

PRESS RELEASE



Marine
Conservation
Society

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MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY BEACHWATCH 2008 RESULTS – Beach Litter at Highest Level Ever!

MCS calls for Governments to develop action plan for marine litter

The amount of litter on Britain's beautiful beaches is at its highest level since records began, according to the Marine Conservation Society's (MCS) Beachwatch 2008 Survey Report published today at www.mcsuk.org. The Beachwatch 2008 results show that litter on our beaches has increased by a staggering 110% since the annual survey began in 1994. Average figures for the UK are now at 2,195 litter items/km of beaches surveyed compared to 1,045 items/km in 1994.

At present there is no Government-led plan of action for tackling marine litter in the UK. In order to turn the tide on rising litter levels, MCS is calling for a coordinated approach from Governments to develop a marine litter strategy and deliver it through appropriate Government bodies.

Marine litter kills wildlife, can be hazardous to people and costs millions to clear up. Over 170 species of marine wildlife including seabirds, turtles and whales have been recorded mistaking marine litter for food, which can result in starvation, poisoning and fatal stomach blockages.

"Whether you live near the coast or miles inland, we are all connected to the sea. This is a man-made problem. Every piece of litter has an owner and we all need to take responsibility to not drop litter in the first place. MCS wants zero waste on Britain's beaches and our first goal is to halve the litter on Britain's beaches by 2015, but in order to achieve this we need statutory agencies appointed with the specific responsibility to stop marine litter and develop a marine action plan now," said Emma Snowden, MCS Litter Projects Coordinator.

Emma continued, "A record number of 5,219 volunteers took part in Beachwatch 2008 showing the high level of public concern but we need thousands more people to join MCS and help with MCS Beachwatch 2009. In order to turn the tide on marine litter we need the public to continue showing their support. If you only do one thing today please sign our petition calling for a Government Action Plan on marine litter. Vote now at www.mcsuk.org."

The Beachwatch 2008 report is based on data collected by a record number of 5,219 volunteers on 374 UK beaches surveyed over one weekend in September 2008. Volunteers surveyed 175.7 km of coast and removed over 385,000 litter items. In order to tackle the problems of marine litter it is important to know where it is coming from. Our latest report identifies four main sources of beach litter – public litter (37.7%), fishing litter (13.8%), sewage related debris/sanitary waste (6.2%) and shipping litter (1.8%). The average density of UK beach litter in the Beachwatch 2008 survey was 2,195 items of litter per kilometre – an average of over two items for every metre stretch of beach!

MCS Beachwatch results are essential in turning the tide on litter. The results of recent surveys have helped MCS influence changes to laws on disposing of wastes at sea, and resulted in investment in better sewage treatment at the coast. While MCS lobbies for a national strategy to tackle this extraordinary volume of rubbish washing up on our beaches, it also encourages individual responsibility for litter disposal.

For further information about the problems caused by marine litter and the MCS campaign to stop it, please see our Beachwatch backing papers including the full Beachwatch 2008 results at www.mcsuk.org

MCS is extremely grateful to The Crown Estate, SeaFrance and The Co-operative for funding the litter projects. Neil Jacobson, Head of Coastal Operations at The Crown Estate says, *“Beachwatch and its thousands of volunteers continue to highlight the increasing problem of beach litter and this report makes it clear that individual action is the key to encouraging everyone to keep Britain’s beaches beautiful and free of litter.”*

Robin Wilkins, MD of SeaFrance says, “Along with other members of SeaFrance staff and local volunteers, I have been involved in regular beach cleans and surveys at Kingsdown. It’s been quite shocking to see the levels of litter on the beach. One problem is that it’s the easy option to just leave your litter behind rather than take it home with you, but the litter left behind impacts our coastline for generations. SeaFrance is absolutely committed through its support as lead sponsor of MCS Beachwatch to help combat this problem.”

The data from Beachwatch surveys also contributes to the International Coastal Cleanup, involving over 70 countries worldwide, organised by the Ocean Conservancy in the United States. MCS would like to thank all of the volunteers that participated in *MCS Beachwatch 2008*, without whose hard work and dedication the *MCS Beachwatch* survey would not be possible.

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For further information about *MCS Beachwatch 2008* and photographs contact:

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The Beachwatch 2008 Summary Report is now available from MCS and can be downloaded at www.mcsuk.org from Wednesday 8th April, alternatively the report can be emailed by request from beachwatch@mcsuk.org. A series of Beachwatch Backing papers, including an executive summary and results chapter can also be downloaded at www.mcsuk.org Photographs available to download from www.mcsuk.org

Editors Notes

At present there is no lead body in England, Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland responsible for dealing with marine litter. It is imperative that one body within each UK country takes on the responsibility for dealing with and preventing marine litter from all sources. Since our seas do not recognise political boundaries it is vital that lead agencies, once identified, work closely together. One of the first tasks of these bodies would be to develop a coordinated marine litter strategy.

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of our seas, shores and wildlife. MCS campaigns for clean seas and beaches, sustainable fisheries, and protection of marine life. Through education, community involvement and collaboration, MCS raises awareness of the many threats that face our seas and promotes individual, industry and government action to protect the marine environment. MCS provides information and guidance on many aspects of marine conservation and produces the annual *Good Beach Guide* (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk), the *Good Fish Guide* and www.fishonline.org on sustainable seafood, as well as promoting public participation in volunteer projects and surveys such as *MCS Beachwatch*, *Adopt-a-Beach* and *Basking Shark Watch*. www.mcsuk.org The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is celebrating 25 years of protecting our precious seas, shores and wildlife this year.

MCS Beachwatch is an annual UK-wide beach litter survey and clean up, organised by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) since 1993. Beachwatch is the flagship event of the Adopt-a-Beach project, which encourages local volunteers to survey marine litter every quarter. Volunteers remove all the litter from a measured area of their local beach, recording every item that they find. The data gathered from Beachwatch every September is published by MCS in the Beachwatch Report. This information is used at national and International levels to raise awareness of the impacts of marine litter, to promote measures to reduce litter at source and to campaign for marine litter legislation. The sixteenth Beachwatch litter survey and beach clean took place on the 20th and 21st September 2008. Beachwatch 2009 will take place on 19th and 20th September, for further information see www.mcsuk.org.

Summary of MCS Beachwatch 2008 results:

Beachwatch 2008 Summary	
Volunteers	5,219
Number of beaches surveyed	374
Total length surveyed (km)	175.7
Number of bags	3,188
% Public	37.7
% Fishing	13.8
% Sewage Related Debris *	6.2
% Shipping	1.8
% Fly Tipped	0.9
% Medical	0.2
% Non - Sourced	39.4
Total number of items	385,659
Total volunteer hours	11,703
Mean items/km	2,195.1

*If data from three beaches where over 8,500 cotton bud sticks were recorded is removed, the percentage for SRD is 3.6%

Top 20 items of litter recorded in Beachwatch 2008

Position 2007	Position 2008	Item	% of Total Litter	Items/km
1	1	Plastic pieces > 1cm-50cm	14.5	318.6
2	2	Plastic pieces < 1cm	7.7	168.7
6	3	Polystyrene pieces	6.5	142.0
3	4	Plastic rope	5.8	127.1
4	5	* Plastic Caps / Lids	5.7	125.5
5	6	Crisp/sweet/lolly wrappers	5.2	114.3
7	7	Cotton bud sticks	4.6	100.5
9	8	Fishing net < 50cm	4.0	88.8
10	9	Glass pieces	3.5	76.8
11	10	Plastic drinks bottles	3.2	71.0
TOP 10 ITEMS			60.7	1333.4
12	11	Cloth pieces/string	2.7	60.3
8	12	Cigarette stubs	2.7	60.0
14	13	Fishing line (from anglers)	2.5	55.2
15	14	Plastic bags (including supermarket)	2.1	46.5
13	15	Paper pieces	2.0	44.0
17	16	Plastic cutlery / trays / straws	1.7	38.2
16	17	Metal drink cans	1.7	37.8
19	18	Foam/Sponge	1.6	35.5
20	19	Wood pieces	1.3	29.2
18	20	Rubber pieces <50cm	1.1	23.5
TOP 20 ITEMS			80.3	1763.6

* Prior to Beachwatch 2008, plastic caps and lids were sourced to Non-Sourced

The Marine Conservation Society's **Adopt-a-Beach** project was established in 1999 to encourage individuals and groups to look after their local beach on a more regular basis by carrying out seasonal litter surveys and beach clean ups, to identify local sources of litter and raise awareness of the problems caused by litter. Further information can be found on the Adopt-a-Beach website: www.adoptabeach.org.uk

The Crown Estate has supported the Marine Conservation Society's Beachwatch campaign through its Marine Communities Fund since 1999. As owner of over half the UK's foreshore and almost all the seabed out to the 12 nautical mile territorial limit The Crown Estate places great emphasis on the good management and stewardship of the diverse coastal land in its care. The Crown Estate works with many organisations throughout the UK including government departments, public bodies, environmental groups, industry and local communities to ensure appropriate development and conservation of the coastline. Beachwatch is an excellent example of The Crown Estate and the Marine Conservation Society working together for the ninth consecutive year to raise public awareness of marine pollution and encouraging participation at a local level. For more information about The Crown Estate visit www.thecrownestate.co.uk or contact: Katie King, Communications Dept, The Crown Estate: 020 7851 5009 katie.king@thecrownestate.co.uk

Cross-channel ferry company **SeaFrance** are the lead sponsors of the national MCS Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach campaign. In addition to direct financial support of this project, SeaFrance and its staff regularly show their commitment to a healthy future for our seas, shores and wildlife by cleaning their local beach, Kingsdown in Kent. SeaFrance's support has helped MCS mobilise thousands of volunteers to remove and survey litter on hundreds of beaches throughout the UK. For additional comment SeaFrance's Senior Communications Executive, Ellie Philpott, can be reached on 0871 282 8507.

MCS would also like to thank The Co-operative, The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Sir John Fisher Foundation and Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation for their support of Beachwatch and Adopt-a-Beach in 2008.

The **International Coastal Cleanup**, involving over 70 countries worldwide, is co-ordinated by the Ocean Conservancy in the United States, and provides a 'snapshot' of the amounts and sources of litter being washed up or dumped on beaches around the world.