

AGM Questions 2025

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Volunteering & Citizen Science

What opportunities are there for volunteers?

At the Marine Conservation Society, we pride ourselves on providing easy, accessible activities that can take place anytime and anywhere, truly making it easy for everyone to be a champion for our seas.

Taking part in [beach cleans](#) is one of the most popular ways for volunteers to get involved. As well as collecting important data to inform our policy work and influence national legislation on litter, this is also a great way to protect marine life as you'll be removing harmful litter from the environment that can cause entanglement or impact wildlife through ingestion of items. You can find out more about beach cleans in your local area [here](#), but remember to keep checking as our volunteer organisers are adding new events all the time. We also offer free training sessions and resources so that you can organise your own beach clean – whether it's just for you, for friends and family or even for your community.

We host a variety of citizen science activities, like our litter and seaweed surveys, and we offer opportunities for volunteers to [represent the charity](#) in their local and wider community as a presenter, events volunteer or media spokesperson. Find out about the full range of activities [here](#)

What opportunities are there for young people and those living far from the coast to get involved with the Marine Conservation Society's work?

Young people: Our [Youth Ocean Network](#) is a great way for people ages 13 to 25 to get involved in our work (those aged under 18 will need to meet our Youth Engagement Officer Katie online with a parent or guardian present before joining). There are online meetings every month, with six in-person roadshow events across the UK each year. You'll have the opportunity to ensure young people's views are embedded in our work and campaigns, learn about marine conservation, and network with ocean professionals across the globe. Our YON members have presented at ocean-themed conferences, monitored marine mammals on a research vessel, created internationally recognised 'artivism', delivered youth events and so much more. Whether they aim to be professionals in the field or embed ocean conservation in their daily lives, our YON is here to help them on that journey.

Students aged 16+ can take part in one of our [beach cleans](#) or [inland litter picks](#), or undertake citizen science surveys as part of their [Duke of Edinburgh volunteering](#). Our website also has plenty of online [secondary learning resources](#) and YouTube webinars available for students to freely access. You can also request a marine learning session for your school [here](#).

Those who live inland: No matter where you live, you can take part in our [Source to Sea Litter Quest](#) to collect and record litter in your local area. This complements Beachwatch data and supports our policy work, resulting in for, example, government commitments to [Deposit Return Schemes](#) for drink-related litter and bans on single-use plastic items.

Look out for campaigns which include letters to send to your local politician or [become a voice for our ocean](#) and represent the Marine Conservation Society in your local community through our supported activities as presenters, events team or media spokespersons. Visit the [volunteer dashboard](#) to see all our available opportunities.

How can I raise money for the Marine Conservation Society?

If you'd like to fundraise for us, please reach out to our Community Fundraising Team by emailing fundraising@mcsuk.org. They can offer advice and ideas about how to make the most out of your fundraising activities.

What barriers to marine conservation can the public easily assist with?

Choose sustainable seafood using our [Good Fish Guide](#) and help overfished stocks to recover. Opt for green-rated options and explore our recommended alternatives to the 'big five' species like cod and tuna. Using the Guide is an easy way to see the environmental impact of seafood options so you can shop, eat and live more sustainably. It has a wider impact, too: choosing sustainable seafood encourages supermarkets and restaurants to demand it from their suppliers, promotes the adoption of sustainable fishing practices, and encourages the government to improve management.

Taking part in our [beach cleans](#) helps gather critical data that we actively use to lobby for ocean-positive change, such as bans on single-use plastics and the urgent need for [Deposit Return Schemes](#) (in the case of Wales, one which includes glass). As we increase our efforts to stop the use of [forever chemicals](#), one simple step you can take is to consider buying PFAS-free items, and encouraging your friends and family to do the same.

What methods and processes do you use for the data collected through beach cleans?

Beachwatch data is analysed through a structured process that transforms litter collected and recorded on UK beaches into meaningful scientific and policy-relevant insights. All data are verified and entered into our national database, where rigorous quality control is applied. Following validation, statistical analyses are undertaken to identify spatial and temporal trends in beach litter, with the findings presented in our annual [State of our Beaches](#) report, released each spring.

When we analyse the litter data, we start by summarising data at each individual beach stretch before combining it at larger scales, so no single beach skews the results. Instead of using averages (means), we report the median (the middle value) which better reflects typical litter levels. This helps us ensure our data isn't affected by changes in number of surveys or volunteers over the years. We can then look at the average per 100m for counties or nations and compare them to each other and to other years. We can also see which litter items are found most, along with the percentages of material and its sources.

The data acts as evidence to underpin our advocacy work so we can lobby governments for legislative changes that tackle pollution at its source, and raise public awareness that drives positive behaviour change. It has been fundamental in bringing impactful change to the UK, from the introduction of the carrier bag charges to the recent bans in single-use plastic items and plastic in wet wipes.

Our [beach cleans](#) contribute data internationally as well as to our dataset; we conduct regular monitoring of OSPAR-designated beaches and our [Great British Beach Clean](#) forms the UK's submission International Coastal Clean-up. Academic institutions also often use the Beachwatch dataset to publish peer-reviewed research on marine litter and environmental change.

What happens to all the waste we clean up through beach cleans?

This varies around the UK, and it depends on the litter type. In some areas there are organisations that will take fishing nets and related litter (Waterhaul, for example), while some [beach clean](#) organisers can recycle plastic bottles, metal cans and glass bottles through local recycling schemes. At the moment, options to recycle microplastics are very limited.

Beach clean organisers can access local networks to optimise the amount of litter that can be recycled with the balance having to still go through general waste disposal –

some councils will collect waste from beach cleans on public beaches. If the beach clean or inland litter pick takes place on private land, disposal of the litter collected can be organised with the landowner.

Could I apply the beach clean steps and techniques to conduct or organise a beach clean in South Africa?

Although we only collect and records marine litter from the UK and Channel Islands, our methodology is aligned with international standards and could be applied anywhere. To understand more about the international work that we contribute towards, look into the Ocean Conservancy and find out about the [International Coastal Clean-up](#).

What is happening to Seasearch?

As a founding partner of [Seasearch](#), we are incredibly proud of its 40-year history and our role as host and administrator.

Earlier this year, a review of Marine Conservation Society's role as host of Seasearch was carried out, to reflect on the volunteer experience and investigate if there had been any changes that over time would require attention. The outcome of this review was that necessary changes to reporting, work planning and health and safety standards for paid contractors were required to remain compliant and that a number of the charity's legal requirements were no longer aligned with the Seasearch community's preferred approach.

10 months' discussion with Seasearch community representatives followed – during this time we were unable to reach an agreement on the delivery of volunteer activities funded by the Marine Conservation Society and as a result we couldn't secure further funding to support Seasearch activities, including its administration.

This meant we could no longer fund our own staff costs resulting in the redundancy of the Seasearch staff team at the Marine Conservation Society but also aligned with the community's desire to become a self-led entity. The solution was for the Marine Conservation Society to support a transition with community representatives for Seasearch to become a 'Community Interest Company', (TBC) able to act on behalf of and deliver for the benefit of the Seasearch community. To assist this, we are providing a package of support which includes a grant to cover third party set up costs and the donation of existing books for sale, to help ensure its future and further growth.

We sincerely hope that future projects arise that will provide mutually beneficial opportunities for the Marine Conservation Society to work in partnership with the new Seasearch organisation, however the Marine Conservation Society will no longer deliver Seasearch as part of its core activities. Please do look out for further updates as we keep our members who are involved in Seasearch up to date throughout this transition phase.

How do you access the Seasearch observers/surveyors' database?

All of the data submitted by [Seasearch](#) Observers and Surveyors is publicly accessible on the NBN Atlas. If you have any questions about data, need support with filling out your Seasearch forms or want to find out more, you can reach out to your Regional Seasearch Coordinator while the new community-led Seasearch is in the process of being more fully set up.

Conservation & Policy

How is the Marine Conservation Society working to influence government policy and strengthen protection of UK seas – and how effective is it at doing so?

We're committed to being a strong, evidence-based voice for our ocean in Westminster, the Senedd, and Holyrood. Our dedicated Parliamentary Affairs and Policy & Advocacy teams work tirelessly to shape policy and champion marine protection. They have built strong, cross-party relationships with members of Parliament, and parliamentary groups, ensuring our briefings, policy positions, and research inform key debates.

Our work spans a wide range of issues, from tackling [water pollution](#) and promoting ocean regeneration, to advancing the [circular economy](#) to tackle marine litter and securing funding for marine conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. We regularly participate in Ministerial roundtables, host events across the parliaments to raise awareness of ocean protection and encourage members of Parliament to ask questions and speak up for the ocean. We are regularly invited to give evidence to relevant committees on matters relevant to all our work areas and respond to government consultations (most recently, the Welsh government's consultation on its upcoming Deposit Return Scheme) and provide [guidance](#) so our supporters can add their voice and respond, too. Our collective responses helped secure the [new management measures](#) for Scotland's offshore MPAs and we are awaiting next steps following the consultation on single-use cup charges in Scotland, which we and our Sea Champions responded to last November.

Our work leads to results. Following years of campaigning, we succeeded in securing commitment from all four UK nations to implement a [Deposit Return Schemes](#), with legislation passed in England and Northern Ireland, and Scotland and Wales to lay their legislation shortly. This is a massive win for us and for everyone who helped evidence the need for DRS by recording the drinks litter found on [beach cleans](#). We have had government ministers and civil servants say on record that our Beachwatch data is a key evidence base for their policy development and prioritisation, and the data was used to support the introduction of bans on single-use plastic and plastic in wet wipes.

Looking ahead, we are preparing to launch dedicated manifestos for Scotland and Wales ahead of the 2026 elections, strengthening our commitment to protecting UK seas.

What is being done to strengthen enforcement of and protections in Marine Protected Areas?

We support the proposals for restrictions on bottom-towed gear in the 41 English sites – the Stage 3 consultation closed in September and the results are expected in the coming months, with the management expected to be in place around 6-12 months later.

[New management measures](#) came into place in Scotland this month, protecting almost 177,000 km² of its 20 vital offshore MPAs from bottom-towed gear – this was a big campaign win for us and partners and followed two decades of effort. We are pushing for the same to happen in the remaining inshore sites (MPAs, SACs, SPAs and Priority Marine Features) without measures in Scotland, and in Wales. Our marine planning work is also seeking to ensure that damage from construction and development does not occur in sensitive areas of the sea, including MPAs.

Things are steady in the North Norfolk MPA, but progress is slow. The main focus here is the Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds Marine Conservation Zone, where earlier evidence showed chalk damage from crab and lobster potting. There's no formal management yet in place here, only a voluntary code of practice. A new byelaw for permits, tighter regulations and pot tagging is planned, so changes will be introduced gradually as new evidence comes in.

We have been prominent in the push for fully documented fishing, including REM with cameras on the scallop fleet in Scotland, but want to see that rolled out wider. We are directly involved in discussions around scallop regulations across the devolved nations of the UK through Fisheries Management Plans and are working with industry to develop/use alternative approaches to dredging. We are advocating for low impact alternatives to bottom-towed gear, and the [Good Fish Guide](#) ratings will favour this.

We think spatial management of fishing is needed and that 'no take' zones have an important role to play in helping regenerate local shellfish populations. We have been advocating for 'no take' zones as part of spatial management of inshore fishing in Scotland and in England, we support the MMO proposals to prohibit bottom towed gear on non-compatible seabed types.

We will continue to brief Parliamentarians about the links between the climate and nature crises. This provides further evidence to support our calls for improved ocean management (such as marine planning and MPA management to reduce the pressure on our ocean), ocean regeneration of key species like oysters and seagrass that can help lock up carbon, and to join our voices with other organisations to help influence international treaties, such as during COP26.

What are the Marine Conservation Society's plans for future marine conservation projects?

We are currently working on three key areas: halting pollution at sea, managing activities at sea, and active regeneration of our seas. In the short term, we aim to halt the decline of marine species and provide space for the regeneration of our ocean to begin, but longer term, we are looking to ensure the key species and habitats are regenerated and thriving. This is where our exciting new Atlantic Coast programme comes in: it will focus on the habitat-building species, like [oysters](#), blue mussels and [seagrass](#), needed to restore the building blocks of our ecosystem, and provide stable conditions and cleaner waters for other marine life.

To begin with, we will be aiming to bring back the collapsed native (European) oyster populations to the west coast of the UK through spatting ponds and mobile hatcheries. This will help tackle the shortage of available baby oysters (called spat) and work has already [begun](#): with the support of partners, around 50,000 baby oysters have been transported to an oyster farm in Wales where they'll be raised until they're ready to be deployed (likely 2026 or 2027). The [Unlikely Ocean Hero appeal](#) will help kick-start this ambitious new chapter and enable us to maximise the impact we achieve by restoring this superhero species.

Through the Atlantic Coast programme, we are also developing new approaches to sustainable collecting seagrass seeds, expanding the use of eco-moorings to protect seabed habitats as well as seagrass, working with key marine users such as ports to reduce, and potentially reverse, some of the damage their business creates, and exploring how to grow at scale the engineering species we need to begin the regeneration of our ocean.

We have seen the remarkable impact of restoration efforts – not just for the individual species like oysters or seagrass, but for local biodiversity in general. Through our [DEEP](#) and [Restoration Forth](#) partnerships in Scotland, and the National Lottery funded [Natur am Byth!](#) work in Wales, we have already begun to reverse the decline of native oysters, seagrass and pink sea fan in some of the UK's most picturesque areas. This drives us to regenerate our west coast and offers a glimpse of what we can achieve.

The impacts of [climate change](#) are becoming increasingly clear and widespread – we are already seeing changes in our seas, with some species now migrating to the increasingly warmer waters of the UK. We will be continuing to collect data on the types and distribution of certain species in our waters, so we can monitor and identify changes over time. Our [Big Seaweed Search](#) is a great tool to help identify the shifts in local conditions, whether through changes in temperature, acidity or nutrients, and in populations of native

and non-native species. We also continue to encourage supporters to report their wildlife sightings to us and recently released the report with the findings from the past year.

As the climate crisis intensifies, we aim to reduce the impacts of climate change – not just carbon sequestration and storage, but providing a real buffer against the increasing impacts of ocean acidification. Additionally, we will continue, across our work areas, to secure benefits to people, wildlife, and planet through cleaner seas, coastal flood protection and more breeding grounds for sustainable fishing.

Our published strategy runs to 2030 and outlines the four Ocean Goals we are working towards: a better protected ocean, a healthier ocean, a cleaner ocean, and engaged communities of support.

We also recognise that ocean recovery takes far longer than a decade, so we have identified key strategic impact areas that are already looking beyond 2030. These areas include ocean regeneration, effective ocean management and [water quality](#). While some ocean regeneration projects require goals that look well beyond a 10-year horizon, others demand flexible frameworks to adapt to shifting priorities, funding, and external conditions over time – which is why it's important we develop flexible frameworks that allow us to adapt as circumstances change.

What is your opinion on the outlook for funding of marine restoration projects over the next 5-10 years?

There is a growing interest in marine restoration projects, including projects that harness the power of [oysters](#), [seagrass](#), kelp and other species to tackle challenges such as [climate change](#), biodiversity loss, and coastal resilience. We are seeing a growth in philanthropists, charitable foundations and companies supporting restoration projects, including FatFace and the FatFace Foundation who are generously supporting our restoration work across the Atlantic Coast.

We are also seeing an increase in companies investing in nature-based solutions to help restore and protect habitats. This often-large-scale investment, if delivered alongside credible sustainability targets, has the potential to make a transformational difference to the funding landscape. In the last year we have also seen an increase in statutory funds focussing on marine restoration, including the Scottish government's Nature Restoration Fund and the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund. We hope that this trend continues as significantly more investment will be required to deliver impact at scale.

How relevant is the work of the Marine Conservation Society to climate change?

Our work is particularly relevant to [climate change](#) and all our work to restore species and habitats helps reduce its impacts, from campaigning to prevent fishing practices that release [carbon](#) back into the atmosphere, to restoring species that absorb and store it. Nature is the biggest super power we have to address climate change – it's been doing the heavy lifting for decades; now we need to return the favour.

As part of our parliamentary advocacy work, we campaign against climate change and its effects on the marine environment, including ocean acidification. We have briefed parliamentarians on the marine implications of carbon capture use and storage, where ocean acidification is one of the key risk factors due to leaks of carbon dioxide into the sea, and the risks that ocean acidification poses to marine life and the health of our seas – as part of our work on this, we sit on the Ocean Acidification Research for Sustainability Group, led by the University of Plymouth.

Addressing marine pollution – [sewage](#), [plastic](#), and [chemical](#) – is vital to safeguard the health of our seas and the species we rely on to mitigate climate change. Our work on marine planning helps guide developments away from the most sensitive areas, and our engagement work helps empower people to make informed choices and understand that every single one of us can play a part in addressing the impacts of climate change.

How does the Marine Conservation Society interact with the UN Sustainable Development Goals departments?

We are actively engaged with the Sustainable Development Goals through our membership of both the UN national decade committee for the decade for Ocean Science, and our membership in SDG14, life below water, in which we work as part of a global partnership to address issues such as Ocean Acidification.

How is the political landscape for your campaigns?

The political landscape is mixed. The governments of the UK have committed to a number of policies that align with the Marine Conservation Society's priorities. This includes tackling [sewage pollution](#) and poor water quality and moving towards the circular economy, including the upcoming introduction of [Deposit Return Schemes](#) and bans on [single-use plastics](#).

However, sometimes policy delivery can be slow or uneven, and there are some political priorities of the UK Government, such as much-needed renewable energy developments, that, if implemented incorrectly, could negatively impact sensitive marine habitats and our ocean. Our dedicated Parliamentary Affairs Team and Policy and Advocacy Team therefore work diligently to remain informed and identify opportunities to influence Parliamentarians and policies, to ensure the ocean and its inhabitants are considered in decisions.

We are very active politically; over the last few months, we attended political party conferences and the UN Ocean Conference, and we work with cross-party representatives in Westminster, the Senedd and the Holyrood to be the voice for the ocean.

How do you measure the success of your campaigns and projects?

We measure impact by tracking both what we do and the change it creates. Our approach links every project and campaign to our wider environmental goals so we can see how individual actions contribute to long-term systemic change. We look at shifts in policy, behaviour and environmental outcomes, not just activity or outputs. Behind this, we have a consistent way of planning and delivering work that ensures resources are used efficiently and progress is measured fairly. This gives us reliable evidence of what's working, what needs adapting and where we can make the biggest difference.

Together, these approaches help us turn strategic ambition into practical results. They show that our efforts are creating measurable progress towards protecting our ocean, defending crucial habitats, regenerating vital ecosystems and inspiring volunteers.

What's happening with blue whales and minke whales right now, and what are the key conservation issues or developments we should know about?

Both blue whales and minke whales are notoriously difficult to study because they are elusive and wide-ranging, but we do know they share a history of severe exploitation. Commercial whaling pushed both species to the brink, yet populations are now showing signs of recovery. For blue whales, numbers have risen to an estimated 25,000 individuals worldwide, up from fewer than 3,000 at their lowest point in the 1960s. Similarly, the International Whaling Commission reports global minke whale stocks have also improved since the global moratorium on commercial whaling was implemented in 1986. However,

threats such as climate change and chemical pollution remain a serious concern for their future. The Northern minke whale can be spotted in UK waters, primarily along the West coast of Scotland. To learn more about which whales you can spot in our seas and when, visit our webpage [here](#).

What is being done to help to reduce microplastics in the ocean?

[Microplastics](#) can enter our seas in many ways and are a huge threat to marine wildlife. We are therefore tackling microplastics across several of our work areas. We have been one of the leading voices in calling for action on microfibres – tiny plastic fibres that shed from textiles – including calling for legislation to make microfibre filters mandatory in washing machines, as well as wider action including industry roadmaps and extended producer responsibility schemes.

Our Beachwatch survey includes collecting data on [nurdles](#), tiny pre-production plastic pellets, which we share with The Great Nurdle Hunt to reduce plastic pellet loss across the supply chain. Monitoring is so important, and our policy and advocacy team are working hard to improve the monitoring of microplastics with the water industry to support policy developments to where possible stop microplastics at source.

What is your position on commercial tuna fishing as a sport (catch and release), and what can be done to protect the blue fin tuna in our waters?

We are not currently working in the sporting area of fishing (our focus is on fishing for consumption), but we have read the Thunnus UK research on the issue of tuna's ability to recover following catch-and-release fishing and would advise anglers to use the guidance produced.

In terms of protecting bluefin tuna populations, we will advocate for Defra and the MMO to ensure catch limits are adequately monitored and enforced; this will help ensure we continue to see a resurgence in the iconic tuna in UK waters.

Organisational Sustainability

Is the Marine Conservation Society offering a carbon offset programme to raise revenue from private enterprise, e.g. the housebuilding industry?

Our priority is regeneration and reducing emissions at source. Carbon offsetting can allow businesses to continue with “business as usual”, but addressing the climate crisis requires real and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Regeneration, however, focusses on restoring ecosystems and improving resilience, which delivers long-term environmental benefits rather than simply compensating for emissions elsewhere.

In a more split and less integrated society which seems to be at play currently, what plans does the Marine Conservation Society have to bring people from all backgrounds together?

We believe one ocean is for everyone, and that commitment has shaped us since our creation in 1977, when scientists, divers and environmentalists united to tackle the growing degradation of marine habitats and wildlife. From the outset, the charity has championed community involvement and education as the foundation of its work, campaigning tirelessly to protect and restore the UK’s seas so that nature flourishes and people thrive.

This is why we put inclusion, representation and respect at the heart of everything we do – from building a more diverse workforce and Board to making our projects, campaigns and events accessible to all.

Through our supporter events and opportunities like the [Youth Ocean Network](#) or our [beach cleans](#), our members and supporters – from all walks of life and areas across the UK – can come together, share ideas and learn, and connect to each other and the ocean. We will continue to foster our diverse community of supporters and provide these opportunities for them to come together and have fun while taking pro-ocean action.

As charity fundraising comes under ever increasing pressure, what are your plans to make the charity financially self-sustaining in the coming years?

As a charity, annual fundraising will always be necessary, but we are working hard to diversify our income, including a renewed focus on areas such as [corporate partnerships](#), [philanthropy](#), [individual giving](#), and [legacy gifts](#). One thing that all members can do to help the Marine Conservation Society remain financially sustainable is to consider remembering the charity in your will – it is one of the most significant ways you can support us, and is usually beneficial for tax purposes for your inheritors.

How are the trustees creating efficient reporting structures that provide oversight without diverting significant time from mission delivery? And how does it gather feedback to ensure its governance is actively empowering staff to focus their expertise on delivering maximum value for our cause?

Our ocean goals give us a clear, focussed strategy and a shared sense of purpose. We prioritise impact – it's not about how much we do, but the difference our actions make. We've strengthened how we work by adopting a programme management approach, breaking down silos to create cross-cutting teams focussed on key initiatives, and streamlining reporting with consistent templates and indicators. Culture is equally important: we foster a positive, solution-focussed mindset and embrace continuous improvement. We're fortunate to have trustees with diverse experience, and a step change in staff professionalism ensures governance supports and empowers our teams to deliver maximum value for our mission.

Other

What advice would you give to someone interested in pursuing a career in marine conservation?

There are lots of ways to start your career in marine conservation. Volunteering with organisations in the sector, joining local restoration projects, attending events, applying for internships, or getting involved in campaigns are all great ways to gain experience. Building a network of contacts is important too, and don't be disheartened if success doesn't come immediately – competition for roles is high. Think creatively about your route in: marine conservation organisations need more than marine biologists, so experience in areas like fundraising or marketing can be a valuable stepping stone.

There are also brilliant marine biology and related courses you can study, alongside other options beyond university. If you're still at school, you could ask your teachers to explore our [Ocean-Friendly Schools](#) initiative, and when you're a little older, join our [Youth Ocean Network](#) for exciting opportunities and activities that will help you prepare for the next steps in your career. We are also working to develop our first Youth Advisory Panel, giving young people the chance to guide our work, gain new skills and build experience that could help shape a future career in marine conservation.

Do we have many high-profile members who we can help promote the society?

We have a wonderful network of celebrity Ocean Ambassadors from many walks of life and different types of achievement – from entrepreneurship, sport, hospitality, science, and broadcasting – but crucially all share our love of protecting the ocean. You can read more about them [here](#). We do also encourage all our members and supporters to help promote the charity, which you can do by engaging with our social channels ([@mcsuk](#) / [@mcs_uk](#)) or reaching out for a conversation with our communications team about any ideas you have, connections or offers of support: info@mcsuk.org.