

Manifesto for Welsh Seas



Foreword from Sandy Luk

Chief Executive Officer of the
Marine Conservation Society



As Wales heads to the polls for the 2026 Senedd election, voters have a chance to choose a government committed to bold, practical action to regenerate Welsh seas.

Our manifesto sets out a clear blueprint to do just that. Our four asks of the next Welsh Government for the protection of Welsh seas would tackle marine litter and water pollution, safeguard sensitive marine ecosystems, ensure fair use of Welsh waters, and direct funding to marine recovery.

We hope you will join us to make these vital protections a reality for generations to come.

Our key asks

1

Bring forward a deposit return scheme (DRS) that includes glass and reuse by October 2027

2

As part of the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill, consult on and set effective biodiversity targets and ensure they are implemented within 24 months of the Act receiving Royal Assent

3

Use the Spatial Assessment of Welsh Seas to decide how different areas of Welsh seas should be utilised

4

Ensure Welsh Government funding supports nature recovery by using the Sustainable Investment Principles, and work with the Marine Conservation Society and the Crown Estate regarding 'nature leasing'

Are you a policymaker?

Check out our more detailed manifesto here: www.mcsuk.org/welsh-seas





Beach clean on Talacre beach, as part of the Hiraeth Yn Y Môr project in North Wales
Dan Price

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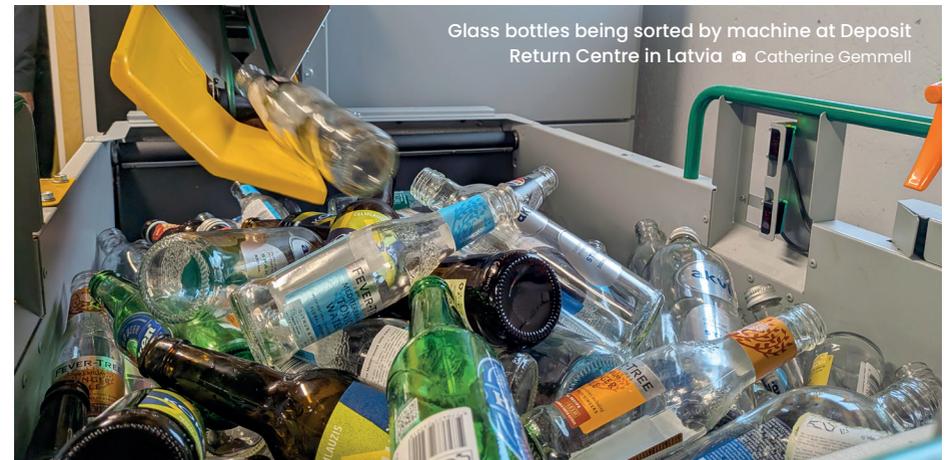
Bring forward a deposit return scheme (DRS) that includes glass and reuse by October 2027

In 2024, the Marine Conservation Society's State of Our Beaches Report showed drinks-related litter found on 99% of Welsh beaches surveyed. Glass bottles were found on nearly half of these.

Deposit Return Schemes are effective and proven ways to tackle drinks-related litter. We are calling for the Welsh Government to bring forward a DRS inclusive of glass and reuse in line with the October 2027 deadline set for the schemes in England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

Countries with established Deposit Return Schemes, like Germany, Norway and Lithuania, have return rates of over 90% for drinks containers. In countries like Germany, which includes both refillable and single-use glass bottles in their DRS, return rates for refillable glass bottles are over 98%.

This has also led to reductions in beach litter. The first litter survey on Irish beaches since Ireland's Deposit Return Scheme started in 2024 has also shown a 30% drop in drinks-related litter.



Glass bottles being sorted by machine at Deposit Return Centre in Latvia
Catherine Gemmell

Bottlenose dolphins populations can be found along the Welsh coast
 © Peter Bardsley

As part of the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill, consult on and set effective biodiversity targets and ensure they are implemented within 24 months of the Act receiving Royal Assent

Whilst the Bill outlines a period of up to 36 months from receiving Royal Assent for targets to be set, this could mean that targets are not set until 2029. This is just one year before the Global Biodiversity Framework's 2030 deadline and would risk further delay to vital changes we need to address biodiversity loss in Wales.

Wales deserves strong biodiversity targets that turn ambition into action and protecting 30% of its land and sea by 2030.

Our marine ecosystems must thrive today, and flourish in future.

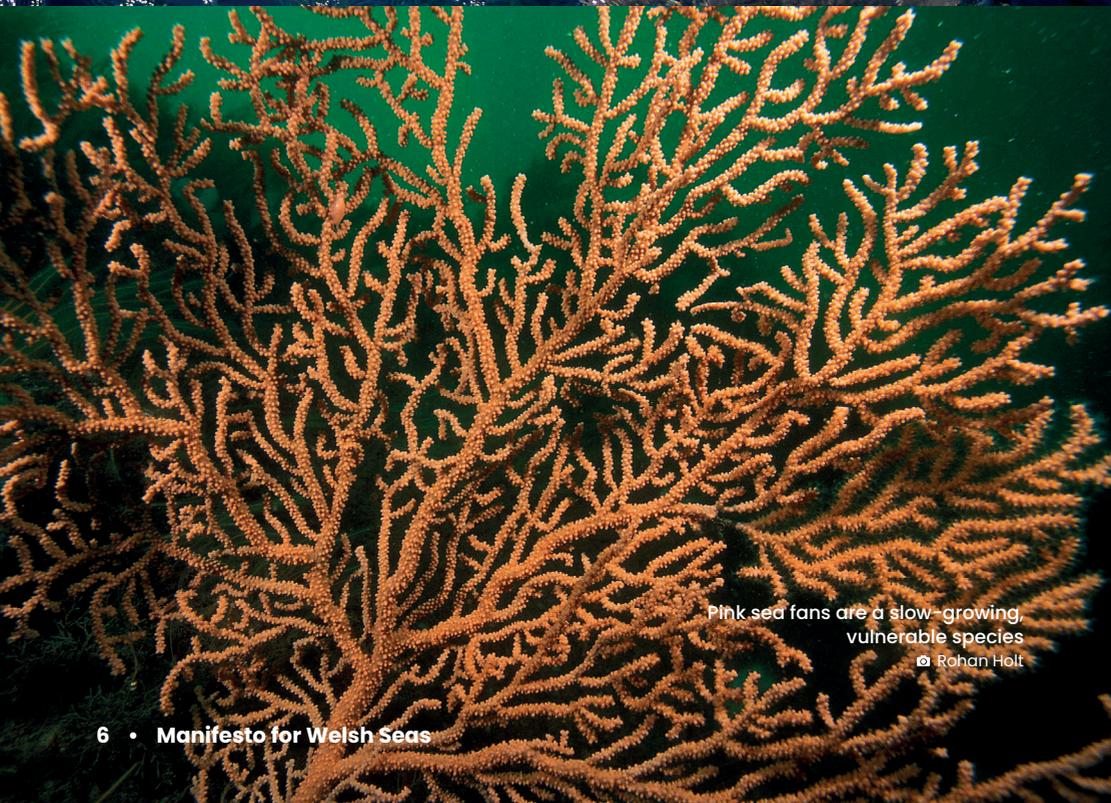
With 1 in 6 species at risk of extinction in Wales, we must see biodiversity targets as soon as is practicable. We would like these to be brought into force within 24 months of the Bill receiving Royal Assent.

Targets must reduce pollution effectively and ensure contaminants are at levels not detrimental to coastal, estuarine and marine species and habitats.

Angelshark, a critically endangered species that is known to be present in Welsh waters
 © Luis Miguel Estevez / Shutterstock



Pink sea fans are a slow-growing, vulnerable species
 © Rohan Holt



Use the Spatial Assessment of Welsh Seas to decide how different areas of Welsh seas should be utilised

Through forward-looking marine spatial planning, the Welsh Government can set a global standard for how nations balance uses of the sea with the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems that sustain us all.

As we move towards a net-zero future, offshore renewable energy will play a vital role. Yet, the rapid pace of development will bring new pressures to sensitive marine environments already under strain.

A spatial, strategic and holistic approach to marine planning can direct activities to the least environmentally sensitive areas.

This will give every sector space and certainty for all sectors to operate whilst protecting and enhancing the marine environment.

The Marine Conservation Society welcomed the announcement of a Spatial Assessment of Welsh Seas.

As a next step, the future Welsh Government must act on the scenarios proposed. The Independent Review warned that without foresight and co-ordinated planning, developments risk pushing our seas beyond their limits. The choices made now will define the future health, resilience and prosperity of Welsh seas.



Seabirds flying over Skomer Island
 © John Archer-Thomson



Grey seals in North Wales
 © Yoke Creative



UK wind farm
 © Paul J Robinson / Shutterstock

4



Native oysters being returned to Milford Haven waterway as part of Natur Am Byth! restoration project
© Lou Luddington

Ensure Welsh Government funding supports nature recovery by using the Sustainable Investment Principles, and work with the Marine Conservation Society and the Crown Estate regarding ‘nature leasing’

Wales has the chance to lead a new era of investment – one where every pound spent by the Welsh Government actively drives ocean regeneration and supports thriving coastal communities. The Sustainable Investment Principles, recently consulted on by the Welsh Government, set out a clear path to ensuring all decisions and investments in Wales deliver benefits for people, nature and the economy.

The next Welsh Government must apply the Sustainable Investment Principles to each of its spending decisions to ensure that all projects deliver long-term benefits to people and marine ecosystems.

Nature leases

Alongside these principles, the Welsh Government can work with the Crown Estate to lease areas of the seabed for nature. These will work as Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs). These offer us a chance to protect ecologically vital areas that fall outside the criteria of Marine Protected Areas. These include blue carbon hotspots like seagrass meadows, oyster beds, and fish spawning grounds- the living engines of our ocean.



Two-spotted gobies, in eelgrass
© Paul Naylor



Seagrass meadow
© Heather Hamilton



Want to find out more?

To learn more about our work in Wales, read our detailed manifesto and policies visit: mcsuk.org/welsh-seas



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Cover 📍 Front: Rhossili Bay - David King; Rear: Basking shark - Mark Harris

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