark numbers?

Basking sharks are currently listed as '*Endangered'* on the IUCN Red List. Populations have declined by around 80% in the past century, but progress has been made to safeguard the species and it's now one of the most heavily protected shark species in UK and EU waters.

An estimated 20,000 basking sharks visit UK waters each year. In 2023, sightings to partner organisations fell to a 20-year low, and concerningly, no basking sharks were reported off Scotland's west coast – an area they're commonly seen in – in 2024. However, poor weather may have been a factor that year, inhibiting sharks from surface feeding as much and making it more difficult for people to see them. Thankfully, sightings picked up in 2025 and 2026 on the west coast of Scotland.

The current consultation for fisheries management measures in more than 160 inshore sites in Scotland's waters includes the Sea of the Hebrides Marine Protected Area for basking sharks and minke whales, meaning that we now have the chance to safeguard areas these creatures use and rely on to help protect the species.

Is there any systematic or statutory monitoring of marine populations around offshore wind farms?

Yes, there is broadly a requirement for monitoring before and after the deployment of windfarms. Across the UK, pre-consent monitoring is a requirement of statutory environmental assessments (Environmental Impact Assessment, Habitats Regulations Appraisal and Marine Protected Area Assessment) which must consider project-specific impacts, typically including, but not limited to, marine mammals, seabirds, benthic habitats, fish and shellfish and underwater noise.

One example of this was surveys for the proposed Southwest Tiree Array off the west coast of Scotland, which we raised concerns about at the time, that recorded as many as 900 basking sharks in a single day and close to 1,000 across the survey period – the highest density of surface basking shark sightings ever recorded globally. That particular proposal did not progress, citing engineering challenges of securing turbines to the large extent of rocky reef found there.

Post-consent monitoring is complicated as requirements vary across the UK. In Scotland, guidance states that mitigation and monitoring plans are usually required as part of the application. These must clearly describe commitments and actions under different scenarios, cover construction and operational impacts on the marine

environment, and be sufficiently detailed at application stage to avoid delays or post-consent amendments. In England, such plans are not a requirement, but monitoring may be required as part of a Deemed Marine License within a Development Consent Order.

Environmental compensation for impacts of offshore wind developments is also a requirement across the UK, with schemes specific to each UK country, and we push for like-for-like compensation; for example, it is not acceptable to compensate for the annual death of hundreds of seabirds by carrying out beach cleans.

It's a topical question because the big concern is putting the wind farms in the right place – taking into account the surrounding marine ecosystems and species, and how the infrastructure would impact them.

That's why it's so important to have a planning system that directs activities to the least environmentally sensitive areas to safeguard. In fact, a proposal is currently being put forward for a windfarm off the east coast of Scotland at Berwick Bank and we are very concerned, as are other organisations, about the possible impact of this proposal on seabird populations and we do not think that this should go ahead.

This also brings into the question how you compensate for potential impacts. Some development, if not carried out in the right place, simply cannot compensate adequately for its impact on the marine environment in a like-for-like way.

We will continue to, alongside other organisations, voice our opposition to the Berwick Bank windfarm, whilst pushing for appropriate marine planning across the UK that delivers nature-positive renewable energy as part of the solution to climate change.

Is there a Net Zero for marine welfare as there is for the energy industry?

There is no single, directly equivalent 'net zero' target for marine welfare in the same way that there is for the energy industry. This is because marine welfare is multi-dimensional, varying across species, habitats, ecosystems, and regions. It would be challenging to summarise marine welfare into a similar target, because it involves multiple aspects, such as biodiversity, habitat condition, pollution, fisheries, and ecosystem function. Instead, marine welfare is guided by a number of international commitments, environmental targets and regulatory frameworks.

These include United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water), which aims to conserve and sustainably use the ocean and marine resources; the Global Biodiversity Framework, including its '30 by 30' target to effectively conserve and manage at least 30% of marine and coastal areas by 2030, and its wider ambition to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2050; the Water Framework Directive, which aims to achieve good ecological and chemical status; and the UK Marine Strategy, which sets objectives and targets for achieving Good Environmental Status (GES).

The Marine Conservation Society is actively supporting marine welfare through our work on marine planning for nature. Marine planning is a key mechanism for managing human activity at sea, helping to ensure that different uses of the marine environment are considered together through a marine spatial prioritisation program. We call for marine plans to be more spatial, holistic and strategic, so activity can be directed to the least environmentally sensitive areas, the needs and impacts of activities are considered collectively, and they can be prioritised and pressures managed to ensure nature has the space needed to recover.

We are feeding into the development of the English East Marine Plan, advocating for more nature positive polices and in Wales, we're ensuring nature is included in the Welsh National Marine Plan. We helped to secure the Marine (Scotland) Act 2010, as a member of the Clyde Regional Marine Planning Partnership helped developed (over nine years) the draft Clyde Regional Marine Plan, the consultation for which was finally launched 4th November, and we are working to ensure that the National Marine Plan 2.0 is achieving more for nature.

Are you working with the NFU on addressing farming run-off?

We are working through our partners to tackle this source of pollution, however, organisations like the Wildlife Trusts and RSPB lead the sector on this topic. This enables us to lead the way on other pollutants like sewage and PFAS 'forever chemicals'. The sources of pollution are vast, but as a sector we are making sure we present solutions to these issues, and work to see them delivered.

Youth engagement

What is the strategic plan for the next three years with regards to working with schools in the UK, specifically Suffolk Coastal?

Our learning and engagement work has evolved from coastal-focussed outreach to strategically reach and bring meaningful impact to inland communities, under-represented audiences and young people across the UK, primarily through what we call Ocean Roadshows that operate in specific areas.

Currently, these are:

- **One Ocean Roadshow** – An ocean literacy project in the north of England, empowering local communities and schools to rediscover the ocean, its fascinating marine inhabitants, and the important role we play in protecting the ocean's health.
  The project is travelling across the north of England, from the west coast of Morecambe, Blackpool and Formby across to the Yorkshire east coast, from Scarborough down to Hull. We'll also be covering the inner city and surrounding

areas of Manchester, Preston, Blackburn, Bolton, Warrington, Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Halifax, Huddersfield, Doncaster and York.

- **Scottish Seas Roadshow** – An ocean literacy initiative that helps communities and schools across Scotland reconnect with the sea, discover its remarkable marine life, and understand the vital role we all play in safeguarding ocean health.
  This roadshow is delivered in the central belt of Scotland, as well as in different rural and island communities each year.

We are hoping to launch a new Roadshow in London in 2027 and look forward to developing more initiatives to reach and inspire young people throughout the UK.

We also have over 100 online open access resources and materials that can support individuals, youth groups, young people schools and teachers on our website. Teachers and schools can sign up (via the Learning resources webpage on our site) to our education newsletter to receive updates on our work, resources and opportunities.

Our five-year Ocean Friendly School Awards project, included work with schools across the UK (including Suffolk), came to an end in 2026.

What more can we do to encourage younger generations to become actively involved in marine conservation, not just as volunteers but as future decisionmakers and advocates?

We believe it's important for people of all ages to learn about ocean issues and feel empowered to take action. It's vital to get young people in particular involved, so they can help decide what their future is going to look like.

As well as that, spending time in nature has been proven to benefit young people's development, physical health and mental health. Taking part in citizen science activities, projects and initiatives can help them gain new skills and training, and provide an idea of pathways into the marine conservation field.

To become involved in conservation, it's crucial that young people learn about the marine environment – its importance, the issues it faces and what needs to be done for it to remain healthy. This is why we have developed learning resources for primary and secondary aged students, as well as youth groups. These can all be found on our website under 'learning resources'. We also deliver ocean roadshows in Scotland and north of England which include education and outreach for schools, youth groups and community groups. You can book a session via our website.

If they feel inspired and interested in ocean issues having learnt about them, it's important for young people to have the opportunity for hands-on, first-hand experiences. Through our youth engagement work, we create inclusive opportunities for young people to engage with the natural world around them, and that improve

wellbeing, inspire curiosity and show how their own actions can help protect our blue planet.

Volunteering is a brilliant way for young people to get involved in marine conservation – and work around their commitments like school and youth groups. However, programmes like the Youth Ocean Network, Youth Advisory Panel, and our summer internship and residential trips go even further. They help young people build new skills, feel part of a community that cares about the sea, and explore pathways into marine conservation.

The Youth Ocean Network is open to young people aged between 13 and 25 and living in the UK. The network brings a youth voice into the Marine Conservation Society, informing our work, and is creating a movement of ocean activists and protectors. From monthly Zoom meetings to helping organise youth events across the country, giving talks at conferences and participating in campaigns on issues such as the Deposit Return Scheme and forever chemicals, members are making change happen.

The Youth Advisory Panel empowers young people to help shape the future of ocean protection. By bringing new ideas, lived experience, and bold thinking, panel members play a vital role in strengthening our mission to restore and protect our seas.

We're also running residentials and an internship in Scotland, which we're planning to roll out across the UK when we have secured the funding. Keep your eyes out for these opportunities and do share them with any young people you feel may be interested!

Encouraging young people to learn about and join such initiatives is a simple but important way we can all help inspire and shape future leaders, conservationists and advocates for our seas. You can signpost them to our website to explore these opportunities or email our friendly team to find out more.

Supporting their passion, interest or desire to work in or be involved with ocean conservation is also vital. Finding out more about the pathways, jobs and routes into the field and encouraging the young people in your life to pursue a future in conservation is something everyone can do.

Have conversations about marine issues and lead by example through ocean-friendly actions – for example, you can tell them about why you chose to join us a member and the positive impact that's having on our seas. For our part, we'll keep fighting for a healthier ocean, regenerating habitats and securing protections to show young people that change is possible, there is hope, and they have a future worth fighting for.

Membership & the Board

Virtual training events are a great way to keep us all informed/ engaged. Please can we have more in the calendar!

Thank you for your feedback. We will continue to offer virtual events and talks for our members and supporters to keep them informed of our work and inspire them to take action to protect our seas. We recently undertook some focus groups with members and supporters to understand what is important to them as part of a charity membership package. Learning and opportunities to come together as a community featured heavily, as did understanding the impact of their membership funding. As a direct result of this feedback, we are currently planning a series of member-specific events and webinars, to start in 2027, which aim to provide more of these opportunities for our member community. We will be in touch with all members with more details on both the dates and topics for these events in the near future.

Are you looking for new trustees?

Trustees step down by rotation every three years. They may offer themselves for re-election at the Annual General Meeting, but the total duration of each Trustee's tenure is limited to ensure there are opportunities for new Trustees to join the Board.

We review our board membership regularly to understand the skills and experience we already have and may need to ensure our Board runs effectively. We are not currently recruiting for new trustees; when we are, it tends to be during the first half of the year and is advertised openly.

Financial performance

What is the return on fundraising spend – i.e. how much is raised for every £ spent on fundraising?

Last year, for every £1 we spent on fundraising efforts, we raised £4.41. In total, the cost of raising funds was £1.12m, which equated to 22.7% of the total income raised last year (£4.95m).

How does this year's financial forecast compare to last year's full year outturn? Do you anticipate further revenue decline?

In the financial year of 2025-26, we received £4,954,448 in income – £3.1m of which was unrestricted. Compared to the previous year (2024-25), this is a decrease of 7% (£385,388).

This reduction primarily reflected lower income from trusts, companies and grants. It also includes £300,000 of unrestricted grant income which was expected during the year but was not received until April 2026, which falls in the financial year of 2026-27. However, we were pleased to see strong growth in legacies and individual donations, which increased by 76% and 23% respectively.

In 2026-27, we will continue to maintain close oversight of income, expenditure and cash flow so we can deliver our strategic priorities and maximise our impact for the ocean. We anticipate that income will be ahead of both years in 2026-27.

Other

Can we join efforts with the National Emergency Briefing process to achieve more awareness and support?

We very much support the important messages coming out of the National Emergency Briefing, and have shared on our social media channels, but we are not able to financially support it at this time. Our CEO, Sandy Luk, has also participated in a local screening of the film and we are working to screen the film internally for staff. We support Chris Packham's petition calling for MPs to debate the UK Government's response to the climate and nature crisis, with the debate scheduled for 16 November 2026.

The ocean is our greatest ally against climate change, and we are consistently raising awareness of its role in mitigating the impacts of, and overcoming it. We advocate for nature-positive renewable energy which safeguards biodiversity, encourage greater private and public investment in the blue economy, and are actively regenerating habitats and species which absorb carbon and prevent coastal erosion.

I thought that crab fisheries were suffering massively from the influx of octopus in the Southwest. There are several strong negatives, it seems. Crabs are surely highly significant components for balance - all species - and this does not look like balance.

This is often the challenge; as species move – often due to climate change, or from recovery – they can impact commercial operations. However, it's unfair to blame a species' recovery for all the impacts on crabs and lobsters.

Increasing temperatures and ocean acidity are directly impacting the ability of species like crabs and shellfish to breed. This means energy usually spent on reproduction is instead used to repair shells weakened by increased ocean acidity.

Ultimately, it's about balance; we need enough crabs and lobsters to support both the marine life of the UK (including octopus and seals), and low-impact sustainable fishing. This means we need to work with the industry and the governments of the UK to ensure fishing pressure is at the right level, and supports stock recovery and marine species and ecosystem recovery.

Does the Marine Conservation Society have a stance on the use of AI within its work, and how challenging is it to find the balance of usage when the boundary of value versus negative impact is hard and also a big talking point in the world today?

As an environmental charity, we are committed to establishing ways of working which use Artificial Intelligence (AI) responsibly and only when there is a true value to its use compared to alternative options and solutions – whilst considering the potential risks associated with the technology. The ethical risks we must consider include the environmental impact of AI. For example, the intensive use of resources required to power it, the accuracy and credibility of AI-generated information, the security of data to generate outputs, and social impacts such as human rights, jobs, and skills development.

As such, we adopt a deliberate, ethically governed approach to using AI, in which we avoid wasteful or unnecessary use of AI whilst remaining open to applications that help us increase our conservation impact, improve organisational effectiveness, or deliver greater value for beneficiaries.

We support staff to develop an informed understanding of AI's environmental implications and encourage thoughtful, proportionate use rather than blanket acceptance or rejection. With this sensibly robust approach, we will maintain a consistent and timely review of our policy and stance as the technology continues to evolve.

Transparency is essential. Any outputs produced using AI, will be made clear through labelling. Rigorous checks will then be carried out to ensure the tools/platforms provide true value that outweighs any risks.

Our work will continue to be human led. People are and will always be at the heart of we do; AI will not change that. Rather, it will support people to do their work more efficiently and effectively so we can achieve more for our ocean, sooner.

Do you have some examples of how AI can help the Marine Conservation Society?

We are already using AI in a number of practical ways across the organisation, both to support data analysis and to accelerate the development of tools that help us make better use of our evidence. However, we avoid using it for creative or social content because we have the in-house talent to develop assets and want to share only real imagery and stories with our audiences.

Examples of where we do use AI for analysis and improved workflow include:

- **Beachwatch Data Explorer**: an interactive explorer for UK beach litter survey data. AI coding assistants were used during development to help build the platform more efficiently. While there is no AI functionality within the tool itself, it enables users to interrogate, analyse and visualise Beachwatch data more easily, helping answer questions that would previously have required specialist analysis.
- **AI-enabled business intelligence and dashboard development**: our team experimented with connecting AI tools (MCP Servers) to business intelligence and analytics tools (Power BI), enabling them to work directly with datasets and support the creation of dashboards and visualisations. This can reduce the time needed to develop reports, explore trends and answer data-related questions.
- **Policy impact on beach litter conversational tool**: an AI-powered pilot project that will allow users to explore evidence on the links between policy interventions and beach litter outcomes through natural-language questions.
- **Automated data processing workflows**: using tools such as Alteryx to streamline the cleaning, transformation and preparation of large datasets, reducing manual effort and improving consistency.
- **Source to Sea mapping tools**: using AI-assisted development approaches to speed up the creation of mapping and visualisation products that bring together multiple environmental datasets and support interpretation.

Looking ahead, AI has significant potential to support citizen science and environmental monitoring by helping analyse larger datasets, identify trends and anomalies, make evidence more accessible to different audiences, and strengthen the links between data collection, learning and conservation impact.