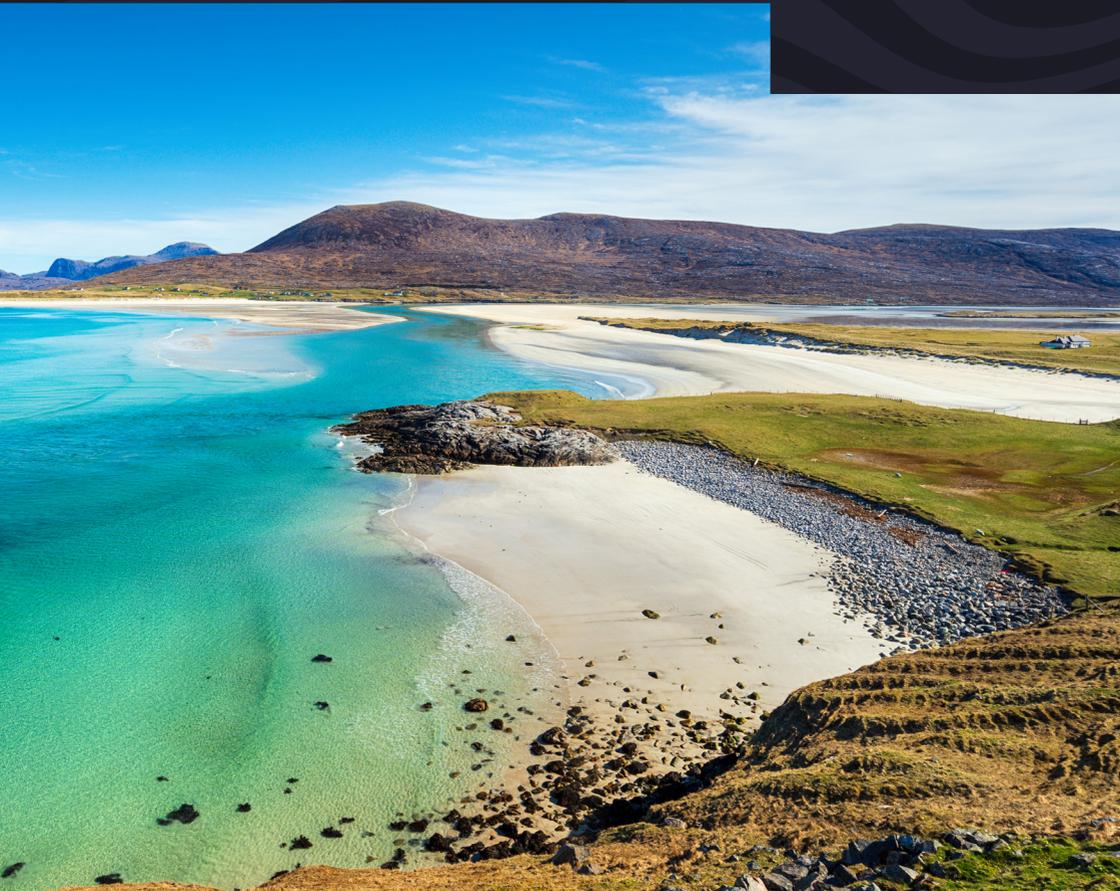


Manifesto for Scottish Seas



Foreword from Sandy Luk

Chief Executive Officer of the
Marine Conservation Society



Scotland is home to over 60% of the UK's marine environment. In the 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, Scottish voters have the opportunity to elect a Scottish Government that will commit to protecting our ocean.

Our Manifesto for Scottish Seas is our blueprint to protect Scottish seas over the next parliamentary term. Our five key asks would tackle water pollution in Scotland through the introduction of a new Water Bill, speed up the transition to a circular economy to tackle marine litter, and deliver stronger protections for seabed habitats. Ecosystem-based marine planning and innovative financing through Scottish-Government-backed blue bonds can help to drive forward Scotland's ocean regeneration.

Together, we can ensure Scotland's waters are healthy, productive and a source of pride and prosperity for generations to come.

Our key asks

1

Commit to introducing a new Water Bill within 12 months in the next parliamentary session

2

Speed up Scotland's transition to a circular economy to tackle marine litter

3

Introduce robust measures to protect seabed habitats from damaging forms of fishing

4

Deliver a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to marine planning

5

Create Scottish Government-backed 'blue bonds' to boost ocean regeneration and support the growth of Scotland's sustainable blue economy

Are you a policymaker?

Check out our more detailed manifesto by going to **mcsuk.org** and searching '**Scottish Manifesto**'



Kelp forest, Shetland
© Billy Arthur



Lumpsucker, Loch Carron
© Cathy Lewis



Litter found on Cramond beach,
including sewage-related debris
© Robert Ormerod



A new Water Bill within 12 months in the next parliamentary session

Scotland's water system is falling behind. Storm overflow monitoring lags behind England and Wales, and our waters face growing risks from PFAS 'forever chemicals.'

Despite this, the current Scottish Government have shelved plans for a Water Bill for Scotland.

We want the next Scottish Government to go further and commit to the introduction of a Water Bill in the first 12 months of the next parliamentary session.

A new Water Bill would offer a once-in-a-generation chance to fix Scotland's water system.

It must deliver:

- 100% monitoring of storm overflows
- A clear plan to eliminate sewage related debris such as wet wipes
- Robust monitoring and prevention of PFAS chemicals from entering our water network in the first place

Clean water is the foundation of ocean recovery, public health and thriving coastal economies. By transforming our water system, Scotland can set a global standard for clean seas.



Wet wipe on Cramond beach 📷 Holtography

Plastic bottle found on Kinneil Estate
Holtography

Speed up Scotland's transition to a circular economy to tackle marine litter

Our 2024 State of Beaches report revealed that levels of litter on Scotland's beaches had increased 7% in a single year. This threatens marine wildlife, harms Scotland's beautiful coastline and burdens coastal communities often cleaning up as volunteers.

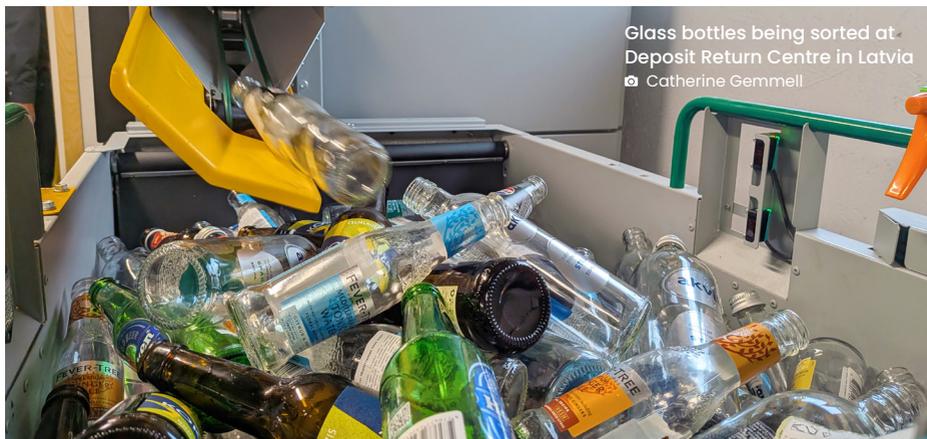
The next Scottish Government must champion bold circular economy measures rooted in prevention, reduction, reuse and recycling.

This means:

- Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme by October 2027

- Introducing a new targeted, effective levy on single-use cups and introduce steps toward greater reuse options
- Providing free recycling for end-of-life fishing and aquaculture gear at every Scottish port and harbour

Ambitious circular economy measures won't just clean up our beaches. They'll spark innovation, strengthen coastal communities, and prove that Scotland can lead the world in protecting its seas.



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



Sea urchins, corals and kelp in Loch Carron, a Marine Protected Area
© Dan Bolt



Puffin on Fair Isle, a seabird impacted by sandeel population levels
© Kevin Morgans

Introduce robust measures to protect seabed habitats from damaging forms of fishing

Current fishing practices are directly contributing to a failure to achieve Good Environmental Status in Scotland's waters.

The next Scottish Government must implement long-overdue protections for marine habitats across Scotland and transform fisheries management.

These protections should include:

- The careful monitoring of the condition of Scotland's offshore Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and further strengthening these protections, if necessary, as part of an adaptive management approach
- The adoption of a presumption against bottom-towed fishing gear in a significant proportion of inshore waters, including whole-site protections from this gear for inshore seabed MPAs and Priority Marine Features (PMFs)
- Setting clear targets to end overfishing, bycatch and the entanglement of protected species
- Supporting Scotland's fishing industry to transition to more sustainable, low-impact fishing practices





Fish farm salmon round nets in Loch Awe
📍 richardjohnson / Shutterstock



Wind turbines in North Sea
📍 MaxNoz / Shutterstock

Deliver a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to marine planning

Scotland's seas are under pressure. Competing industries, accelerating climate impacts, and rapid offshore wind expansion risk damaging the very marine ecosystems we rely on. Fishers, too, need long-term clarity over where and how they can operate.

Smart Marine Spatial Planning offers the way forward. Marine Spatial Planning will protect marine life, guide responsible offshore wind growth, and give

Scotland's fishing communities the certainty they deserve.

The next Scottish Government must:

- Deliver an ecosystem-first National Marine Plan 2, which puts improvement of the overall health of the marine environment at its heart
- Integrate marine planning with fisheries management for coherent, sustainable decisions
- Work with established Marine Planning Partnerships (MPPs) to make regional plans a reality and establish MPPs for other regions of Scotland.

Through evidence-based Marine Spatial Planning, Scotland can safeguard its seas while balancing future renewable energy & sustainable blue economy needs.





Brown and green seaweeds in
Scottish waters
📷 Martin Prochazkacz / Shutterstock

Create Scottish Government-backed 'blue bonds' to boost ocean regeneration and support the growth of Scotland's sustainable blue economy

The Scottish Government has failed to prioritise nature and marine funding in recent years, leaving the Marine Directorate under-resourced and delaying long-overdue reforms such as the Inshore Fisheries Management Improvement Programme.

While the government's Blue Economy Vision is welcome, it needs real investment to become a reality.

Blue bonds- government-backed bonds issued to private investors to fund sustainable marine projects- offer a solution. They can create ringfenced funds for

ocean regeneration and other sustainable blue initiatives at scale, often at lower interest rates than standard bonds, providing better value for taxpayers while delivering a transformation for our seas.

We call on the next Scottish Government to:

- Create blue bonds to boost ocean regeneration
- Increase investment in Marine Fund Scotland, the Marine and Science Innovation Strategy, the Scottish Marine Environmental Enhancement Fund (SMEEF), and the Marine Directorate



Seagrass meadow
 © Heather Hamilton



Want to find out more?

To learn more about our work in Scotland, and read our detailed manifesto and policies, visit mcsuk.org and search **'Scottish manifesto'**



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Cover 📍 Front: Isle of Harris - Helen Hotson; Rear: Bottlenose dolphin - Martin Prochazkacz

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