

# *Great British* BEACH CLEAN

2015 Report\*



\* Includes the *Great Channel Islands* and *Great Northern Irish* BEACH CLEAN

# Welcome to our beach litter report for 2015!

Our 2015 Great British Beach Clean event has been yet another record breaker! When 5,349 volunteers took part in 2014 we were thrilled - but that record was smashed in September 2015 when 6,035 of you headed to the beach - the most in our 22 year history of running clean-ups.

**Thanks to each and every one of you - your support is a massive part of the fight to reduce beach litter on UK shores.**

Another record was broken too, but we rather wish it hadn't been. In 2014 we found 2,457 pieces of litter on every kilometre of beach we cleaned - the highest amount since we began our annual September cleans. But in 2015 it got worse, with 3,298 items picked up per kilometre surveyed.

It's a damning indictment that current legislation to stop litter reaching the sea isn't working. From public litter to industrial waste, fishing litter to fly tipping - this problem belongs to us all, so it can be fixed.

Bottles are the story of this year's Great British Beach Clean, with almost 100 being found on every kilometre we cleaned. We've more on bottles on pages 10 and 12.

In this year's report you'll find out how some beach data is helping to show how UK governments are performing when it comes to European litter targets, go on a beach cleaning road trip with MCS staff and get the latest beach litter news from around the UK.

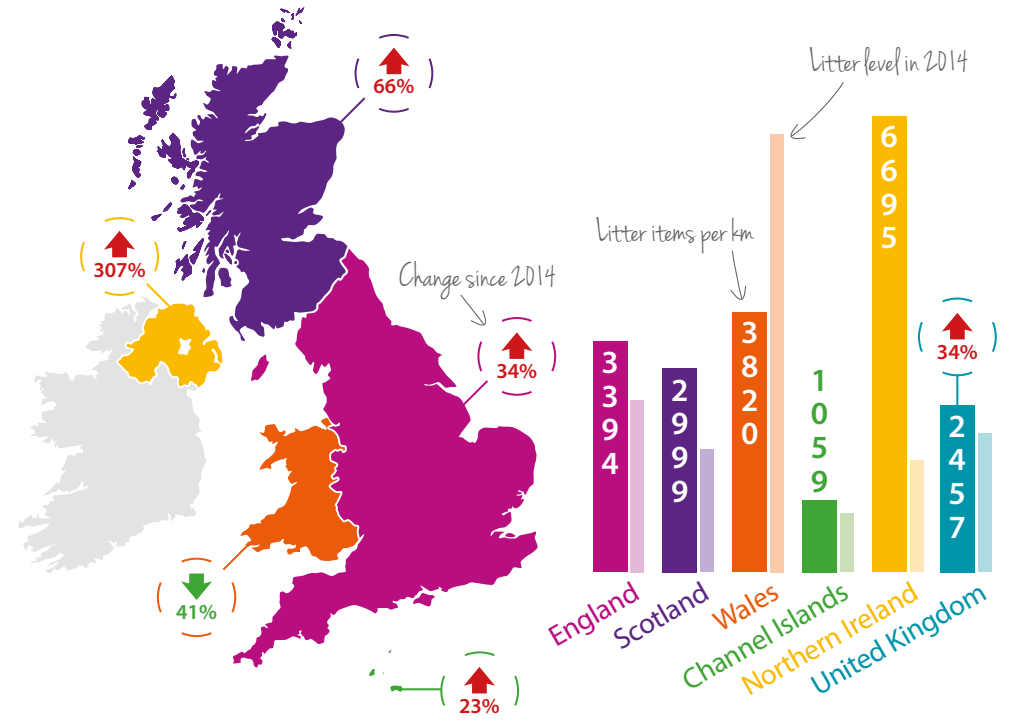
This year there have been some changes to the way we record our data. You'll notice some different categories - it's all to fit in with European recording and allows data to be compared more easily.

Once again thank you for your continued support. We look forward to seeing you in September 2016!

*Lauren* MCS Beachwatch Manager

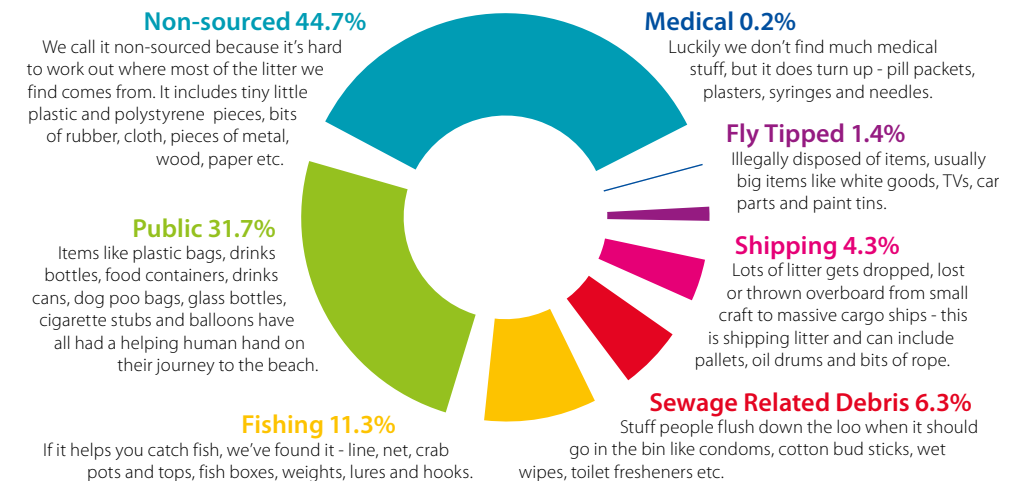


# The UK's beach litter story



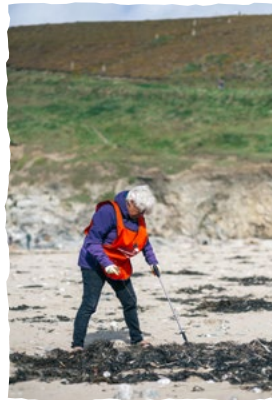
## Our volunteers record what they find...

### ...and where it's likely to have come from!





# Thanks to all our volunteers who took part!



each = 10 volunteers

# Here's the top 10 of what we picked up

We record 118 different items of litter during our surveys and the litter we found filled 2,556 bin bags. But what exactly went into the bags?



- 1 Plastic / Polystyrene pieces (0-50 cm) **960.8/km** ⇔
- 2 Other glass pieces **208.0/km** ↑2
- 3 Packets (crisp, sweet, lolly, sandwich) **197.7/km** ↓1
- 4 Caps & lids **187.1/km** ↓1
- 5 String / cord / rope (thickness 0-1 cm) **150.9/km** ⇔
- 6 Cotton bud sticks **119.2/km** ↑4
- 7 Fishing nets and net pieces **106.2/km** ↑1
- 8 Drinks bottles **98.9/km** ↑1
- 9 Cigarette stubs **86.6/km** ↓3
- 10 Cutlery / trays / straws **80.9/km** ↑2



Staggering statistic... **7/10** of our top finds are made of plastic or polystyrene!







Cleaning up pink bottles at Poldhu Cove © West Briton



© Stephanie Thomas

### Inked

Just before the Vanish bottle incident, thousands of printer cartridges started washing up on beaches around Europe, including in the UK.

The HP cartridges were spotted on the UK's south and west coasts, as well as Ireland, the Hebrides, France and Portugal. They came from a cargo spill in the Atlantic in 2014.

MCS and HP acted quickly and the cartridge giant donated to a fund, administered by MCS, to ensure the cartridges were removed quickly. The cash will be used to support clean-up initiatives to find and return the cartridges.



HP cartridge photos © Tracey Williams/Newquay Beachcombing

### In the pink!

Beaches around Cornwall were threatened with an environmental disaster in January with reports of hundreds of pink plastic bottles washing up on Cornish beaches.

The bottles, identified as Vanish liquid, contained hydrogen peroxide which you absolutely do not want in seawater.

The bottles were first spotted at Poldhu Cove, Gunwallow, Church Cove, Looe Bar, Marazion and Long Rock, but there were soon sightings further afield including Cefn Sidan beach in Carmarthenshire.

Reckitt Benckiser (RB), the company behind Vanish, began an investigation. It's believed the bottles were part of a shipment lost at sea. RB have promised financial, technical and logistical support for the clean-up and disposal of the bottles, wherever they come from.



Pink bottles everywhere at Poldhu Cove © West Briton



© Scottish Marine Animal Stranding Scheme 2016

### Scottish orca drowns after litter entanglement

One of a pod of killer whales that patrols the Scottish Hebrides and east coast of Scotland was found dead on the Isle of Tiree in January. Lulu was one of the group's females, and her death may have reduced their number to as few as eight.

A post mortem revealed that she died by drowning after becoming entangled, most probably with creel ropes. Her death is a severe blow to the pod which could possibly become extinct in our lifetime, according to the Hebridean Whale and Dolphin Trust.



# Great British Beach Clean - on the road!

This year two MCS staff went all out for the Great British Beach Clean.

Catherine Gemmell, MCS Scotland Conservation Officer and Lizzie Prior, MCS Beach Clean and Conservation Administrator, took to the roads in South Wales and East Scotland.

Lizzie visited seven beaches across South Wales during the weekend as part of her beach clean road-trip and Catherine cleaned six beaches across East Lothian and Fife in just a single day!



 Lizzie's road trip in South Wales



“I thoroughly enjoyed beach hopping across the beautiful Welsh coastline and meeting people along the way. Everyone was so lovely and passionate. I was surprised that there was such a strong link between how the beach was used by the public and what we found there. So in places where people hang out at the back of the beach we would find lots of cigarette butts, but on a beach where a lot of people went in the sea, there was a lot of body board foam found.” *Lizzie Prior*



 Just arrived at our first beach. St Brides in Newport. Beautiful day for a #beachclean @mcsuk

1st beach all done. 12kg of litter collected. Thanks to all our volunteers! #beachclean @mcsuk

Another beautiful day for a #beachclean The sad bit was a balloon release took place right by us #dontletgo @mcsuk

Lots of cigarette butts and plastic found. Unusual item - a vial of liquid! #beachclean #swansea @mcsuk

Just arrived at Langland Bay! Time for a bit of lunch before the 5th #beachclean @mcsuk

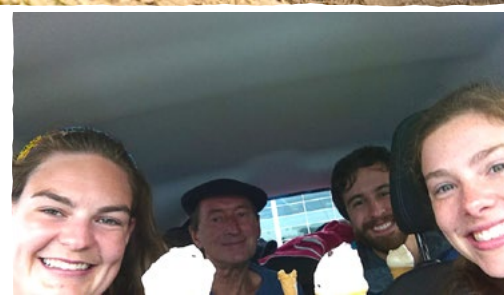
7 #beachcleans in 4 days and met amazing people along the way. @mcsuk




 Catherine's road trip in East Scotland



“The road trip was a brilliant way to get to know some of our wonderful Scottish Sea Champions better - I was supported at each beach by many of them - and of course the ice cream reward at the end! Each beach seemed to have a different top litter item! For Cramond it was sanitary cloths, for Aberdour it was glass and for Pettycur Bay it was hundreds of cotton buds!! At each beach people were always asking us what we were up to and congratulating us on our efforts - we even got some extra helpers at Aberdour!” *Catherine Gemmell*



 Picked up last @SeaChampions. Hitting the road to Tynninghame for the first clean-up. @mcsuk @CalumDuncanMCS #GBBC #Beachclean

#GBBC #beachclean number 2 for @SeaChampions @mcsuk road trip! #gullane

It's hotting up in here - the @SeaChampions are stripping off! Three beaches down, three more to go! GBBC @mcsuk @CalumDuncanMCS

Crossing the Forth Road Bridge onto Aberdour for clean no. 4! @mcsuk @CalumDuncanMCS @SeaChampions #GBBC #Beachclean

A huge thank u 2 my @SeaChampions ! Couldn't have done it 2day without u. 14 hours later in abdn ready for round 3! @mcsuk #gbbc #beachclean

Lizzie and Catherine are gluttons for punishment - they both say they'll do it all again!



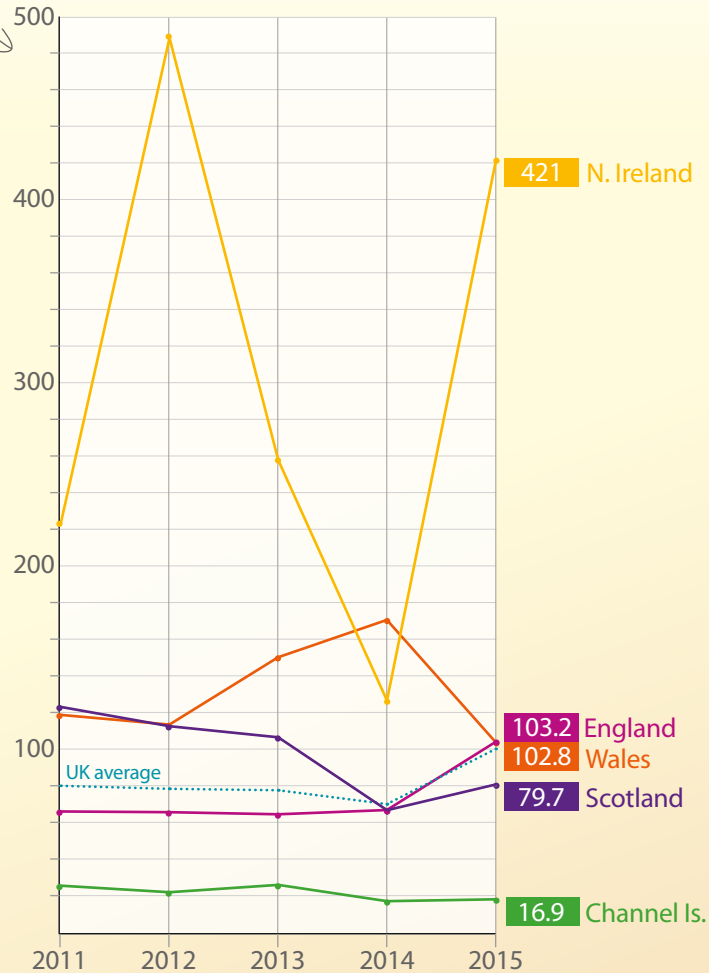
# Are we bottling out of binning?



In 2015 we found, on average, a staggering 99 plastic drinks bottles on every kilometre we cleaned. They're everywhere!

Our message on bottles is - always recycle and if you can, buy a reusable drinks bottle - there are loads of trendy receptacles on the market and tap water is free!

Plastic bottle litter per kilometre



# Litter monitoring - checking up on UK progress

From the start of 2015, 19 beaches were selected to be monitored as part of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) - EU-wide legislation to ensure governments in European countries are reaching targets to reduce the litter you can actually see on beaches. This is really great for MCS and shows how robust our data collection is!

The information from these beaches - from Scotland to Jersey - will be used by the EU to check and see how UK governments are faring in the fight against beach litter.

The MSFD monitoring will take place four times a year at the selected beaches until 2018. It's quite a commitment, but one that Jez Payne, who's been organising cleans on Jersey since 1990, really welcomes.

"The forms are more useful than the old ones, and this monitoring is good because we can compare ourselves against European standards."



Bottle header © Ryan Townley

Plastic litter © Natasha Ewins



# What are we doing about...

## Plastic bottles



The number of plastic bottles found on UK beaches is the big story of the 2015 Great British Beach Clean.

In almost every part of the UK the number of bottles our volunteers found went up compared to 2014. 99 bottles were found, on average, per kilometre cleaned - an overall increase of 43%.

Plastic drinks bottles are almost a fashion accessory and are promoted as such by manufacturers. People are happy to be seen swigging their H<sub>2</sub>O - great for our hydration but in the long run - bad for our beaches.

In Scotland there's a growing momentum behind the 'Have you got the bottle?' campaign. Backed by MCS, it's pushing for a Deposit Return System (DRS) which would put in place a financial incentive to return your drinks bottle.

“We believe an increased level and quality of recycling and reduced litter levels where DRS are running is compelling and we will keep up the pressure with the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland and others for a DRS for Scotland.” *Calum Duncan, Head of Conservation, MCS in Scotland.*



MCS is fully behind a DRS in Wales too. We'd like to see the new Welsh Government introduce such a scheme throughout Wales.

There's currently no talk of a scheme being introduced in England, but we would love to see this as part of England's new litter strategy.

We'd like to get things moving, so we're asking YOU to write to your MP/SMP/AM showing your support for DRS and get them to tell you what they're going to do to get a DRS off the ground - see [mcsuk.org](http://mcsuk.org) for details.

## Wet wipes



After a staggering 50% rise in wipes found on our beaches between 2013 and 2014, there's been a further rise of 31% according to our 2015 figures.

We want to see this figure come right down and the main way to do this is to ensure that people understand what can and can't go down the loo - wipes are in the 'can't' category!

In 2016 we're launching a campaign focusing on wet wipes and the problems they cause when they enter the sewer system via the lav.



Follow us on Twitter and like us on Facebook or sign up to our enews at [www.mcsuk.org/enewsletter/subscribe.php](http://www.mcsuk.org/enewsletter/subscribe.php) to keep up to date with what we're doing.



## Single use plastic bags



Those flimsy, thin, plastic bags that you could pick up in fistfuls from supermarkets for the last few decades have become floating death traps in our oceans - found in the guts of turtles and other marine life, masquerading as the ocean's grab and go snack - the jellyfish.



This year we found an average of 59 bags per kilometre of beach cleaned. But there's good news - in Wales, plastic bags dropped by 47% on 2014 figures - an indication that the 5p charge introduced there in 2011 is starting to show positive results. With fewer bags in circulation, fewer are finding their way to the beach.

In Scotland, where a 5p charge was introduced in 2014, there was a less than 1% drop in the number of bags on beaches. We'll be scrutinising next year's figures with interest to see if a similar decrease to that in Wales happens, likewise in England where the charge only came into force last October.

Our message on single use plastic bags is that their use needs to be reduced dramatically, and ultimately they must become a thing of the past.

## Balloons



The number of balloons we found on beaches during the 2015 Great British Beach Clean has gone - where else - up!

Like sky lanterns, balloons are basically litter in the sky. Trouble is, it all floats back down to land, often many miles from where it was let go.

We're working hard with local authorities around the UK to encourage them to ban the release of both balloons and sky lanterns on their land. Over 40 councils have now agreed to a voluntary ban including Cornwall County Council, Gwynedd Council and North Norfolk District Council.



### You can help!

Twitter is a great public platform to show your council you'd like them to join the other local authorities who already have a ban in place. Look up our 'Don't Let Go' campaign on our website for more details, where there's even some drafted text to get you started.







the **plastic!** challenge!

1<sup>st</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## Could you give it up?

In June 2015, 845 people said 'no' to single use plastic. Over 95% of the people who took part said they would continue to reduce their plastic use after the main challenge was over. Not only that, our challengers raised almost £4,000 for MCS!

This year we're hoping for even more support – can we get over 1,000 people to take part?

Find out more and join the **Plastic Challenge** community on [www.mcsuk.org/plasticchallenge](http://www.mcsuk.org/plasticchallenge) and [#plasticchallenge](https://twitter.com/plasticchallenge)

By its very nature, this isn't an easy challenge! Challengers said dried goods like pasta, rice and pulses were the trickiest items to find plastic free, along with milk and loo paper.

Our challengers turned themselves into a proper community – swapping tips, suggesting alternatives and supporting each other during the month of June and beyond with the help of our tip swap pages on our website.

**How long could you go?**  
A day? A week?  
A month? A lifetime?

**Get planning early... you need to get in training!**

**Get your strategy straight and make plans before June 1<sup>st</sup>.**

You don't have to wait until September to join MCS on a beach clean – there are events throughout the year.

You can find out about clean-ups close to where you live via the events tab at [www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch](http://www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch)

“A worthwhile couple of hours. I felt I had done something for my community and have been busy telling friends and family about the great experience. Not so great seeing the shocking amount of rubbish collected from the beach!”

*Emily, Lincolnshire*

“A great few hours out making a difference. My niece (14) and I had a great morning and didn't realise how much litter we located in such a small mapped out area. We have told our family and friends and will attend in greater numbers next time.”

*Mark, Tyne and Wear*

# Great British BEACH CLEAN

16<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> September  
**2016**



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The Marine Conservation Society's sustainable seafood and beach litter work is supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery.



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**ZSL**  
LET'S WORK FOR WILDLIFE

Selfridges kindly provided support for Great British Beach Clean (GBBC) through Project Ocean, its long-term partnership with the Zoological Society of London. Last year, Selfridges removed all single-use plastic water bottles from its stores, amounting to approximately 400,000 bottles a year.



The Octonauts Magazine team supported the GBBC on the south coast of England this year, accompanied by over 150 volunteers.

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Protecting our seas, shores and wildlife