

EMBARGOED PRESS RELEASE UNTIL 00:01 FRIDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2026

Plastic pollution persists on UK beaches after heatwave summer, as Marine Conservation Society calls for Great British Beach Clean volunteers

After a summer of record breaking, soaring temperatures and millions of visits to the coast, thousands of volunteers for the [Marine Conservation Society](#) will head to beaches across the UK from 18th – 27th September for the charity's *Great British Beach Clean* to find and record what was littered.

Data collected will add to the charity's *Beachwatch* dataset, which has tracked marine litter since 1994. Over 32 years, volunteers have recorded more than 3 million pieces of litter, creating a unique picture of how the rubbish washing up on the UK's shores is changing.

Every item recorded during a survey helps the Marine Conservation Society understand what is ending up on our coastline and campaign for action to tackle the sources of pollution. The evidence has helped support successful measures including the carrier bag charges and the legislation to tackle plastic in wet wipes.

Catherine Gemmell, Policy & Advocacy Manager at the Marine Conservation Society said, "We know simple policies can make a big difference. The number of plastic carrier bags recorded on UK beaches has fallen by 80% following the introduction of charges for single-use carrier bags. We're looking forward to a similar drop in drinks container litter with the introduction of Deposit Return Schemes in October 2027. This is just the tip of the iceberg though; our data shows we need more policies to tackle single-use plastic at a much faster rate."

Last year, an average of 105 items made from plastic were found on every 100 metres of beach surveyed by the charity's volunteers, accounting for 87% of all litter recorded. This represents a steady rise in the proportion of beach litter made from plastic over the past three decades – from 75% in 1995, to 81% in 2005, and 87% in 2025 – highlighting the enduring and growing scale of the plastic pollution problem.

Plastic pollution persists in the marine environment for many decades, breaking apart into ever-smaller fragments rather than simply disappearing. These microplastics can be ingested by marine animals, while larger pieces can cause injury, starvation or death through ingestion or entanglement.

The charity is asking for more to be done to turn off the tap on plastic production, reducing the amount of virgin plastic produced and getting tougher on single-use plastics.

The charity has found that some plastic items are on the rise, such as plastic fast-food containers, plastic and polystyrene pieces.

In 2025, drinks-related litter was found on 95% of beach cleans, with almost 50,000 drinks-related litter items recorded. Plastic bottles alone were found on 69% of beach cleans.

Lizzie Price, Beachwatch Manager at the Marine Conservation Society, said, "More than three decades of beach clean data shows that plastic remains stubbornly prevalent with some types of plastic litter still increasing. The data our volunteers collect paints a picture of the state of our beaches and allows us to advocate for policy changes to help clear up our coast."

Over the last 10 years, around 50% of litter recorded by Marine Conservation Society volunteers has come from public sources, having been dropped, blown or washed onto our shores. With millions of people visiting the coast during this summer's hot weather, this year's Great British Beach Clean will show whether more litter has been dropped on our beaches.

With the Great British Beach Clean, supported by [holidaycottages.co.uk](https://www.holidaycottages.co.uk), taking place from 18th – 27th September, the Marine Conservation Society is calling on the public to join thousands of volunteers across the UK and help track marine litter after such a hot summer.

Find a beach clean near you or organise your own: www.mcsuk.org/beach-clean

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Press Contact

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Images

Please find a selection of high-res imagery [here](#).

Notes to editors

About the Marine Conservation Society

The [Marine Conservation Society](#) is a leading UK environmental charity, working for the future of our ocean by driving political and social change through people, science and evidence – protecting habitats and regenerating ecosystems in partnership with communities, businesses and governments.

Related items

- View the [litter dashboard here](#)
- View the Marine Conservation Society's [State of our Beaches 2025](#)
- View the [2025 State of our Beaches Policy Recommendations Paper](#)

Media opportunities

Volunteers for the Marine Conservation Society will be hosting beach cleans throughout the week. Please see a selection of beach cleans below which have consent for media to attend. If you would like to arrange an interview or a beach clean, please email evie.martin@mcsuk.org

Date	Region	County	Beach & link – please let us know if you would like to attend
19/9/26	South Wales	Swansea	Great British Beach Clean Port Eynon Marine Conservation Society
19/9/26	South Wales	Swansea	Great British Beach Clean Langland Bay Marine Conservation Society
20/9/26	South-West England	North Somerset	Great British Beach Clean Sand Bay Marine Conservation Society
22/9/26	South-West England	Cornwall	GBBC Beach Clean Watergate Bay, Newquay Marine Conservation Society
23/9/26	South-West England	Cornwall	GBBC Beach Clean Porth Beach Newquay supported by Newquay Blue Balls Marine Conservation Society
24/9/26	South-East England	Sussex	Brighton Great British Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
18/9/26	South-West England	Devon	GBBC Launch Clean with holidaycottages.co.uk Marine Conservation Society
25/9/26	South-West England	Devon	Bovisand GBBC Beach Clean 2026 Marine Conservation Society
25/9/26	East England	Norfolk	GBBC clean with our supporting sponsor holidaycottages.co.uk Marine Conservation Society

19/9/26	Scotland	Edinburgh	Great British Beach Clean Cramond Beach (OSPAR) Marine Conservation Society
22/6/26	Scotland	Edinburgh	Youth Beach Clean with Young Sea Changers Scotland Marine Conservation Society
20/9/26	Scotland	North Highlands	Fortrose Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
27/9/26	Scotland	North Highlands	Dornoch Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
26/9/26	Scotland	North Highlands	Nairn East Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
23/9/26	Scotland	East Lothian	Great British Beach Clean - Longniddry Bents 3 Marine Conservation Society
19/9/26	Northern Ireland	County Antrim	Ballygally Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
22/9/26	Northern Ireland	County Antrim	Carnlough Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society
26/9/26	Northern Ireland	County Down	Newcastle Beach Clean Marine Conservation Society